

The Fayette County Union

West Union, Iowa

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JOHN T. GAGER BURIED SUNDAY AT AGE OF 99

Last Surviving Civil War Veteran Writes Own Obituary in 1911

HAWKEYE – John T. Gager, oldest resident and last Civil war veteran of Fayette county, was buried Sunday at Bethel cemetery, following services conducted by Rev. C. Dane Hoggie, Hawkeye, and Rev. E. G. Hunt, Mount Vernon, in the Methodist church in Alpha. Rev. Hunt baptized Mr. Gager and his family when they joined the Alpha church 50 years ago.

All posts in the county of the American Legion were represented at the military funeral held with the civil services. Estimates placed the number of Legionnaires attending at 100 to 150. More than 359 in all attended the service.

Dies Friday

The aged veteran died early Friday morning at the home of his only surviving son, Ernest Gager, who lives on Highway 18 just at the junction of the Alpha road, 13 days after celebrating his 99th birthday. He was in fair health at that time, and able to repeat the Lord's Prayer word for word. Mrs. Gager reports, however, that they could see the decline beginning only two days later.

Mr. Gager wrote his own obituary, dated Jan. 1, 1911, which he entrusted to

the care of Mrs. Ernest Gager in 1926. Because it tells the story of his life clearly and completely, the Union is reprinting it verbatim, with the permission of Ernest Gager:

John Thurston Gager was born in Broome County, N. Y., Nov. 17, 1846. Lived with his parents in Broome and Chemung counties until September 1851 when the family moved to Illinois, landing in Chicago, Oct. 9 (having taken two weeks for the journey by canal and lakes), thence to DuPage county, where he lived until 1872. Mr. Gager obtained his education by attending the winter terms of the district school, and attending one winter term of the Oak Park high school.

He spent his time mainly on the farm of his father until the Civil war, when he enlisted in July 1862, in Co. B, 105th Reg. Ill. Vol. Infantry, and served three years as follows:

Experiences Told

Crossed the Ohio River at Louisville, Ky., in October 1862; received orders and started immediately on a forced march through Shelbyville to Frankfort, arrived just in time to save the long bridge over the Kentucky river which had been set on fire by the retreating rebel army.

Then marching, skirmishing and fighting through Hartsville, Cave City, Munfordsville, Bowling Green,

Scottsville and numerous other places in Kentucky; Galatin, Tunnel Hill, Nashville, Lavergne, Murfreesboro, Stone River, Tullahoma and through Chattanooga, Tenn., Bridgeport and Stepheson, Ala., and Lookout Mountain, Ga.

Here in Lookout valley, Sherman reorganized his army preparatory to the Atlanta campaign in the spring of 1864. Starting May 2, and campaigning through Buzzard Roost, Dalton, Ringold, Resaca, Big Shanty, Alatoona, Marietta, Chattahoochee, Peach Tree Creek and entered the city of Atlanta, Sept. 2, making 138 miles in four months.

Then through with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, reaching the coast at Savanna, Ga., Dec. 20. Crossed over the Savanna River Jan. 1, 1865 and raiding through South and North Carolina, reached the vicinity of Goldsboro and Raleigh, N. C., early in April, and being near Raleigh at the close of the war.

Joined Sherman

Then marched through by way of Richmond and the famous Virginia battlefields to Washington, and marching with Sherman's army in the grand review of 250,000 troops through Pennsylvania Avenue, May 23, 1865.

Camped just outside Washington on the old Revolutionary battlefield of Bladensburg, Md. Here, about three weeks, was mustered out and transported by rail through Baltimore, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh to Chicago and reached home the latter part of June, but a small remnant of the regiment that had marched south three years before.

Following the close of the war, Mr. Gager paid his small savings toward the purchase of a farm of 60 acres adjoining his father's, later completing the payment of this and purchasing an additional 15 acres. Here he resided

until 1872, when he sold his farm and removed to Bethel Township, Fayette County, Iowa, where he purchased a farm of 240 acres which he built up and improved until 1892, when he left the farm and removed to the village of Alpha, where he lived a semi-retired life from exacting duties, but was apparently always busy.

He was united in marriage, in October 1865, with Miss Sarah F. Austin, Downer's Grove, Ill. Of the children born to them, two died in infancy, Ada L. at the age of seven, Alice 22, Clarence 40, Elmer 31, Clara 52 and Eva 52.

His wife died Sept. 28, 1886. He was a member of the Methodist Episcopal church at Bethel, and later of the Congregational church at Alpha, always contributing freely of his time and means to church and Sunday school work and serving many terms as superintendent of the Sunday schools both at Bethel and Alpha.

Mr. Gager was always faithful in the duties of citizenship, filling various offices on the school board, in the township affairs, and many terms as secretary of Bethel Cemetery association, Bethel Creamery company; Alpha Creamery company and president of Alpha Telephone company.

Societies Listed

In fraternal societies he was an active member of Bethel Grange Patrons of Husbandry, Alpha lodge No. 434, Independent Order of Good Templars, and Waucoma post 171, Grand Army of the Republic.

He was again united in marriage in September 1888 with Mrs. Sarah A. Paul, Waucoma, Iowa, who passed to the great beyond in March 1913.

All his life having seen so much of the evil of intemperance he was bitter

and unrelenting foe of the saloon, and always and at all times working for the advancement of the cause of temperance.

Not made clear or to be added to his own obituary is that 10 children were born to his first marriage. George and Edith were those dying in infancy, Charles G. died last August, and Ernest R. is the only surviving son. One sister, Mrs. Abigail Foote, San Antonio, Tex., also survives him, 12 grandchildren, 29 great-grandchildren and one great great grandchildren.

Relatives from away attending the service were Mr. and Mrs. Orrie Palmer

and family, Lanesboro, Minn.; Miss Violet Robinson, Austin, Minn.; Mr. And Mrs. R. R. Gager, Waterloo; Mr. And Mrs. Elbert McIntyre, West Union; Mr. And Mrs. Charles Gager, Robert and Jean, Mr. And Mrs. Lawrence Kruger, Mr. And Mrs. Jack Baade, all of Monona; Mr. And Mrs. Alva Gager, Mrs. Lisa Gager, Mr. And Mrs. E. H. Timm and family, Mr. And Mrs. Walter Bemis and family, Hawkeye; Mr. And Mrs. E. B. Shaw, Mrs. Alfred Stewart, Mr. And Mrs. Archie Stewart and Mrs. Jack Lindsay, all of Oelwein.