

The Civil War: The Lives and Service of an Extended Decker Family

Slide 1: Title

As I have researched the various Decker families over time, I have always been compelled by the history in which they were living. Sometimes I have to stop and remind myself that someone who was born and baptized in New York in the late 1600s probably lived their entire life before The Revolution. I have had a similar issue with those that lived during the time of the Civil War. And there could be no better reminder than standing next to a couple of graves at Gettysburg National Cemetery, who were not only soldiers but uncles of my Great Grandfather, James Franklin Decker. When I started doing genealogy just over ten years ago, I only knew as far back as James, who was orphaned as a boy (about 9) and moved to Michigan about 1890 while in his twenties. As I encountered more Decker names from the Civil War, and I transcribed many of them who served for The Union, I became more intrigued about many of them, particularly those who are somewhat closely related to my Decker line.

Slide 2: Civil War Soldiers: Descendants of Myndert Decker

My direct line includes Myndert Decker of Columbia County, New York. Of his six children, two of them could easily be said to have been strongly affected by the Civil War.

Michael Decker lived in Berne, Albany County, New York until his death about 1860-1865. Three of his children are known to have served in the Civil War: Minard, born about 1824, Lucius, born about 1833, and William, born about 1847.

John Decker lived in Ellisburg, Jefferson County, New York until his death in 1852. Two of his children are known to have served in the Civil War: Isaac, born 1838, and John D. Decker, born in 1845.

Slide 3: Civil War Soldiers: Descendants of Jacob Cornelis Decker

Jacob Decker was a first cousin of Myndert Decker. Of his descendants, two are known to have served in the Civil War. His grandson, Clark Wilcox Decker, was born in 1838 in Michigan and lived in Adrian. His father, Uriah (or Uri) Decker moved there from Columbia County, New York in 1833. It was there, on his farm in Lenawee County, that the cranium, tusks, three ribs, and other bones of a mastodon were found in 1864 about three two feet below the surface of a small peat bog (the Decker mastodon). A strange find for me in genealogy terms, but even more so as this is also in the time of the Civil War. Many members of Uriah Decker's family (ten children) lived in Michigan for several generations.

Also in this family was Jasper R. Decker, a grandson of Walter Decker. Jasper's father, Harley Redfield Decker, moved to Lenawee County, Michigan sometime before his first marriage in 1847. Jasper was born in 1848.

I also included the lineage to Erastus Decker, a cousin of Clark W. Decker, as through him there is another connection between the families.

Slide 4: Myndert & Jacob – Cousins

As I mentioned before, Myndert & Jacob Decker were first cousins. Their common ancestor was their grandfather, Jan Jacobsen Decker, who was baptized in the Kingston Reformed Dutch Church in New York on September 28, 1679. He married Thyssje Bogart about 1706, and was himself a grandson of Jan Broersen Decker, son of Jacob Jansse Decker & Belytje Bastianssen. Therefore the five grandsons of Myndert Decker were third cousins of Clark Decker and Harley Decker, the father of Jasper.

Slide 5: Family Connection

Even though the connection between the two families is third generation, there is somewhat more of a connection between them. James Franklin Decker, my great-grandfather, was orphaned as a child of about nine years of age in about 1873, and became (with his four siblings) a ward of the courts of Niagara County, New York and was assigned guardians until the age of 18. During this time he lived where he could, and the family history suggests he somewhat bounced around. In the 1875 census, he is listed in Niagara county with the family of Erastus Capron Decker (as Franklin Decker), with the relationship of “adopted son.” Erastus was first cousin to Jasper Decker’s father Harley and Clark Decker, suggesting that the families were at least somewhat familiar with each other.

Slide 6: Was Minard a Brother?

