

The Many Worlds of District 1, Part IX: War & Peace (a)

War is an endeavor in which ordinary people organize to kill, rout or subdue, on behalf of country, faith or clan, other ordinary people whom they do not know. They may feel antipathy or not for the opposing cause, indifference, respect or hatred toward an individual adversary. Their reasons for fighting can be simple or complex: a society threatened, a yearning for glory and adventure, a fear of punishment for refusal, fellowship with friends who join up, a sense of duty, or all of these or none. Whatever the reasons, the greatest divide in war is not between soldiers on opposite sides who try to defeat each other in combat. It is rather between those who shiver over campfires along the lines of battle and those who warm themselves at home, far from the maddening waste.

[photo of Union soldiers in tent]

The peace before

On the tenth day of **July in 1860**, John M. Lamb, official census taker for the County of Ramsey, State of Minnesota, counted the “free inhabitants” of McLean Township, which roughly corresponds to present-day District 1, by “individual visitation to each dwelling enumerated.” He asked many questions, some impertinent by later standards, including: the approximate value of real estate as well as personal property in the household, the place of birth of each resident, whether anyone had been married or attended school within the past year, whether the household contained any persons over 90 years of age who could not read or write, whether any persons in the household were deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, a pauper or had been convicted of a crime. *

In McLean Township, Mr. Lamb---who held the title of “Asst. Marshall,” found Dwellings #2411 through #2431. [Addendum A: List of dwellings and residents]

To save the Union

When rebel forces attacked Fort Sumter in April 1861, Minnesota was a toddler in the family of the United States, having achieved statehood only three years before. Most of its citizens were well aware of the strife between North and South. While acknowledging that slavery was wrong, they nevertheless hoped that talk of war would come to nothing and were more interested in the rights of pioneers than the rights of slaves or slaveholders. News of Fort Sumter changed minds with stunning speed. A wave of enthusiasm for a short, decisive war against “this unholy and unjust Rebellion” ** set St. Paul awirl with patriotic fervor. Minnesotans had not joined the Union to see it fall apart.

Governor Alexander Ramsey happened to be in Washington D.C. on Saturday evening, April 13, when news of the fort’s surrender reached the capitol. Early the following morning he rushed to the office of Secretary of War Simon Cameron, who, hat on and papers in hand, was about to leave for a meeting with President Lincoln. Eager to see Minnesota become the first to volunteer, Ramsey offered 1000 men and wrote out a tender on the spot, which Cameron carried to the president. The offer was immediately accepted, and Ramsey telegraphed the lieutenant governor, Ignatius Donnelly, to put out the call, which Donnelly did. That same day, members of the St. Paul Pioneer Guards gathered at the armory to enlist men in the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers, offer promotions, choose officers and draw up the organization of the regiment. The call then went out to the general citizenry and was

met over the next few weeks, according to regimental historian Lieutenant William Lochren, “with enthusiastic response from every part of the state.” Drilled and marched, issued black felt hats, red flannel shirts and black pantaloons, armed with weapons of various kinds from the state arsenal, feted by speeches, parades, banquets, cheering and applause, immortalized by photograph and carrying the state flag delivered with ceremony by the ladies of St. Paul, the regiment steamed away from the lower levee of “the Saintly City” in the early morning hours of June 22, 1861. ** Enlistments had been extended from three months to three years. Of the more than 900 men in the First Regiment, only a tiny band would return, with the flag, in March of 1864, and some of them would re-enlist.

The First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers was followed by ten more to comprise, in total, eleven regiments of infantry, two companies of sharpshooters plus a regiment of mounted rangers as well as cavalry and artillery units. A draft proved unnecessary. Men (and at least one woman in disguise) volunteered to meet the full quota of each call and included “colored troops,” many of whom were eventually transferred or promoted as officers into the “colored” units of the regular U.S Army.

But if, in the aggregate, sufficient numbers signed up to fill the quotas, individual decisions weighed heavily. A bonus of \$100 was introduced to lessen hardship. Each soldier was promised \$13 pay every month as well as a stipend to buy food, plus clothing of high quality valued at \$42 per year. Recruiting teams, offered commissions for enlistments, roamed the countryside where they talked duty and country to farmers in the field, frontier men used to physical danger and driven by a need to prevail against great obstacles. Circulars went out in quick succession from St. Paul to more than 400 large and small communities where throngs gathered at political meetings. Towns and counties offered their own bounties to recruits and help for their families. Pleading defense of the Union, prominent leaders from both parties convinced most readily those accustomed to daily acts of courage. On request, a furlough was granted until after the harvest of 1861. Many signed on the spot as, according to enlistee Charles W. Johnson, the assembled sang, “We are Coming from the Hillside, we are Coming from the Plain, we are coming, Father Abraham...” **

Still, many did not enlist, had misgivings, or simply stayed home.

