

# MIDWEST HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

## ALERT

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Library Hours:

Tuesday and Saturday  
10 to 4 pm.

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Inside this issue:

- Items of Interest
- Calendar of Events

### HOW COULD UNCLE DELBERT LEAVE SIBERIA, RUSSIA ON FOOT AFTER WWI?

Did Uncle Delbert Austin take another person's identity and hide out in the hills of Arkansas to avoid the Army? Is there any way Uncle Delbert could have walked out of Siberia after the War? ... The mystery will soon be solved.

So, when Julia offered a class on researching our ancestors in WWI, I took the opportunity to try to confirm or discount Delbert's family story (which I did not believe) that the Army did not provide transport to his group and they had to walk out of Siberia. Delbert had also mentioned that his job while in Siberia was to guard the supply train.

Our class was to contact the National Archives in St. Louis, MO. I completed their forms, but received nothing back except a form letter stating that his record was one of those that had burned in the July 12, 1973 fire that destroyed 80 per cent of the Army records (although I could pay \$25 for one piece of paper that was mostly burned but still retained his name on it). I could find no other records at that time except for two articles in the *Muskogee Times Democrat* newspaper. One article dated 24 Sep 1917, page 7, reported Delbert was drafted, and had left the previous day from Muskogee, OK to go to Camp Travis, TX. The second article dated 07 Jan 1918, page 2, stated that he had been acting as assistant cook for the past week and he had helped cook the Christmas dinner.



This year I went back to Family Search and was amazed to find many of his military records. (Evidently, the pandemic was good for something.) I had seen his military draft card before the pandemic, in which he requested exemptions as his father and his brother were his dependents (probably not true but did provide an excuse for him to take a furlough as noted below).

Then, I noticed a new record from the US Veterans Bureau, Master Index 1917-1940. It stated: "**FBI report the fingerprints on file for Robert L. Russell, ASN 5 04933 are identical with the fingerprints of Delbert Austin, ASN: 2-220-723, who enlisted 9-19-17.**"(1) I also found on Family Search under the military images that Delbert was on furlough from January 28 to

February 10, 1918; (after serving just over four months), was AWOL on February 10<sup>th</sup> of that year, and then listed as deserted as of February 10, 1918 from Camp Travis, TX. (2)

I checked again with my cousin and this time when I mentioned the name of Robert Lee Russell, he said, “Oh, now I remember. Delbert couldn’t deal with the Army; he went back to his mother’s place in the hills of Arkansas to hide out. After a while, he became nervous of the Army’s retribution if they found him; and he decided to enlist under another name—his uncle, Robert Lee Russell of Arkansas, who was deceased.” (Military records from Family Search show that deserters who were caught received three to six months in solitary confinement and any future pay was reduced by two-thirds for each day of their illegal absence. They also show that if a person deserted and was found, he could be subject to a trial and sentencing.) (2)

At this point, I asked Julia of MHGS how she would proceed. She suggested that I again go to the National Archives in St. Louis, MO and see if they had records under the name of Robert L. Russell. This time they produced a final pay stub at no cost to me. Again, I went back to Family Search and low and behold I discovered images in their military section that gave his beginning duty of August 26, 1918 at Evacuation Hospital #17, Artillery American Expeditionary Forces in Siberia. He is also listed as living in the barracks at Ulysses Bay, six miles from headquarters. (2) So, he was confirmed to be in Siberia!!!

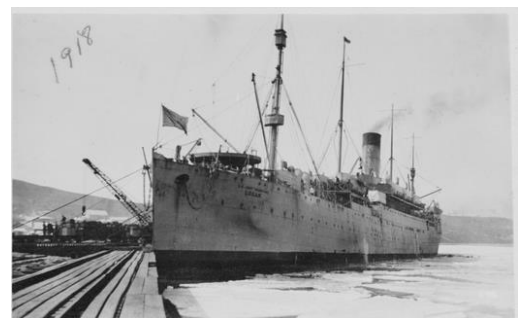
Per Wikipedia: The experience in Siberia for the soldiers was miserable. Problems with fuel, ammunition, supplies, and food were widespread. Horses accustomed to temperate climates were unable to function in sub-zero Russia. Water-cooled machine guns froze and became useless. (3)

