



## Getman News From The Past

### **The Getman Family**

The history of this family is Interwoven with the history of Montgomery county, from Revolutionary times till now and the family is spread over a goodly section of the western end of the county, in St. Johnsville, Canajoharie, Fort Plain, Fonda, Tribes Hill, Johnstown. N. Y. and other towns and villages. A genealogy of the family would show them to have entered in most every walk of life, farmers, merchants, lawyers and businessmen of all professions, thereby giving a good cross section of the history of the Mohawk valley.

(Saint Johnsville, New York, ENTERPRISE AND NEWS, Wednesday, February 19, 1936)

## **William C. Getman**

### **Sheriff – Los Angeles, California**

Several issues ago I asked if anyone had information concerning William C. Getman, who was killed while serving as Sheriff of Los Angeles. The following is a compilation of what has been learned since, and provides a summary of the interesting life of the man.

### **Born near Fort Plain, New York**

William Clark Getman, (GFG A 183) was the only son of Willaim G. Getman (1796 – 1830) and Catherine Charlesworth. His name seems to have been honoring his father (William) and an uncle (Clark Charlesworth).

William was born about 1821 in the Town of Minden, Montgomery County, New York. His father died January 25, 1830. What became of his mother is currently unknown.

### **Serves in the Mexican – American War**

It is known that William served in the Mexican war and sustained as many as three injuries. Research by Clyde Getman suggests that William probably served in the 2nd Infantry Regiment which was sent to Camargo, Mexico and joined General David E. Twiggs' Brigade. From September 1846 to December 1847 the regiment campaigned from the Rio Grande to Mexico City, fighting in battles at Veracruz, Cerro Gordo, Contreras, Churubusco, Moline del Rey and Chapultepec.

### **Moves to California Following the War**

Census records show him in Sacramento, California in 1850 and as a Hotel Operator in Los Angeles, California in 1852.

### **Warranted Land in Wisconsin**

William was warranted a piece of property (160 acres) in the state of Wisconsin on September 10, 1850. This was a Military Warrant based upon his service in the Mexican War. He apparently sold the property and remained in California.

### **Serves as a California Law Man**

Thirty-one-year old Sheriff William "Billy" Getman, thrice wounded during the Mexican American War, and a Lieutenant in the Los Angeles Rangers became Sheriff in September 1857.

## **Accounts of his death**

### **Newspaper Article**

*Los Angeles Herald, CA  
Monday, April 17, 1899*

... In the summer of 1857, the state election came off and the regular state and county tickets were presented. William C. Getman, who had already served two years as city marshal, was elected sheriff. He was a noble-hearted man, brave and a terror to evil doers. In the spring of 1858, after he had been for some months in possession of his office, Sheriff Getman was informed that there was a crazy man in Madigan's corral, which stood at the corner of Aliso and Alameda streets, where now there is a stable.

He went down to arrest the man. Arriving there, the supposed lunatic made no resistance, but asked as a favor that he might go to see a friend in Nigger alley. As the man was quiet and apparently in his right mind, the sheriff granted his request, not thinking for a moment that any harm could come of doing so.

Together they went up to Nigger alley, and when they had reached a point about half way through, the man, who had not been searched, suddenly drew a revolver from his pocket and covered the sheriff with it. Getman shouted, 'Don't shoot!' but the scoundrel fired, killing him instantly.

Intense excitement was felt all over the city when the assassination became known. The citizens gathered from all parts, and, to escape the crowd, the desperado, who was afterwards found to have been in reality an outlaw, took refuge in a pawnbroker's shop at the foot of Nigger alley. Driving the proprietor from the store, he seized all the firearms and prepared to defend himself to the last.

The mob gathered in upon him, but he fired into their midst and held them at bay, wounding W. W. Jenkins, who now lives in Castaie canyon, above Newhall, in the thigh. Jenkins was game. Winding a bandage around his bleeding limb, he hobbled, around the building to a point where the ground enabled him to look down a knothole in the ceiling and view the interior of the store.

At the front door stood the desperado, a revolver in each hand, and apparently master of the situation. Aiming through the knothole, Jenkins shot him in his tracks, the ball passing through the head of the desperado. And so ended the assassination of Getman.

## **Officer Down Memorial Page**

*on line internet source*

Sheriff William Getman was killed while trying to diffuse a violent situation. A suspect had entered a pawnshop and demanded to the storeowner shoot him or he would shoot the storeowner. Sheriff Getman responded and came up behind the suspect, spoke calmly to him and placed his hand on the suspect's shoulder. The suspect quickly turned around and started shooting emptying his gun. Sheriff Getman was struck and killed. A Deputy and other men returned fire killing the suspect.

## **William C. Getman**

*Unidentified internet reference*

In 1857 the voters elected William C. Getman to succeed Sheriff Bettis. Getman's term of service was the briefest of any person who ever served the county as Sheriff. He was the second to be killed in line of duty.

"Billy" Getman, as he was popularly known, was a western hero in every sense of the word, and he was well qualified to perform the job to which he was elected. As a soldier during the Mexican War, he had been severely wounded by grapeshot at the storming of Belen Gate in siege of Mexico City. For two years prior to his election as sheriff, he had served as city marshal of Los Angeles. He was also a lieutenant in the Rangers. This was a law enforcement

organization that had evolved from the city's volunteer police force.

Getman had been in office only a few days when he was informed that a man named Reed was causing some concern in town. When the Sheriff and a deputy, Francis Baker, arrived at the scene they found that Reed had barricaded himself in a room adjacent to a pawnshop. As Sheriff Getman was about to force the door, Reed suddenly burst through it. As Reed ran out he pulled a pistol from his pocket and fired point blank at the young sheriff, killing him instantly. A running gun battle ensued, and armed Angelenos joined the fray and began shooting at the fleeing felon. This tragic incident occurred on January 7, 1859, and Sheriff Getman was buried two days later. Once again the Board of Supervisors was called upon to appoint someone to complete the unexpired term of a Sheriff. The person chosen was James Thompson.

**Sheriff William C. Getman** – September 1857 – January 1858 Four months after William Getman became sheriff, he was involved in a shooting with a mentally ill man. The sheriff was shot and killed. His deputies confronted the suspect and during another shooting, suspect Reed was shot and killed. The day of Sheriff Getman's funeral, all of the buildings in town were draped in black. Saloons were closed. The whole town watched as the funeral director reluctantly removed what was the symbol of a hero, Sheriff Getman's badge. Sheriff Billy Getman was the first law enforcement officer in the nation killed by a mentally deranged person. His death was also one of the earliest documented cases of what has become known as, "Suicide by Cop." This syndrome is characterized by a mentally ill person provoking the police into killing him since he is not willing to do it himself. William Getman was the second and last Sheriff killed in the line of duty in Los Angeles County.

## **Burial**

William's original burial is identified as Fort Moore Hill Cemetery, in an article by the Los Angeles Times. The article was related to the history of Fort Moore Hill, current site of the Los Angeles Unified School Districts office. Many, but not all, of the remains in that cemetery were reinterred at Rosedale Cemetery, Los Angeles in 1917, Others were not and remain under more current construction. The location of William's remains is unknown