There has been a lot of confusion about Minard and whether he was a son of Michael. The evidence is fairly circumstantial, but quite suggestive. The first place I encountered this was on the website for the 20th N.Y.S.M. (<http://ulsterguard.us>) under “Anecdotes.” In the 1855 census for the Town of Berne in Albany county there is a Minard listed who couldn’t possibly be the son of Michael, for one he had lived in the town all his life, which was seven years longer than his father had lived there. Turns out he was a cousin to the Minard Decker (son of Jacob P. Decker) who served at Gettysburgh.

First, Minard & Lucius both enlisted in the 20th New York State Militia, serving in different companies. Second, in the 1830 & 1840 census listings there are children of Michael Decker (male & female) that are otherwise not accounted for. Third, in the 1860 census, Angeline Decker is listed both with her parents (in Berne, Albany County, enumerated in June) and with her brother Minard (in Shandaken, Ulster County in August). Also, there is the will of Phillip Warner. The brothers Jacob & Michael Decker each married sisters Sarah and Elizabeth Bovee. Their maternal grandfather was Phillip Warner, and his will (proved in 1827) lists amongst his children (all of full age) Elisabeth Bovee, wife of Michael Decker, and Sarah Bovee, wife of Jacob Decker. Amongst those not of full age or infants there is listed: Michael M. Decker, Jacob P. Decker, Abraham B. Decker, John H. Decker, and Philip Decker. A presumption would be that Michael M. had the middle name Minard, or that one was a nickname, or such. Jacob Decker did not marry Sarah Bovee until about 1824, therefore son Minard Decker is presumed to have been from a first marriage, and therefore would not be included in the will of Phillip Warner.

The evidence connecting Minard is still inconclusive, but highly suggestive. A lot of help on this came from Harold Miller of <http://bernehistory.org> and David Decker.

Slide 7: John M. Decker Family

John Michael Decker married Phebe Sturdevant about 1820, and moved to Ellisburg, Jefferson county, New York about 1823. His biography appears in the Child's Gazetteer of Jefferson County, Town of Ellisburg, written in 1890. They had four children (all boys), one died in infancy. Two sons served in the Civil War.

Slide 8: John D. Decker

John D. Decker, the youngest son was born in June, 1845. He enlisted in November, 1861 in the 7th New York Calvary, but died of disease at the regimental hospital less than two months later, in late December, 1861. (Died in Virginia, according to gravestone.)

Slide 9: John D. Decker

John was buried in Saxe Cemetery, Ellisburg, Jefferson County, New York, aged 16 years, 6 months.

Slide 10: Isaac W. Decker

Isaac, born in 1838, was the second oldest son of John & Phebe. He served in the 24th Regiment, New York Volunteers from May 1861 to May 1863. He married Lodema Kibling in 1865, and later worked as a proprietor of a meat market, produce dealer, and was commissioner of highways for Jefferson County in 1890. In 1905 he was invited to participate in a reunion from the war, as follows:

I.W. Decker has received an invitation to attend the third annual re-union of the First Iron brigade at Syracuse Sept. 14. This title was won April 18, 1862 for the march from Collette Station to Falmouth, Va, in which Mr. Decker's regiment, the 24th, with several other regiments participated. All surviving members of the 24th are invited to be present.

[Source: South Jefferson Historical Society, 8/29/1905, article on file]

He died in 1924 at the Soldier's home in Bath, Steuben County, New York where he went after feeling ill. He is buried in Ellisburg Cemetery, Jefferson County, New York.

Slide 11: Family of Michael Decker

Michael Decker married Elizabeth Bovee about 1824 and lived in Berne, Albany County by 1830 until his death between 1860 and 1865. Elizabeth then moved to Ellisburg where she died in 1869. She is buried in Ellisburg Cemetery, Jefferson County, New York.

The records, including census information from 1830 and later, show that they likely had nine children. Of these, three of them served in the Civil War.

Slide 12: William H. Decker

William was the youngest of the children of Michael & Elizabeth. He was born in 1847, and enlisted in the 2nd Mounted Rifles Regiment, New York in March, 1865. He mustered out in August, 1865 in Petersburg, Virginia.

