



## 2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

### Charles Miller Whitman

Cause of death: Suicide.

The cold words on Charles' death certificate leave only the question of why. The newspaper speculated that Charles had taken his own life "prompted by temporary insanity." It said he had been ill for some time and the newspaper reporter believed that the illness had affected Charles' mind. What is known about his life could lead to the conclusion that perhaps the reporter was right.

Charles was born on December 20, 1838, in Hector, Tompkins County, New York. By the age of 12 years, he was working on a ferry in New York State. He worked for a time in the lumber business before coming to Winona County, Minnesota, in 1856 to work on a farm.

On February 15, 1864, Charles decided to enlist and was assigned to the Second Battery. He may have chosen the unit as he probably knew some of the men serving in it since so many of them came from Winona County. Charles was 24 years old, 5' 6" tall, had blue eyes, brown hair, and a light complexion. He was promised \$300 in bounty money for his agreement to serve for three years or the duration of the war. He and other recruits arrived at the Battery's camp near Chattanooga on the last day of March, just in time to see the men who had reenlisted go home on their veteran's furloughs. The men who remained were assigned to the Second Illinois Artillery, Battery I. There, they served in some hard fighting as the Union Army fought the Confederates for every foot of ground between Chattanooga and Atlanta that summer. The detailed men returned the Minnesota Battery that fall and continued to serve in garrison duty and scouting details until the end of the war when they were mustered out at Fort Snelling in August of 1865.



Charles went back to Winona County and the land he had bought just before he joined the army. He farmed his land and in 1867, married Abbey G. Weeks. Together they had three children before Abbey died. In 1878, Charles married Susan Wood and three more children were born. In 1881, he sold his farm in Winona County and moved to Lincoln County, Minnesota, where he managed a ranch for a pair of men named Weeks and Sanborn. The November elections of 1886 brought Charles a new job, that of sheriff of Lincoln County. The term was two years and Charles was reelected four more terms. Susan died in December of 1894. Charles was alone for six years before he married Eliza Zwahlen in 1900.

Charles was a member of the Masonic Lodge in Winona and continued to be active with the Lodge in Lincoln County for a time. He was also a member of the Lake Benton G.A.R. Post.

On December 16, 1915, Charles got up and went for "his usual morning walk outside." Shortly after his return, Eliza heard the discharge of a gun in the next room. She rushed in to find Charles dead, the top of his head badly mutilated by a shotgun wound. Neighbors and the coroner were immediately called and the jury ruled the death a suicide at an inquest that same afternoon.

Charles was laid to rest in the Memorial Hill Cemetery in Lake Benton with a military marker.