

BYRON EDWARD PAY, 1844-1906

Born

October 21, 1844, Le Ray Township,
Jefferson County, New York

Enlisted

June 22, 1861 at age 16
Mankato, Blue Earth County, Minnesota
Company H, Second Minnesota Volunteer Infantry

Mustered into Service

July 15, 1861 at Fort Snelling
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Medal of Honor Citation Issued

September 11, 1897

Died

February 19, 1906,
Volga, Brookings County, South Dakota

Buried

Arlington Cemetery, Arlington,
Brookings County, South Dakota

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Byron E. Pay was one of a detachment of 16 men who heroically defended a wagon train against the attack of 125 cavalry, repulsed the attack, and saved the train at Nolensville, Tennessee on February 15, 1863.ⁱ

Early Years

Byron E. Pay was the seventh child of nine born October 21, 1844ⁱⁱ in Le Rayⁱⁱⁱ Township, Jefferson County, New York to William and Susanne Pay. His father, William Pay, a farmer, emigrated from London, arriving in the port of New York 13 June 1836 on the Ship St. Laurence.^{iv} The following year Byron's mother, Susanne Pay and four children, Eleanor age 9, Benjamin age 5, Thomas age 3 and Robert age 1 immigrated to the United States from London, England arriving in New York City 28 March 1837 on the ship Montreal.^v

The 1855 New York State Census has William Pay, wife Susanne both age 49, and born in England. Their children living with them all born in NY state were: Warren age 17 (1838); Anna E. age 13 (1842; Byron E. Pay age 11 (1844); Asher F. age 9 (1846) and Edward E. age 6 (1849),^{vi}

One year later in 1856, the William Pay family moved to Woodstock, Illinois and in March 1857 moved to Washington County, Iowa.^{vii} The following May 1858, at the age of 13, Byron entered the office of the Washington Press as an apprentice^{viii} but left this job during the summer to move to Blue Earth County, Minnesota where his oldest brother, Benjamin Pay lived. Byron worked on a farm in Vernon Center Township, Blue Earth County, for the next three years.^{ix}

In the 1960 U.S. Federal Census, Byron E. Pay, age 16 [sic] and brother, Warren Pay age 22 were living in Ceresco Township, Blue Earth County, Minnesota with their oldest brother, Benjamin Pay, age 26; his wife Mary, age 26; and their children, William Pay age 3 and Nellie Pay age 2^x.

The Civil War Years

Byron E. Pay was 16 years, 8 months old at the time of his enlistment in Company H, 2nd Regiment Minnesota Volunteer Infantry.^{xi} Three of Byron's brothers also served in the Civil War:

Robert P.,^{xii} Warren W.,^{xiii} and Asher F. Pay.^{xiv} Robert P., born in England was mustered in on September 4th 1862 in Rockford, Illinois at age 27. He was 5'4", light hair, blue eyes and light complexion.^{xv} His brother, Byron E. was probably the same size or smaller when he enlisted.

The records of Company H, or even of the 2nd Minnesota, in 1861 are a little sketchy.^{xvi} The soldiers were trained at Ft. Snelling in the summer of 1861^{xvii} and then shipped south to Kentucky that fall. In 1862, the 2nd Minnesota saw their first action at the Battle of Mill Springs in January, then had their share of skirmishes and small battles throughout the year in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama but by year's end, they were back in Kentucky.^{xviii}

On Feb. 15, 1863, a Sunday morning, the men of Company H including Byron E. Pay was one of a detachment of 16 men scouting for supplies near Nolensville, Tennessee who heroically defended a wagon train against the attack by 125 mounted men from the 6th Alabama Cavalry. They repulsed the attack and saved the train.^{xix} When the smoke cleared away, they found two dead Cavalrymen, several wounded, and 10 dead horses and one of their own mules. They took three prisoners and three horses and had three men slightly wounded.^{xx}

On September 20, 1863 at Chickamauga, Georgia, a battle the Union forces lost, Byron E. Pay was seriously wounded. He was treated for his wound. Notes in his record state, "This man is elsewhere, therefore no discharge paper furnished. Descriptive Roll Sent. Wounded at Chickamauga on Sept. 20/63. Absent wounded. Prov. Made for the muster out of roll sent." One record had his discharge date as May, 1864 and another July 14, 1864 by order of the Secretary of War for disability resulting from a gun shot wound in left shoulder".^{xxi}

The Post War Years

Byron was 19 years old and still owed \$100 from the military^{xxii} when he returned to Mankato. By June 1864 he was hired by Mr. J. B. Hubbell of the Northwestern Fur Company,^{xxiii} assigned to load 86 wagons with flour at Mankato, Minnesota and deliver them across western Minnesota and eastern Dakota Territory to what became Fort Thompson in September. He left Mankato on the 1st of July, arriving with his wagon train at the fort during the month of August.^{xxiv}

Upon returning to Mankato, his next assignment was to take several teams and join up with Company L of the 2d Minnesota, which had become an Indian fighting group, to scout the upper reaches of the Minnesota River and gather up the remnants of the Sisseton Tribe and take them to the Ft. Thompson reservation, also known as the Crow Creek Agency.^{xxv}

After accomplishing this, he took a supply train to the fur company posts deep in "Indian country" at Ft. Berthold in western Dakota Territory (later North Dakota). This required passing through the skirmishing area still being disputed by the Sioux and Mandan tribes. Byron Pay, now 20 years old, left on February 20, 1865, and by mid-March the fur company's posts had been resupplied, taking just six weeks to lead the supply train almost 400 miles in mid-winter through hostile territory from Ft. Thompson to Ft. Berthold.^{xxvi}

