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# The Family of Francis Marion Shaw Newsletter

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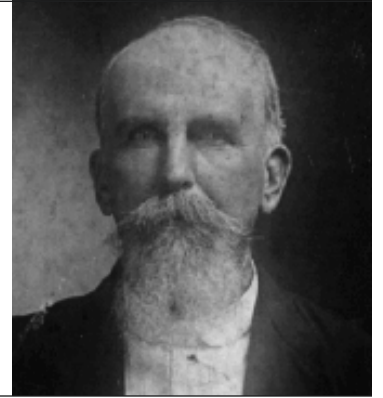
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# THE FAMILY OF FRANCIS MARION SHAW



## WITNESS TO MURDER

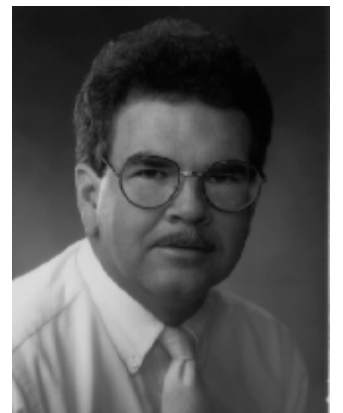
Volume 7 Number 3  
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*The Family of Francis Marion Shaw is a non-profit newsletter published semi-annually or more frequently for the benefit of the descendants of Francis Marion Shaw and his wife, Rachel Moore Allen Shaw.*

*Historical contributions are requested. Your family histories including character traits, religious affiliations, professional pursuits and vital information such as birth dates and places, marriage dates and places, and death dates and places, are all welcome. Photographs help make the newsletter come alive. If you have some special photos of your ancestors which you would like to share with all of the family, please make a copy print of it and send it on to the address below. If original photos are sent, they will be carefully handled and returned, but editor cannot be responsible for loss or damage. Send your non-returnable manuscripts and photo submissions to:*

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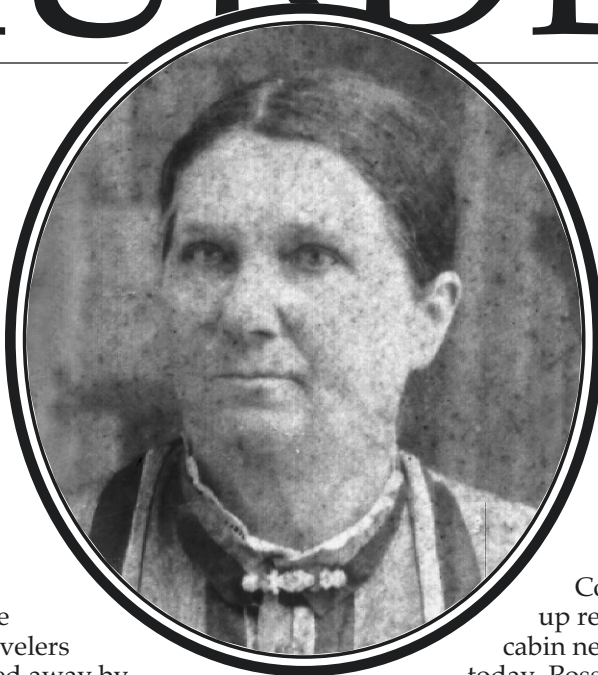
*Bryan Lee Shaw, Editor*



The red, sandy lane that leads off of the paved highway known as Possum Creek Road, seems like any other lane in rural Berrien County, Georgia. The traces of the days travelers have just been washed away by a late afternoon shower. Locusts are abuzz in the still, humid air. The fading sunlight reaches its fingers into the dark shadows of the heavy underbrush.

But this is not like other similar roads. Something happened at this place at an earlier time that would shock the sensibilities of any God fearing man—or woman. This was the place of murder.

