



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

William H. Compton

William took up the law as his profession and as a lawyer, he left many details about his life. He was born in 1841, the son of a doctor in Gasport, Niagara County, New York. The family moved to Branch County, Michigan, when William was four years old. His father continued working as a doctor for five more years, then changed professions to take up the mercantile business until his death some 30 years later.

Following his father, William went into the mercantile business when he finished common school and worked at it for two years before attending the University of Michigan to study law.

The year of 1862 was one of changes for William. His mother died that year, he married Mary Jackson, and he graduated from law school. He also decided not to practice law, but to enlist. William enlisted in Battery I, First Michigan Light Artillery on August 15, 1862.

The First Michigan was sent to Washington to fortify that city against any Confederate attack. The wet and cold of a Washington winter proved to be too much for William. He became sick in December of 1862, suffering with problems in his lungs and throat. His disability discharge stated the cause to be excessive exposure to wet and cold. William was not sent to the hospital during his illness; instead, he was treated by his father in a private home in Washington. The discharge was final after just nine months of military service.

William went back to Michigan and his health began to improve. After a time, he moved to Durrand, Wisconsin, and went back to the mercantile business, but that didn't last long. On September 1, 1864, William crossed the Mississippi River to enlist at Lake City, Minnesota. He chose again to serve in the artillery, the Second Minnesota Battery. His descriptive sheet notes him to be 5' 7" tall, with blue eyes, dark hair, and a light complexion. This time, William's health held up better and he served until the end of the war, though a friend described his duty as "light" and that William was still battling lung problems. William stayed with the army, was promoted to corporal, and served as a clerk in the office of the chief of artillery in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

After the war, William went back to Michigan and took up the practice of law. He became quite successful, according to local reports because of his hard work, integrity, and ability. He served as city clerk for a few years, as a township clerk, and as a director on the school board. He attended the Methodist Church where he held many church offices and taught Sunday School. He was a member of the I.O.O.F, the Masonic Lodge, and the G.A.R.

Life was not especially kind to William. His wife, Mary, died in 1870 from diphtheria. He married Eliza in 1871 and they had one son. Eliza died in 1873 and William married again in 1875. Bessie Bennet was a school teacher in Bronson, William's hometown, and they had three children together. William

was left alone once more in 1882 when Bessie died. In 1883, William was married a fourth time to Flora Stratton, the daughter of the minister of the Methodist Church in Bronson. William and Flora had one daughter together.

A description of William and Flora said, "Owing to their culture and genial disposition, they are among the leading members of society, and are recognized as people of influence and merit. As an advocate, Mr. Compton is precise, careful, earnest and astute in the interests of his clients, and is a close reader of human nature. He does nothing in a hurry, never becomes excited, and acts only after mature deliberation."

William received the nomination of the Republican Party for the Legislature on the People's Ticket in 1872, but he was defeated. Again in 1876, his name was put forward as a candidate, but he was again unsuccessful.



On January 11, 1904, William lost his last battle, his death coming at home with Flora attending him. He was laid to rest in the Oak Grove Cemetery in Coldwater, Michigan.

The name of the cemetery is fitting as a massive oak tree has grown up over William's last resting place, the huge roots wrapping and lifting his stone until nearly half of it is covered.

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.

Updated: 29 August 2012