

# Confederate Spy Buried in Dells Cemetery

*Tales of Earlier Days*

By Bob Dewel

A hundred and six years ago, very early on Memorial Day May 30, 1905, a young man with a plank could be seen entering the Kilbourn (now Wisconsin Dells) cemetery. Painted on the plank were the words "One Country, One Flag", along with a rough depiction of the American Flag of the day.

With the aid of the Sexton, a hole two feet deep was dug over the unmarked grave of a woman, and the plank set up. She had died five years previously while on a lecture tour in the Dells, but the grave remained unmarked.

## The Confrontation

As the men left the area they were approached by three Civil War veterans. After an argument, the veterans were led to the grave, having announced they would destroy the marker since they considered the presence of this body in the cemetery was a desecration.

After reading the marker, their leader banker Thomas Coon declared: "Well, comrades, I guess the boy has beat you. I guess you won't haul the plank down." Flowers were then placed, possibly reluctantly, on the grave, along with those of ten Union soldiers, local boys who had fallen in battle.

Why the fuss? This was the grave of Belle Boyd, one of the great female spies in history, whose information to the rebels had led to the decimation of Sauk County and Wisconsin's Iron Brigade at the battle of Gettysburg. Despite the end of the Civil War 40 years previously, feelings against the South still ran high, and the grave had been ignored and left unmarked, perhaps even despised, since Belle's sudden death in Kilbourn on June 12, 1900.

Indeed tension had been high for several days, ever since Glazier stated his intention to mark the grave. Official of the Civil War Veteran's organization, the GAR, along with their auxiliary, the WRC, had refused to cooperate with the plan, and Glazier had been denounced.

How do we know this? An article in the Baraboo News of May 22, 1952 quoted at length the story as told by the man himself, former Dells resident Gus O. Glazier. He had written of the event on October 6, 1905 in a dispatch to the News. In far more detail than this article allows, he recounted both the refusal of the GAR to participate and the altercation with the veterans at the cemetery.

## The Sordid Life of Belle Boyd

There is no doubt that Belle Boyd was a self-admitted spy for the Confederacy during the Civil War. Thirty Five years had passed, and now in 1900 she was on sort of a lecture tour. We

don't know what her message was—repentance and hope for forgiveness, or continuous defense of the South. Her appearance in Kilbourn obviously was strongly resented.

The age of eighteen had found her in South-leaning Baltimore. It is inferred that she was more than popular among the young military men of that city. A 1913 Baraboo News tells us that she was a Confederate lover, but then married a Union soldier and converted him to the Rebel cause, making him a traitor.

Born in Martinsville, Va., she grew to 5 foot seven, had an aquiline nose and hair of a reddish-brown hue. She completed her education in Baltimore at age nineteen and, knowing many Union officers “used her acquaintance and blandishments to gain information... which she conveyed at every opportunity to the South—especially to General Stuart and later to Stonewall Jackson.”

Arrests and conviction occurred followed by imprisonment. At one time she was sentenced to be shot. Finally she was banished to England by President Lincoln. She then began an acting career using the name Nina Benjamin. Here the article becomes confusing for the second husband, whom she converted to the Rebel cause, is mentioned as returning to America to become a spy. What happened to him is not known, but by 1869 she married a Colonel Hamilton and returned to the States.

Apparently her Rebel past did not prevent her return, but she was in ill health. Sent to an insane asylum in California, she had a son but he did not survive. However, in subsequent years she had three children. For unknown reasons she now divorced Hamilton and married Nat R. High. It was he who traveled with her on the lecture tour which brought them to Kilbourn.

Her illness and very sudden death the evening of her arrival accounts for the presence of her grave in Kilbourn, since apparently Nat High did not claim her body or have a part in its disposal, nor is he mentioned again.

#### Belle Boyd Today

So what are we to make of the compassionate action of Gus Glazier, who decorated her grave “in respect... although on what we felt she was on the wrong side, we should forgive her.” How do the people of Kilbourn, now Wisconsin Dells, feel about her now?

Well, never adverse to an opportunity for publicity, a Dells newspaper reports that in 1932, many tourists including some from Virginia visited the grave (and the Dells) every summer. It is said that her reputation enjoys a fair amount of favorable publicity in the South.

By 1929, efforts to send her remains “back home” went unfulfilled, and a 1952 story in the Rochester Democrat reported that on the 107th anniversary of her birth (perhaps 1844) the State Bars (Confederate Flag) was flown over her Wisconsin grave. Soil from Virginia was spread over the site.

Delegates from Virginia came for the occasion, the Dells Legion participated, and an excursion boat was named in her honor. By 1955 a report from Wisconsin Dells stated that the Stars and Stripes now flew over the refurbished grave site also, along with the Confederate Flag.

The Dells report stated that despite talk of moving her remains to Virginia, Wisconsin Dells “be believes it has earned the right to claim her for its own”. It is assumed that the Union soldiers in the cemetery receive appropriate recognition also.