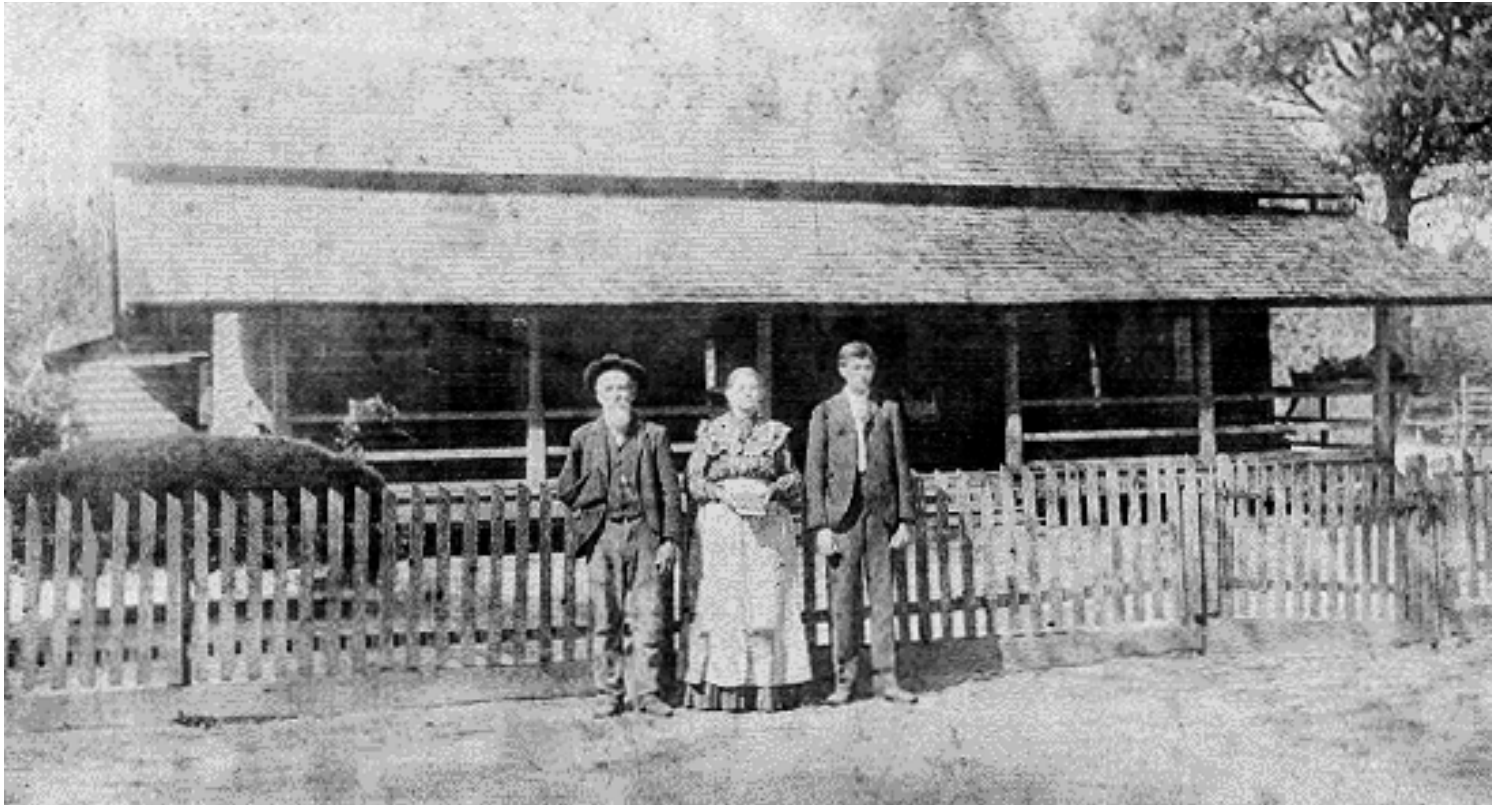
The year was 1900, late September, and families were suffering from the illness of



fever. The farm of Marion and Rachel Shaw had not escaped its bout with the scourge. A young, white couple by the name of Merritt, from Coffee County, had taken up residence in a small cabin near the place where, today, Possum Creek crosses

the highway. [The cabin had earlier been occupied by Marion's son, Jesse Shelby 'Dock' and his wife Suzie.] The Merritt couple had 5 children and were sharecropping on the Shaw's farm.

The Merritt lady had been ill with the fever for some time, but was recuperating. On the evening of 21 September, 1900, Rachel decided to walk down the lane from the farm home to the cabin to look in on the convalescing woman.



