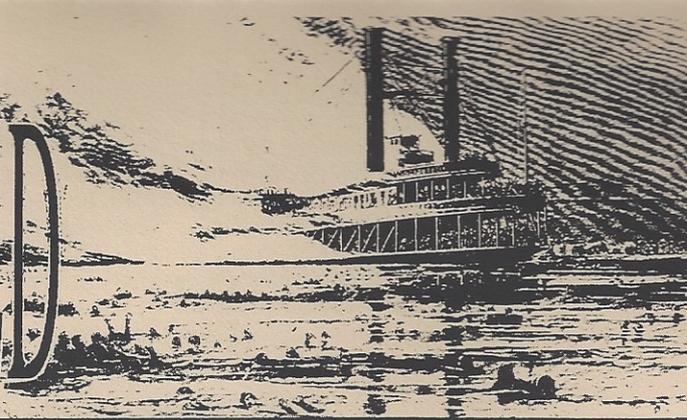


the

SULTANA REMEMBERED



Newsletter of the Association of Sultana Descendants and Friends

April 27, 1865

WINTER 2000

The Grand Army of the Republic Remembered

- By Pam Newhouse

When soldiers who had survived the *Sultana* disaster finally arrived home, they slowly began to pick up the pieces of their lives. The sights and sounds they had seen and heard on the battlefields were clearly and indelibly etched in their memories, making domestic life seem unreal at times. We know that many just wanted to put the past as far behind them as possible, and didn't want reminders..

But this was difficult. Almost every family and many businesses had been touched in some way by this war which would ironically become known in the North as the "Civil War." Soldiers' widows and orphans were numerous, and many of the veterans were mentally and physically damaged. These problems turned out to be more than many post war communities could handle.

State and Federal leaders, including the now-dead President Lincoln, had promised to care for "those who have borne the burden, (as well as) his widows and orphans," but there was little knowledge of how to accomplish this, nor little political pressure brought to bear to see that these promises were kept.

Many of the veterans began to feel hollow- as if their central core was missing and their natural compass was gone: They began to yearn for their army comrades who lived in other towns and states. Their old friends, they reasoned, would understand how they felt and faster healing could take place.

Out of this social climate came the formation of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.).

Early in 1866 Dr. Benjamin F. Stephenson created the basis for the Grand Army of the Republic. A former surgeon, Stephenson devised an elaborate system of oaths and rituals that played on anti-confederate sentiment, and on April 6, 1866 at Decatur, Illinois, he established the



G.A.R. MEMEBERSHIP BADGE

**"In their final years,
the G.A.R. men
quietly faded away.
Their story had been
told and retold..."**

- Bruce Catton

G.A.R.'s first chapter. The community level organization was called a "Post" and each was numbered consecutively within each department. Most Posts also had a name. The rules for naming Posts included the requirement that the honored person be deceased, and that no two Posts within the same Department could have the same name. The Departments generally consisted of the Posts within a state and, at the national level, the organization was operated by the elected "Commander-in-Chief."

Post Commanders were elected as were the Junior and Senior Vice Commanders and the members of Council. Each member was voted into membership using the Masonic system of casting black or white balls. The casting of more than one black ball was required to deny a candidate membership. When this occasionally happened, the rejection was reported to the Department which listed it in General Orders and were were maintained in a "Black Book" at each Post meeting place. The meeting rituals and induction of members were similar to the Masonic rituals.

The official ruling body of the Department was the annual Encampment, which was presided over by the elected Department Commander, Senior and Junior Vice Commanders and the council. Encampments were elaborate multi-day events which often included camping out (just like the good old days in the army!), formal dinners and memorial events. The first encampment was held late in 1866, when Stephen A. Hurlibut was elected the first national commander. The stated goals of the G.A.R included the promotion of fraternal feelings among veterans, the aiding of needy or disabled comrades, the support of veterans' widows and children, the facilitation of service benefits, and the encouragement of public allegiance to the government. The society also had definite political ends, seeking a mutually advantageous association with the party that had administered the war effort. (Folks came to believe that G.A.R. stood for "Generally All Republicans.")

