

# DUV TENT 21, NORMAN NAMESAKE, MAJOR BELLE REYNOLDS 1840 • AFTER 1900

## ILLINOIS 17<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY, CO A

Belle Reynolds is listed with her regiment, the 17th Illinois. Her husband of one year, William, joined the 17th in Peoria, their home in May 1861. William was 26, nearly 5'10" with blue eyes, brown hair and fair complexion. Both Arabella Macomber and William S. Reynolds were native of western counties of Massachusetts, he in Berkshire, and Belle in Shelburne Falls, Franklin County. In 1850, Arabella is listed with her family, in Hampshire County, as the oldest daughter of H.W. Macomber<sup>1</sup> and his wife Martha. H.W. is a "silk manufacturer" with a good income, and the family is reported as "prominent and educated" in a town known to be a station of the underground railroad.

Almost everything known about Belle and William was written in newspaper accounts during the War. References in today's literature continue the reports written then, and there is a sense that the couple "dropped from history," after a brief time. But Belle's actions stirred many at the time, to service and patriotism. William joined the 17th as a Sergeant, and was promoted to a 2nd Lieutenant, as a clerk assigned to the Adjutant for Company A.<sup>2</sup> When Belle joined her husband, the 17th was based at Bird's Point, MO. Belle moved with the unit to the skirmish at Fredricktown, MO in October, 1861, then Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, TN in early February, 1862. Mrs. Reynolds and another soldier's wife were at camp on April 6th when the battle at Shiloh overran the area, and they fled for Pittsburg Landing on the Tennessee River. Their riverboat *Emerald* began to take on the wounded to move them up-river, and for a nearly sleepless week, the women provided care to the wounded, on the boat and nearby docks. Finally, instructed by her husband to return to Illinois, she boarded the steamship, *Black Hawk*. Belle found she was on board with many interested citizens, including Illinois Governor Yates, who sought details of the battle. Governor Yates then had his secretary complete the Army commission papers, and Belle returned to Peoria as Major Reynolds.



Nursing not only kept Belle Reynold's interest after the War, she completed medical studies and practiced as a physician in Illinois and California, and served with the Red Cross in the Philippines.<sup>3</sup> The 1900 Santa Barbara City, Santa Barbara County Census reports Belle L. Reynolds to be a "Physician." The role into which Mrs. Major Belle Reynolds was thrust at the Battle of Shiloh, had become her lifetime choice.

Peoria Citizens' wrote a thank you letter, and a copy with the report about the brave Mrs. Major Belle Reynolds was carried in the *Peoria Daily Transcript* the national *Harper's Weekly* on May 17th with a full portrait, then in the *Chicago Times*, May 19th 1862. Belle's travels were newsworthy for a time, since she out-ranked any woman in the military and certainly, her husband. She returned to the 17th to be with William, and was reported to have been at Vicksburg in 1863, then continued with Lieutenant Reynolds until his three-year discharge in 1864. The 1870 Census, shown below, from Pymosa, Cass County, in southern Iowa, reports William, 36, to be a "cashier" and Arabella, 27 as "keeping house," traditional occupations but note that Arabella has the \$2,400 "Value of Real Estate" linked with her name, and William has \$2,000 personal property. The 1900 Santa Barbara census reports Belle L. Reynolds as born in October 1840, age 59, with no children born, and to be a widow with 20 years of marriage, which would have meant William's death was about 1880. No further evidence is found in the subsequent Federal Census, and her place of burial is unknown.

92	Reynolds	Arabella	Wife	of	William	2000	Mass
	Wife	of	William	Reynolds	1840		

## ARABELLA MACOMBER REYNOLDS

BORN IN SHELBURNE FALLS, FRANKLIN COUNTY, MA, 1840 - AFTER 1900  
WIFE OF WILLIAM S. REYNOLDS, 1840 - ~ 1880, MARRIED 1860

1. Federal Census: Macomber Family, Northhampton, Hampshire County, MA; 10 Aug 1850  
2. Illinois Civil War Detail Report, from the State Archivist; [cyberdriveillinois.com](http://cyberdriveillinois.com)  
3. Picture: Garrison, Webb, *Amazing Women of the Civil War* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press) 1999  
4. Mary Elizabeth Massey, in a review of *Notable American Women 1607-1950*, for the journal, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 1, (Washington, D.C.: The American Historical Association) 1973, p. 144-145.

