Benjamin K. Pierce given recognition

Historian documents the life of unsung military officer

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Call it highly unlikely, but it's true, Pierce Street in Birmingham and Fort Fierce, Fla. were amed after the same person. One Benjamin K. Pierce, born 1790 in New Hampshire, older brother of Franklin Fierce, 14th United States President, was quite a traveler.

traveler. Retired Detroit Times newspaper man and ambitious writer-historian. Louis Burbey of Royal Oak recently published a book on the life and times of Benjamin Pierce, military officer. titled "Our Worthy Commander." Burbey, an invelerate historian, likes digging for information on his-

oursey, an invererate nistorian, iless digging for information on history's less-well recorded personalities who made significant contributions to present life.

One of his earlier projects, to trace the origins of afreet names in Birming-the origins of afreet names in Birming-theough the street of the street of the street own. His articles on Hunder Willet, Hamilton and Pierce streets were published in-The Eccentric in the late '68s. Burbey said he was "particularly fascinated by the background of Pierce." He traced the Pierce family back to England, the first of whom came to America in 1833. The great, great granddaughter of Benjamin Pierce and her children live in Norfolk, Va. and Burbey has been in contact with her.

PIERCE WAS A PROFESSIONAL MILITARY OFFICER for 38 years. He began his service as an artillery offi-cer in the War of 1815 between the United States and Great Britain.

At the termination of that war he was assigned to Mackinae Island and in 1817, at age 27, became the Com-

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mandant of the island's important Fort Mackinac. The fort was under the supervision of the U.S. 5th Military District located in Detroit. This neces-sitated frequent visits to headquarters.

ON ONE OF THESE VISITS he ourneved by horseback to what is now

ON ONE OF THESE VISITS he journeyed by proseabect to what is now the city of Birmingham. He bought 160 acres of land here at \$2\$ and cre. Although he referred to his land as "the farm," he never lived on it. After his first wife, Josephine, died nehildbirth and the baby a few days later, Pierce and his friend Dr. William Beaumont rode out to the farm, possibly because Pierce was interested in convincing Beaumont to buy it. However, Beaumont declined. When the United States acquired Florida from Spain, Capitain Pierce and his command were transferred there in 1821.

and us command were transierred there in 1821. He went via the Mississippi River to Fort San Carlos de Berranacas, Pensacola, Fla.
Although the command got to the Missippi River by going to Green Bay. Wis, and down the Wisconsin River to the state of t

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While sailing down Florida's Indian River in "Mackinac" boats, then Colonel Pierce and his command arrived at an inlet from the ocean where they creeted a blockhouse. The troops armed it Fort Pierce after 'our worthy commander."

Burbey includes the details which bring his subject close to his readers. Pierce had three wives, all of whom died before he did. His first, whom he married in a colorful ceremony on Mackinac Island was part Indian and part French. The brid's mother and aunt, as was tradition, both came to the wedding in their pative dress. Possibly the bride, too. The Pierce family doubless opposed the union.

PIERCE HAD MANY FRIENDS IN THE MICHIGAN AREA in addition to Beaumont. He stayed with either the

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Huster or Willet families when he visited his farm. He worked with both General Alexander Macomb and Geral Charles Gratiot. He was well-traveled and well-respected.

Although he doesn't mention it in the book. Burbey said of Pierce. "He was better guy than his brother, Frank-lin. Franklin was inclined to liquor." Burbey has waived all rights to "Our Worthy Commander" in favor of Indian River Community College in Fort Pierce. Any profit derived from the book is allocated to a scholarship fund.

James Babcock, rare book dealer in Salker and Boos in the Great Ameri-can Mall, 280 N. Woodward, has a sup-ply of the books which sell for \$7.85 each.

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PLANNED by the writer-researcher who said, "This is what keeps a person young mentally and physically."
Another figure in history who interests the writer is Etienne Brutes who explored Lake Superior and the other Great Lakes in 1623.

Once into the early history of the country Burbey said he has found "There are so many subjects to write on I can't keep up with them."

Fame and fortune are not half so important to this writer as the enjoyment that comes in the doing and learning and he hopes to stay with it for many years to come.



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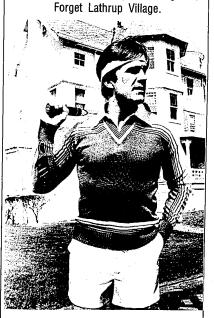
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