The organization's importance to the

Republican party grew with its membership. Within six months of the G.A.R.'s formation, Illinois alone boasted 157 posts. Soon neighboring states added chapters, and the organization expanded eastward and southward. By mid-1867 virtually every Northern state had G.A.R. posts, as did those former Confederate states where large numbers of Federal veterans had settled.



G.A.R. POST BANNER

It was under Hurlbut's successor, General John A. Logan, that the organization experienced its most significant growth. Under Logan's leadership, the G.A.R. realized the equalization of wartime bounties, the passage of a national pension law, and the establishment of homes for veterans' orphans, and the first Decoration Day.

Over the next six decades, the power of the organization delinced, after the membership peaked at an all time high in 1890 of 427,981.

The G.A.R. erected memorial monuments whenever there was a strong G.A.R. presence. In large cities, they were grand affairs and usually featured a statue of a Union soldier on top of a tall base. These memorials were costly and fund-raisers were often undertaken, as well as donations accepted.

In smaller towns the memorials were more modest, such as the one erected in the Bezonia, Michigan cemetery by the E.P. Case G.A.R. Post #372. Bezonia is the hometown and final resting place of Bruce Catton, one of Michigan's finest sons who was a superlative Civil War writer. A

journalist by training and trade, his books and articles have done much to further several generations of Americans' appreciation of our Civil War. In his book about his boyhood in Bezonia, *Waiting for the Morning Train*, Catton writes about the G.A.R. men in his village, which could be about any one of thousands of such places across the country. And he says it so well:

"One of the pleasantest holidays of the year was Memorial Day, universally known then as Decoration Day because it was the day when you went out to the cemetery and decorated graves. This day of course belonged to the Civil War veterans, although as years passed it more and more became a day to put flowers on the grave of any loved one who had died, and when it came just about everyone in town went to the cemetery with a basket of lilacs. Lilacs grow like weeds in our part of the country, and most farmers planted a long row of lilacs as windbreaks around their houses; in town almost every house had lilacs in the yard, and in late May the scent of them lay on the breeze. To this day I never see lilac blossoms without remembering those Decoration Day observances of long ago.

The Civil War veterans were men set apart. On formal occasions they wore blue uniforms with brass buttons and black campaign hats; by the time I knew them most of them had long gray beards, and whatever they may have been as young men they had an unassuming natural dignity in old age. They were pillars, not so much of the church (although most of them were devout communicants) as of the community; the keepers of its patriotic traditions, the living embodiment, so to speak, of what is most deeply believed about the nation's greatness and high destiny.

They gave an especial flavor to the life of the village. Years ago they had marched thousands of miles to legendary battlefields, and although they had lived half a century since then in our quiet backwater all anyone ever thought of was that they had once gone to the ends of the earth and seen beyond the farthest horizon. There was something faintly pathetic about these lonely old men who lived so completely in the past that they had come to see the war of their youth as a kind of lost golden age, but as small boys we never saw the pathos. We looked at these men in blue, existing in pensioned security, honored and respected by all, moving past the mounded graves with their little flags and their heaps of lilacs, and we were in awe of them. Those terrible names out of the history books - Gettysburg, Shiloh, Stone's River, Cold Harbor - came alive through these men. They had been there.....and now they stood by the G.A.R. monument in the cemetery and listened to the orations and the prayers and the patriotic songs, and to watch them was to be deeply moved.

The G.A.R., of course, was the Grand Army of the Republic, the veterans' organization of those days. The Bezonia

local of this organization was officially the E. P. Case Post #372, and it had been named for Edward Payson Case, a Bezonia man who died in 1886, a year before the post was organized. He must have been quite a man; he had enlisted in 1864, in the artillery, and his unit had been sent to Cumberland Gap on garrison duty and had finished out the war there, never getting into combat. Almost to a man, our G.A.R. members had been in violent action during the war, and they never would have named the local post after a noncombat soldier if he had not been an impressive sort of person. The monument they built, sometime in the late 1880s or early 1890s, was completely handmade. It was a fat column of field stone and mortar, no more than four or five feet tall, capped by a round slab of rock that was just a little wider than the supporting column; it looks like an overgrown toadstool and it would be funny if it were not so unmistakably the work of men who were determined to have a monument and built one with their own hands because they could not pay for a professional job. The spirit that built it redeems it; it stands today as the most eloquent, heart-warming Civil War memorial I ever saw.