Byron continued buying furs and delivering supplies to the Sioux Indians in 1866.^{xxvii} On September 14, 1866, Byron E. Pay is listed as an invalid per government pension records^{xxviii} although he remained in the employ of the fur company until 1871.^{xxix} On September 10, 1867, Byron E. Pay married Hattie E. Youngman in Blue Earth, Faribault County, Minnesota.^{xxx}

In May 1872 he and Hattie located a preemption claim on the NW 1/4 of section 8, township 108-49, Dakota Territory. He, his wife and young son settled in a sod house on the Big Sioux River south of Medary and lived there through the winter.^{xxxi} A year later, May 18, 1873, Byron E. Pay, wife and son moved into Brookings County, on the Northeast quarter of section 9, and made the first homestead filing in the township.^{xxxii} On July 3rd his brother, Warren, and wife arrived. The following day, July 4, the first celebration of the national holiday took place with the entire population of the northwestern part of Brookings county participating – the five Pay family members. On this day the claim of B. E. Pay was christened Oakwood Farm by Mrs. Pay.^{xxxiii} Oakwood was either the 2nd or 3rd settlement^{ndxxxiv} in Brookings County during the early 1870s.

In 1872-73, Byron Pay served as sergeant-at-arms in the Dakota Territorial House of Representatives^{xxxv} and in the fall of 1873, Byron and Warren Pay and three other men were the first United States jurors from Brookings County to attend court in Pembina, now in North Dakota. “The trip was made overland in a covered wagon, drawn by a span of mules . . . They did not see any settlers on the route after leaving Oakwood until they reached Fargo. Mrs. Hattie Pay, her young son, Charles and Mrs. Anna M. Pay, were the only white people around the lakes, and they remained alone taking care of the stock while their husbands were away.”^{xxxvi}

In 1874 Byron Pay’s home became the post office and he the postmaster at Oakwood. Postmaster total compensation for Byron E. Pay in 1875 was \$5.49.^{xxxvii} In the fall of 1878, he built and ran a hotel, Oakwood House in Oakwood and also acted as a locating agent in the early days locating homesteads for early settlers. In 1874 at age 30, he became a U.S. Marshal serving from 1874-1885. He also served five years as a Brookings County Commissioner.^{xxxviii}

In May 1879, Mr. B. E. Pay returned from Yankton after an absence of several weeks on the grand jury^{xxxix} and was soon back in the employ of the U.S. government, working for the Department of Justice as an Indian Agent, traveling between Yankton and the Black Hills in the winter of 1880-1881. He served in the territorial legislature and held various positions of trust. By 1883, the town of Oakwood was a casualty of the railroad when it extended a branch bypassing the town. Oakwood dwindled away while a new town of Bruce, on the railroad line several miles east of Oakwood, sprang up. Almost all of the buildings at Oakwood were moved either to Bruce or Volga. About all that remained was Byron Pay’s hotel.^{xl}

Byron, his wife Hattie and their two sons moved to Volga, SD, when he was still in his early 40’s and he worked for the Bank of Volga. He was a staunch Republican and an alternate to the National Convention in 1884. Byron was also a Vice-President of an Old Settlers’ Association and was active in the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic – a precursor of the American Legion.) He was the commander of the Brookings GAR post in 1891 and 1892.^{xli}

At age 53, he was awarded the Medal of Honor by President William McKinley on Sept. 11, 1897 (probably not in person), 34 years after the Civil War battle near Nolensville, Tennessee.^{xlii}

On November 20, 1902, Byron E. Pay wrote a deposition, which is now among J. B. Hubbell’s papers of the Northwestern Fur Company at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. “Byron Pay was the man engaged by Hubbell to make the trip with the Indians. Pay not only describes his journey from Fort Ridgely to Pipestone, (Minnesota) where his train was joined by fifty of Hubbell’s wagons loaded with supplies for the Indians, but he tells of the difficulties encountered in carrying out his task.”^{xliii}

Less than four years later, at the age of 61, Byron E. Pay died suddenly at his home in Volga, probably of a stroke, on Monday, February 19, 1906.^{xliv} He left behind a wife, Hattie and two sons, Charles W. and Mell B. Pay. His obituary said, “Mr. Pay was one of the oldest and most universally respected residents of Volga, and was well-known throughout the state of South Dakota.” “Few men have been through more varied scenes and vicissitudes in life than he, and few men have come to the end of their earthly journey with more warm friends and fewer enemies than Mr. Pay.”^{xlv}



xlvi; xlvii



Compiled by Joyce Rohloff Gardner, Mankato Chapter DAR

SOURCES:

Age Calculator.net. Web. <http://www.calculator.net/age-calculator.html>

Based on the date of birth and death, gives age in years, months, weeks, etc. June, 2016.

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NOTES:

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- xi Age Calculator.net
- xii Web: Illinois, Databases of Illinois Veterans Index, 1775-1995. Robert P. Pay.
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- xxvii Daily Plainsman, Huron, SD.
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- xxix Volga Tribune, Page 13.
- xxx MN Marriage Index
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- xxxix Brookings County Press.
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- xli Ibid.
- xliv U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865, Minnesota, Medal of Honor.
- xlvi Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, Kane, Lucile M.
- xlvi Crisler, *The Byron Pay Story*.
- xlv Volga Tribune and Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times
- xlvi Find A Grave, Byron E. Pay
- xlvi Brookings Co. Press, Byron E. Pay sketch
- * Introduction Photo: Byron E. Pay – family photo