

Thomas Robinson

Born

May 17, 1837, Norway

Entered Service

New York

Interim 1865 to 1870

U.S. Navy

Died

May 12, 1915, Soldiers' Home Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

Early Years

Of all our Medal of Honor winners the life story of Thomas Robinson has been the most complicated to unravel. After much research little has been gleamed about his life. We know from his death certificate that he was born May 17, 1837 in Norway to his father Christian Johanson, a native of Norway and to his Mother Ingabold Oleson also born in Norway.ⁱ It is not known if he had any siblings or when he immigrated to the United States. Conflicting Federal Census data gives us an immigration date of 1856 for the 1910 census or an immigration date of 1860 for the 1900 census. We can calculate that at least Mr. Robinson came to America as a young adult and not as a child.

War Years

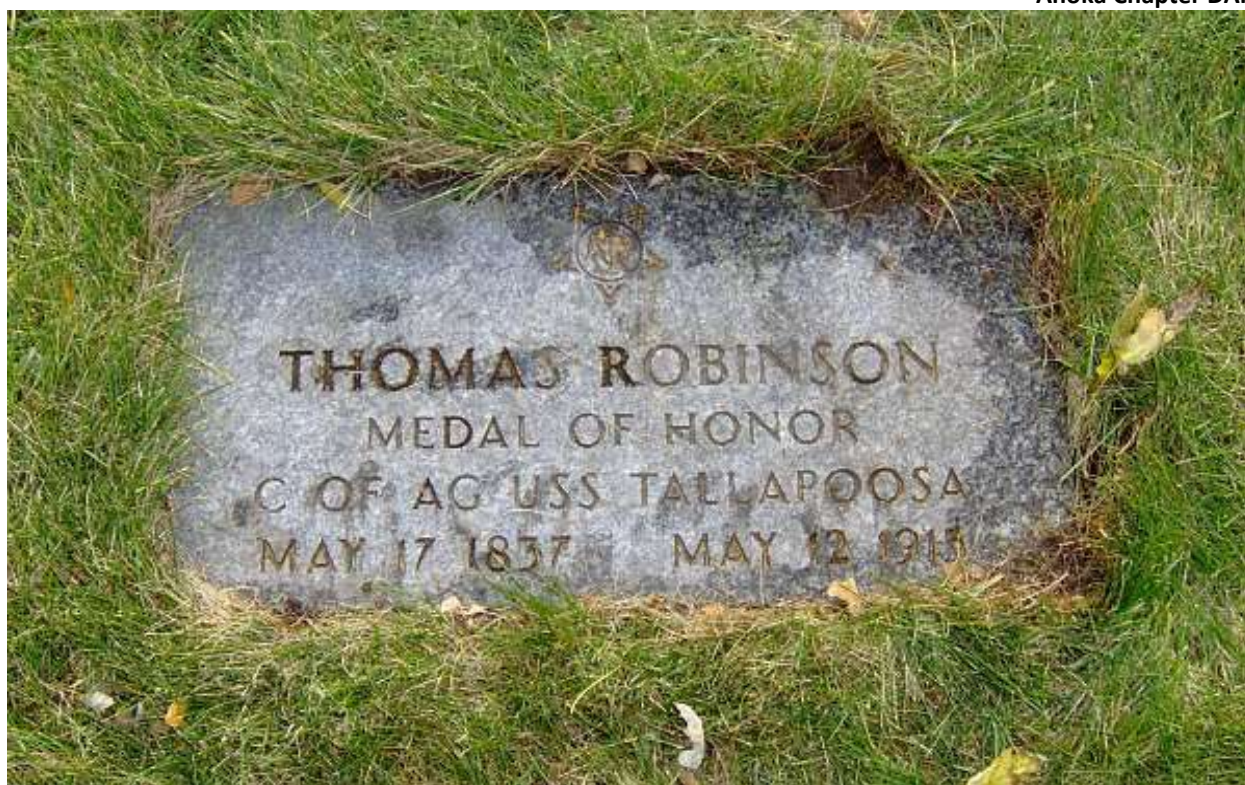
Mr. Robinson settled in New York and it was from there that he entered the U.S. Navy. His Soldiers' Home record from Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota gives his service length as 3 years.ⁱⁱ Although no specific dates are given, he is cited as serving from 1865 to 1870. It was while serving on the U.S.S. Tallapoosa that Mr. Robinson saved a man, Wellington Brocar, a landsman, from drowning.ⁱⁱⁱ The event occurred July 15, 1866 near New Orleans, Louisiana. For his bravery Thomas Robinson was awarded his Medal of Honor through General Orders 77 on August 1, 1866.^{iv} Mr. Robinson left the service after having achieved the rank of Captain of the After Guard.