By the time I knew them these veterans were in their seventies, or very close to it, and a hale and hearty lot they were. There was one man, whose name I do not remember, who lived on a farm a few miles south of town. He had fought at Gettysburg, and in 1913 there was big fiftieth anniversary celebration of the battle, with surviving veterans invited to attend. This old chap went to Gettysburg, enjoyed the three days' activities, and then came home by train, and when he finished the trip, at Beulah (Michigan), he found that the friend who was to have met him with a buggy to drive him out to his farm had somehow failed to make it. Quite undaunted, the seventy-year-old veteran picked up his carpetbag and hiked the five miles home. He could see nothing remarkable in this, because he had made many worse hikes during the war.

In their final years the G.A.R. men quietly faded away. Their story had been told and retold, affectionate tolerance was beginning to take the place of respectful awe, and in Europe there was a new war that by its sheer incomprehensible magnitude seemed to dwarf that earlier war we knew so well. One by one the old men went up to the sun-swept hilltop to sleep beneath the lilacs, and as they departed we began to lose more than we knew we were losing. For these old warriors, simply by existing, had unflinchingly expressed the faith we lived by; not merely a faith learned in church, but something that shaped us as we grew up. We could hardly have put it into words, and it would not have occurred to us to try, but we oriented our lives to it, and if disorientation lay ahead of us it would

come very hard. It was a faith in the continuity of human experience, in the progress of the nation toward an ideal, in the ability of men to come triumphantly

through any challenge. That faith lived, and we lived by it. Now it is under the lilacs." ■

Postscript

Inheritor of the G.A.R.: Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

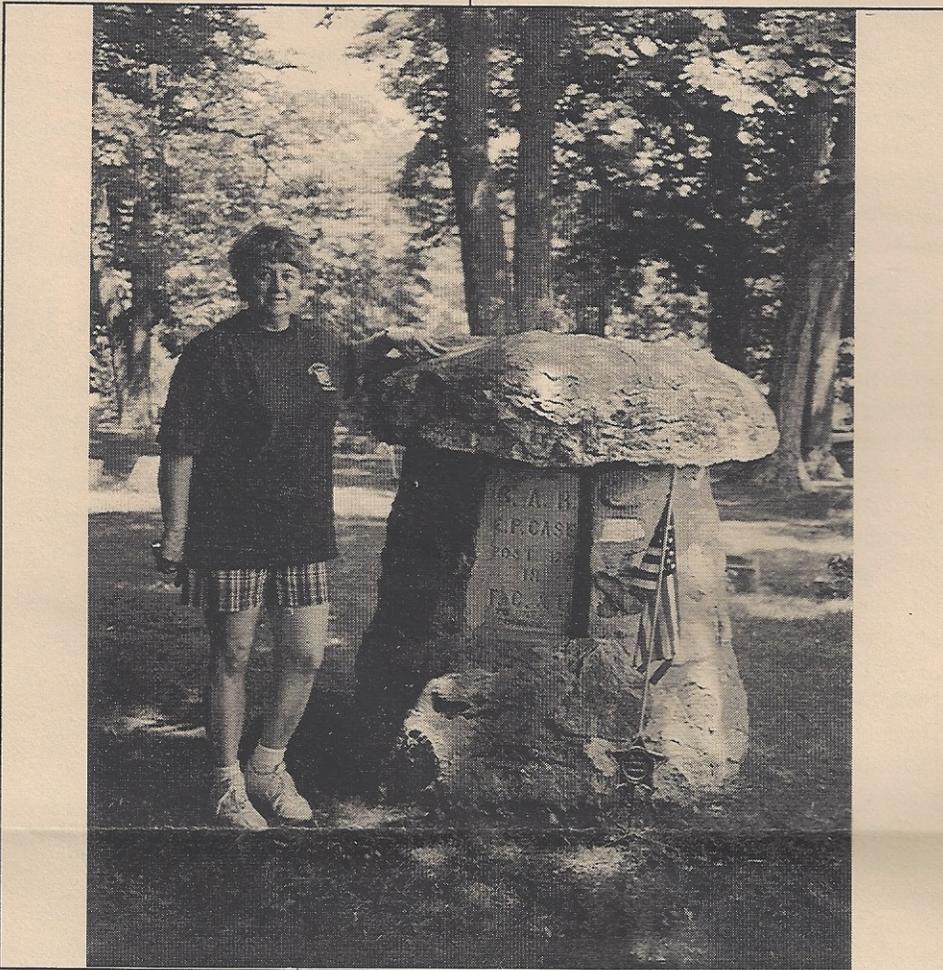
In 1949 the G.A.R.'s 83rd and final encampment was attended by six of its sixteen surviving members. The last comrade, Albert Woolson of Minnesota, a drummer boy in the war, died in 1956 at age 109.

