

Woman served like a man during Civil War

The writer, David Litogot, is a Farmington Historical Society member and a history teacher at Woodale Elementary in Farmington Hills.

Of all the fascinating stories of the Civil War, none is more intriguing than that of a Michigan woman who, disguised as a man, went off to war. The life of Mrs. Lina H. Seelye, nee Sarah Emma Edmonds, alias Franklin Thompson, was one of adventure, excitement and narrow escapes. For two years, she concealed her true sex and her true identity while fighting at Bull Run, Chickahominy Swamp, Fair Oaks and Malvern Hill.

Sarah Edmonds was born on a farm in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1839. As a young girl, she read a book about a female sailor and it gave her ideas and dreams. Her life as a farm girl was tedious and lacked excitement. Several years later, when her father insisted that she marry an older, repulsive neighbor, she ran away. Dressed as a man, she was able to travel more easily and conveniently. She posed as a Bible salesman and was quite successful. One selling trip took her to Michigan in 1860, where she lived with a family in Rose Township in the Oakland County and in Flint.

WHEN WAR brought the need for volunteers from Michigan, Sarah,

footprints in history

now called Franklin Thompson, enlisted — caught perhaps in a situation where, if she did not volunteer along with her male friends, she would be branded a coward. Perhaps it was the prospect of excitement and adventure. Whatever the reason, she enlisted in the Flint Union Greys in April 1861. This group would become Company F of the Second Michigan Infantry Regiment. Evidently and luckily for Emma Edmonds, no one seems to have considered physical examinations nec-

essary, but she must have been clever, indeed, to adapt herself to camp life without arousing suspicion. By the end of July 1861, she saw her first action — the battle of Bull Run. Escaping injury, she decided to continue her masquerade despite the risks. She spent more and more time in the makeshift camp hospitals helping her sick comrades. The following year, she was appointed mail carrier and even volunteered for duty as a spy behind enemy lines. As a spy, she disguised her-

self as a Negro boy, using a wig over her short hair and black dye over her exposed skin. Dressed in "plantation style" clothing, she wandered over to the Confederate lines and was quickly used as a cook and breastwork builder. She also was drafted into standing picket duty. During that job, she returned to the Union lines. She returned southward shortly thereafter, but "disguised" as a white woman.

EMMA'S MAIN job, however, was mail carrier. In this role, she escaped several close calls and serious injury when a mule fell on her. The pressure of maintaining her secret identity must have been too much, for, in April 1863, Franklin Thomp-

son deserted from the Union Army. In her book, "Nurse and Spy in the Union Army," she detailed how cowardly she became, how her "soldierly" qualities disappeared. She was ill and was denied a leave. Emma faced ending up in the hospital — which meant sure discovery. To her, this was far worse than death. She went north to Ohio to recuperate. While convalescing, she wrote her book, taking great pains to conceal the fact that she had been anything but a female nurse. As a result, portions of the book are fabrication. (The book sold 175,000 copies in its first printing and she donated the proceeds to the Sanitary Commission, the Civil War equivalent of the Red Cross.)

obituaries

FRANK GOSSETT
Mr. Gossett, 56, of Perry, Mich., formerly of Farmington, died July 24 in Lansing General Hospital. Mr. Gossett was a machinist in the automotive industry. Survivors include his wife, Marie; sons, Jed and Dwayne; daughters, Deanna James, Sharyn George and Terri Muoro; mother, Clara Gossett; brother, Leemott; sisters, Vera Harlan and Dorothy Hess; three grandchildren.

Services were July 18 at the Heehey-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. William Frayer officiating. Burial was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi. Memorials may be made to the American Cancer Society.

GRACE NEWSTED
Mrs. Newsted, 87, of Novi died July 15 in White Hall Nursing Home. Mrs. Newsted was a homemaker. Survivors include her son, Bruce; a daughter, Dorothy; sisters, Florence and Elinor; five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Services were July 17 at the Ted C. Sullivan Funeral Home, Novi. Burial was in Glen Eden Cemetery, Livonia. Memorials may be made to the Farmington Hills Grove Chapel, 23233 Drake Road, Farmington Hills 48024.

JAMES R. CHAMBERS
Mr. Chambers, 75, of Westland, formerly of Farmington, died July 17 in Harper Hospital. Born in Indianapolis, Ind., Mr. Chambers was a salesman for Mead School Supplies. He was a member of the American Legion Post 3416 of Farmington. Survivors include his sister, Marie Grey; nieces, Barbara Harry and Kathleen Hayward. Services were July 21 at the Heehey-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Kenneth Chase officiating. Burial was in Parkview Cemetery, Livonia.

LAWRENCE ANDREW STEINMEYER
Mr. Steinmeyer, 68, of Farmington died July 24. Born in St. Catherine, Ontario, Canada, Mr. Steinmeyer was district manager for Niagara Machine & Tool Works in Southfield. Survivors include his wife, Rose Marie; sons, Lawrence James and Mark Andrew; three grandchildren. Mass was celebrated July 27 at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church, Farmington, with the Rev. Jean Cronin officiating. Burial was in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield.

Arrangements were made by the Heehey-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington. Memorials may be made to Angela Hospice, 14501 Levan, Livonia.

NORMAN HAROLD ZAVITZ
Mr. Zavitz, 87, of Farmington died July 28 in Dotsford Hospital, Farmington Hills. Born in Theford, Ontario, Canada, Mr. Zavitz was a retired supervisor for a Crain Company. Survivors include his wife, Dorothea; son, Jack; daughters, Charlotte Hester, Shirley Reynolds and Linda Zavitz; sister, Nellie Deane; 11 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Services were July 29 at the Thayer-Stock Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Arthur Spafford of First United Methodist Church of Farmington officiating. Burial was in Roseland Park Cemetery, Berkeley.

JOHN ARTHUR CUMMINGS
Mr. Cummings, 72, of Farmington Hills died July 22. Mr. Cummings was an engineer in the automotive industry. Survivors include his son, John; a daughter, Janice Grey; four grandchildren. Services were July 31 at the Heehey-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Kenneth Chase officiating. Burial was in Oakview Cemetery, Royal Oak.

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