



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Alexander Kinkead

Alexander left a fair number of records behind to tell the story of his life, starting with his birth in Elkton, Maryland, on December 3, 1831. His ancestry was from Scotland where it was said they descended from nobility. The family was said to be “strictly protestant” and this put them at odds with the ruling English, so at least one branch of the family arrived in America around the start of the Revolutionary War.

Three brothers in the Kinkead line were all interested in coming to Minnesota in the 1850s—George, Alexander (called Alex), and William (called Will). Alex wrote a letter to someone descendants believed to be another brother, John, in February of 1855. Besides the usual family news, the lengthy letter contained questions about Minnesota—where might the best land be, what were the towns like, the weather and more. Alex was especially interested as he and William were both planning to move to Minnesota and become farmers, something he said both had long aspired to. The P.S. at the end of the letter asked “if your place is accessible from St. Paul, Minnesota, or would I be obliged to get to you from another direction.”



Will and Alex arrived near Mendota, Minnesota, between 1856 and 1857. They were looking over the land for homesteading. George, already married with a family, was planning to come to Minnesota after the first two brothers had settled on a location. Alex and Will traveled west and settled near what would become the present day city of Glenwood. Alex build a log house there and the brothers used it as a place to live while they were looking for the ideal piece of land.

While out surveying, the boys discovered “a region of lakes, timberland, and prairie, so rich in beauty and natural advantage” that William decided to apply for a homestead and buy land for George near Lakes Winona and Agnes. Soon the little settlement was known by the name “Alexandria” for Alexander Kinkead.

In the fall of 1858, the name “Alexandria” was approved for a post office in the newly born town. Alex Kinkead was the first postmaster. When the county was organized in 1859, Alex was elected Registrar of Deeds. George brought his family to Minnesota and joined Will and Alex in 1860.

Alex became a druggist and did quite well. By 1860, his real estate holdings were valued at \$3,000 according to the 1860 census. That same census listed Alex and his wife, Cordelia. They had been married in St. Paul on February 6, 1860.

When the War broke out, Alex was not among the first to enlist in the spring of 1861, but he must have been thinking about it as by February of 1862, he was in St. Paul and signed his enlistment papers to join the Second Minnesota Battery of Light

Artillery on February 2. Alex served as First Sergeant until September 13, 1862, when he received a commission as 2nd Lieutenant. He would be a 1st Lieutenant before the war was over. The descriptive roll noted Alex as being 5' 6" tall, light hair and complexion, with blue eyes. William also enlisted and served in the Second Minnesota with his elder brother. Will was not Alex's only relative in the Battery; his brother-in-law, Edwin Whitefield, also served in the Battery.

There are no official mentions of Alex in the records of the Battery during the first months of its service, but the battle of Stones River, December 31, 1862 to January 1, 1863, changed that. The Battery was in the thick of the fighting where several men were wounded and one killed. Alex was thrown from the horse he was riding, falling with all of his weight on his hands. The army doctors said this caused "a rupture of the cords of his left wrist." It would seem this did not keep Alex out of action as just over a month later, his name was quite prominently mentioned in the Battery's records, though not in the most favorable way.

Alex was brought up on charges in February of 1863. The charges were brought by the Battery's commanding officer, Captain William Hotchkiss. Hotchkiss charged that Kinkead had knowingly allowed six men from the Battery to go out on a foraging mission that took them beyond the protection of the usual pickets on guard. The men and their horses were captured. The Captain explained why he brought the disobedience charges, but admitted he had little evidence, so what happened to the charges against Alex is unknown. He kept his rank and remained in the Army.

A letter dated October 9, 1863, was written about 2nd Lieutenant Alexander Kinkead stating that he had had been ill for some time and at least 20 days furlough and a change of climate was needed to restore his health. The letter asked for the furlough and was signed by the surgeon of the Battalion, 1st Division.

Alex reported another injury when he filed for a pension many years later. He gave no dates, but a pension examiner recorded the story. Alex had been "sitting conversing with brother officers in his office, when lightning struck the chimney of the house and descended through the fireplace into the room, throwing him with such force against a bed post as to hurt him severely and render him unconscious." Alex said this caused the injury to his back.

In September of 1864, Alex was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. By October, he was detailed to serve with the Quartermaster Department at Chattanooga. He remained there until July of 1865, returning to the Second Battery in time to go back to Minnesota to be discharged in August of 1865.

