



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Richard Lansing Dawley

Richard Lansing Dawley was born in Galen, Wayne County, New York, on March 26, 1826. He was raised by his uncle as by 1830, both of his parents were gone. When Richard was 20, he was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and decided to enlist in the 6th Regiment of U.S. Infantry. The Mexican War needed soldiers and Richard was one of them, enlisting on August 13, 1846, for a five year enlistment. He served under Captain John Todd in Company A. The company saw action in the battles of Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, Cherebusco, Chepultapec, and Mexico City before Richard was discharged at Fort Ripley, Minnesota, on August 13, 1851.

By 1853, Richard had married Mary Jane Averill and they were living in Plymouth, Wisconsin, when their first child, William, was born. Charles was the next son and by the time their first daughter, Ida, was born, the family was living in Winona County, Minnesota. The 1860 census recorded a taxable real estate value of \$300 and personal estate valued at \$1500. Various records show his occupation as both farmer and mill worker.



In 1862, another war called Richard. He decided to enlist on January 28, enlisting as a private in the Second Minnesota Battery of Artillery. His experience with artillery in the Mexican War may have helped him as Richard was promoted to Second Lieutenant on February 28th, 1862. Richard helped form the Second Battery, returning to Winona to recruit men for the unit. His name is credited as the recruiting officer for many of the men from Winona County. Another promotion to First Lieutenant came to Richard in October, 1862, just after the battle in Perryville, Kentucky. With the new rank came added responsibilities. The morning reports note that he took the Third Section out on picket patrol on April 15th and they remained on duty for five days. Richard was present at the Battle of Chickamauga and assumed command of the Battery after the other lieutenant was wounded in the fighting. On the 24th of November, 1863, Richard was in command of the right section and they joined the battle as the Union Army made its break out from Chattanooga, Tennessee. They remained on the line for two days before returning to the Battery.

Things did not go smoothly in the army for Richard. It appears he had some conflicts with his commanding officer, Captain William Hotchkiss. Both were veterans of the Mexican War, both had prior experience with artillery, yet they did not get along. On January 15, 1864, Richard was relieved of command and placed under arrest by Captain Hotchkiss. The statement made by Hotchkiss read, "This officer has not been able to cooperate with his superior and

commanding officer because not disposed to do so. He has uniformly been very inefficient, has been clannish with the men of the Bty. and thereby kept up dissatisfaction among them. His commanding officer has borne with his irregularities with unaccountable patience until recently when he was compelled to have him arraigned before a court martial."

The charges were dated April 5, 1864. That same day, Richard wrote his letter of resignation, stating the reason was his "inability to cooperate with the Comdg officer of said Battery". The official acceptance of Richard's resignation made note that it was done for "the good of the service".

The men of the Second Battery, however, had a different opinion of Lieutenant Dawley. The noncommissioned officers and men of the Battery took up a "voluntary subscription" and bought an engraved sword, sash, and belt for Richard as a parting gift. In the speech to present the sword, the men remarked how Richard was "unremitting in those attentions which are conducive to our welfare, sharing alike with us in the danger and glory of the battlefield," his qualities that marked him as a "gentleman," and how his "judgment, coolness, and bravery" had "won their admiration and commanded their respect." The news writer who reported on the presentation did comment that Richard was not a speech maker and his remarks were brief, but "accorded so well with his well-known quiet and unassuming manner that the boys felt that which language failed to convey to them."

Richard returned to Winona County after his resignation was accepted and he remained with his family. A bit a bad luck overtook Richard as he got home. The army had given Richard his pay in a check for \$200. Richard signed the check over to his wife, Mary, and she endorsed it, but before it got to the bank, it was lost. Richard took out an ad in the *Winona Daily Republican* newspaper offering a "liberal reward" for the return of the check. Nothing in the paper ever noted if Richard got the check back or not.

The 1870 census showed the family living in St. Charles, Winona County, Minnesota, and that the family had grown to include six children. Richard was farming and the value of his real estate was \$4000. A seventh child, Frank was born in 1872, and the last child, Henry, was born in 1874. It is suspected that his birth may have been too much for Mary Jane. She died two weeks after Henry was born, her death coming on April 4, 1874. She was laid to rest in the Hillside Cemetery in St. Charles. Less than five months later, Henry joined his mother in Hillside Cemetery.

Richard stayed in St. Charles and, though his military days were over, he was known as "captain" from his service in the local militia.

In 1883, notices appeared in the DeSmet newspapers that Charles had gone to Minnesota to visit his father. Shortly after, sale ads appeared in the Minnesota papers for Richard's home in St. Charles. In November 21, 1883, the following article ran in the St. Charles paper: *R.L. Dawley has gone to De Smet, D.T (Dakota Territory), having sold his residence property here. The Captain has long been a resident here, and will be missed from our midst; but we suppose the "new coundree" has attractions which are hard to resist.*

The attractions were simple. Richard had two sons living there, land was cheap and the new community of DeSmet was just getting established. Richard did not take a homestead there, but lived in a house Charles had built in DeSmet. Both Charles and his brother, Hiram, were in the lumber business there.

Richard was active in his new community and was the roads commissioner until his health began to fail.



In 1887, Richard was still living in De Smet when he filed for his military pension. He did not file as a Civil War veteran, but rather as a Mexican War veteran. This may have had something to do with the circumstances under which he resigned from the Second Minnesota Battery. His disability was listed as an “abscess of the liver” and he was unable to make a living for himself any longer. He was 61 years old.

On February 13, 1888, Richard succumbed to what was called blood poisoning. He left seven children and his body was brought back to St. Charles to be buried beside his wife in Hillside Cemetery.

The funeral was held under the auspices of the Grand Army of the Republic, but his grave was not marked until the spring of 2003 when members of the Second Minnesota Battery of Reenactors ordered and placed a stone for their own “Lieutenant Dawley”.



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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