“...there were in every neighborhood a few young men who were eager to go to the war, but it was often too great a pang for their parents to consent. Instances occurred where, after a full talk and consideration of the matter, a young husband agreed to enlist, but the wife, on hearing the decision, burst into tears, and seemed unable to consent to spare him. In such case, of course, the man was promptly released from his promise.”

*General C. C. Andrews, Narrative of the Third Regiment ***

Two from McLean

George Townsend, second son of Ann Townsend, the widowed owner of a McLean Township farm valued at \$1000, enlisted in the First Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers on April 29, 1861 and served in Company C. His regiment fought at Bull Run on July 21, 1861, a Union rout during which “the war ceased being a ‘lark.’” **** Minnesota lost about 20% of those who fought that day. The regiment went on to face disaster again at the battle of Ball’s Bluff, joined the Union invasion of the Shenandoah Valley, and engaged in the Peninsula Campaign along the Chesapeake. In early April 1862, the men set up tents across a creek from the Confederate Army near Yorktown, in a place nicknamed “Camp Misery,” where the soldiers remained in “constant and hard duty” and were “aroused nearly every night by musketry on the picket lines.” Both sides awaited orders. But before the fighting began, George

Townsend was discharged “for disability,” whether from illness or injury the company roster does not say. **

Peter Jerome, who was 28 in 1860 and farmed with another young Canadian in McLean Township, enlisted in the Fourth Regiment of Minnesota Volunteers during the autumn of 1861. The regiment was formed to garrison forts on the dangerous Minnesota frontier but was expected to eventually join the war.

This call was a broad intimation that the Fourth would be home guards, and the people so understood it, and a good deal of fun was enjoyed at the expense of those who enlisted in this regiment; but our men believed that the war would be a long one, and that they would have an opportunity to see all the fighting that they would desire to.”

*Captain Alonzo L. Brown, Fourth Regiment Historian ***

Jerome was promoted to sergeant on November 27, 1861. When his three-year term was over, he re-enlisted in Company E and did not muster out until July 19, 1865 with the rank of second lieutenant. The Fourth Regiment, ultimately commanded by Colonel John B. Sanborn of Ramsey County, spent the winter of 1862 defending the Minnesota frontier, but then steamed downriver to St. Louis and joined the Union army for the siege of Corinth in northeast Mississippi, followed by the Battle of Iuka, the Battle of Corinth, the campaign down the Mississippi Central Railroad, the Yazoo Pass expedition, the Vicksburg campaign, the Battle of Chattanooga, the Battle of Altoona in Alabama and Sherman’s march to the sea.

Minnesota’s commitment to the preservation of the Union often proved pivotal, especially at Gettysburg where on the second day of the battle, the First Regiment was ordered on a suicidal mission “to buy five minutes’ time” and prevent the Union center from collapse. Against two brigades of Confederates, the First lost “215 or the 262 men who made the charge,” a casualty rate of 82%---“the largest suffered by any regiment throughout the war.” ***

The courage and sacrifice of those who fought saved the Republic from destruction, even if many of the men who gave their lives did not have foremost in mind a desire to redeem the soul of the country through the abolition of slavery. The human price was enormous. The longest-lived veteran of the Civil War was a Minnesotan: Albert Woolson of the First Regiment, who signed up at age 17 for his “share of the glory.” Near the end of his life, he observed, “We were fighting our brothers. In that there was no glory.” ***

[photo of casualties on the field at Gettysburg]

* *1860 Minnesota Census of the Free Inhabitants of McLean Township*, Roll 7, pages 269-272, Minnesota Historical Society.

** *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars 1861-1865, Vol 1*, written by The Board of Commissioners (appointed by the Minnesota Legislature), and survivors of military service, published in 1890 by the Pioneer Press Company.

*** *The Last Full Measure, The Life and Death of the First Minnesota Volunteers* by Richard Moe, 1993.

**** *Minnesota in the Civil War*, by Kenneth Carley, 1961.

Addendum A: List of dwellings and residents, circa July 1890

2411: Truman W. Smith, 35, farmer; from Vermont, value of real estate and personal property not noted; wife Mary, 34, from Vermont; 3 daughters, Antoinette, 12, and Emma, 10, born in Vermont; and Mary Francis, 4, born in Minnesota; 2 servants: James Canisten, 21, born in Connecticut and Mary Hallonen, 18, born in Ireland.

2412: John H. Sherman, 37, carpenter; from New York, real estate \$200, personal property \$200; wife Ann, 30, from New York, and 2 sons, Julius, 5, born in New York and John, 2, born in Minnesota.

2413: Unoccupied house

2414: John Farr, 24, farmer laborer, from Ireland, value of real estate and personal property not noted; wife Mary, 26, from Ireland, son Patrick, 1, born in Minnesota.

2415: Thomas Campbell, 37, farm laborer, from Scotland, real estate \$400, personal property \$100; wife Rachael, 24, from Virginia, son Andrew, 2 months, born in Minnesota.

