

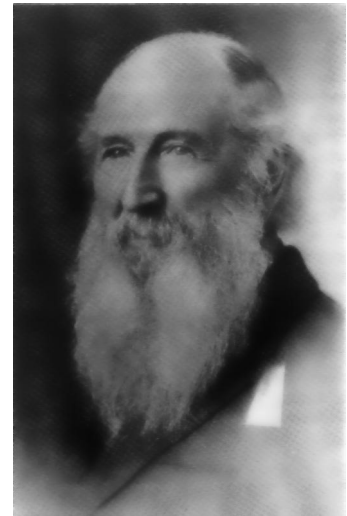


2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Lyman Warren Ayer

Two Wisconsin missionaries met while teaching at the Mackinaw Congregational Mission School and soon married. They were Frederick Ayer and Elizabeth Taylor. After their marriage, they continued in the mission field and remained on the frontier. They were at the mission at Pokagoma Lake, in what would become Pine County, Minnesota, when their son, Lyman, was born on June 10, 1832. He is believed to be one of the first, possibly *the* first, white child born in the territory eventually called Minnesota.

Lyman grew up at Indian missions around Minnesota. He learned to speak the Native language of the Ojibwa people and it was said he spoke it as well or even better than English in his earliest years. His education was from his mother with the exception of a six month session with a “Scotsman” near the Red River area, but Lyman learned from more than just books. His earliest occupations may have been influenced by the Native American culture around which he was raised. He hunted, trapped, and was a “bronco-buster” before he went into teaching at the seminary at St. Cloud. While there, another student at the seminary, Miss Laura Hill, caught his eye. Lyman and Laura were married on July 25, 1859.



Recruiting for the Second Battery was well underway when Lyman decided to enlist in February of 1862. He may have enlisted with Laura’s brother, Henry, who enlisted at about the same time. Lyman eventually rose to hold the rank of second lieutenant by the end of the war.

That may not have been quite as high of rank as Lyman aspired to reach. In December of 1862, he wrote a letter to Laura asking her to encourage his father to talk to the Governor of Minnesota about Lyman raising his own company of artillery. Lyman and another Battery member, Alexander Kinkead, wanted to raise a four gun Battery in Minnesota for service within the state. This was likely in response to the U.S.--Dakota conflict in the fall of 1862. Lyman indicated that he had written his father, but Laura’s urging was important to get the elder Ayer to act. Lyman wanted his father to go in person to see the governor; that a letter just would not do. He mentioned that Kinkead had also written the Governor about the battery they wanted to raise. A letter in Governor Ramsey’s papers from Frederick Ayer did make the request, but by letter only. Whatever efforts were made on Lyman’s behalf went unanswered as he remained with the Second Minnesota Battery throughout the war.

Lyman wrote a very different kind of letter to his parents than to his wife. Letters to his parents were filled with news of the battles, movements and actions of the Army. Laura’s letters were more personal. He encouraged her to improve herself through music, painting, drawing, and to always “employ your time to the best advantage.” He softens the “self improvement” tone of his letters by reminding her, “Though I think you one of the best of women yet you know I believe no one is so perfect that they cannot improve.” Letters from Laura, his parents, other family and

friends were very important to Lyman and in every letter he wrote, he pleaded for those at home to write to him more often. This was even more pronounced in letters to Laura. In one, he responded to her news of accomplishments in music, then continued to encourage her to other artistic pursuits, especially “scraps and pictures for a scrap book. Save all your pieces of music, etc., etc., Curiosities-flowers, socks”. He clearly missed his family.

As the war went on, Lyman was detailed to various duties in the Battery. He served as a clerk for Captain Hotchkiss in 1863, and as Ordinance Officer in 1864. In the last months of the war, he was detailed to the headquarters at Chattanooga as the assistant adjutant, a post he held until the Battery went home to Minnesota to be mustered out.

An odd twist in Lyman’s tale is the comment he made to Laura in a letter dated April 5, 1864. Many of the men in the Battery were due to reenlist or be mustered out at the time. Lyman wrote, “I would have been glad to have reenlisted had not you and father not seemed so opposed to it--I think I would be good for three years more.” He made it sound as though he was not going to reenlist, but he signed his Veteran Volunteer Enlistment papers on March 26, 1864, more than a week before the date he wrote on the letter to Laura. Lyman did reenlist and he served until the Battery was mustered out on August 16, 1865.

