



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Andrew Erickson

A large wave of Norwegian immigrants arrived in Minnesota in the late 1850s and early 1860s. One of those families to arrive from Norway was Andrew Erickson and his wife, Olava. They had been married in Eidsvold, Norway, came to Minnesota in 1860, and settled in Spring Grove, Houston County, along with many other families from Norway.

By the late summer of 1864, Minnesota was holding a draft rendezvous to help fill the Union ranks. Andrew enlisted and his promise to serve three years or until the end of the war with the Second Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery earned him a bounty of \$100. He received a third of it at the time he enlisted in Rochester and the balance due after he served. The muster in sheet in Andrew's file said he was a farmer, born in Norway in 1840, he had hazel eyes, sandy hair, and a dark complexion. He stood 5' 9" tall.

Andrew arrived at the Second Battery's camp while they were in garrison duty outside Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was the fall of 1864, and the Battery would see no more major battles with Confederates; their worst foes were boredom, cold, rain, insects, and heat. Andrew remained a private for his year with the Battery and his service records show neither accomplishments nor demerits. He was mustered out with the rest of the men of the Battery on August 16, 1865, at Fort Snelling.

His family was waiting for him in Spring Grove, so Andrew most likely took a river boat to the southern border of Minnesota to return to them. He and Olava had nine children, the last, a daughter born in 1877, was only one born in their new home.

Their new home was in Freeland Township in Lac Qui Parle County. Prospects further west were all the talk in 1876 Minnesota, so Andrew moved his family to the township on the western border of the state. He was the first white settler in Freeland Township when they arrived in 1876. Their daughter, Alette, born on December 18, 1877, was the first white child born in the township.

Those first years in La Qui Parle County were hard ones for the Ericksons. In 1877 and 1878, there was a grasshopper plague. Andrew's description said, "The grasshoppers came in such big swarms that the sun was almost hidden from view. They settled on the crops and destroyed much of it. In 1877, we had 18 acres of wheat and in order to stave off their onslaught, we carried and hauled hay and straw and other perishable things along side these acres of wheat and set it afire. In that way, we saved the crop from the grasshoppers that year." The next year, Andrew said, even the trees were stripped of leaves by the grasshoppers.

Grasshoppers were not the only threat to the crops in the field. Prairie fires were frequent and dangerous. The wind, almost always present on the prairies, blew the flames along the tall, dry grass and in minutes, many acres could be destroyed.

Andrew described how they plowed wide patches of ground next to the house and barns so the fires would have nothing to burn near the buildings, hoping to avoid a total loss. One year, Andrew said, "I worked against the prairie fires until I was more dead than alive."

Something else in abundance on the prairie did not cause as much damage, but did cause a fair amount of concern and that was snakes. Andrew said there were a great many snakes about his farm and they were not harmful, but crept into everything, including the house. One day, he said, Olava found a snake in the baby's bed lying right next to the baby and both were asleep.

Some years later, Andrew was interviewed for a history of the county and he talked about what life was like in the early years. "It was 15 miles to our nearest neighbor," Andrew told the historian. He talked about the many Indians who lived in the area and how they were often around his farm and house. He told of one day when a Chief from the Sisseton reservation came into their house and sat down in the middle of the floor with his tomahawk in his hand. Andrew said, "It was his idea to frighten the wife and children out of the house, so he could help himself which he succeeded in doing, as they fled in great haste." He continued, "As a whole though, the Red Men were quite friendly." By 1878, the government had moved the Indians to another reservation and the Ericksons had no more "red" visitors.

Andrew worked his farm until age began to take its toll and he turned the work over to one of his sons. Little explains what happened, but Andrew's health must have taken a turn for the worse as he was admitted to the Minnesota Soldiers' Home in Minneapolis on March 7, 1908. There he remained until his death on March 6, 1918.

His wife and family remained in Lac Qui Parle County and Andrew was laid to rest in Lakewood Cemetery in the Soldiers Home section. The reason his grave was never marked with anything permanent may have been due to the distance between Minneapolis and their home in Canby, but it is not known. Olava began the process to apply for a widow's pension, but did not complete it.

Andrew waited until 2006, 88 years, for his grave to be marked with a permanent grave stone placed by the Second Minnesota Battery reenactors and Lakewood Cemetery.



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: 3 October 2020