



## 2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

### William Kinkead



William was a prolific letter writer and his correspondence with hometown newspapers provides much information about William's life and his time with the Second Battery.

William was born on November 3, 1835, in Elkton, Maryland. By the time William was seven years old, both his parents had died. He grew up in the household of John Kinkead, likely a family member, perhaps an uncle.

The family ancestry was from Scotland where it was said the family 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.

William and two of his brothers were interested in coming to Minnesota in the 1850s—George, Alexander (called Alex), and William (called Will). Because their father had served in the War of 1812, William was eligible to claim 160 acres as the minor son of a deceased veteran under the terms of the Bounty Land Act of 1855. George and Alex were "of age" and could buy land at \$1.25 an acre under the Act.

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 built 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. George brought his family to Minnesota and joined Will and Alex in 1860.

William was said to be the first man to cultivate land in Douglas County. He was instrumental in organizing that county and was made the road commissioner assigned to open the road across the state from St. Cloud to the Red River. William made his home in Alexandria for a while, but by 1862, he was in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where Alex was living at the time.

William was a cabinet maker by trade. Ads in the *St. Cloud Democrat* newspaper in May of 1862 note that William and a partner were opening a furniture store. It was noted that with their fine selection of furniture, there would no longer be any need to travel to St. Paul to buy "fine furnishings."

The furniture business was a short lived occupation for William as he enlisted in the Second Minnesota Battery of Artillery on August 13, 1862. Muster roles show him 5' 8-1/2" tall, with hazel eyes, dark hair and fair skin. It is unknown if William chose to enlist by any influence of his brother since Alex was already serving in the same unit. William was given a \$25 bounty for his agreement to serve three years. When he caught up to the Battery in late September, the unit was on the march through Kentucky that took them to their first battle at Perryville. William served in that battle, though he was not mentioned in any reports. William did his own reporting in a lengthy letter to the newspaper about the battle. The Battery next saw action at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in the battle at Stones River where William again was present, but not mentioned except in his own letters to the hometown newspaper.

Reports are filled with William's name come February of 1863. He and five other members of the Battery were sent out on a foraging detail near Franklin, Tennessee, on February 6. The men strayed a little too far from Union lines and were captured. They were taken to Libby Prison in Richmond where they spent about a month as guests of the Confederacy before they were sent to City Point, Virginia, Maryland, be exchanged on March 7, 1863. Of the six, only two of them ever returned to duty with the Battery. William was not one of them.

According to his medical files, he suffered his first "hemorrhage" of the lungs that was believed to have been caused by the "cruelty and exposure of Libby Prison". William was in and out of military hospitals with what was called "Debilitas" for the next year.

On April 4, 1864, William had finally recovered enough of his health that he was chief clerk in the hospital for returning prisoners of war. He remained at this job only a short time before being transferred to the Adjutant General's Office in Washington DC where he worked until he was discharged from the Army on September 27th, 1864. William remained in Washington and was appointed by the Governor of Minnesota to "look after the interests of sick and wounded Minnesota soldiers" passing through Washington.

William took his duties seriously and reported by telegraph on the well being of various Minnesota soldiers. An article in the March 11, 1865, Anoka Star Newspaper gave details about the Eighth Minnesota Regiment, many of whom were from the Anoka area. William reported one officer and 44 enlisted men sick, but none dangerously so. He also reported one death of a man from Anoka County.

*The St. Cloud Journal* newspaper was a little more lavish in their praise of William's work.

*He was active and zealous in attending to his duties, and made arrangements with the lines of telegraphic communication between Washington and Annapolis to be immediately informed of every arrival of exchanged prisoner; and no matter when the summons came; whether by night or day, in sunshine or storm, he would hasten to the*

*point designated, and like the good Samaritan, bind up the wounds and cheer the hearts of Minnesota's gallant but suffering sons. From rank to rank, he would pass like an angel of mercy, until the last had been found and cared for, when he would again return to Washington to attend to his official duties, and before having time to recruit his exhausted energies, would again be called to another point to minister to the want and needs of the poor victims of rebel barbarities. Minnesota owes him a debt of gratitude for all his untiring devotion to her soldiers. And all this he did without remuneration or hope of reward, actuated solely by pure love of the work and desire of doing good.*

William remained in Washington DC after the war was over. On October 16, 1866, he married Laura Harkness. Records indicate William stayed in Washington until his health again failed and they decided to go to Minnesota to give William a chance to "repair his shattered constitution" as it was described.

The notice in the *St. Cloud Journal* stated simply that William had come home to die as his health did not improve. The newspaper called the cause of death consumption, his death coming on May 23, 1868. Laura buried William in the North Star Cemetery in St. Cloud with an elegant marker that named him "Beloved Husband, aged 32 years."

Laura went back to Washington DC after William died and filed for a widow's pension from her address at 916 New York Avenue. She was granted \$8 a month.



The stone Laura had placed for William was of the style common in the 1860's--a slab of soft white marble about two inches thick. Time and erosion wore the stone down and it was found broken in two places when William's grave was visited by members to the Second Minnesota Battery of Reenactors in the late 1990s. Plans were made to replace the stone, but these were placed on hold until it could be determined if the unmarked grave next to William was that of his brother, Alexander. If it proved to be Alexander's grave, both stones would be ordered and placed together. Extensive research did locate Alexander's grave, but it was

not next to William.

In 2009, a new marker was obtained from the Veteran's Administration and the cemetery installed it to mark William's final resting place and note his service to the Union.



*Researched and compiled by the reenactors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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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