William seems to have had a lifelong connection with women named 'Jennie.' There is a grave for Jennie E., wife of W. H. Decker in Zion Church Graveyard, Pierrepont Manor, Jefferson Co., New York, by whom he had a son Harley Jennings Decker (born 1882). In 1883 he married Jennie Freeman in Jefferson County, New York, who applied for his widow's pension in 1923. Finally, he adopted a daughter, also named Jennie Freeman, who was born in 1877.

William died in April, 1923 and is buried in Ellisburg Cemetery, Jefferson Co., New York.

Slide 13: Lucius & Minard Decker

Both Lucius & Minard served in the 20th New York State Militia, also called the 80th New York Infantry or the Ulster Guard. Both fought at Gettysburg and died on the third day of the battle, July 3, 1863, defending against Pickett's Charge. They are buried in Gettysburg National Cemetery with those from New York.

Slide 14: Lucius H. Decker

Lucius enlisted in September, 1861 in Company G, at the age of 28. In October he was promoted to Full Sergeant. During his service he spent time away from his company recruiting, but was at the Gettysburg in 1863 where he was killed on July 3 during the third day of fighting. The 20th N.Y.S.M. was recorded as aiding the Pennsylvania troops in defense of Pickett's Charge. He was wounded in the chest and killed.

Slide 15: Minard Decker

Minard enlisted in September, 1861 in Company K. He was shortly promoted to Full Sergeant (October) and later (according to the records) to Full Corporal. He was wounded on August 30, 1862 at the battle of 2nd Bull Run, Virginia. He fought at Gettysburg where he was wounded in the liver and killed on July 3, 1863.

Slide 16: Gettysburg National Cemetery

The graves for Sergt. L. H. Decker, Co. K Regt. 20 and Sergt. M. Decker, Co. G Regt. 20 are side-by-side in the national cemetery. The designations for the company in which each served appears to be reversed from those in the records.

Slide 17: Gettysburg – Ulster Guard

Among the many names used by the regiment, as mentioned previously, was the Ulster Guard. Although officially listed in the records as the 80th N.Y. Infantry, the unit preferred to use their state designation of the 20th New York State Militia. During the battle of Gettysburg they were involved in the initial skirmishes on the west side of town on the first day of battle, July 1. This monument marks the approximate location of where the 20th N.Y.S.M. first encountered fire. Unable to hold the position they retreated back into town setting up for the fighting that would occur over the next two days.

Captain John D. S. Cook of the 20th N.Y.S.M. compiled his [Personal Reminiscences of Gettysburg](#) where were read on December 12, 1903, some 40 years after the battle.

Slide 18: Gettysburg – Cemetery Ridge

On the final day of the battle, July 3, the 20th N.Y.S.M. was supporting the Pennsylvania troops who were directly involved in repelling Pickett's Charge, which was directed at the "Corpse of Trees" on Cemetery Ridge, now known as the "High Water Mark of the Rebellion" marked with this monument. To the right of the monument would have been where the fiercest fighting occurred, which involved the 20th N.Y. S.M. and presumably would have been the location where both Lucius and Minard were wounded and killed.

Slide 19: Family of Uriah Decker

Uriah Decker was born in 1805 in Columbia County, New York. He married Experience Baker in 1829, then moved to Lenawee County, Michigan in 1833. They had ten children. Many of his descendants lived in (or near) Adrian, Michigan. Their son, Clark Wilcox Decker, was born in 1838 in Michigan, and married Emma Finch in 1865.

Slide 20: Clark Wilcox Decker

Clark W. Decker first enlisted in 1861 for a period of three months. He fought in the Battle of Bull Run in July, the first real battle of the war. He enlisted with the Michigan Cavalry and served from 1861 until he mustered out at the end of the war in October, 1865. He served as a Second Lieutenant starting in 1861, and First Lieutenant starting in 1864.

