

# Why it's called *Bills* Lake

## Connecting dots and drawing conclusions

It is my supposition that Bills Lake was named after Charles W. Bills who died in the Civil War.

- It says so in an article about the death of Charles Stray who owned much of the shoreline on the west side. The piece is to be found in a 1960 edition of the *Newaygo Republican*
- Naming cities and land (and lakes) in honor of Civil War casualties was something that was done in those days, especially during and after the Civil War. For instance, my winter residence is Bartow FL. It was once named Ft. Blount FL until Francis Bartow, a Confederate Brigadier General, was killed in the first Battle of Bull Run.
- Charles, the son of patriarch Abel Bills who brought his family to the area from New York state in about 1840, died in a regimental hospital in Alexandria VA in Feb. 1863, presumably of wounds suffered in a battle at Petersburg Va in the previous December.
- The 1880 plat is the earliest that I or anyone else in Newaygo County can find. It lists our body of water as Bills Lake. This means that the lake was named sometime between 1840 and 1880. If, say, an 1860 plat could be found that identifies it as Bills Lake, then I am wrong.

### How did he die?

Charles, at age 22, enlisted into the Union Army at Leslie Michigan on Aug. 21, 1862. His muster date is Sept 25th. He joined Company H of the 24th Regiment, a unit of Michigan volunteers that was organized in Detroit and had been mustered into Federal service on Aug. 15th.

This regiment joined the ranks of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin units and the 19th from Indiana. They formed what was known as the Iron Brigade in the Army of the Potomac. This unit served in many of the war's memorable battles including Gettysburg.

However, Charles didn't make it to Gettysburg. Instead, he was wounded at Petersburg ---but apparently not in the Siege of Petersburg which occurred much later --- a mere four months after being mustered in.

The 24th participated in the Battle of Fredricksburg on Dec. 11-15 and the Union army sustained considerable losses in a futile attempt to dislodge the Confederate forces who were dug-in. But Fredricksburg is located 83 miles from Petersburg. In other words, what skirmish Charles was involved in remains a mystery. Bottom line: the dates between his wounding and death are a corroboration.

Name	Charles Bills
Enlistment Age	22
Birth Date	abt 1840
Enlistment Date	21 Aug 1862
Enlistment Place	Leslie, Michigan
Enlistment Rank	Private
Muster Date	25 Sep 1862
Muster Place	Michigan
Muster Company	H
Muster Regiment	26th Infantry
Muster Regiment Type	Infantry
Muster Information	Enlisted
Muster Out Date	7 Feb 1863
Muster Out Place	Alexandria, Virginia
Muster Out Information	died disease

## RECORDS OF THE SURVIVORS

**Charles Bills**, wounded near Petersburg.  
August Gilsbach, prisoner at Weldon Road.  
Sergt. John R. King, prisoner at Gettysburg ; at Anderson.  
Dennis Mahoney, wounded at Gettysburg.  
Alexander H. Morrison, Mt'd Orderly at Brigade Hdqrs.  
John Nollette, in Div. Eng. Corps two years.  
A. Wilder Robinson, served in Battery B.  
Andrew J. Stevens, in Brigade Com. Dept. one year.  
John Steele. in Ambulance Corps one year.

History of the Twenty-fourth Michigan of the Iron Brigade : known as the Detroit and Wayne County Regiment : illustrated

Detail Related Source

Suggested Records ⓘ

No record has been selected or there are no Suggested Records related to this record.

Comments ⓘ

He lingered from Dec. to Feb. 7,, 1863 where he died in a regimental hospital in Alexandria VA. His mustered out information states: "died disease." He is buried there in a national cemetery.

Many of his family members are buried at Oak Grove Cemetery, located down towards Croton Dam on Elm St. one half mile from Hilltop Store. This explains why Charles' grave is not among them.

Caution: I have never found an item that explicitly states that his death is the reason why we live on Bills Lake. However, I have found no compelling reason to believe that the lake was named after his father.

### C. O. Stray, 92, Dies at Grant

GRANT — Charles O. Stray, 92, former operator of boat liveries in the Croton area, died Thursday at the home of a daughter, Mrs. John Morrison of Grant.

Mr. Stray was a member of a pioneer Newaygo County family, his grandfather being Charles Bills for whom Bills Lake was named.

Besides Mrs. Morrison, he is survived by two other daughters, Mrs. Leonard Shutts of Newaygo and Mrs. Clara Brougel of Bills Lake; a son, John of Grant; 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

The body is at the McKinley Funeral Home where services will be held at 1 p.m. Monday. Burial will be in Oak Grove Cemetery, Croton Township.

This article mistakenly identifies Charles W. Bills as Charles Stray's grandfather. Private Bills was actually his uncle.

That's because Charles Stray's father married Mary Elizabeth Bills who was Abel's daughter and Charles Bills' sister. Mary Elizabeth and her husband, Orson Stray, owned land that reached the shores of the lake on the west side.

His son, whose obituary is to the left, inherited those shoreland properties and sold them during the early 1900s.



Photo by Katie Sawyer Boyle

**An item in the Newaygo Republican states that Bills Lake was named after Charles W. Bills, who died in the Civil War on Feb. 7, 1863. He was the first son of Abel and Almira Bills who arrived in the Croton area from Owego, Tioga, New York sometime prior to 1838.**

**In those days, it was common practice to name or rename towns --and apparently lakes -- after soldiers who died in the war.**

**His remains are in Alexandria National Cemetery, Alexandria VA**



# Where Charles W. Bills is Buried

## Alexandria National Cemetery

### Alexandria, Virginia



#### Civil War Dead

An estimated 700,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died in the Civil War between April 1861 and April 1865. As the death toll rose, the U.S. government struggled with the urgent but unplanned need to bury fallen Union troops. This propelled the creation of a national cemetery system.

