

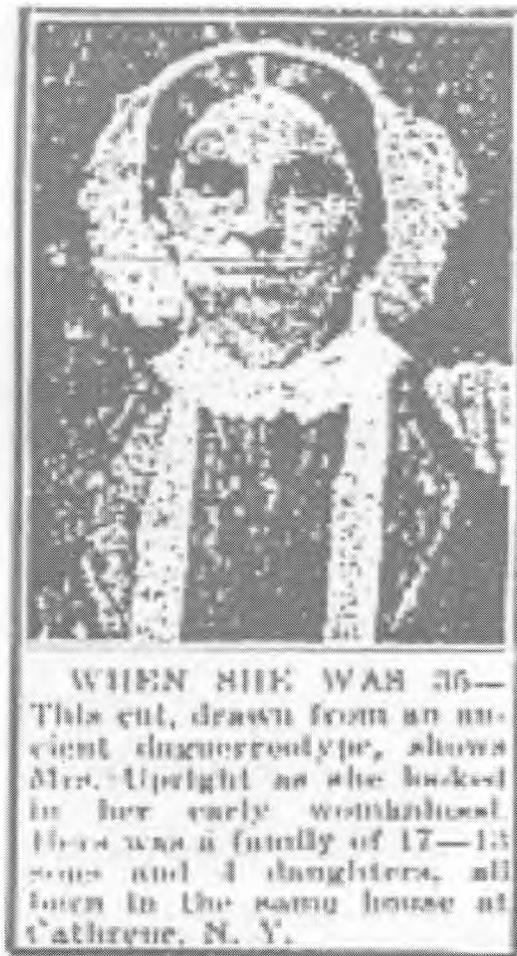
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# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 49 SEPTEMBER 2011 NUMBER 3

## THE MERCHANT FAMILY: TEN WHO SERVED IN THE CIVIL WAR

By Jean Lythgoe



This picture shows Mrs. Merchant (later Mrs. Upright) when she was 35. The mother of 17 children sent 10 sons to fight in the Civil War. Originally published in the *Rockford [Iowa] Globe Gazette*.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents an article about the remarkable saga of the Merchant family. Eliza Ann Merchant was the mother of 17 children including 13 sons. She sent ten of her sons to fight in the Civil War plus another one who served in the U.S. Calvary after the war. Three of the brothers lost their lives during the Civil War.

The article was written by Jean Lythgoe. Jean has been a long time member of the board and was just elected to her third term as President of the Rockford Historical Society. She has been a Librarian Assistant in the Adult Services Dept. of the Rockford Public Library for many years and is in charge of the Local History Room. Jean has written many articles for the *Nuggets of History*. In addition to this article, Jean did a presentation at the annual meeting in September and has prepared an exhibit at the Main Branch of the Rockford Public Library.

If you have a subject that you have researched, or an idea for an article that you would like to pursue, give me a call. I would like to encourage original research into some aspects of local history that have not been adequately pursued. I can be reached at 815/986-4867 or 815/987-5724.

Thomas Powers, Editor

### Newly elected officers of Rockford Historical Society

President	Jean Lythgoe
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## The Merchant Family: Ten Who Served in the Civil War "The Sons of a Noble Woman."

By Jean Lythgoe

We Remember...v.8 contains a history of the Merchant family. It begins with Enoch Merchant, (the name is spelled both Merchant and Marchant), paternal grandfather of the Civil War brothers. He was a blacksmith and moved from Connecticut to Tompkins County (now Town of Catherine, Chemung County), New York. He died in 1848 at the age of 79.

One of his sons, Arlo J., was born in 1803 in Connecticut, and was trained as both a blacksmith and a carpenter. In 1824 he married Eliza Ann Olmstead, who was born December 30, 1806 in Wilton, Connecticut. They had 17 children, 13 of them sons!

The 1850 census in Catherine, Chemung County, New York, lists the Merchant family as follows. All of the children had been born in that location.

