



## 2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

### Sylvester Montour

The 1850 census showed Sylvester, called Sylvan, as being six years old living with his family in St. Paul, Minnesota, where his father was a blacksmith. The family had grown by the 1860 census and Sylvan had become Sylvester. He was living in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his parents and five brothers and sisters. Sylvester was the third child, having an older brother and sister. It also said he was 12 years old in 1860, having been born in Prairie Du Chein, Wisconsin, in 1847. The census math is a little fuzzy on Sylvester's age. Four years later, Sylvester told a recruiting officer that he was 18 years old. By most calculations, four and 12 do not add up to 18, but if he was six in 1850, he should not have been 12 in 1860!

Still, it was the draft rendezvous in the late summer of 1864 and men were needed to continue fighting the Confederacy, so it is unlikely the recruiting officers would have cared what Sylvester's age may have really been. Sylvester said he was 18, that his occupation was boatman and he wanted to enlist. He even agreed to let his name be credited to Centerville in Anoka County for their draft quota. For his enlistment, Sylvester received \$33.33 up front with the promise of \$66.67 to be paid later. Sylvester had hazel eyes, a dark complexion, black hair, and stood 5' 6" tall. He was mustered into the Army at Fort Snelling on September 2, 1864, just two days after enlisting. His enlistment papers show that Sylvester made his mark instead of signing his name.

Sylvester arrived at the Battery while they were on garrison duty in Tennessee, so he did not participate in any major battles. His time was spent on garrison duties and scouting missions. He served as a private until the Battery was mustered out at the end of the war on August 16, 1865.

He moved around some after the war, making his home in St. Louis, Missouri; Savannah, Illinois; Davenport, Iowa; and St. Paul, Minnesota. Since all of these are river towns along the Mississippi, it might be that he continued his trade of working on the steamboats, though he did later say he also worked as a teamster and a laborer.

In Sylvester's defense for enlisting when he was not yet 18 years old, he may not have actually known when he was born. On his first application for a pension in 1900, he was still making his mark, so he had not learned to write his name. He told the Pension Department that he thought he was born about May 13, 1846, but qualified that statement with an "on or about" clause. On a subsequent pension document, Sylvester said he had been born about May 19, 1845. That page was dated 1912 and Sylvester was still not signing his name, so he probably never did learn to read or write and truly did not know how old he was.

It likely didn't help that Sylvester had Native American heritage. His mother was a Native American woman named Angelique Barrette and she was the great-granddaughter of Dakota Chief Wa-pa-shaw (Wabashaw). Sylvester and his brother, Joseph, were recorded as receiving an affidavit for land in 1856 as part of the 1837 treaty with the Dakota. The 1898 Indian census noted Sylvester was a member of the Medawakanton Sioux. Very few records make the connection to a Native heritage and it would appear Sylvester "passed" for white. The only census that noted his race as other than "white" was the 1898 census for Native Americans.

Family life for Sylvester was not all rosy. He married Mary Cherrier in St. Paul in 1868. They had seven children before she divorced him and remarried. Sylvester left no record of him ever remarrying.

The disabilities listed on the pension application for Sylvester included “asthma, short-windedness, a running sore on his left leg, obesity and heart trouble”, so the pension was granted.



By 1912, Sylvester was living in the Old Soldier's Home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His rate of pension \$15.50 a month. The records indicated he would have seen increases to \$22.50 in May of 1920 had he lived that long.

Sylvester died on October 31, 1913, at the Old Soldiers Home and was buried in the Wood National Cemetery next to the Home. His final records indicated he was a widower.

Sylvester was the last of three men from the Battery who lived their last days at the Milwaukee Old Soldier's Home. David Twiggs lived there until 1893 and Adam Eppinberger until 1887. Sylvester and David enlisted and were mustered in together, Adam had enlisted a few months before them.



*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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