On September 11, 1861, the War Department directed commanding officers to keep "accurate and permanent records of deceased soldiers." It also required the U.S. Army Quartermaster General, the office responsible for administering to the needs of troops in life and in death, to mark each grave with a headboard. A few months later, the department mandated interment of the dead in graves marked with numbered headboards, recorded in a register.



Photos by Katie Sawyer Boyle

# Where Charles W. Bills is Buried

## Alexandria National Cemetery

### Alexandria, Virginia



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GRAVE LOCATOR  
4/15/2022

926 ALEXANDRIA NATIONAL CEMETERY, VA

Name	Columbaria		Birth Dt.	Death Dt.	Interment	Rank	Branch	
	Section	Row						
BENTLEY, WILSON A	A	0	366	JUN 25 1863	JUN 25 1863	PVT	USA	
BENSON, DOROTHY MARIAN GRACE	B	0	3262-1	JUL 10 1922	MAY 18 2009	MAY 10 2010	Dependent	
BENSON, JOSEPH	A	0	987		OCT 04 1863	OCT 04 1863	PVT	USA
BENSON, JUDG LOUIS	B	0	3262-1	JUL 24 1926	OCT 10 2017	MAY 10 2010	EMTD	
BENSON, NICHOLAS	A	0	1828		NOV 30 1862	NOV 30 1862	Sgt	USA
BERITONUS, LEWIS	B	0	3108		JUL 15 1865	JUL 15 1865	PVT	USA
BERRY, ABIAH	A	3	413		DEC 08 1862	DEC 08 1862	PVT	USA
BERRY, GOTLEIB	A	3	1819		JAN 17 1864	JAN 17 1864	PVT	USA
BERRY, JOHN	B	3	3226		DEC 12 1864	DEC 12 1864	PVT	USA
BERRIMAN, ROBERT LEE	B	3	33	JAN 11 1961	JAN 25 2023	FEB 07 2023	PVT	USA
BESCH, JOHN	A	3	992		OCT 01 1863	OCT 01 1863	PVT	USA
BESLEY, GEORGE	A	0	2562	JUL 15 1867	AUG 15 1864	MAY 15 1864	PVT	USA
BESSEY, ALEX	A	0	1652	SEP 28 1862	SEP 28 1862	SEP 28 1862	PVT	USA
BETTIS, BELLE LANGLAY	A	0	1327	APR 21 1895	NOV 27 1969	DEC 01 1969	Dependent	
BETS, GEORGE	B	0	2812		OCT 15 1864	OCT 15 1864	PVT	USA
BETS, REUBEN	B	0	3800		JUN 08 1861	JUN 05 1865	PVT	USA
BEUTNER, HARRY F	B	0	5820	APR 14 1895	FEB 19 1947	FEB 23 1967	ACM9	
BEYER, ALBERT	B	0	2911		APR 15 1865	APR 15 1865	PVT	USA
BEYER, GEORGE	A	0	424		NOV 05 1862	NOV 05 1862	PVT	USA
BYRLEKINE, MICHAEL	A	0	1184		MAR 15 1862	MAR 15 1862	PVT	USA
BYTTS, GEORGE D	A	3	904-3		SEP 10 1862	SEP 10 1862	PVT	USA
BIASE, ANTHONY J	B	3	5031	OCT 16 1899	MAR 25 1967	MAR 10 1967	PVT	USA
BIASE, FLORENCE B	B	3	5031	SEP 23 1895	JAN 25 1987	JAN 10 1987	Dependent	
BIRD, RICHARD O	B	0	2444		JAN 20 1864	JAN 20 1864	PVT	USA
BIRCH, JAMES H	A	0	2965		JUN 08 1864	JUN 08 1864	CPL	USA
BIRCFORD, FERGUS	A	0	22		MAY 23 1862	MAY 23 1862	PVT	USA
BIRGLE, DEAN CHARLES	D	0	23	APR 02 1915	APR 28 1967	MAY 02 1967	Sgt	USA
BIRNALL, PAUL	A	0	827		JUN 09 1863	JUN 09 1863	PVT	USA
BIRNALL, JOSEPH H	A	0	126		SEP 22 1862	SEP 22 1862	PVT	USA
BIRGLOW, W E	A	0	642		DEC 23 1862	DEC 23 1862	PVT	USA
BIRGLOW, W E	A	0	196		JUL 25 1862	JUL 25 1862	PVT	USA
BIRKINGTON, GEORGE	A	0	710		FEB 07 1863	FEB 07 1863	PVT	USA
BILLS, CHARLES	A	0	710		AUG 18 1864	AUG 18 1864	PVT	USA
BIRNHAM, CARY R	B	0	2443		JUN 09 1864	JUN 05 1864	PVT	USA
BIRCH, THOMAS C	A	0	816-73		JUL 03 1864	JUL 03 1864	PVT	USA
BIRCH, WILLIAM F	B	3	2323		JAN 24 1949	FEB 24 1949	SFC	USA
BIRCHER, GEORGE W SR	B	3	3620	JUL 03 1917	JAN 24 1949	FEB 24 1949	SFC	
BIRNHAM, GEORGE	A	3	1371		FEB 19 1862	FEB 19 1862	PVT	USA