Merchant, Harlow	47	blacksmith, \$1,000	CT
Eliza	43		CT
Enoch	25	blacksmith	NY
Gordon M.	24	farmer	NY
Aaron	23	farmer	NY
Marinda	20		NY
Dewitt C.	18	carpenter	NY
Abner D.	17	farmer	NY
Rebecca H.	15		NY
Silas B.	14		NY
Alice L.	13		NY
Abel L.	12		NY
Lewis	10		NY
David	9		NY
Arlow	8		NY
Martha E.	6		NY
James	5		NY
Norman G.	4/12		NY

Enoch married Miranda Brown on April 16, 1850, and they are listed as living with his parents in the 1850 census. Living next door to the Merchant family was the other married son, George W and his wife.

Merchant, George W 20 carpenter, \$140 NY  
Demaris D. 20 PA

The Merchant family came from New York state to Winnebago Station, Illinois by railroad in 1854. Arlo J. Merchant died June 29, 1855. He was 51 y 11 m 5d. According to an account by his son Silas, Arlo J. Merchant was doing carpentry work on a building in Rockton, fell and was fatally injured. He had been a member of both the Masons and the Odd Fellows.

After the death of her first husband, Eliza married Sheriff Morris J. Upright (b 1810) on Feb. 24, 1861 at the Winnebago M.E. church, by the Rev. M. Bourne. They then farmed in Boone County. In 1865, they moved to Butler County, Iowa and in 1880 to Rockford, Floyd County, Iowa. Upright died June 28, 1883 at age 74 in Rockford township, Floyd County, Iowa, and was buried in Riverside Cemetery. Eliza Olmstead Merchant Upright died in 1890 and was buried next to him. However, she did not receive a tombstone until 1992. It was not until 102 years later, after descendant Arlo H. Marchant died at 89 on March 4, 1992, that memorial money went to purchase the stone. There was a dedication service on Aug. 29, 1992, with both newspaper and television coverage. (*"Tombstone is dedicated in Rockford" [Iowa] Globe-Gazette. Mason City-Clear Lake, Iowa, Monday, August 31, 1992, v.133, #206*).

### Enoch Merchant

Enoch, the eldest son was a blacksmith, married, and living in Winnebago County when he enlisted. He joined for one year, and was mustered in on February 2, 1865, in Marengo, joining the 156<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, Co. F. He was listed as a corporal. He is also listed in Co. G, 56<sup>th</sup> Ill Infantry, as a mechanic. Enoch was mustered out at Memphis, Tennessee by Captain Campbell on September 20, 1865. He applied for a pension on April 19, 1890 and died in Sycamore, Illinois on Jan 19, 1892. His obituary reads: Enoch Merchant, an old resident of this place, died at his home in Sycamore last Tuesday." [*Rockford Daily Register Gazette, January 29, 1892*] He was buried at Elmwood Cemetery, DeKalb County, Illinois. His widow Rose, applied for a pension Jan. 29, 1892, 10 days after his death.

The Illinois Civil War Detail Report gave the following personal characteristics: age 39, height 5'9, hair brown, eyes hazel, complexion fair.

## Aaron Merchant

Aaron Merchant appears in the 1860 census in Winnebago County, living with his mother. He enlisted as a private in Company G, 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry. The 15<sup>th</sup> was a Scandinavian regiment, organized at Camp Randall, Madison, Wisconsin in December 1861 and January 1862. The regiment was mustered in February 14, 1862; and on March 2, 1862 was ordered to Bird's point, Missouri. Six companies were sent there to take part in the siege of Island No. 10, (The island was near New Madrid, Missouri and closer to Tiptonville, Tennessee. The island itself no longer exists.) After the surrender of Island No. 10 to the Union forces, the entire 15<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin regiment was used to garrison and strengthen the fortifications. Then companies G and I were left there as a permanent garrison.

Aaron Merchant was killed at Island No. 10, December 26, 1862, as the result of the accidental discharge of a cannon.