Guy Glazier would be pretty surprised at all of this, and (hopefully) pleased.



Though a high level spy, Belle is celebrated in this manner in the Dells Area Cemetery

## Plan Unique MAY Ceremony At 6/1952 Wisconsin Dells

A unique ceremony is being planned at Wisconsin Dells on Memorial Day — a tribute of southern women to the famous Civil war Confederate spy, Belle Boyd, who is buried in the Wisconsin Dells cemetery and whose grave up to this year has been the care only of northerners. That grave has to date been marked only by a worn monument, bearing the inscription: "Belle Boyd, Confederate spy. Born in Virginia, died in Wisconsin. Erected by a comrade."

Monuments have been erected to Belle down south but it was not until a Milwaukee public relations man conceived the idea of honoring her here that the contemplated recognition was started. The Milwaukeean called attention of the facts to Virginia's Governor John S. Battle, who in turn asked the United Daughters of the Confederacy to do something about a public recognition for the famous woman's grave. Elliott Gray, chapter of Richmond is sending three women, headed by Mrs. W. Phillips, to take part in the ceremony commemorating Belle's life and death. They will arrive at the Dells May 28th.

The Legion post of the Dells is to take part in the ceremony and it is to include dedication of a new excursion boat, to be christened the Belle Boyd by Mrs. Phillips for the Riverview Boat company. Plans include a rose arbor and a fence to be placed at Belle's grave.

The famous woman spy died while on a lecturing tour in Wisconsin Dells. She had been lecturing in Portage and then went to the Dells, where a sudden heart attack ended her life on June 11, 1900, at the age of 56 years. The experiences of which she told in the lectures included being captured and imprisoned several times, but she was either released in an exchange of prisoners or escaped. History relates that finally one of her Union guards fell in love with her and he was allowed to resign his commission as navy lieutenant and follow her to England, where she had escaped in the meantime, and there they married. She was on the stage for a time after returning from England but apparently at the time she died she was without relatives or friends to return her body to the south, and so she was buried in the north.

## Belle Boyd Gets Wisconsin Tribute On Memorial Day

MAY 30, 1955

WISCONSIN DELLS, Wis. (UP) — Belle Boyd, the beautiful Confederate spy of the Civil War, received a Wisconsin tribute on Memorial Day.

Belle's fellow Virginians have lately taken to paying a Memorial Day pilgrimage to her grave here. But Wisconsin Dells residents took over the ceremonies Monday.

It was their way of serving notice that Belle will stay buried in Wisconsin.

The stars and bars of the Confederacy, as well as the stars and stripes Belle fought as a girl, were hoisted over her grave. Flowers were placed upon her grave.

The red-haired Belle became the pride of Martinsburg, Va., and one of the most famous woman spies in history when she was just 17 years old.

She shot a union soldier who invaded her home while she and her mother were alone. Union authorities were so taken with her beauty that they cleared her of all charges and even placed a guard around her home to protect her.

But Belle was loyal to the South. She took advantage of her favored position to spy on her Yankee friends.

Union forces arrested and imprisoned Belle twice and she be-

came too notorious to do much more spying. So she turned to the stage under the name of Nina Benjamin and started going through a series of husbands.

Belle was in her 50s when she came to the site of Wisconsin Dells in June, 1900, to deliver a narrative of her life as a spy. She died of a heart attack and was buried here.

For years, the Wisconsin Dells Legion post tended Belle's grave while her fellow Southerners apparently forgot her. But in 1952 a delegation from Richmond, Va., came on Memorial Day to spread soil from the banks of the James River on her grave.

Since then, there's been talk in Virginia of bringing Belle home.

But Wisconsin Dells believes it's earned the right to claim her for its own.

The Wisconsin town received support this year from Belle's granddaughter, Mrs. Virginia Monique Hammond of Los Angeles.

She sent a message saying "My grandmother shall rest forever in her scenic and eternal resting place in Wisconsin Dells . . . despite rumors that some misguided Southerners wish to remove her remains to Virginia."

## Jumping Dog At Dells Now Has Stand-In

JUNE 12, 1954

WISCONSIN DELLS, Wis. (UP) — Quite a few tourists who have seen Watch I make the leap at Stand Rook may think they're seeing double this summer. The jet black labrador-schnauzer has a standin.

Watch II will be making the leaps which have drawn the fire of one million amateur photographers in the last six years.

Later on in the summer, after making sure his protege has things under control, Watch I plans to just sit back and take it easy, according to Willie Mecker who has spent the winter and spring training the newcomer.

Mecker said he had been work-

ing with a high wooden platform at his training school in Wheeling, Ill., but he depended on Watch I to take the new labrador through the actual jump the first few times.

The five-foot leap over a 50-foot chasm has been made by Watch I thousands of times for visitors to the Dells.

