

# Two Strangers Named Robert Cheek

## Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

This is the story of two young men, one little more than a boy. They shared the same first and last names, and shared the same family line, the Cheek family. Yet, as will become apparent, they never knew each other.

One was an uncle to the other, or, if you prefer, one was a nephew to the other. The Cheek family line was among the more prestigious in Baraboo in its time, well known and respected. Sadly, each Robert Cheek suffered a sudden and violent death, with different circumstances and times, but resulting in their demise in each case.

### Robert "Rob" Cheek

The first Robert Cheek, the uncle, was about age 17 in 1862, a year of unbridled patriotism in both the North and the South as they warred upon each other in the young nation. Its otherwise admirable Constitution in 1789 had reluctantly recognized the presence of human slavery, with no real solution. Now the die was cast, with overtones of succession from the Union by the Southern States.

Though remote and little removed from its frontier days, Baraboo was a bastion of the Northern indignation, and Rob Cheek was among the eager young men prepared to manfully defend the sanctity of the Union and the movement to abolish slavery. His older brother Phillip was already in service and young Rob was champing at the bit to prove his manhood and do his bit toward victory.

Rob had a problem, for his father, with one son already in the conflict, refused permission for this underage son to enlist. In a letter from Camp Randall, where Rob was tentatively enlisted, he wrote for this father's permission, knowing that the answer might be negative.

Rob's letter, now in the possession of Mary Hein of Baraboo, offers his Father Twenty five dollars and a promise of ten dollars a month, apparently to pay for hired hands to take his place on the farm. .

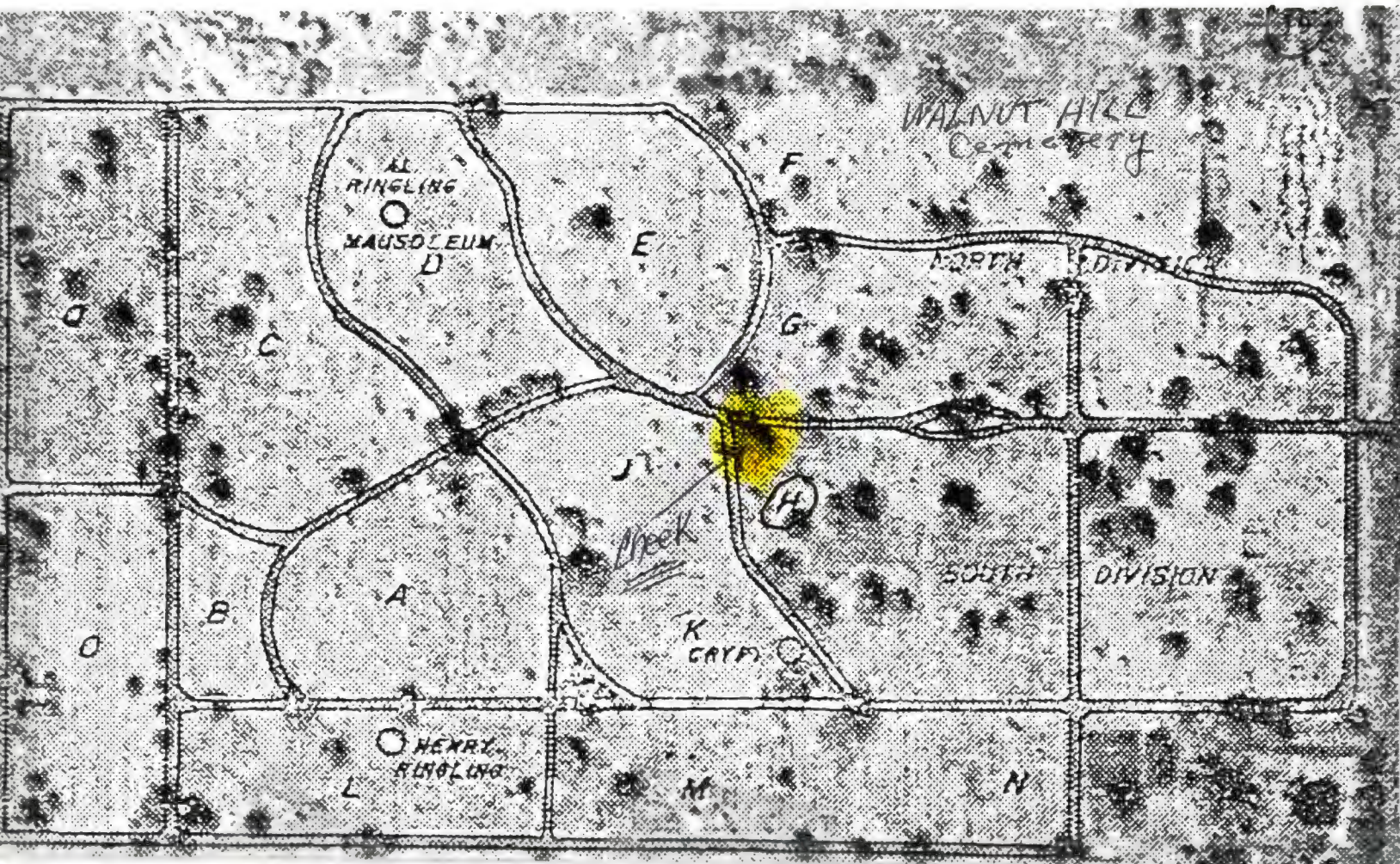
Rob was serious, for in the next sentence he states "If you don't sign I shall go somewhere and shan't farm it any more--your land". In other words, unless his father gave his permission, Rob was threatening to leave the family farm and go on his own after the war, which was not expected to last long anyway.