Alex and Cordelia moved from Alexandria a little further south and settled in St. Cloud in 1865. William was living there, so this may have influenced their relocation. Alex reported they had a daughter, Edith, who was born in Minnesota in 1861. He also reported they had moved to New York City in 1869, and in 1872, moved to California. Alex left out a rather significant portion of his life in that brief list.

In 1870, Alex and Cordelia had a baby boy, but he died at the age of 7 months and two days. This happened in Elko, Nevada. The same newspaper, the *Nevada State Journal*, noted the birth of a daughter to the couple in 1872. Alex did mention his second daughter in his pension files, reporting her name as Maude and said she was

born in Nevada in 1873. If this is the same daughter as was reported in the newspaper, Alex had the date wrong.

Elko, Nevada is also where another legal document was filed, a decree of divorce. That was in 1876 and it appears Alex had little contact with his daughters after that. He moved to California.

At some point along the way, Alex studied to become a doctor and he was known as Dr. Kinkead in California for some 25 years. Doctoring was not his only interest. Alex followed the gold mining operations closely and land records in 1890 show him selling several pieces of land, most near the head of the Piru Canyon area. This area was known for its placer mining.

Interestingly, Cordelia was recorded in the 1900 census as a "widow" and head of her household. It noted that she had given birth to four children, only one of which was still living. She was not a widow as Alex was still alive and living in California.

Alex made his home in Ventura County, California, for many years. He was admitted to the Old Soldiers' Home in the fall of 1892, was released and returned in 1895. He left the Home again until he was readmitted in January of 1903. He left for the last time in November of 1903. It would seem from newspaper sources that Alex lived a "hermit life" in the mountains at the head of the Piru Canyon. It was said he seldom left his mountain, only coming to town for necessities. Still, in a letter to the Pension Department, Alex noted his active participation in the campaign for California's governor, the letter dated 1891. Alex received a pension for his military service of \$20 a month starting in December of 1897.

In the spring of 1908, Alex came into the town of Ventura and took a room over the Depot Saloon. He stayed there several weeks, then took a trip to Los Angeles, returning the following day. Two days later, he went about his usual business and retired for the night. He was found dead, in his night clothes, laying on his bed the next morning. It was June 14, 1908.

In April of 1912, the Pension Department received a letter from Alex's daughter. She was trying to find her father. The letter she had written him with his last known address had been returned and she wanted to find him. There is no record if the Pension Department answered her.

Alex's story does not end with his burial in the Ventura Cemetery, also known as St. Mary's Cemetery. He was buried with military honors provided by the local GAR Post, though it is unknown if his grave was marked in any way at that time.

The cemetery Alex rested in had two parts, the Catholic half and the Protestant half and had been established in 1862, but not truly organized until the 1880s. The two churches who owned the cemetery stopped caring for the land in the 1880s and the cemeteries, now thought of as one, fell into disrepair. The cemetery was used, but not cared for until a women's group did a major cleanup effort in 1910-11. At that time, it was "like a wild field, overgrown with mustard."

The cleanup efforts died away and by the 1930s, the cemetery land "was overgrown, weed choked, and scattered with broken tombstones." The last burials were made in 1943 and an ordinance prohibiting any further burials was passed later that same year. Even then, it was not known for certain how many bodies were in the

cemetery as some had been removed to the new city cemetery over the years. Best estimates put the total at some 3000 occupied graves.

In 1963, the City of Ventura adopted a plan to make the old cemetery into a park. Notice was sent to as many families as possible that they could remove the bodies and claim the markers that by this time had been removed to a work yard of the park department. Only six bodies were removed. Stones that were not claimed—none were—were used in the golf course levee and buried in rubble. The area became known as Cemetery Memorial Park.

There were some noises made about restoring the cemetery and sorting out its confusing ownership in the mid-1970s, but little changed until the early 2000s. Another proposal to improve the park met with harsh resistance, especially after rumors surfaced that the once-cemetery was to become a dog park. This was not in the plan, but the rumor persisted. After much verbal wrangling, some of it in the courts, the city of Ventura amended the plans to make the old cemetery into a quiet place of reflection and meditation. It was still much like a park, but memorials and some of the old markers were returned and incorporated into the new plan.

Descendants of Alex Kinkead worked long and hard to get the cemetery to a place where erecting a grave marker of some kind for Alex was possible. Contact was made with the Second Minnesota Battery of Reenactors for support and documentation, which was provided. In 2012, a veterans' marker was installed in the Memorial Walk for Alexander Kinkead of the Second Minnesota Battery.



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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