In 1881 the G.A.R. formed the Sons of Veterans of the United States of America (SV) to carry on its tradition and memory after the G.A.R. ceased to exist. Membership was open to any man who could prove ancestry to a member of the G.A.R. or to a veteran eligible for membership in the G.A.R.

Many posts sponsored Camps of the SV. In 1925 the SV name was changed to Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW), under which its federal charter was issued in 1954. The SUVCW is legally recognized as the heir to and representative of the G.A.R.

Today, the National Organization of the SUVCW, headed by an annually elected Commander-in-Chief, oversees the operation of 26 Departments, each consisting of one or more states, and about 180 community based Camps. More than 7,500 men enjoy the benefits of membership in this organization which is dedicated to the principles of the G.A.R.: Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty. It publishes The Banner quarterly for its members.

The SUVCW is one of five Allied Orders of the G.A.R.. The other four Orders are: Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic, Women's Relief Corps (WRC), Auxiliary to the SUVCW, and Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War.



**SULTANA REMEMBERED EDITOR PAM NEWHOUSE AT
THE BENZONIA G. A. R. MONUMENT**



**MEMBER OF THE G.A.R SHAKING HANDS WITH A MEMBER
OF THE UNITED CONFEDERATE VETERANS (UCV).**

Not for fame or reward
Not for place or for rank,
Not lured by ambition
Or goaded by necessity
But in simple obedience to Duty
as they understood it
These men suffered all,
Sacrificed all,
Dared all - and died.

- on the Confederate monument at Arlington National Cemetery. But it seems a fitting tribute to both Southern AND Northern men.

My Alabama Sultana Ancestors

- by George C. Beason

Since their first entry into this country in the 1630s, small groups of families and friends have moved steadily westward.

One group included the Beasons, Deermans, Baggetts, Smiths, and Buffingtons who first moved from Virginia and Georgia to the Carolinas, Tennessee, and on to Alabama.

These families tended small farms and had many children to help with the chores. Few if any had any slaves.

Among these people was Mary Brigham Deerman (mother of 14) who received an Indian land grant around 1819 to settle on the "Jackson Trace" on the Coosa River, near the later settlements of Whitney, Gilbert and Steele.

Here, around 1820, Mary built a one-room church and established an adjoining cemetery. In 1834 her grandson deeded what had become known as Deerman's Chapel to the Methodist Church.

In January of 1864, when the Civil War was in full swing and the outcome was not yet clear, five teenaged friends from St. Clair County, Alabama, made their way to Nashville, Tennessee. There, James David Baggett, his brother William, Lewis A. (Doob) Deerman, Frank Battles, and Polk Smith enlisted in the 3rd TN Cav., Co. K (USA). They took part in several battles, and William was wounded in the left eye, captured, and paroled home. The other four went to Sulphur Branch Trestle with their regiment.

They were all captured on September 25, 1864 by the army of General Forrest and were sent to Cahaba Prison. (These boys were some of the few Union soldiers who were imprisoned in their own state.) Lewis Deerman and a friend escaped from the prison train but were recaptured within a couple of days after wading all night in the swamps.

Lewis' brother Harrison D. Deerman (CSA) died of a lung infection in POW camp Fort Delaware, NJ in March of 1865, just before Lewis and the other Cahaba prisoners were sent to Vicksburg, Mississippi to be exchanged.

They boarded the *Sultana* on April 24 with the other more than 2000 Federal soldiers. Lewis and Frank Battles made

their beds half way back on the deck. They were awakened around 3 AM by the explosion. Frank found an 8 ft. long 2 x 10 and Lewis found a three foot long board. They entered the water together where Lewis helped Frank (who couldn't swim) mount his board and pushed him away from the crowd. Lewis swam about an hour and a half and found a log where he stayed until morning. Frank was the first person he saw whom he knew.