*Killed by Accident.*

Name.	Rank.	Co.	Where.	When.
Merchant, Aaron .....	Private....	G	Island No. 10.....	Dec. 25, '62
Murphy, Morgan .....	.....00.....	tr	.....	Sept 7, '63
.....	.....00.....	1	.....	June 23, '64

## George W. Merchant

George was living in Winnebago County as a carpenter and was married when he enlisted as a private in Company C of the 74<sup>th</sup> IL US Infantry. He joined Aug 6, 1862 in Rockford, Illinois; recruited by Captain H. P. Sloan. He enlisted for 3 years, and was mustered in on Sept. 4, 1862 at Camp Fuller, Rockford, Illinois. He was later transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> US Veteran Engineers on July 27, 1864. Later still, he served as a lieutenant, and was honorably discharged on September 26, 1864. Sometime after the War, he settled in South Dakota. The 1890 surviving soldiers census schedule shows George W. Marchant served 2 years 20 days as a private in Co C. 74 Ill Infantry, and 1 year 1 month as a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in Company K, 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Volunteer Engineers. At the time of that census, he was living in Elkton, Brookings County, South Dakota. Under "Disability incurred," it says "Deaf in one

ear s...[unable to read rest. j] Should have pension." He applied for a pension July 16, 1890, and died between that time and May 6, 1898, when his widow applied for a widow's pension in her name.

#### Dewitt C. Merchant

Dewitt first joined on May 24, 1861 for a three-year term of service at Freeport, Illinois, enlisted by Captain J. E. Smith. He was mustered on the same day as a private in Company C, 15<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry. He was single, and a carpenter, and was residing in Rockford, Illinois at the time. Dewitt later reenlisted as a veteran on January 1, 1864 at Camp Cowan, Hebron, Mississippi, again by Captain Smith, and was mustered in on March 10, 1864. Under the remarks is the entry, "Veteran C Co. "C" Veteran Battalion." When he rejoined in 1864, his personal characteristics were: age 31, Height, 5'8, hair brown, eyes hazel, complexion light.

The remarks in his service record for this second enlistment say: "Veteran killed in action at Atlanta GA July 22, 1864."

#### Silas B. Merchant

Silas was a farmer and single, living in Winnebago County, Illinois when he joined the army on August 1, 1861 in Rockford, signed up by Captain Hobart for three years' service. There were three entries for Silas in the Illinois Civil War Detail Report. In the first report, he was mustered in at Chicago on September 13, 1861 as a private in Company G, 44<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry Volunteers. Remarks: Promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant. The second Illinois Civil War Detail Report (ICWDR) entry lists his rank as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, Co G 44 IL US Infantry and that he joined March 23, 1863 at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, signed up by Governor Yates for three years; he was mustered in on the same date and location. Remarks: Promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. The 3<sup>rd</sup> ICWDR entry lists his rank as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, Co G 44 IL US Infantry, and that he joined April 26, 1863 at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, by Governor Yates for three years. He was mustered in on that same date at Stevenson, Alabama. Remarks: Resigned September 25, 1864.

Personal characteristics: age 24, height 5'10; hair dark, eyes dark, complexion dark, single farmer.

The story of how Silas came to enlist is as follows. One Saturday evening he came home from the county where he was building a barn in the New Milford area. His mother was in tears because a younger brother, known as Chubb, had run away to

Chicago and enlisted. Silas thought the matter over and told his mother that he would enlist and look after his brother. His mother seems to be satisfied by this. At the beginning of the next work week, he closed up his engagement and took his tools, leaving everything in order. He then went to Chicago, getting there just in time to enter the same company as his brother.

Since Arlo is listed as joining August 1, 1861 and is mustered in at Chicago, on September 13, 1861, Company G, 44<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry, and Silas is mustered in also on the same date, in Chicago, into the same Company and Infantry Regiment, it is logical to assume that Arlo was "Chubb."

