

Ex Libris

The intent of this feature is to bring attention to books, pamphlets, articles, or other publications of particular interest to Alford family researchers. The books may be new, such as a newly published Cemetery Directory for a particular county or state, or may be older books that need rediscovery. If you have a book or article you would like us to feature, you may submit the review yourself, or just identify it to us, and we will work the review in as soon as practical. Submit your suggestions to Wayne Parrish, email address usmpcp@att.net.

[If you are wondering... Ex Libris is Latin for from the books. _Editor]

In Their Honor: Soldiers of the Confederacy, The Elmira Prison Camp, Diane Janowski with photographs by Allen C. Smith, New York History Review Press, Elmira, New York, 2010, 218 pages.

If you had a Confederate ancestor who was imprisoned at the prison camp in Elmira, New York, or if you are just a history buff who is interested in the personal side of history, you will want to read this book. The stories compiled by Ms. Janowski are written by descendants of the prisoners themselves from family lore and genealogical research. The author herself says of her work, This book is not about war strategy, nor conditions inside the camp - it is about how the men and boys ended up in Elmira. Where other books about the Elmira camp are very clinical, this one is very personal.

Ms. Janowski's book, and the poignant photographs by Allen C. Smith, provide a personal, provocative insight into what the prisoners at Elmira suffered. While there may not be a story included about your ancestor, the book will certainly enhance your appreciation of what the soldiers suffered.

The extreme New York winter of 1864-1865, coupled with short rations and less than ideal medical facilities exacted a severe toll on the southern soldiers. About one out of every five prisoners died there. The prisoners came to call it Hellmira with good cause.

One very interesting footnote in Elmira's history is the story of how the identity of the graves was preserved so well. John Jones was born into slavery in Loudon County, VA. Long before the war he ran away, and eventually made his way to Elmira, where he became a successful businessman and sexton of the local church. He acquired the contract for burial of the prisoners with the camp commander, and kept meticulous records. Not only were the name and unit carved into the coffin and a wooden marker, he acquired empty medicine vials and placed a small piece of paper with the identification data in the sealed vials and tucked them into the coffin with each soldier. When permanent markers were erected in the early 1900's, John Jones' careful work was invaluable.

My own gg-grandfather, Francis Marion Parrish, a soldier in the 21st Alabama Infantry, was captured at the surrender of Fort Morgan, and transferred to the Elmira camp. He survived the war, but was one of a handful of men too sick to be released when the camp was closed. He was transferred to a Union hospital and died on June 17, 1865, of pneumonia. He is buried along with almost 3,000 of his comrades in the Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira. His story may be found at the New York History Review website, <http://www.newyorkhistoryreview.com/parrish.html>.

An Alford known to have been a prisoner at Elmira was Josiah Alford, the son of Archibald (Baldy) Alford and Priscilla Pierce, died in the Elmira camp on October 24, 1864, of chronic diarrhea. He was a private in Company I, 1st Infantry Regiment, NC. He was a native of Wake County, North Carolina, and is interred in grave 861, Woodlawn National Cemetery. He was moved to Elmira after being captured at Chancellorsville.