

## John Shippee

By Tom Riley



John Shippee was the son of David Shippee and Catherine Sehulster and was born on August 26, 1843 on his father's farm at Echo Lake in the Newfoundland section of West Milford Township. He worked on the farm until 1862 when at the age of 18, he enlisted in Company E of the 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment NJ Infantry. He was the second of eight children.

He enlisted at Paterson for nine months' service and when the company was mustered in at Trenton, John was made a sergeant. Traveling by train by way of Washington D.C., the 25<sup>th</sup> was sent directly to the front at Fredericksburg, Virginia.

After the first wave of Union troops was stopped cold by the well-fortified Confederates, the second wave, with the 25<sup>th</sup> in the center, was ordered forward. The rebels, holding the high ground, had no trouble shooting down this wave as well. According to Butler's Martin Cook, who also served in Company E, wave after wave of Union troops were repulsed until the entire brigade was forced to retreat. In its first action, the 25<sup>th</sup> lost six men killed, sixty-one wounded and eighteen missing or captured. The Battle of Fredericksburg is considered one of the Union Army's worst defeats of the Civil War.

After participating in the siege of Suffolk, VA, their nine-month enlistment expired. The regiment was mustered out on June 20, 1863 and returned to New Jersey.

After his honorable discharge from the 25<sup>th</sup>, in September 1864, John re-enlisted and was commissioned a second lieutenant in Company K, Thirty-ninth NJ Volunteers. The 39<sup>th</sup> was one of the nine-month regiments formed in response to President Lincoln's July 1864 call for 500,000 more men to finish off the Confederacy. As with all the regiments raised late in the war, recruiting for the 39<sup>th</sup> was slow and large bounties were required to fill the unit's ranks.

The 39<sup>th</sup> was involved in a number of small engagements, but their first real pitched battle wasn't until the attack on Fort Monroe in the Battle of Petersburg, VA. On April 2, 1865, the 39<sup>th</sup> led the assault. Tearing away the abatis and wading through knee-deep mud under heavy enemy fire, the regiment mounted the parapet and captured the fort. The rebels rallied and mounted a counter-attack which drove the Jersey boys back. The 39<sup>th</sup> reformed and went at the rebels again, only to be driven back again. They attacked a third time and stubbornly held the outer works, while the Rebs clung to the inner works of the fort. The stalemate continued overnight and by daybreak the Confederates were gone.

During the battle, Lt. Shippee was knocked off his horse and a call went out for volunteers to carry him back to the Union lines. Silas and Jim Van Orden, two brothers from West Milford, offered to go. Grabbing a blanket, they crept across the battlefield and brought him safely back, crossing a brook where they had to wade in water up to their waists. Greatly appreciative, John always called the Van Orden boys his “body-guards” and credited them with saving his life.

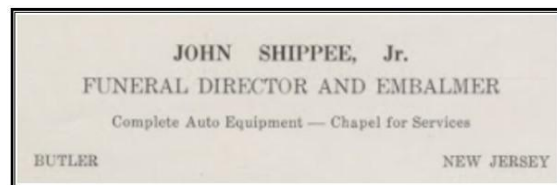
The regiment took heavy losses in the engagement with seventeen men killed and seventy-four wounded. Although many were new recruits, the men of the 39<sup>th</sup> proved they could fight like veterans.

They pursued Lee’s army all the way to its surrender at Appomattox. They marched in the Grand Review of the Army in Washington D.C. at the end of the war and Lt. Shippee was mustered out of service with the rest of the regiment on June 17, 1865.

After a short visit with his family, twenty-one year old John Shippee left to seek his fortune as a roughneck in the oil fields of Pennsylvania. Returning home after four years, he married Elizabeth Brower, came to live in Butler, and took up the carpentry trade. He worked for some time as a journeyman, then started his own business, working as a contractor and builder. His home on Manning Avenue is an excellent example of his craftsmanship.



While working in the carpentry business, John was also studying to become an undertaker, a trade he would practice for the next thirty years. The first floor of his home became a funeral parlor and the barn in back, his embalming studio.



John and Elizabeth Shippee had five children: Flora, who died at an early age, Frederick, Arthur, proprietor of the Manhattan Hotel in Bloomingdale, John Jr. a graduate of the Champion College of Embalming in New York City, (Champion is still a leading name in mortuary science) and Pauline. When Elizabeth passed on May 25, 1891, Pauline moved home to look after her father's household affairs. Sometime before 1903, John Jr. joined his father's business and became sole proprietor when John Sr. retired. Nine grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren carried on the family name.

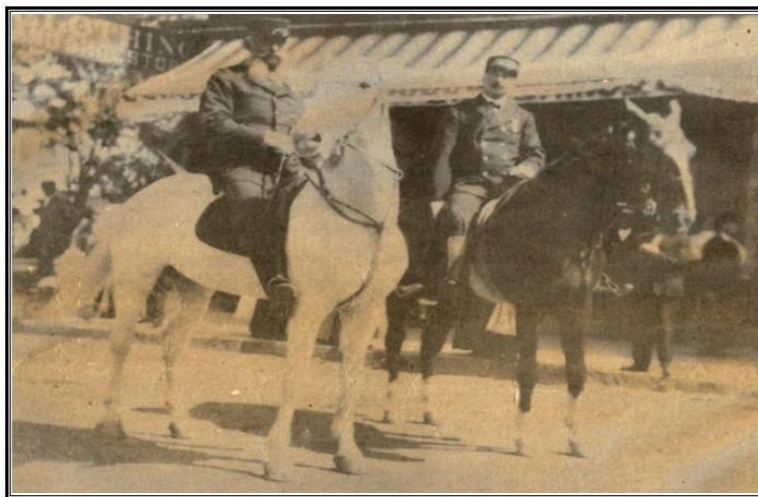
A true Jeffersonian Democrat, John was a well-known figure at the county and state conventions of his party. In 1890, Butler Democrats ran what they called the "big four ticket." Jesse Ward ran for tax collector, John Rogers for assessor, George Chambers for freeholder, and John Shippee for the office of justice of the peace. They all won and Mr. Shippee was reelected in 1896.

John was one of the main organizers of the Butler Fire Department. The first meeting of the organization took place at his home. He was their oldest exempt fireman and took an active interest in fire department affairs for the rest of his life.

He also served as president and treasurer of the Catholic Benevolent Society and was a member in good standing of the Neaskeleta Tribe of the Order of Improved Redmen Lodge.

Mr. Shippee was one of the founders and a charter member of the John E. Beam Post No. 92 of the Grand Army of the Republic (a Civil War Veterans Organization.) He served three terms as the Post's commander and held many other offices. When time took its toll on the old soldiers and the post disbanded, John was active in the affairs of the American Legion.

Lt. John Shippee died on October 12, 1931 and is buried with his wife in St. Anthony's Mount Calvary Cemetery. As stated in his obituary, he will long be remembered as a commanding figure on a big white horse, long whiskers flowing, leading the G.A.R. parade down Main Street, Butler on Memorial Day.



Sources: *Suburban Trends* June 15, 1969, *History of Morris County* 1882, *Paterson Morning Call* Oct 14, 1931,