2416: The Poor House; Michael Miller, 44, Superintendent, from Pennsylvania, real estate \$500, personal property not noted; wife Sarah, 47, from Ohio; 1 son, Charles, 4, born in Minnesota.

10 paupers, all arrived in Minnesota between 1857 and 1860: Michael Rouke, 47, day laborer, from Ireland; John Davis, 50, harness maker, from England; Peter Fagin, 30, carpenter, from Germany; P.P. Nelson, 22, day laborer, from Sweden; Charles Allers, 30, day laborer, from Pennsylvania. Occupation not specified: Bridget Nixon, 50, from Ireland; Elizabeth Bissel, 22, from Germany; Mary Arngel, 26, from Germany; Catherine E. Beers, 40, from Germany. 1 child pauper: Thomas Cullen, 4, from Germany.

2417: Daniel O'Connor, 30, farmer, from Ireland, real estate \$4000, personal property \$1000; John, 28 and Margaret, 40, from Ireland.

2418: Joseph Mariah, 26, farmer laborer, from Canada, value of real estate and personal property not noted; Peter Jerome, 28, farm laborer, from Canada.

2419: Peter Marion, 45, farmer, from Canada, real estate \$2000, personal property \$400; wife Mary, 36, from Canada; sons Louis, 16 and Nugear, 11, born in Canada; son Eugenia, 9, born in Illinois; son Joseph, 6 and daughter Luisa, 2, born in Minnesota; farm laborers Peter Mallet, 25 and David Plessey, 22, from Canada.

2420: John B. Christian, 53, farmer, from New York, real estate \$1000, personal property \$200; wife Adeline, 42, from Michigan; daughters Elizabeth, 21, Sophia, 18, Matilda, 11, and Dorothy, 9, and sons Charles, 16 and Lewis, 14 and Edward, 6, born in Michigan; daughter Cordelia, 4, and son Alfred, 2, born in Minnesota.

2421: David Holton, 29, farmer, from Pennsylvania, real estate \$3000, personal property \$1200; wife C.A., 25, from Maine; daughters Elty, 9, Melissa, 7, and Elva, 4, and sons Orrin, 5 and John R., 2, born in Minnesota; farm laborer C.A. Boyden, 29, from Massachusetts.

2422: Patrick Burk, 40, farmer, from Ireland, real estate \$2000, personal property \$400; wife Joanna, 25, from Ireland; daughters Ann, 10, and Susan, 8, born in Minnesota.

2423: Peter Stregert, 40, farm laborer, from Germany

2424: Daniel Carroll, 40, farmer, from Ireland, real estate \$1000, personal property \$200; wife Joanna, 33, from Ireland; daughter Mary, 10, born in Ireland; daughters Margaret, 7, Elenora, 5, and Nora, 3 months, and son William, 3, born in Minnesota.

#2425: Ann Townsend, 45, from England, real estate \$1200, personal property \$250; sons William, 23, and George, 19, and daughters Elizabeth, 17, Mary, 15, and Ellen, 13, born in England; son Charles, 5, and daughter Emily, 3, born in Minnesota.

2426: John Scott, 40, farmer, from Scotland, value of real estate not noted, personal property, \$250; wife Isabella, 30, from Ireland; daughter Adelaide, 5, born in Iowa; daughter Margaret, 2 and son Franklin, 5 months, born in Minnesota.

2427: Thomas Carver, 40, farmer, from Ireland, real estate \$1600, personal property \$1200; wife Janet, 27, from Ireland; son William, 7, daughter Isabella, 4 and son Chaucy, 2, born in Minnesota.

2428: John King, 30, farmer, from Ireland, real estate \$1600, personal property \$150; wife Catherine, 28, from Ireland; sons James, 1, and Thomas, 2 months, born in Minnesota.

2429: Thomas Slaughman, 36, farmer, from Germany, real estate \$1200, personal property \$250; wife Ann, 30, from Germany; son John, 8, born in New York; daughter Mary, 5, and son Thomas, 2 months, born in Minnesota; servant, Mary Shertzes, 19, from Germany.

2430: R. R. Nelson, 34, U.S. District Court Judge, from New York, real estate \$50,000, personal property, \$3000; wife E. F., 25, from New York; daughter E.B., 1, born in Minnesota. Also S. Beebee, female, 54, male J.F.F., 17, and male F., 14, originally from New York. Servants: Mary Eagle, 18, female F.S.D. Emille, 34, and female N. Demuel, 20, from Germany; female D. Smith, 30, Henry Mitchell, 23, Samuel Mitchell, 38, and Laura Mitchell, 34, from England; and Frank Sune, 25, from Connecticut

2431: M. D. Clark, 35, farmer, from Ohio, real estate, \$18,000, personal property \$4000; wife Nancy, 34, from Ohio. Farm laborers E. C. Hough, 30, from Pennsylvania; William Gallagher, 35, from Ireland; Ole Erickson, 25, from Norway; Servant Joseph (no last name given), 18, from Poland; female child Frances Cady, 4, born in Minnesota.