"He fell only once in the early days," publicitor Bellman Jones said. "But he landed in the net we have below without injury."

Both dogs are now owned by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation which received most of the scenic area, the boat lines and the hotel recently.

## Planned Back In 1929 To Take Belle Boyd 'Home'

Old files of the Baraboo News-Republic bring to light the fact that Belle Boyd, confederate spy buried at Wisconsin Dells, was not entirely forgotten in her homeland all these years. Back in 1929 there was quite a movement to rebury her in the soil of her native south, a clipping says, the article entitled "Belle Boyd Goes Home". The article concludes:

"And in the future her own people of the South will care for her grave and over it one day in each year will droop the Stars and Bars, which she served so well so many years ago."

Why the plan was not carried out files do not reveal, but it is interesting to read the old clipping in view of the fact that three ladies from the southland are coming to the Dells Memorial day to decorate Belle's grave and to see that it is properly marked.

We learn that Belle was not

only an actress but she wrote a book, the story of her girlhood and experiences, entitled "Belle Boyd in Camp and Prison." This she wrote while she was virtually in exile in England after the Civil war. She tells how, the daughter of a Confederate soldier, she worked with other ladies of the Shenandoah valley to raise money to equip her father's regiment, part of the Stonewall Brigade. She recounts that her first service to the south was as a nurse. When the northern invaders came to her home they found her an "independent rebel lady" and it was only through the intervention of the Union commander that her home was saved.

She tells that her position within the federal lines gave her an opportunity to serve her cause. She seems to have used her charms to

escape punishment, when caught, but is credited with furnishing valuable information to Stonewall Jackson and in one instance saved his forces from defeat. She was confined at one time in Old Capitol prison in Washington and for some mysterious reason again was freed. The record is none too clear, some writers have termed the stories more or less "legendary."

However, it is certain her spirit was never broken. Perhaps the highest tribute to her was the order of Secretary Stanton, who after one of her arrests issued the order, "Don't let her get near enough to anyone to talk, she'll charm the heart out of his body."

After she had been imprisoned in Carroll prison in Washington and sentenced to hard labor in Fitchburg prison, sentence was commuted and she was sent south with orders never again to be found within federal lines. She boarded a blockade runner bound for England, the ship was captured by a Union vessel and she became a prisoner again. Here romance entered her life and she fell in love with a young lieutenant who later joined her in England and married her.

The old files reveal that she married three times, her last husband, the son of a Toledo clergyman who accompanied her on her lecture tours and was with her in Kilbourn in 1900 when she died. For some time her grave was unmarked, it is to ladies of the Kilbourn G. A. R. that history owes the fact that it was preserved, for they placed upon it a first wooden marker inscribed: "One Flag, One Country, Marie Isabel High, Belle Boyd, Confederate spy, born May 2, 1843, died June 11, 1900." Each year at Memorial day, the G. A. R. and their ladies decorated her grave as reverently as the graves of their own soldier dead.

So when the little delegation from the Shenandoah valley home arrives at Wisconsin Dells, this Memorial day, they will find her grave carefully tended and properly marked, a tribute to northern kindness to a stranger in a strange land.

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## Guy O. Glazier Recalls Death Of Belle Boyd

MAY 22, 1952

"I certainly stirred up a hornet's nest when I suggested the marking of Belle's Boyd's grave," writes Guy O. Glazier from Boulevard, Calif., where the former Sauk county resident has lived for many years. Guy was living in Kilbourn at the time of her coming and her death and he writes that he is reading with much interest accounts of plans to honor her grave this coming Memorial day. He says:

"I know a lot about her death and burial and the aftermath of erecting of the first head board."

Enclosed is an article which Mr. Glazier had prepared for Editor Cole back in Oct. 6, 1905, and in which he said:

"I notice an item regarding the removal of the body of Belle Boyd in which it states that she was buried there by the Grand Army of the Republic and the Relief Corps. Now, I am perfectly willing to give the devil his due but I would like to give the people a few facts which have never before appeared in print. Belle Boyd died at the Hill House in Kilbourn, June 11, 1900. Her husband, Mr. High, was with her. Like a great many small travelling shows, they were very low financially.

"So the Grand Army of Kilbourn were appealed to. No, not one red cent would they give to bury that rebel, and so the body lay all day at the Hill House. Late in the day the conditions were heard by a young Episcopal minister, the Rev. Fr. Arthur Gorter, who willingly lent his assistance. Word was sent to her relatives, also to the Theatrical Union, both of whom sent money by telegraph. The next day a lot was purchased in the Spring Grove cemetery and Belle Boyd was buried, Father Gorter conducting the funeral services. I was told by Father Gorter that there was not a single member of the G. A. R. or W. R. C. attended the funeral.

"For five years the grave laid there, untouched and uncared for, with not a head stone or slab to mark the last resting place of one of the most daring spies in the rebel army. Her many deeds of daring among the Union armies would have filled a volume of many pages.

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