

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Recovery of Civil War Veteran's Memoirs Inspires New Novel

WATERLOO, Iowa, May 8, 2017.—Iowa authors Dave Hoing and Roger Hileman enjoy creating historical fiction based on family history, so when Roger's distant cousin Harold emailed him to tell him he'd just acquired the memoirs of their mutual ancestor, Michael Hileman, Jr., he was elated.

"I emailed back, begging him to tell me how he found it," Hileman said.

Michael Hileman, Jr. (1820-1915) had conveyed his life story to his son-in-law, Thomas Pirnie, shortly before his death. The single-spaced manuscript, over 100 pages in length, is filled with pivotal events in American history, including Michael's attendance at the Lincoln-Douglas debates. He enlisted in the Civil War at age 41 with the 96th Illinois Infantry. After being captured at Chickamauga, he was sent to the notorious Andersonville prison, from which he escaped and was later recaptured. Later chapters also tell of his homesteading years in Dakota Territory in the 1880s.

But how Harold Hileman recovered the manuscript is a story itself.

"I'd seen the memoirs once, back in the '90s," Roger said. "I was researching my family tree, and my dad knew this Hileman relative named Bill who was into genealogy. So we went to see him. I was astonished when he showed me the memoirs."

Bill wouldn't allow the manuscript to leave the house, however. He said it was borrowed and would have to be returned soon. Disappointed, Roger left for home.

A few years later, Harold contacted Roger from California. He was also researching the Waterloo portion of his Hileman family tree. Roger wrote back, telling him about Bill and the manuscript.

"After that I knew I needed to take a trip to Waterloo and get to know my cousin [Bill]," Harold said, "so off I went to Waterloo on my first real genealogical adventure."

Unfortunately, by the time Harold arrived, Bill had already returned the manuscript to a man named Pirnie. Determined to recover the memoirs, Harold began searching the Internet for information on Thomas Pirnie, Michael's son-in-law who had transcribed the memoirs. Pirnie had had two sons, Thomas H. and Lowell. Both had died recently in Cedar Rapids, but Thomas H. had been a partner in a law firm, so Harold contacted their office.

"After explaining the situation to the senior partner," Harold said, "he bent over backwards to help me. He'd handled Mr. Pirnie's estate himself. [Having] no living heirs to his estate, it was Mr. Pirnie's wish to leave everything to his neighbor, a lady who had faithfully cared for him during his failing years."

When Harold called her she told him she thought she had what he was looking for. However, when he inquired how he might obtain it, she said it was worth "a lot of money."

It soon became apparent she wouldn't come down to a reasonable price. Harold called several more times without success, until she finally said she'd hand the negotiations over to her son.

"Her son threw out a figure into the thousands of dollars," Harold said. "That was way out of my budget, so I asked if I could go there and take pictures of the memoirs."

The son told him no. Harold was losing hope that he'd ever see the memoirs again.

But several weeks later, he contacted Harold and told him he'd put the manuscript up for auction on eBay. If Harold was outbid, the son would sell it to him at the price of the final bid. In the end, Harold got the priceless memoirs for \$360.

Grateful for tipping him off about Bill and the memoirs, Harold sent Roger a photocopy of the manuscript. The document is now too fragile to copy, but Harold transcribed the memoirs onto a website, making them available for everyone to enjoy.

After reading the photocopy, Roger knew he had to work Michael into a story. He and Dave Hoing discussed this at length, but eventually agreed that Michael's life was too broad and sweeping to be contained within a single novel.

Then Dave stumbled upon David Laskin's book *The Children's Blizzard*, and compared it to Michael's first-hand experience with the 1888 storm. They now had their story angle: Michael would become a supporting character, offering tales of his earlier life to the residents of a fledgling prairie village during the time of the infamous blizzard.

The result is Dave and Roger's latest novel, *A Killing Snow*, a story about life and death on the Dakota prairie in the 1880s. Hoing is a longtime Library Associate at the University of Northern Iowa. Hileman works in ACT's research area in Iowa City. Their earlier novel *Hammon Falls* was published in 2010.

A Killing Snow, published by Penmore Press, is available for purchase on Amazon.com and in book stores in Cedar Falls and Iowa City.

Michael Hileman Jr.'s memoirs can be read online at

<http://usgwarchives.net/sd/buffalo/hileman.html>

###

Contact information:

Dave Hoing
1139 Byron Ave
Waterloo IA 50702
319- 236-1783
dave.hoing@uni.edu
<https://www.hoingandhileman.net>

Roger Hileman
176 Columbia Drive
Iowa City, Iowa 52245
319-430-1679
r.hileman@mchsi.com