Whatever the outcome of this family crisis, Rob became a soldier. One year and one day after enlisting, the patriotic young Rob Cheek was killed in the Battle of Petersburg Va.

### Robert Cheek

Phillip Cheek Jr. was the older brother of Rob Cheek, Wounded the Battle of Antietam in September, 1862, he returned to Baraboo, establishing a family and a home on the ridge overlooking downtown Baraboo. Reached then by a circuitous climb along Oak Street and 10<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue, the prominent location was known even to today's old timers as Cheeks Hill.

The oldest son in Philip's family was Robert Cheek, almost certainly named in respect for and memory of Phillip's younger brother, Rob Cheek, killed in the Civil War



nearly 3 years previous to young Robert's birth. Philip's young son, Robert, would at age 15 have known how to saddle and ride a horse, drive a carriage, and no doubt had hunted in the area of present-day Madison Street.

By 1880 young Robert Cheek was described by the newspaper as "an admirable and estimable boy, a dutiful son and promising scholar, in whom his parent's hopes were largely centered". Unfortunately for the family, those words were the words in the obituary of young Robert Cheek. Like his namesake, Rob Cheek, Robert met a violent death at age 16.

As reported in the Baraboo Republic on April 14, 1880, "Early this morning the residence of Philip Cheek Jr. on a high hill in the north part of town was struck by a thunderbolt. Mr. Cheek's eldest son, Robert, fifteen years of age, was instantly killed.

The clothing of the bed upon which he lay was set on fire, and the chimney was torn, a part of the bricks falling on another bed in the opposite corner where Mr. Cheek's two other children were sleeping, and breaking down their bedstead.

In the bedroom below, where Mr. and Mrs. Cheek were sleeping, the plastering was torn down directly above their heads, and the lower corner of the room torn out. The other children in the same room with Robert do not seem to have felt the shock at all."

Thus Robert Cheek, like his uncle Rob and named after him, also suffered a violent death.

#### Other Robert Cheeks

One might assume from these sorrowful events that the name Robert would be anathema to future Cheek descendants. Not so, for the internet provides a list of some twenty apparently prestigious Robert Cheeks living today, scattered from coast to coast. In addition, there are Robert Cheeks in England and Australia. None remain in Sauk County.

The Sauk County Historical Society recently had an inquiry from David Cheek of Australia. We plan to contact the Australian Robert Cheek, and also expect to be writing about Philip Cheek in the future, but with a much happier narrative.