We do not have an account of David Baggett's *Sultana* escape. Polk Smith died. So, three out of four of the boys from St. Clair county survived. Frank Battles reportedly had three cousins on the boat

After being mustered out the four survivors returned to their homes in Alabama where, in the post war years, the Baggett, Deerman, and Beason families intermarried. I am, therefore, a descendant of these three families.

Many Deermans and Baggetts are buried in the old cemetery next to Deerman's Chapel, which was established by Mary Brigham Deerman 180 years ago.

The Chapel has always been a tiny country church and probably never had a membership over fifty. There is not a church office nor telephone and I don't believe that they've ever had a full time pastor. They are on the "Circuit", sharing a pastor with several other churches. Yet, like so many tiny churches tucked away in rural America, its members have always led strong, fundamental Christian lives.

I attended this one room church with my grandparents, Curtis Beason and Jerusha Ann (Baggett) Beason many times prior to WWII and we had "dinner on the grounds"- and played on the gravestones, unbeknown to me, of my grandmother's parents and grandparents, and traced the letters. The church was not yet electrified. One of my memories is of the two bright brass Coleman chandeliers hanging in the church, and the brilliant white light they produced.

I am proud to say that Beasons and Deermans have fought in every war since the Revolutionary War and were on both sides of every major battle in the Civil War. I was pleased to make contact with the descendants of the *Sultana* and I am so proud to be one of them.

Important Dates to Remember in 2000

SATURDAY, APRIL 1 in Marion, Arkansas

- Dedication of an historical marker commemorating the *Sultana*. Sponsored by the Arkansas Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

Reception at the Marion United Methodist Church at 2 PM; Dedication across the street at 3 PM

For more information and specific directions contact Jeannette Coley, 910 South Roselawn Dr., West Memphis, Arkansas 72301-2446 (online address: JMCOLEY@aol.com) or Kay Brockwell (online address: KayB1860@aol.com

Please let me know if you will be there so the hosts can make plans based on numbers of people expected. (Pam Newhouse, CW1865@aol.com or 4081 Clark Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105-9505

SATURDAY, APRIL 8 in Knoxville, Tennessee

- Our 13th annual Reunion of *Sultana* Descendants and Friends.

At Mt. Olive Baptist Church, south of the city. Meet at the *Sultana* monument in the adjoining cemetery at 11 AM. Reunion to follow at the church. Bring your family stories, artifacts, questions, answers, finger foods- and be prepared to have a wonderful time!

For those of you coming a distance and needing to stay overnight, the Airport Fairfield Inn is a nice place to stay, as some us have stayed here a few times and have been pleased. It is located at 126 Cusick Rd., right across from the Knoxville Airport (south of the city towards Alcoa, TN). Rooms are about \$55-65 per night and the phone number is (423) 984-9350. This hotel is but a few miles south of Mt. Olive Baptist Church. In the next month's newsletter, which you will receive before the Reunion, I will include a map of the area.