During the second day of the battle at Chickamauga (September 19-20, 1863), Silas was badly wounded. The *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, July 2, 1910 tells the story:

"Their regiment, the 44<sup>th</sup> Illinois, saw hard service. In the second day's fighting on the awful field of Chickamauga, Silas was badly wounded through the chest and arm, and came near losing his life from hemorrhage. While he lay in the field hospital the surgeon decided on the amputation of the arm. This Silas resisted; when the surgeon came the third time with his assistant and was getting his instruments ready Merchant drew his revolver from his pillow and told the surgeon: "If you come any nearer you're a dead man. I've fought to defend my country, and now I'll fight to defend myself."

"His colonel, who lay in the next tent, wounded, called out: 'Why, Orderly, what's the matter now?' Merchant replied: 'They're going to cut my arm off and I told 'em the first man that came near I'd shoot him.' The colonel replied: 'You're right, Sergeant, I'll stand to your back.'"

When Silas was a little better, he was sent to the hospital in Nashville, Tennessee and later sent home. In the meantime, his mother had been notified that he had been killed, and then latter mortally wounded; she did not expect to see him again. When he did arrive home, he was so changed that she did not recognize him, and he had to tell her who he was. After recovering, he returned to service and was later promoted to lieutenant. He married Margaret Gray on September 15, 1865 and moved to a farm in Manchester Township, Boone County, Illinois. They had five children. Margaret died on October 6, 1882. He then married Mrs. Mary Lovesee of Roscoe, Illinois, who had two daughters. Silas died June 24, 1910 and was buried in Livingston cemetery in Boone County.

### Abel L. Merchant

Abel was married and a farmer, living in Seward, Winnebago County, Illinois. He joined and was mustered in as a private in Company C of the 15<sup>th</sup> Illinois Volunteers, at Freeport, Illinois; signed up by J. E. Smith. He enlisted for 3 years. He died of disease on November 15, 1863 at Winchester, Illinois. One source says that he had come home on a furlough and died in Winnebago County.

His personal characteristics: age 22, height 5'7 hair brown, eyes gray, complexion light.

### David Olmstead Merchant

David was a farmer and single, living in Winnebago, Winnebago County, Illinois. He enlisted on August 9, 1862 in Rockford, signed up by H. P. Sloan for a 3-year period of service. He was mustered in on September 4, 1862 in Rockford at Camp Fuller. He was a private in Company C, 74<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry. He was mustered out, honorably discharged on June 10, 1865 in Nashville, Tennessee, by Captain Chickering.

He later lived in LeMars, Plymouth County, Iowa, where he died in 1907 at the age of 65. He was buried in the Le Mars City cemetery.

Personal characteristics: age 20, height 5'6; hair dark, eyes hazel, complexion light

### Lewis Merchant

Lewis was single and a farmer living in Winnebago County, Illinois. He joined the army on September 17, 1861 in Rockford, Illinois. He was enlisted for three years by Captain Smith. He was mustered in on November 20, 1861 at Galena, Illinois. Lewis served as a private in Company G of the 45<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry, and was mustered out, honorably discharged, on September 29, 1864 at East Point, GA, at the expiration of his term of service. Lewis later married and lived in Kansas. He applied for a pension on June 1, 1880. He and his wife Susie H. also both appear in the 1900 and 1910 census in Manhattan, Ward 3, Riley County, Kansas. He died sometime between the date the census was taken, April 29, 1910 and December 12, 1910, when she applied for a pension as his widow.

His personal characteristics were: age 21, height 5' 6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, hair black, eyes brown, complexion dark. He was single and a farmer.

