

# Ephraim Shay, the Man

By Rick Henderson

*Ephraim Shay has been credited by some as a schoolteacher, physician, civil engineer, logger, merchant, railway owner and inventor. These indeed are a large variety of interesting vocations for one individual. While researching Mr. Shay, I cross-referenced from every source I could lay my hands or mouse on to build a complete profile, a majority of which is centered on his Shay style locomotive. In doing so I discovered a few interesting items regarding the development of the Shay locomotive and the life of Ephraim Shay.*



Ephraim Shay c1892

## ***Ephraim Shay, the Man***

Today, Harbor Springs, Michigan still remembers Ephraim Shay as one of their prominent historical citizens, a true tribute to a man dead over 95 years now. He passed away April 19, 1916 in Harbor Springs. His grave in Lake View Cemetery, Harbor Springs, like the man, is itself unusual. It bears two tombstones. One is the US Government grave marker for a Civil War Veteran. The other, a large black rock over four feet tall, incorrectly reputed to be a meteorite from his own property. Samples of this rock have recently been tested by two professional geologists and have determined it to be of earth origin.

Ephraim Shay was born on July 17, 1839 in Sherman Township, Huron County, Ohio. His parents insured Ephraim received a better than average education. He attended a Select School, studying to become a schoolteacher after his grade school years in Shaytown, New Jersey. His first teaching work was in New Jersey and by January 1861 Ephraim Shay was teaching school in Bellevue, Ohio. The opportunity for such an advanced education in the mid 19th Century would prove extremely valuable to Shay in his coming years and may explain a lot of his successes.

1861 was a troubled time in the United States and at the age of 21, Ephraim Shay was destined to be a part of US history that would forever change our country. Ephraim was spending his free time looking for farmland in Huron County, Ohio, while the Southern States were looking to secede from the Union. In June he was traveling to look at land in Michigan and then onto Peoria, Illinois to locate the owner. It was in Peoria that Shay learned of the formation of a Union Regiment in Saint Louis. He traveled to Bloomington Illinois and joined a forming Company and then onto Saint Louis, Missouri where he was enlisted for 3 years or more. Shay served as an Enlisted man, assigned first to Company D, 8th Regiment of Missouri Volunteer Infantry. Likely due to his education, Shay's assignment was with the Adjutant's office and as a clerk with the Quartermasters.

Shay's tour in the Army took him to Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas. In Mississippi, Shay was assigned as a medical steward with the Hospital Corps in Chickasaw Springs. He became the charge hospital steward of the dispensary in Prentiss Hospital, Vicksburg Mississippi. This service as a medical steward would give Shay valuable experience in medical care but he never trained or practiced as a physician as some have incorrectly assumed. Ephraim Shay received an Honorable discharge in 1864 and he returned to Norwalk Ohio.

On July 26th, 1864, Ephraim Shay and Jane Henderson were married in Norwalk Ohio. Jane Shay would be his constant companion for the next 48 years through many changes in their lives. They had one son, Lette and three granddaughters.