

Ancestor Profile – Alonzo Bush

Alonzo S. Bush was born August 23, 1839 in the city of Wheeling in Ohio County, West Virginia. He was a son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Bush. Alonzo's mother died when he was a young boy. In 1850, Alonzo was 9 years old and living in Evansville, Indiana with his father, his future step-mother, Irene Mills, and his 7 year old brother, Platoff Bush. In 1860, 21 year old Alonzo was still helping support the family by working as a clerk in Evansville while living with his father, stepmother, and little brother, Platoff.

The two Bush brothers soon enlisted with the Union army after the Civil War broke out. "Both boys were with the 1st Indiana Cavalry - but served with Stewart's Brigade which was detached from the 1st Cavalry throughout the war. They served as 'escort' to several different Generals. At Gettysburg they rode escort for Gen. Oliver O. Howard. However, by that time, Alonzo had sustained a groin injury and could not ride astride so his immediate commanding officer, Capt. Abram Sharra, promoted him to Sgt. and put him with the quartermaster. During the war, both brothers were wounded twice - in different battles. Alonzo was shot in the back of the head in one battle and in the neck in another. And, there was the unfortunate incident of his horse falling on him just outside Falls Church, Virginia. That one pretty much messed him up for life and sent him back to the Armory Hospital in Washington, D.C."¹

While recuperating at the Armory Hospital, Alonzo met poet Walt Whitman and correspondence was later exchanged between the two. "Alonzo was at several civil war battles and injured at just as many. I guess his claim to fame was corresponding with Walt Whitman. We have copies of Alonzo's letters and the originals are at the *Walt Whitman Archives*. A Gay Rights activist used Alonzo's letters as proof he and Whitman were lovers. Guess that would have been OK except the fact Alonzo was married for 20+ years until his wife's death from typhoid fever. Alonzo died at a veteran's hospital in Illinois. Poor thing had multiple physical problems - not the least of which was from falling on his horse horn and injuring his groin so severely it plagued him the rest of his life."²

In 1870, Alonzo Bush was a 30 year old railroad conductor living again in Evansville, Indiana. He was living with his 28 year old wife, Elizabeth, and their 2 young daughters - Eva and Mandal Bush. By 1880, forty year old Alonzo was working in real estate and still living in Evansville with his 40 year old wife, 'Libbie', and their 2 children - Eva and Willie Bush - daughter Mandel having previously died young.

On January 26, 1888, Alonzo Bush unfortunately married Kate Williams³ as his 2nd wife. That marriage proved to be a rocky one and they reportedly separated on February 15, 1895. She later successfully gained access to a portion of his meager military pension. Alonzo was eventually reduced to working as a day laborer and boarded with his married son, William Bush, in Vanderburgh County, Indiana. Alonzo passed away in Evansville, Indiana on March 11, 1922 at age 82.

"He is buried at Oak Hill cemetery in Evansville next to his first wife - the only woman he loved and considered himself married to. In his papers to the government regarding his pension, he states his second wife only married him for his pension and he tried to prevent her getting any of it. She, of course, sued for it and won. And his pension was halved. She received her half until her death.

When reading both of their records [brothers Alonzo and Platof Bush], one is struck by the sadness of it all. The government did their level best to deny the pensioners. They were required to provide proof they served, were wounded, affidavits from people that knew them and could swear they were disabled, names of their commanding officers and the doctors that treated them - and it went on and on. If they couldn't provide one piece of the required info, they were put into government limbo. Both men went through several lawyers just trying to get their measly 10 or 12 dollars a month. If they were granted their pensions they had to re-apply every 10 years or so to get their increases of 1 or 2 dollars a month! Alonzo was blind and incontinent in his eighties and STILL begging for his pension. I suppose justice was served, in a way, when, after Alonzo's greedy 2nd wife died, the government found her children had still been receiving half of his pension and they were made to pay it back. And then Alonzo, once again, began receiving the entire amount. Small comfort though, I'm thinking. He was in and out of the veteran's hospital in Danville, Illinois but died in Evansville and was buried there. The so called 'gay' letters really made me burn. If you've read them, you can see that they are really just chatty, friendly letters. But the gay advocates turn them to their own purposes. And the references to their friend who is about to lose his leg being a 'gay boy' and having a 'gay time' are used in the context of the day. Homosexuals weren't even referred to as GAY until the 1960s for Pete's sake!"⁴ Alonzo's 1922 newspaper obituary states: "Alonzo S. Bush - The funeral of Alonzo S. Bush, age 82 years, Civil War veteran, 505 Edgar Street, who died at the Deaconess Hospital Saturday will be held from Johann's Chapel at 2:30 o'clock Tuesday afternoon with burial in Oak Hill cemetery - He leaves a son, William Bush of St. Louis, and two half brothers, Charles T. and Mike Bush of this city."⁵

1-2. *Researcher and cousin, Sharon O'Brien, 12 May 2005.*

...Submitted by great-grandnephew Michael L. Lance

3. *Posey County, Indiana Marriages, book C-10, page 60.*

4. *Researcher and cousin, Joyce Elaine Bernardi, Pennngrove, CA, 1 Aug 2006.*

5. *ewspaper obituary, Evansville Courier, Evansville, Indiana, 4 Mar 1922.*