#### **MURDER ON THE MARION SHAW FARM**

*There is no sign of the horror that took place just a short distance down the lane, to the left, from the location of this peaceful setting of Marion and Rachel Shaw with their grandson, Brodie, in front of the farm home.*

*The tragedy occurred on September 21, 1900. Brodie was just 13 years old at the time. He appears to be about 16 or 17 years old in the photo above.*

*As an odd point of interest, Francis Marion Shaw died exactly 22 years to the day that the murder-suicide occurred.*

What conversation the two neighbors had is not known, but the Merritt woman wished to continue the discussion and offered to walk part way up the lane with Rachel towards the Shaw home. The evening was growing dark, so Rachel accepted the offer and the two women began the walk along the sandy road.

When only a short way from the house, the ladies were suddenly startled by a man leaping from the dark, shadowed bushes. It was Mrs. Merritt's husband. He was holding a Winchester rifle in his hands and with great anger in his voice, he shouted, "Oh yes; you have been telling lies on me."

Without any further comment, or before Mrs. Merritt could even respond, Mr. Merritt raised the rifle and, at close range, fired a single shot into the forehead of his wife, killing her instantly.

Rachel turned and ran up the lane towards her home, surely expecting at any moment to feel the sudden burn of a bullet in her back. Her legs must have felt like she was running in quicksand. Then she heard him yell at her to get Marion and come back down there because he was going to kill himself. And with that pronouncement, Merritt fired a shot into his body.

Rachel reached the farm house and summoned Marion to go back down to the site of the murder. Marion gathered several persons from nearby, probably including his sons, and cautiously returned to the scene of the crime. He found Mrs Merritt dead, and Mr. Merritt

mortally wounded, but still breathing. Merritt died within the hour.

**T**he murder-suicide caused quite a stir in the normally quiet farm area. Several theories were advanced to explain the cause of the horrible event. One of them was that Merritt and his wife had been quarreling a great deal, and in a fit of anger, he decided to put an end to it.

Another possibility was that they were not man and wife, and the authorities were after the alleged husband. This story alleged that Merritt ran away from Coffee county with the wife of a citizen two years earlier. The woman was accompanied by her 5 children, and pretended that Merritt was her husband and father of the children. However the story was about to come out, probably through conversation of the children, and Merritt decided to draw a curtain of death on the lie.

The couple was buried in the Beaver Dam Cemetery the following morning, in unmarked graves. There are numerous unmarked graves in the cemetery, and no record is known of their location.

Sadly, the disposition of the 5 children also is a mystery. Whether they were taken into homes by their extended family or turned over to the state orphanage, is not reported in any newspaper in Berrien or Coffee county.

—BLS

# ONE ARM, ONE HAND, ONE HEART



## DEDICATION OF GOVERNMENT MARKER AND IRON CROSS AT PLEASANT CEMETERY, NEW LOIS, GEORGIA

Solemn respect was paid to Private Francis Marion Shaw, C.S.A. by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Wiregrass Greys, and the belles of the Order of Robert E. Lee.

The ceremony was conducted by Adjutant General William A. Clements, Jr., and Burie W. Clements, Jr., great grandsons of Private Shaw.

The government marker was unveiled by Jimmy Shaw, great grandson of the veteran, and the iron cross was unveiled by young David Nathaniel Underwood, a 4th great grandson.

A floral wreath was placed at the headstone by Betty Jean Shaw Hughes, great granddaughter.

Invocation was by the Honorable John P. Webb.

**O**n the 8th of August, 1998, on a storm-threatened hillside in southwestern Berrien County, Georgia, the descendants of Pvt. Francis Marion Shaw, C.S.A. gathered to honor the service and unselfish sacrifice of their distinguished patriarch.

It was a ceremony filled with color, pageantry, and solemn dedication. As claps of thunder rolled across the darkened sky, a poignant rendition of *Dixie* and a 21-gun salute echoed across the fertile landscape. For those in attendance, it was a moving, everlasting memory.