### Arlo J. Merchant

Arlo was born on February 14, 1843. He was living in Winnebago County, Illinois and was single and a farmer. He joined the army on August 1, 1861 in Rockford, Illinois and was signed up by Captain Hobart. He is mustered in at Chicago, Illinois on September 13, 1861 for three years, as a private in Company G, 44<sup>th</sup> Illinois US Infantry. In the first citation of the Illinois Civil War Detail Report, his personal characteristics are as follows: age 19; height 5'6, hair dark, complexion light. Arlo reenlisted as a veteran on January 1, 1864 at Blains Cross Roads, Tennessee; signed up by Captain Clark, and he was mustered in on February 17, 1864 at Chattanooga, Tennessee for a second three-year term. This time he gives his occupation as soldier, and he has gained an inch: height 5'7. He was mustered out, and honorably discharged on September 25, 1865 at Camp Irwin, Texas by Captain Wilson. He later lived in Rockford, Floyd County, Iowa. Arlo died July 20, 1910 in Rockford Township, Floyd County, Iowa and was buried in Riverside Cemetery.

### James Polk Merchant

James was born on March 5, 1845. One source indicates that he was a teamster in the Quartermaster's Dept; another source says that he served in the ambulance service. He married Anna Marie Auran (born Oct. 10, 1846) on July 4, 1867 and they lived in Lanark, Illinois for many years. He and his wife Anna Marie are in the 1910 census, in Cherry Grove, Carroll Co, Illinois. He died April 9, 1914. She died October 1, 1928 in Linn Township, Carroll County, Illinois.

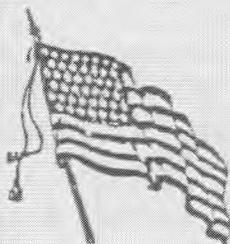
### Norman M. Merchant

Norman was born on January 20, 1850. He did not serve during the Civil War, but afterwards. Norman enlisted on March 3, 1873 as a private in Company B, U.S. Cavalry, and was discharged at Camp Lowell, Arizona Territory on March 11, 1878, at the expiration of his term of service. He reenlisted on May 4, 1878, and was assigned to Battery B, 4<sup>th</sup> Artillery. He was discharged in accordance with his mother's request.

He died May 2, 1899 in Rockford Township, Floyd County, Iowa, and was buried in Riverside Cemetery.

"Each of the brothers who survived received an honorable discharge."

This is a list of the Merchant sons and their service records: sometimes framed by family members.



## The Sons of a Noble Woman.

Gives Her Eleven Sons to the Union Army.

In the last week of the third session of the forty-sixth congress, a bill was passed to pay to Mrs. Eliza Upright of Rockford, Iowa, a pension at the rate per month now allowed to parents for the loss of children upon whom such parents were dependent. The proposition for pension is based upon grounds different from any which have ever been brought before congress. Mrs. Upright, now seventy-four years of age, has never appeared at the pension office in the character of an applicant, and in the language of the report of the house committee, "the action in bringing her before congress seems to have been prompted by a desire to do her honor, as well as to testify in a substantial manner the appreciation of the government."

The facts are that Mrs. Upright, formerly Mrs. Merchant of Manchester, Illinois, sent ten sons to the volunteer army during the war for the Union, and one son to the regular army after the close of the war. One of the ten sons serving in the Union army died in service, one was killed in action, one was killed by an accidental discharge of a cannon, two were promoted from privates to commissioned officers and these with five others were honorably discharged at the close of the war.

This is an extraordinary record and the more notable because neither the mother nor her sons sought either notoriety or recognition from the government. The case was first brought to the notice of congress in February, 1879, by the following letter from the Honorable George W. McCrary, then secretary of war:

War Department, Washington, Feb. 11, 1879.  
To Hon. N. C. Dearing, House of Rept.

SIR:—I have considered the petition of Mrs. Eliza Upright of Buttler county, Iowa, praying for the discharge from military service of her son, Norman M. Merchant, Battery B, 4th Artillery, which petition was presented by you and is concurred in by numerous citizens. The discharge of this soldier is asked by the petitioner, who says that she is seventy-four years old, on the ground that she had ten sons in the Union army during the rebellion and the one above named, her eleventh and youngest son, has served for over five years in the regular army. She furnishes the names of her sons and a statement of the

organizations in which they served:

