

Kentucky's Civil War: Clark County's Hanson Brothers



Historical Marker #951 in Clark County notes the fratricidal nature of Kentucky's Civil War. Five Hanson brothers fought on opposite sides, and two of them, Roger and Charles, attained prominence.

Roger Hanson was born in Winchester on Aug. 27, 1827. A Mexican War veteran, he participated in the California gold rush before becoming a Kentucky legislator. During the Civil War, Roger became colonel of the 2nd Kentucky Confederate Infantry. Captured at Fort Donelson, he ultimately became a brigadier general and commanded the "Orphan Brigade," Kentucky's most famous Civil War infantry unit. In early January 1863, Hanson was killed in a desperate charge at Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Six months later, Roger's Unionist brother, Col. Charles Hanson, surrendered after fighting John Hunt Morgan in Lebanon, Ky. During the action, Morgan's beloved 19-year-old brother, Tom, had been killed. Eager for retribution, another Morgan brother grabbed Hanson by the beard and threatened to kill him. Charles was saved, however, when his rebel brother-in-law, Lee Wheeler, stepped in. Charles, saved by family ties, survived the war.

This Winchester family was emblematic of Kentucky's divided families during the Civil War.

Photo: Confederate Brigadier General Roger Hanson of Winchester, killed at the Battle of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Courtesy Library of Congress.