

Why it's called Bills Lake

Connecting dots and drawing conclusions

It iss 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?

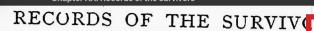
Charles, at age 22, enlisted into the Union Army at Leslie Michigan on Aug. 21, 1862. His muster date is Sept 25th. He joined Company H of the 24th Regiment, a unit of Michigan volunteers that was organized in Detroit and had been mustered into Federal service on Aug. 15th.

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.

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	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	Н
	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



Charles Bills, wounded near Petersburg.

August Gilsbach, prisoner at Weldon Road.

Sergt. John R. King, prisoner at Gettysburg; at Ander 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

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Suggested Records ?

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

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, locateddown 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 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,

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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



