

Patrick Samuel Gardner

He was called “Captain Gardner” by his friends, reminiscent of his days as commander of a mounted cavalry company. Patrick Samuel Gardner was the first American in this line of my family; he was my paternal great-grandfather. Frontiersman, farmer and soldier in Minnesota, he was born in County Limerick, Ireland on May 8, 1826. Although we know little about his youth, we know that life among the common people in nineteenth century Ireland was hard. Just prior to 1850, Patrick immigrated to the United States, apparently working as a laborer in the Boston area.

Patrick settled in Boston where he met Miss Martha Barnard, who had emigrated as a baby, with her family, from Germany, and they were married in April 1857. By September, the newlywed couple had arrived in Minnesota, where Patrick took up work as a farmer. They appear in the 1857 Minnesota Territorial Census, living as tenants in Oshawa, in the Mankato-St. Peter area. The family grew; between 1858 and 1881, ten children were born. In 1866, he purchased land near Lake Washington, in southwest Le Sueur County. The family lived and farmed there for over 25 years.

At the outbreak of the Sioux Indian Uprisings in 1862, Patrick volunteered in the defense of his home and family. He joined a militia group known as the St. Peter Frontier Guards, with the rank of 5th Orderly Sergeant, under the command of Captain [later Colonel] Charles E. Flandrau. The unit, active only during the period 19-26 August, 1862, possibly fought in the First Battle of New Ulm and was fully engaged in the Second. After several days back at his home in Oshawa, Patrick joined the St. Peter Home Guards militia unit, organized on 6 September 1862, under Captain Wolf H. Meyer. Chartered for 60 days, the unit served seventy-three days, in and about St. Peter. Patrick was enrolled with that militia unit as a 2nd Lieutenant. Later in life, he wrote a poem about that sad, first contact with the Indians at New Ulm.

Personnel were needed to form what I call “federalized” units. These were units ordered formed by the War Department, in Washington. Minnesota, no longer a Territory, had to comply with these calls. Men were needed immediately, not only for the Civil War, but for the Indian Wars, in the Upper Midwest. These men were defending the homeland for the men called to fight in the Civil War.

After a few days respite at his home, Patrick enlisted as a Second Lieutenant in the First Regiment of Minnesota Mounted Rangers, at St. Peter, on 5 November 1862, to serve for one year. On 11 November 1862, Patrick was advanced to the rank of 1st Lieutenant. The First Regiment of Mounted Rangers moved from its place of formation at St. Peter to New Ulm, where it remained for the remainder of December 1862. From there it was ordered to garrison duty at Ft. Snelling for the winter and early spring 1863. After a return to New Ulm in the spring of 1863, the First Regiment of Mounted Rangers was ordered to participate in the Indian Expedition of 1863 under General Henry H. Sibley, formed to push the Indians westward, away from populated areas of Minnesota. Patrick was discharged 11 November 1863.

The Indians continued to threaten the settlers along the Minnesota-North Dakota border. The War Department in Washington, however, commanded that another cavalry regiment be formed of Minnesota volunteers. This Regiment was to be sent to fight in the raging Civil War. The Second Regiment of Cavalry was the result. The Minnesota Governor succeeded in a plea to the War Department to divert the mission of the Second Regiment to address the Indian situation, arguing that a mounted cavalry unit was the best way to deal with the far-ranging Indian bands. Patrick did not hesitate to join this Regiment. Mustered in on 26 November 1863, he reported as 1st Lieutenant in Company M on 5 January 1864. During the month of June 1864, Patrick was detailed as Post Adjutant at Ft. Ridgley, on the Minnesota River. After that assignment, his Company (M) was assigned to help build Fort Wadsworth, near Kettle Lake in Marshall County, South Dakota.

A number of additional assignments, mostly in Minnesota, were given Patrick and his Company M, culminating with a forced march from the West to report to Ft. Snelling. This march took place in a frigid period in which the snow approached a foot in depth. The troops, including Patrick, had to bed down in place, merely sweeping the snow away and laying out their bed rolls on the frozen ground.

Patrick was promoted to Captain of his Company M upon the courts-martial of the former Captain, accused, inter alia, of misuse of government-owned property. Patrick and a squad of his soldiers took a final assignment, spending the winter and spring of 1864-5 on the frontier at Chengwatona, in Pine County. The unit was discharged at Ft. Snelling later in 1865, sending Patrick home, as a veteran.

In spite of his increasingly debilitating physical condition, later in his life he was active as a good citizen in both Local and State Government. He served in the Kasota Township of Le Sueur County as a member of the Township Council in various posts. In addition, he was held in such high esteem by his neighbors that he was called upon to serve in the Minnesota State Legislature for two legislative sessions, the 19th (1877) and again in the 22nd (1881).

As the years wore on, he became an almost complete invalid. It was later deemed probable that during the marches in sub-zero weather, his sleeping on the cold, frozen ground, brought on a severe case of Rheumatism that robbing him of living to an old age working the land at his beloved farm near Lake Washington, in Le Sueur County, Minnesota. Completely unable to take care of himself, his beloved wife had to help him in every normal task of daily life. Living at the farm was no longer feasible for him, so he and his wife took up residence in Mankato, where he died peacefully on 7 June 1894, at 66 years of age. He is buried at Calvary Cemetery in Mankato.

Respectfully submitted Leroy W. Gardner
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