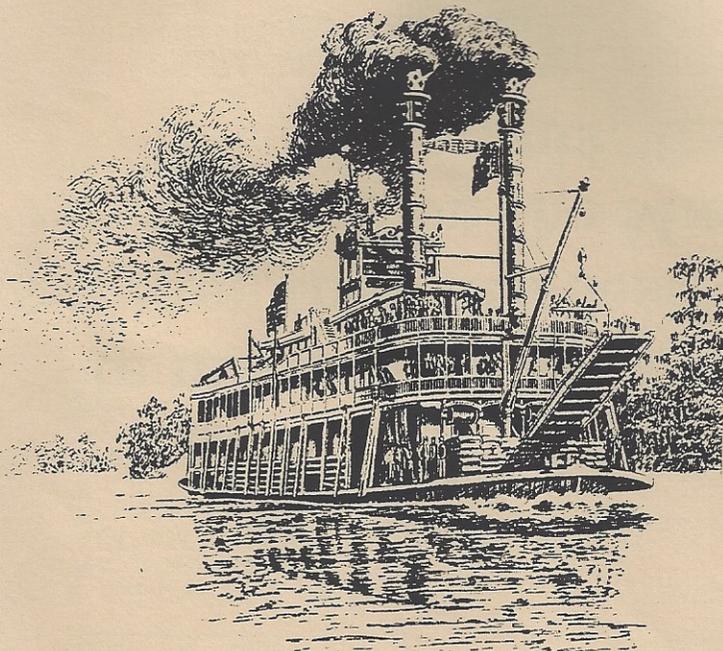


Post War Comments of a *Sultana* Survivor Regarding Government Treatment

After the war, Sultana survivors banded together to seek some kind of recompense for their wartime miseries; not only for their Sultana experience but also for the time they spent in Southern prisons. Many felt that their government had truly abandoned them. Survivor Hosea C. Aldrich said as much in a little self-published booklet entitled, "Cahawba Prison, a Glimpse of Life in a Rebel Prison and also the Explosion and Burning of the Steamer Sultana. 1700 Lives Lost" (Also on the cover: "Price 15 cents, to defray expences") Thanks to descendant Peaches Streeter for sending me a photocopy of this booklet.- Ed.

"Congress has from time to time enacted laws most just and liberal toward the men who were disabled in the late war, but a large majority of the prison survivors are excluded from pension under the laws. They are called upon to furnish the affidavit of some army surgeon, who treated them after release and prior to discharge, showing that they then had the disease on which they now claim a pension, and this is impossible. When I state that not one in a hundred of the unfortunates who were confined for a period of two or three months in a southern prison have not been able to perform full manual labor, I only state what is a well known fact. Disease contracted there has done its work, and statistics show that of those who were released nearly five per cent died before reaching home, and some have never suffered from any particular disease, but rather from a combination of numerous ills, the consequence of wrecked constitutions, commonly termed by physicians, general debility. The commissioner refuses to grant a pension on disease, save where the proof is clear and positive, but in favor of survivors that are yet living we would suggest that it be enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in the United States, upon application and proof being made to the department, all honorably discharged soldiers and sailors of the federal army and navy who during the late war were captured and confined during the period of two months or more in any of the southern prisons, or places used for the confinement of prisoners by the confederate authorities during the late rebellion, and that such pension in each case begin from the date of the discharge of the soldier or sailor, and be at the rate of eight dollars per month, and two dollars per day for each day confined in said prisons, and said pension paid at the same time and in the same manner as other pensions are paid. This would be nothing more than justice to all survivors of rebel prisons."

-HOSEA C. ALDRICH (held in Cahaba Prison and survivor of the Sultana disaster)



From the Editor: "Connections"

- Pam Newhouse

Subscribers, this begins the tenth year that I have sat down to put together his newsletter so that we all may be connected between annual reunions. I feel very fortunate to have found you; in many ways my life has been much changed because of it. Truly, I never imagined where this interest would take me when I first read the note written by my great-great grandmother, in German, telling how her husband, 42-year old Pvt. Adam Schneider was captured at Franklin, imprisoned at Cahaba (she wrote it "Lahbra"), and died on the *Sultana*. I never dreamed that it would finally take me back to Germany - as it did this past September -to meet the German descendants (and my cousins) of Adam's wife Catharine.

They came to Cincinnati in 1853- after my gr-great grandfather made a failed attempt to assassinate the Prince of Prussia (later Kaiser Wilhelm I). The event is commemorated annually by the Ingelheim Historical Society- these Hessians were no fans of the Prussians, then or now. I told them everything I know about the *Sultana*. They were aware that he died in our Civil War, and that he left three small girls behind. It was a joy to connect to my past in this way- and the trip was wonderful; my mother and three grown children went too. We saw the houses where Adam and Catharine were born (they were neighbors) and the vantage point from where Adam attempted to shoot the Prince. It was awesome.

Many other connections have been made as well; many, because of the Internet. If you haven't visited our website lately, please sign on to www.sultana.org. We have a new Webmaster, Michael Johnson, of Sumter, SC, who has updated the site, and will continue to do so. Michael is a descendant of Lewis Johnson, 9th IN Cav. Thanks, Michael!

In the past few months I have heard from various people who are working on *Sultana* projects: One, on a movie, another has written a screenplay; three are writing *Sultana* novels (one has a contract for at least 2), and two are working on documentaries. As Martha Stewart likes to say, "It's a good thing!"

- PAM NEWHOUSE