Many of your readers will remember Mrs. Kate (Mooney) Collum, who visited friends in St. James something like a year ago. Mrs. Collum is a faithful and interested member of Phelps County Historical Society. She has written to me a number of most interesting letters containing human interest stories concerning events within Phelps County. The two letters attached are no less interesting than those that have preceded, and I hope your readers will enjoy them:

San Francisco, Cal.,
Apr. 28, 1941.

Mr. C. V. Mann, Rolla, Mo.

Dear Mr. Mann: The enclosed is a true story in which my mother had a part. Her part was an act for which she received much praise at the time, which was during the Civil War.

Miscal Johnson's Attempted Raid on St. James.

Miscal Johnson was the leader of a Confederate band that harassed the Union forces that operated in South Central Missouri, and during that period known as the "Hotbed of Rebellion." (Mr. Johnson lived in Maries County, on the Gasconade River at a place then called Clifty Dale, or Bloom Garden. This is about a mile upstream from the Gasconade Bridge that crosses Highway 63, the route between Rolla and Vienna.)

Johnson made one raid as far south as the town of St. James. The main object of that raid was to wreck a train carrying Union troops that were enroute to reinforce the hard pressed Union troops to the west. The morning the troop train was expected through St. James, my mother observed that a number of men had begun to tear up the railroad track about one half mile east of the town, where there was a high fill over a culvert.

That place was on the Mooney farm. My mother discovered what was being done — and also recognized the leader of the man — Miscal Johnson. Both my parents had met Mr. Johnson in 1858 — and for political, as well as business reasons, did not like him. When Mother saw what Johnson intended to do, she decided to thwart his scheme. That troop train must be warned of the danger!

Mother ran eastward through the orchard and parallel with the railroad track. She ran as she had never run before. Her love for the Union, and her dislike for Johnson, gave her strength for the ordeal. When she had raced about a mile, she heard the rumble of that long train. Now she had reached a short curve in the road; and being out of Johnson's view, she climbed to the middle of the track and ran toward the oncoming train. Using her petticoat as a flag, she succeeded in stopping the train, and breathlessly told of Miscal Johnson's plan.

Amid much cheering the train now moved on. Johnson's raiders were well known, and there was not a soldier on that train who did not hope to meet him. As the train neared the place where the rails were being removed, the soldiers began firing — jumping off the train and firing as they ran. Quite a skirmish ensued, as a result of which Miscal made his "get-a-way" with more speed than he usually used.

The train carried rails for just such an emergency, so that while Johnson's raiders were being chased by some of the soldiers, others aided the train crew in spiking new rails into place. In town, there was much excitement. Among Johnson's admirers there was much speculation as to how his "crack raiders" happened this time to fail on their job.

My Mother was given much praise for her courageous act, and was thereafter called "The Nemesis of Miscal Johnson." For Johnson's raid, like that of General Sterling Price, proved to be a failure.

Kate Mooney Collum.

1929 Union St.