Post War Years

On May 17, 1881 in Minneapolis, Minnesota Thomas Robinson entered into holy matrimony with Louise Herlin^v. She was a 30 year old immigrant from Sweden fourteen years his junior. Mr. Robinson supported his growing family working as a painter.^{vi} While living in Minneapolis, Thomas and his wife had three daughters. Pearl was born March 4, 1882 followed by Ruby Louise on March 28, 1885 and finally, Rachael born May 4, 1889. Twelve weeks after her birth Rachael died of cholera on July 27, 1889.^{vii} A little over two years later, Mr. Robinson would lose his wife. Louise died September 5, 1891 in Minneapolis. She is buried near her daughter Rachael in the Minneapolis Pioneers and Soldiers Memorial Cemetery. Around 1895 Mr. Robinson entered the Soldiers' Home in Minneapolis, Minnesota.^{viii}

The whereabouts of oldest daughter Pearl Robinson is not known. There has been speculation, but no confirmation that she moved to Canada. Middle daughter Ruby stayed in Minneapolis and married Hugh Sutton Reid on February 1, 1909.^{ix} Hugh was originally from Virginia and by the time of their first child's birth around 1912, Ruby and Hugh had moved to Virginia to raise their six children: Winifred (abt 1912), Ida (abt 1913), Hugh (abt 1915), Ruby (abt 1916), Clayton (abt 1919) and Kenneth (abt 1923). Ruby died on October 22, 1940 in Norfolk, Virginia.^x

After living in the Soldiers' Home in Minneapolis for 20 years, Thomas Robinson passed away^{xi}. He died May 12, 1915 from complications suffered from a fall from a second story window while mentally deranged.^{xii} At the time of his death, Mr. Robinson was 77 years of age. He was buried in Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis.



Grave Photo of Thomas Robinson courtesy of Dave Vangsness, www.findagrave.com.
Lakewood Cemetery, Minneapolis, MN

SOURCES

Grave Photo of Thomas Robinson by Dave Vangsness, www.findagrave.com.

“Civil War Veteran Buried,” *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 15, 1915, p 20.

Commonwealth of Virginia, Certificate of Death, October 22, 1940, Ruby Robinson Reid.

Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1915-MN-017979, Thomas Robinson.

Minnesota Historical Society, Marriage License and Certificate, Hennepin County, May 17, 1881, Thomas Robinson and Louise Herlin.

Minnesota Historical Society, Marriage License and Certificate, Hennepin County, March 19, 1909, Hugh Sutton Reid and Ruby Louise Robinson.

Minnesota Historical Society, Return of a Death: July 27, 1889, Rachael Robinson.

Minnesota Historical Society, Report of a Birth: May 4, 1889, Rachael Robinson.

Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 107 G 19 1 B, Thomas Robinson.

Record of Medals of Honor issued to Officers and Enlisted Men of the United States Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, 1862-1917, Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1917, p 96.

United States Federal census records and Minnesota State census records.

NOTES

ⁱ Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1915-MN-017979, Thomas Robinson.

ⁱⁱ Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 107 G 19 1 B, Thomas Robinson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Record of Medals of Honor issued to Officers and Enlisted Men of the United States Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, 1862-1917, Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1917, p 96.

^{iv} Record of Medals of Honor issued to Officers and Enlisted Men of the United States Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, 1862-1917, Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1917, p 96.

^v Minnesota Historical Society, Marriage License and Certificate, Hennepin County, May 17, 1881, Thomas Robinson and Louise Herlin.

^{vi} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1915-MN-017979, Thomas Robinson.

^{vii} Minnesota Historical Society, Return of a Death: July 27, 1889, Rachael Robinson.

^{viii} Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 107 G 19 1 B, Thomas Robinson.

^{ix} Minnesota Historical Society, Marriage License and Certificate, Hennepin County, March 19, 1909, Hugh Sutton Reid and Ruby Louise Robinson.

^x Commonwealth of Virginia, Certificate of Death, October 22, 1940, Ruby Robinson Reid.

^{xi} Minnesota Historical Society, Soldiers'Home Record, 107 G 19 1 B, Thomas Robinson.

^{xii} Minnesota Historical Society, Death Certificate Index, Certificate Number: 1915-MN-017979, Thomas Robinson.