1. Enoch Merchant was a corporal in Company F, 156th Ill. Volunteers, and honorably discharged September 20, 1865. Died in Sycamore, Illinois, January 19, 1892.
2. Aaron Merchant was a private in Company G, 15th Wis. Volunteers, and was killed at Island No. 10 December 26, 1862, by the accidental discharge of a cannon.
3. George W. Merchant was a private in Company C, 74th Ill. Volunteers, afterwards a lieutenant, and was honorably discharged September 26, 1865. He lives in South Dakota.
4. DeWitt C. Merchant was a private in Company C, 15th Ill. Volunteers, and was killed in action July 22, 1864, at Atlanta.
5. Silas B. Merchant was a private in Company G, 44th Ill. Volunteers, was promoted to first lieutenant and resigned September 25, 1864. He lives in Manchester, Boone county, Illinois.
6. Abel L. Merchant was a private in Company C, 15th Ill. Volunteers, came home on a furlough and died in Winnebago, Illinois.
7. David O. Merchant was a private in Company C, 74th Ill. Volunteers, and honorably discharged June 10, 1865. He lives in LeMars, Iowa.
8. Lewis H. Merchant was a private in Company G, 45th Ill. Volunteers, and was honorably discharged September 26, 1864. He lives in Kansas.
9. Arlo J. Merchant was a private in Company G, 44th Ill. Volunteers, and was honorably discharged September 25, 1865. He lives in Rockford, Iowa.
10. James P. Merchant was a teamster in the employ of the Quartermaster's Department. He lives in Lanark, Illinois.
11. Norman M. Merchant enlisted March 3, 1873, as a private in Company B, United States Cavalry, and was discharged March 11, 1878, by reason of expiration of term of service. He again enlisted May 4, 1878, and was assigned to Battery B, 4th Artillery, and was discharged in accordance with his mother's request.

Sources: Federal Census: 1850, 1900, 1910  
1890 Surviving Veterans Census

Database of 1929 Illinois Honor Roll  
Illinois Civil War Detail Reports

Iowa Graves Survey: WPA 1930s <http://iowawpagraves.org>

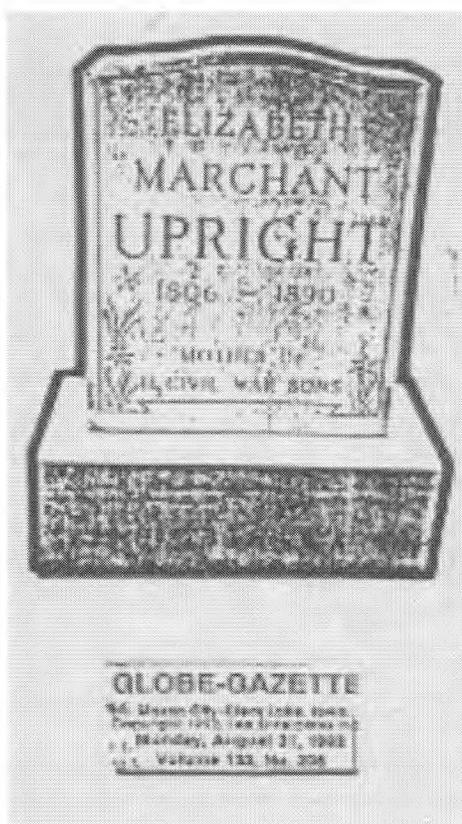
"The Gallant Men Who Wore the Blue," *Rockford Morning Star*, September 5, 1891,  
p.1, col. 1-2

*Rockford Daily Register Gazette*, January 29, 1892. p.2, col. 4

"Sent Eleven Sons to War; Records which is said to be without a parallel in  
country's history; Mother was a widow; and made a heroic sacrifice for her flag--  
Gets a pension by Act of Congress," *Rockford Daily Register-Gazette*, May 28, 1903.

"Tombstone is dedicated in Rockford" [Iowa] *Globe-Gazette*. Mason City-Clear Lake,  
Iowa, Monday, August 31, 1992, v.133, #206

"The Sons of a Noble Woman" photocopied with permission from We Remember:  
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