The occasion also provided me with a moment to offer my humble appreciation in a small, inadequate way to that veteran. To those who may not have been with us, I share my thoughts here, once again:

**W**e are gathered here this afternoon at the final resting place of Francis Marion Shaw to honor the service and sacrifice Private Shaw offered for his home, his family, and his very way of life.

He was born January 5, 1846, on his parents farm, located about 6 miles south of here near the Lowndes County border. He was the 15th born of 16 children from the union of Jeremiah Shaw and Rachel Horne Shaw.

In his youth he was known as Marion by his

family and friends. In his later years, some called him "One-arm Marion" in reference to the absence of his right arm just below the shoulder. He wasn't born with just one arm. He once was as normal as you or I.

He was trained in the ways of a farmer; clearing the land, plowing the soil, planting the seed and gathering the harvest, all with the use of two arms and two hands.

But in the summer of 1864, his normal way of life suddenly and horribly changed. The nation was engaged in a terrible civil war, raging into its third year. The losses on both sides were staggering. The Confederate cause was nearing hopeless. The dwindling human resources called for drastic measures.

On February 17, 1864, the Confederate Congress passed the 3rd Conscription Act requiring all 17- and 18-year-old boys and 45- to 50-year-old men to make themselves available for military service. Marion had just turned 18.

Having seen the horrors of deformed men returning from the front lines, or not returning at all, he may have been reluctant to enlist. But by April 30, 1864, he had made his way to Gainesville, Florida and had enlisted with Captain John B. Nichols, Company A of the Florida Reserves. Marion received a passport which allowed him to return to his home to await a call for duty. He received that call only one week later.

With his two arms and two hands, he gathered his bedroll and personal possessions and joined the other new recruits at Madison, Florida, where they were then shipped by train to Lake City.

Upon arriving at Lake City, they were

## VIDEO COPIES OF DEDICATION CEREMONY

A great deal of those in attendance at the dedication as well as many who were not, have expressed a desire to have a video copy of the event for their own personal library.

Fortunately, Tina Shaw Nunn video taped the entire ceremony and has made it available for distribution to the family.

We have found a source of duplicating the 30 minute tape for a very reasonable price, and therefore the Family of Francis Marion Shaw will be distributing copies to each family, free of charge, at the 1999 reunion.

Just a little incentive to make your plans to attend our 6th annual reunion!

## DEDICATION CEREMONY PROGRAMS

There are a few ceremony programs still remaining for those who may wish to have one for their family history collection. Just write to Bryan Shaw at the address on the front of the newsletter. As usual, there is no charge for the ceremony program.

5TH ANNUAL  
FRANCIS MARION SHAW  
FAMILY REUNION A  
HUGE SUCCESS.



Oldest descendant Minnie Vickers Allen, 89, with youngest descendant, Savannah Lee Elizabeth Davis, 6 weeks.

It seems like the reunions keep getting better each year. The attendance was larger than ever before, with 26 new faces joining us for the first time. Many indicated that they won't miss another.

Each family member was greeted at the door by Phyllis Fletcher, 2nd great granddaughter, and given their choice of an 8x10 digital photograph of Francis Marion Shaw or of Marion and Rachel Shaw together. To the younger crowd (in age and heart) T-shirt transfers of the Francis Marion Shaw Family Logo were also offered.

Updates of Family Photo Sheets were distributed on the Eliza Allen Knight connection. And of course there were plenty of back issues of the Shaw Newsletter and other previously printed handouts.

For the second year now, we spotlighted a couple of our distinguished octogenarians (80-year-olds). This year we interviewed Minnie Vickers Allen, wife of Edgar Allen and the only surviving granddaughter-in-law of Marion and Rachel Shaw. The other spotlight interview was with Lynette Shaw Foulks, daughter of Bruner Shaw, who was one of two grandsons raised by the elderly Shaw couple.

As the day came to a close with a delicious potluck buffet, it was agreed by almost everyone that the only thing that would have made it better is if every descendant would have been there! Plan on next year.

marched across town, issued a musket, a shell box, and ammunition. They had no uniforms. They spent little time in military training, nor did they receive pay for any time of their service.

About the last week of June, Company A was moved to Gainesville, where Marion ran into his first cousin, Wiley Alfred Shaw, son of Daniel K. Shaw, his father's brother. Marion embraced his cousin with both of his arms.