Per AMEDD Center of History & Heritage, the railway was divided into sectors for guarding and that some of the forces were split from the hospital to guard the trains. Also, AMEDD reports that our forces were gradually reduced and withdrawn from Siberia by the end of February 1920. (4) “Delbert/Robert” was discharged somewhat earlier--on December 4, 1919. (2)

Edith M. Faulstich was an author who wrote about WWI’s Siberian Expedition in Russia. Faulstich found there were many American soldiers left in Siberia after the end of WWI. These soldiers were called the Siberian American Expeditionary Forces, Siberian A.E.F. Hardly anyone knew about these soldiers in Siberia or why they were there. Many men froze to death or died of other causes while in Siberia with their story untold and unrecorded in history books. Faulstich discovered Americans had not been told about these forgotten men. (5)

So, full circle, I now optimistically believe he was guarding the train as well as the hospital. The train was reportedly 400 miles from the port where he had to walk to get on the ship “Logan” on December 11, 1919 that brought him back to San Francisco on January 9, 1920.

I guess guarding the train in Siberia was not a horrific memory for him as Delbert is shown in the 1950 census to be working at the Union Pacific Railroad in Omaha, Nebraska at age 44 and he remained there until the end of his employment career--or else his experience around trains allowed for a good job opportunity in the States. Also, it is noted that for some time, Delbert’s father was working with the KATY (Missouri, Kansas, Texas) railroad in Muskogee as an Inspector)



I give my thanks to Julia for starting me down this path, to all those who input military records on the internet during the pandemic and most of all to our servicemen who had to survive terrible times for very little pay.

- (1) Veteran Administration Master Index from Family Search
- (2) Family Search Military Records, Image 85713803
- (3) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Expeditionary\\_Force,\\_Siberia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Expeditionary_Force,_Siberia), page 1
- (4) <https://achh.army.mil/history/book-wwi-fieldoperations-chapter41>, page 11, page 14
- (5) Siberian Sojourn by Edith Faulstich– her works are housed at Stanford University

## HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR ANCESTOR'S CHURCH

- Querying living relatives. The most common source of knowledge on recent generations is the family itself. The same church may have been attended for several generations.
- Consult other genealogical information on the family. Documents associated with someone's life may mention a church affiliation, such as a delayed birth certificate or military benefits application, obituaries, local or county histories, government marriage record or newspaper marriage announcement, or other documents or artifacts such as funeral programs, mass cards, insurance paperwork, death certificates, iconography on a tombstone, jewelry, devotional books, family letters.
- Consider any migrations.
- Colonial-established churches: Some colonial governments enforced an established faith. Spanish and French colonists in area later annexed to the United States were largely Catholic. Settlers in New York and New Jersey often left records in the Dutch Reformed Church. Early New Englanders were supposed to attend Congregational Churches. In the South, English settlers were most likely to appear in records of the Anglican Church (Church of England).
- Settlers' preferences. As new migrant groups arrived in an area, they brought their churches with them. Methodists were especially strong in the Midwest. Both Methodists and Baptists were in the Appalachian regions, along with Presbyterians. Baptists were most prevalent in the South.
- Immigrant Churches. Many immigrants and the following generation or two chose to worship along ethnic or nation-of-origin lines. Scots-Irish arrivals were mostly Presbyterians. Many French who settled in Pennsylvania and Virginia were Huguenots. Many Germans and Scandinavians were Lutherans. Irish and Italian immigrants were predominantly Catholic, as were many Poles, Slovaks, and other Eastern Europeans.
- Use County Histories, Historical Maps, and City Directories. Look at local or neighborhood records to see exactly which churches were in town, then form an educated guess as to the church they attended.

The Melting Pot Genealogical Society, Hot Springs, Ark

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2022-2023

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Please see the Google calendar or our Facebook page for details.

MHGS will be closed on May 27, 2023

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| <b>GENEALOGY ROUNDTABLE SPECIAL<br/>INTEREST GROUP</b>             | <b>DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION<br/>AND SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION</b> |
| <b>Second Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm</b><br><b>Led by Julia Langel</b> | <b>Fourth Tuesday @ 1:30 pm</b><br><b>Led by Twila Ackley Brown</b>                 |
| <b>PHOTO MYSTERIES</b>   |   |
| <b>Third Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm</b><br><b>Led by Rex Riley</b>     |   |

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