The descriptive roll shows Lyman to have been 5’ 7” tall, had blue eyes, sandy hair, and a sandy complexion.

As soon as his time in the Army was over, Lyman went to Tennessee. Laura had followed him south near the end of the war and was teaching school in Loudon County, Tennessee. Lyman took a job in a lumber yard for a while, then went into teaching. They moved from Tennessee to Atlanta, Georgia, where they continued teaching. In one of his letters, Lyman expressed his opinion that “if one tenth of the labor bestowed upon the indians were spent in trying to elevate the Negro that far greater results would ensue”. Since Lyman’s father had been sent to Atlanta to take charge of the freedmen’s bureau, Lyman and Laura may have been working with freed slaves. Lyman also served as the deputy county auditor for 18 months.

After a time, the Ayers returned to Minnesota and lived for two years near St. Cloud where Lyman clerked for the Hill Brothers in their general store for about a year. The Hill brothers were Lyman’s brothers-in-law.

Lyman’s parents had a 600 acre homestead near Belle Prairie and when Lyman’s father died, Lyman and Laura moved to the farm. While he called himself a farmer, Lyman took a job in 1873 to work for the Northern Pacific Railroad collecting indemnity lands, surveying, and timber cruising. He remained at this job for 12 years, then went to the Mesaba range to work for the company that opened the iron mines of Minnesota. Finally, Lyman was working for the state of Minnesota taking the Indian census, cruising, and surveying.

In 1881, Lyman was listed as being paid for his services as a county commissioner of Morrison County, Minnesota. He received \$4.00.

The State of Minnesota appointed Lyman the state forest ranger in 1904. Lyman had to ask for a leave of absence from those duties to attend the State Fair. The *Little Falls Daily Tribune* noted him to be one of the attractions of the fair as the first white child born in the state. It went on to list him as having built the first saw mill in Morrison County and in later years of having an interest in “blooded stock” cattle, specifically a breed of shorthorns.

The *Duluth News Tribune* ran an article about Lyman on December 26, 1906. It described Lyman as one of the oldest living pioneers of Minnesota and who was known “all over the northern part of the state as one of the veteran lumber cruisers. The article read, “*Mr. Ayer is well along in the seventies, and has spent the greater part of his life in the woods, but in spite of his age he can carry as heavy a pack as he could 40 years ago, and write a clear-cut, almost stereo-typed hand that would put to shame a majority of the common school pupils of the state.*”

“Cruising is not what it used to be, Mr. Ayer told a reporter. The railroads have nearly spoiled the grand old game. Now very few long tramps are necessary, and the dangers and hardships of the business have been almost entirely removed. But it will always be good enough for me.” The reporter went on to write that it was nearly train time, so Mr. Ayer “*waved on his big black slouch hat, buttoned up the heavy duck coat and slipped underneath the huge pack which would have staggered the ordinary man in half a dozen blocks.* “

That story was given creditability in another newspaper article where a young man was walking with Lyman and felt guilty at not carrying anything while the older man with white hair and beard had a huge pack. It was to that young man’s chagrin that, after taking the pack, he found he could not carry it more than a block.

Lyman and Laura had two daughters, Ina and Agnes. Agnes died at the age of 17 years. Ina married, had four children and survived both her parents.

Lyman did apply for a veteran’s pension, but confusion in his claim brought a scathing letter from him to the Pension Department. It is unknown if he ever received the pension. After his death on April 20, 1929, Laura applied for a widow’s pension. Her application noted that she was blind and in frail health at the time. If the Pension Department did not expedite the process, she would never see the benefit of the claim.



Lyman was laid to rest in Oakland Cemetery just outside of Little Falls, Minnesota. His stone provides his name, birth and death dates, and the epitaph “First White Child Born in Minnesota”. Laura rests beside him. Nearby are other family members and in the next plot are the Hills, Laura’s family.

Researched and compiled by the reenactors of the 2nd Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery. Visit our website at <http://www.2mnbattery.org> for more information about our soldiers and our organization.

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