On the morning of July 6, 1846, Private Shaw was one of 300 Confederate troops who were camped at Chamber's Plantation about 10 miles from the port of Cedar Keys, on the Florida Gulf. They were there to protect the operation of smuggling bales of cotton out on flat boats to avoid the Union blockade.

About noon, a small advance party of 50 Union soldiers from the garrison at Cedar Keys were discovered about 5 miles below the plantation. The alarm went out. "The Yankees are coming!"

A small skirmish ensued in which the Union troops were nearly overrun before the main body of 150 arrived in their support. The Union troops then withdrew 3 miles back to the coast at Station 4, where they were forced to wait 4 or 5 hours for low tide, so they could cross back over to Cedar Keys.

Private Shaw's company made 3 attempts to overrun the Union force. As they slowly worked their way forward, the Confederates found that the small sandy rises and clusters of palmettos provided little protection from rifle fire. Each palmetto became a haven for soldier and rattlesnake alike.

Marion, with both hands gripped firmly on his musket, had taken cover behind a small cluster of palmettos when, suddenly, he felt the kick of a mule against his right arm. But he had never felt a kick so hard. The musket fell from his hands, but when he reached out to pick it up, pain screamed through his body.

He grew faint as he looked down and saw the blood and horrible wound. The bone had been shattered by a Union minnie-ball just above the right elbow, just 10 inches from the center of his chest.

At that moment, his life and the lives of his family and descendants were changed forever.

After 3 assaults on the Union position, the Confederate force withdrew, carrying the body of a Lieutenant Jones and the wounded Private Marion Shaw.

Little if any medical assistance could be offered to young Shaw. Morphine was nearly non-existent by this point in the war. Private Shaw was carried 100 miles back to Lake City where he was treated with the only remedy available for such a serious wound—amputation.

On July 10, four days after being wounded, surgeons removed the hand and arm of Marion Shaw. Several days later he was returned to his Georgia home, like so many others before, less than whole.

A few months later the war was over. But the hard reality of a life with one arm and one hand was just beginning for Marion Shaw. He sought comfort and companionship with a widow lady, eleven years his senior, who had lost her husband in the second year of the war. Rachel Moore Allen, age 31, already had a family of 3 children. Two sons, William and John were both born before the start of the war, and a daughter, Eliza, was yet in the womb when her father died.

In early 1866, Marion took Rachel as his wife, and her children as his own. Over the next 9 years their family grew by 6, namely: Arthur, Ida Jane, Jesse Shelby, Effie, Lacy and Chester.

Marion provided for his family the only way he knew how. He was a farmer. But with only one arm and one hand, it took great courage and stamina to perform tasks that he had learned so well with two.

To clear the land, to cut each tree, with one arm. To strip it, to split it, to saw it into lengths, all with one arm, one hand. To harness mules, plow the land, plant, cultivate, and harvest, all by the courage and stamina of this one armed, one handed veteran.

Marion cleared and planted one plantation, sold it, and purchased another of several hundred acres. He cleared it, built himself a fine farm home on Possum Creek, and raised his family there. He also raised 3 grandchildren in his home.

In the summer of 1912, the physical hardships of farm life were wearing on Marion and Rachel. The elderly couple purchased four adjoining lots in Ray City, with the intent of building a home there, where they might live out their final years.

By 1920 the health of the elderly Shaws had begun to deteriorate, and on April 15, 1921, Rachel, Marion's earthly companion for 55 years, passed away.

For the next year Marion suffered more frequent bouts of illness. Finally, on September 21, 1922, in the back bedroom of the home of his son Lacy, Francis Marion Shaw, "One-arm-Marion", received his final rest.

**M**arion Shaw was a hero. Not because of what he did on July 6, 1864, but because of what he did after. He left us a legacy of courage, strength, and will. That we, his descendants, might see that no challenge is too great or task too hard, regardless of our handicap or circumstance, if we but put the love of our family above the love of ourselves.

May we pay tribute here today, and forever, to the sacrifice of this man with one arm, one hand. That we may always do so as a family, united, in one heart.

—Bryan Lee Shaw