

Lengthy struggle restores honor to Civil War veteran from Monroe

Capt. Henry McCalla's fellow Monroe Countians cared more for his demonstration of valor during the Civil War than they did for the cold reality of the state adjutant general's record, which said, bluntly, "Dishonorably discharged Nov. 24, 1862." After all, in July of 1863 when Confederate Gen. John Hunt Morgan invaded Indiana, did McCalla not rally a group of local men into a temporary military unit known as the 113th Regiment of minutemen to chase the general out of the state?

Nevertheless, the official record rankled in the minds and hearts of McCalla's veteran comrades. The Bloomington *Telephone* in March of 1903 put it more plainly. "Capt. McCalla's comrades have taken great interest in the matter of his restoration and took it up as soon as it (the Civil War) was over."

According to the newspaper, someone had done some extensive research, documenting the whereabouts of the 31st Indiana Regiment in the time period when McCalla's superior officer had said battle was "imminent." The approach taken



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by McCalla's friends to exonerate him was that of an act of Congress. Commented the *Telephone*, "The bill has been introduced in nearly every congress since the war..."

Surely there must have been times between the 1860s and the turn of the century when there were those Monroe Countians — possibly the "younger generation" — who said that it was a lost cause or that after all that time, what difference did it make. It is to the credit of McCalla's friends that they would not let the issue die.

The laurel for finally straightening up the record went to a Bloomington attorney, Robert W. Miers, who was born in Decatur County in 1848. What brought him to Monroe County was Indiana University, where he earned two degrees, a

Bachelor of Science in 1870 and a law degree the following year.

Bloomington appealed to Miers, and he set up his first law practice here immediately after he finished at IU. A Jeffersonian Democrat, the young Miers was elected prosecuting attorney in the 10th Judicial District, which included Orange, Lawrence and Monroe counties. For 12 years he was an IU trustee during the period when the university moved from Seminary Square to Dunn's Woods and the enrollment increased by 151 percent.

Overlapping his service on the IU board were his two terms as judge of the 10th Circuit. But it was his election to Congress that gave him an opportunity to take up the fight for McCalla's reputation.

In the 56th Congress, Miers got the bill with its documentation through the House of Representatives, but it died in the Senate. In 1903 he tried again. Reported the *Telephone*, "The special act restoring his (McCalla's) name rightfully as a part of the history of the

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