

## **Historical Notes**

**by Rhonda Teter**

In late 1862 or early 1863, Confederate Forces established a gunpowder works at Saltpeter Cave near Boxley, in Newton County. There were fourteen buildings to house the men and machinery. Approximately 20 men were required to man the gunpowder works.

In September of 1863, a detachment of the first Regiment Iowa Cavalry under Joseph W. CALDWELL proceeded on an expedition from Huntsville, to Kingston, and on to the Boxley area. This detachment numbered 300 men.

On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, they captured 3 men and 11 head of horses and mules owned by Parson RODGERS, who had been selling them to the Confederacy. During the night they were fired upon and one of the three prisoners escaped.

The following morning the detachment surprised the crew at the gunpowder works and captured 17 of the 20 there. The Lieutenant in charge and 2 of the men escaped.

Union forces captured the following equipment; two steam engines, three boilers, seven large iron kettles (@800 lbs. each), ½ to of saltpeter, an iron safe, three concord wagons and two carts. The buildings were burned.

Twenty prisoners and horses were captured in the surrounding area.

V. L. SPARKS of Chula Vista, California, shared with us the following story which happened about this same time. John Peterson SPARKS made shoes for the Confederate Army in a Rock Shelter not far from these gunpowder works. His sister carried food to him and others working at Saltpeter Cave. She saw Union soldiers coming and to hide the food she carried, sat on a log and spread her long full skirts over the food. After talking to the woman for a short time, the soldiers moved on. She later found out that not only had she hid food but that she was sitting on the log where her brother and others had hidden their rifles.

In the early 1900's, Francis Marion EDGMON was accidentally killed at Saltpeter Cave. He was the son of Braxton EDGMON and Polly CASEY. He was married to Talithia Tennessee SPARKS, the daughter of Joshua and Catherine EDGMON SPARKS.