

# HERSTORY

## Relative confronted ‘Stonewall’ Jackson



Michael Lagerquist, special to The Free Press

Tamara Thayer holds a replica of the 34-star U.S. flag that her four times great-grandmother, Barbara Fritchie, waved at Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson in Frederick, Maryland, during the Civil War. Research she says proves the authenticity of the story is included in her book, “The Mystery of Barbara Fritchie: A True Patriot.”

## 10th Civil War Symposium supports Boy in Blue

By Michael Lagerquist  
Special to The Free Press

When she took on the family mission of proving stories she had grown up hearing about her four times great-grandmother, Tamara Thayer went to Wikipedia.

Because Wikipedia posts are written by ordinary people, she actually started with the Historical Society of Frederick, Maryland, which was credited as the author of the post her family had a disagreement with.

“When I called them, they said it was actually written by one member, one person,” Thayer said. She will speak about her ancestor, Barbara Fritchie, and do so in her persona, at the 10th annual “Civil War Symposium: The Tide Turns: 1863” on Saturday at Mankato’s Morson-Ario Strand VFW Post 950. Information she gathered is included in her book, “The Mystery of Barbara Fritchie: A True Patriot.”

Thayer’s family’s side says that Barbara Fritchie stood up against Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson in the town of Frederick, which served as the site of several battles and refuge for both sides during the U.S. Civil War. Knowing Jackson’s men were tearing down Union

flags, Fritchie reportedly waved the flag outside of her window.

Maryland was one of the border states in regard to approval of slavery. As such, injured soldiers from both sides were, alternately, cared for in Frederick. The split on slavery was nearly 50-50, meaning tensions always ran high as opponents of actions could be found in virtually the same number as supporters.

One of Jackson’s men shot a hole in the flag Fritchie proudly waved. Noting her bravery in this defiant act, it is said Jackson ordered his men to walk on. This action allegedly weakened his men’s respect for him.

Fritchie, who was 96 years old, died a short time later, obviously well before the Wikipedia posting was written. During four trips to Frederick to research her ancestor and the story that lived in her family history, Thayer discovered the Wikipedia version was based not on fact, but assumptions.

Thayer will become Fritchie when he speaks to dispel the version of the story that was immortalized in a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier (where her name was misspelled), which concludes:

Barbara Fritchie’s work is o’er,

And the Rebel rides on his raids no more.

Honor to her! and let a tear Fall, for her sake, on Stonewall’s bier.

Over Barbara Fritchie’s grave Flag of Freedom and Union, wave!

Peace and order and beauty draw

Round thy symbol of light and law;

And ever the stars above look down

On thy stars below in Frederick town!

Especially upsetting to Thayer’s family is that the dismissal of Fritchie’s role is based on an assumption that because nothing is known of Fritchie before the age of 30, that she could not have had children. Thayer, however, has numerous relatives who had

### If You Go

What: 10th annual “Civil War Symposium: The Tide Turns: 1863,” hosted by the Friends of the Boy in Blue Civil War Memorial

When: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday

Where: Morson-Ario VFW Post 950, 1900 N. Riverfront Drive

Admission: Admission at the door if space is available (will not include lunch). For information, email contact@boyinblue.org.

Please see AUTHOR, Page B2

# AUTHOR: Fighting to shed light on Fritchie's story

Continued from Page B1

children well into their 40s.

"I was trying to tell them my side, what I've heard, and they weren't interested even in hearing my side," Thayer said. "They thought, no, they don't want to be swayed in the other direction."

Thayer said she has found additional information to counter other claims made by the Historical Society, including the claim that while she purported to be an abolitionist she actually owned a slave. Thayer's research found that while Fritchie did purchase a slave, it was pre-arranged and the only way that three generations of former slaves could be reunited.

While Thayer acknowledges it does mean Fritchie purchased a slave, "Sometimes you have to do evil for the good."

And as it turns out, and as Thayer lays out in her book, there were other reasons besides protecting the reputation of Jackson that kept them "throwing more roadblocks at me" to disprove the story of Fritchie's defiance.

In this book, Thayer shows her exhaustive skills as a researcher by making statements about her ancestor and backing up supporting information she has found at the Historical Society of Frederick as well as other objective sources. Piecing them together brings credibility to her

family's long-held beliefs.

One aunt, Thayer said, was most indignant with the attempts to discredit Fritchie. This aunt is named "Barbara" in her honor.

Thayer grew up in Faribault where she was active in her community and church. Among her early achievements and awards were the WCCO Young Achiever's Award, the Faribault Jaycees Outstanding Young Adult Award and National 4-H Congress winner in leadership. Today she gives talks on her books and other topics and is a freelance ASL interpreter.

Her Indie Excellence Books Awards-winning book, "A Country Doctor Goes to War," was sparked by the chance discovery of pictures, letters, artifacts and war journal among her grandfather's personal belongings.

Dr. Ellsworth "Mike" Thayer served on the island of Tinian during World War, which put him about 1,500 miles from mainland Japan. Among the pictures found among his uniform, Thayer said, was one that included the Enola Gay, the first aircraft to drop an atomic bomb in warfare.

After the war, he returned home and helped provide vital health care in Truman, Minnesota. As with the story of her four times great-grandmother, Thayer thought her grandfather's was a story that needed to be told.