Slide 21: Clark Wilcox Decker

I received this picture of Clark Decker in his Civil War uniform from Virginia (Decker) Loewe. It had previously been owned by Shirley Wood, a granddaughter of Clark's sister Isabella Decker, and has about 40 pages containing pictures of the family of Uriah Decker.

Slide 22: Family of Harley Decker

Harley Redfield Decker was born in 1825 in Ontario County, New York, and married Marendra Oles in 1847 in Michigan. They had nine children who were born in Lenawee County, Michigan.

Slide 23: Jasper R. Decker

Jasper Decker was born in 1848. He enlisted in Company L of the 1st Michigan Engineers and Mechanics. He was captured and held prisoner at Andersonville, Georgia.

Slide 24: Decker, J. – Andersonville

During April 1865 the records show that Jasper Decker (listed as Decker, J., Company L, 1st Michigan) was released as part of an exchange. Andersonville was the most notorious prison during the Civil War. According to a reference on Wikipedia: "During the war, 45,000 prisoners were received at Andersonville prison, and of these 12,913 died."

Slide 25: Jasper & Olive (Sister)

Jasper is buried in West Adrian Cemetery in Lenawee County, Michigan. He shares a headstone with his sister, Olive, who died at the age of one year in 1851. The stone is largely illegible. A 1937 reading of the cemetery captures most of the information, although undoubtedly the death occurred in April and not March. The record reads: "Jasper, P, son Marinda, d. Mar. 1865, age 18y 4m, Sultana Victim, Civil War."

Slide 26: S.S. Sultana

The S.S. Sultana was a wooden steamship constructed in 1863 for use on the Mississippi River. The legal capacity of the Sultana was listed at 376 passengers, but at the end of the Civil War it carried about 2,400 passengers, most of them freed prisoners of war. This was done to maximize the amount of profit by the captain & owner of the vessel at a time when maintenance was severely limited. In other words, he needed the money and would do anything necessary. According to documentation on Wikipedia and evidenced by the photo: "Passengers were packed into every available berth, and the overflow was so severe that the decks were completely packed."

Slide 27: S.S. Sultana

The disaster that ensued at 2:00 a.m. on April 27, 1865 is considered to be the greatest maritime disaster of all time. Called the "Titanic" of Arkansas, more people are believed to have died in this shipwreck than any other. Most estimates are that about 1800 of the approximately 2400 people aboard perished. The disaster received little publicity due to the national events of the time, including the ending of the war, the assassination of President Lincoln, and the search for his assassin. John Wilkes Booth had been killed on April 26, 1865. After Lincoln's death on the morning of April 15, he was transported to Springfield on a 13-day journey through 180 cities before arriving in Springfield, Illinois on May 3, 1865.

See also the [account of Uriah J. Mavity](#), a soldier from Indiana who survived the incident.

The website http://www.riverrockentertainment.com/sultana_search.htm lists two Deckers who were aboard, as follows:

First Name	MI	Last Name	Unit	Co.	Rank	Fate
Jasper	R.	Decker	1st Michigan Engineers & Mechanics	L	Private	Died
Jefferson		Decker	80th Indiana Infantry	E	Private	Lived

Slide 28: Civil War Deckers

By various records, some 1,400 to 1,500 Decker soldiers fought for the Union. An additional 139 are listed as having served the Confederacy. At least 618,000 Americans died in the Civil War. In addition to Lucius & Minard Decker, three other Decker soldiers died at Gettysburg (Isaah, and two with the

name Isaac), all from New York. I find these stories to be compelling, but when magnified by the number of soldiers who served, and those who died, it is unimaginable to understand the amount of suffering that was inflicted on those who lived during this time. I continue to gain new insights, and respect, when I encounter Decker families who were born during this time, married before & after the war, or mourned those lost.

Slide 29: Questions

I had thought about researching and writing about this topic for quite some time. As I mentioned, I find the stories quite compelling. Thank you for allowing me to share them.