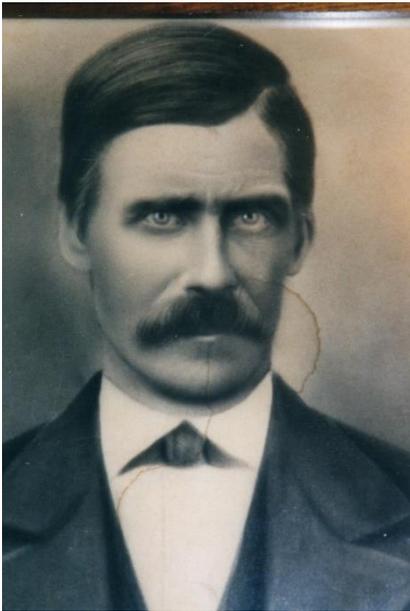




2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Nils Christopher (a.k.a. Nils Christopherson)



Nils was no stranger to hard times long before he joined the army. He was born in Hadeland, Norway May 5, 1844, and was still a baby when his father died. As was the custom at the time, Nils was declared an orphan. It is unknown if his mother was still living or not, but the label of orphan would have been applied to any child whose father had died. Nils was sent to his grandfather and traveled to America when his grandfather immigrated to Iowa a few years later. They settled in Lansing, but Nils was alone at the tender age of 10 years when his grandfather died.

Nils took up working as a farm hand in Spring Grove, a community just north of the Minnesota/Iowa border. By the 1860 census, Nils was living with another family, working as a farm laborer. It noted that he had attended school that year and said he was 16 years old. His obituary credits Nils with being especially frugal with his earnings, saving up to buy 40 acres of land and a yoke of oxen before he was 20 years old.

Nils left his land in the fall of 1864 to join the Second Minnesota Battery during the draft rendezvous that summer. He enlisted at Rochester, Minnesota, and saw his name credited to Spring Grove. He received \$33.33, a third of the \$100 bounty he earned by agreeing to serve one year in the army. The descriptive roll showed Nils to be 5' 7 1/2" tall with a light complexion, brown eye and a light complexion.

Many of the records for Nils, especially his military records, call him Nels Christopher, the "son" part was dropped. Which was most correct is unknown.

Nils joined the Battery in the South and was soon serving garrison duty, guard and picket duty and doing more battle with dirt and disease than with Southern troops. The Second Minnesota spent most of the last year of the war in garrison duty near Chickamauga, Georgia. Though he was listed as present for duty, later depositions when Nils was applying for a pension indicate he had been ill while he was serving with

the Battery. Nils had some trouble with “diarrhea and a bad stomach” when stationed near Chattanooga. His dysentery that lasted two months after he was home from the war was blamed on “bad river water.” Nils was injured once during his time in the army, but it was not Southern bullets, it was a Union train. The train was filled to overflowing with soldiers being moved between Knoxville and Philadelphia, Tennessee, when a number of cars jumped the tracks. Nils was riding on top of one of the ill-fated cars and was forced to jump to avoid being crushed beneath it. The fall was some 30 feet according to what Nils told the Pension Department, stating that he injured his right side.

When the war was over, Nils came back to Minnesota with the Battery and was officially discharged from the army on August 16, 1865. Just over two weeks later, Nils married Carrie Ellingson in a ceremony held at her father’s home. The couple settled down to farm in Houston County, Minnesota, near Black Hammer.

Nils sold that farm in 1869 and moved to Cottonwood, Minnesota, traveling there in a lumber wagon pulled by his yoke of oxen. His obituary described life there quite colorfully. *“There he homesteaded for four years, braving the dangers of frontier life and the hords (sic) of Indians which roamed over Minnesota at that time.”*

Nils moved back to Spring Grove in 1873 where he bought a farm. He and Carrie, also spelled Kari, raised ten children before Nils retired from farming in the spring of 1907. Nils and Carrie didn’t get to spend their retired years together, Carrie died in December of 1907.

Nils visited among his children until he decided to settle down once more. A new wife, Elsie Nelson, probably had a lot to do with settling down! They were married in Maddock, North Dakota, in 1919.

Nils and Elsie had 13 years together before Nils suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died the next day, September 19, 1932, at the age of 88 years. He was buried in the North Viking Lutheran Cemetery in Rugby, North Dakota.

The obituary for Nils took up nearly two columns in the *Spring Grove Herald* newspaper, listing his many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren as well as waxing poetic about Nils and his military history.

“One of the last survivors of the Civil War Veterans of Benson County, North Dakota has fought his last battle. He always said that God had been very good to him and carried him thru the hardships of an orphaned childhood, thru the dangers of the Civil War with its many narrow escapes and finally blessed him with many temporal blessings and a fine large family, a pleasant home, a devoted wife and loving care during the evening of his life.”

The article went on to report the military funeral held for Nils and made his connections to people in Spring Grove. Nils left the property in the town of Maddox and \$1500 to Elsie, the rest of his estate was divided between his children and grandchildren.

Elsie, as Nils' widow, applied for a pension in 1939. At the time, the city auditor who was helping her with the application stated that she had been trying to get the pension for some time already, was totally blind and 75% deaf. The Pension Department the law quoted back to Elsie and denied her claim. Women who married a veteran after 1905 were not entitled to a pension after their veteran husbands died. Elsie and Nils had married in 1919, so she was not eligible.



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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