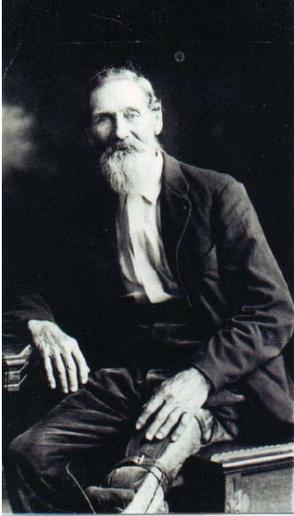


William Fitzgerald of Canton, Illinois



Perhaps no soldier of the civil war endured more hardships and suffering than did the subject of this sketch, William Fitzgerald of Canton. His suffering was great physically and mentally, as he was for years compelled to rest under a charge of desertion and it was insinuated that his wounds were received in the confederate service.

After waiting patiently for years he has come out from under the charges with a war record untarnished.

William Fitzgerald was born near St. Joseph, Missouri Feb 18th 1837. His parents, Harvey Fitzgerald and Elsie Stufflebeam Fitzgerald were natives of Kentucky.

When I was a boy there were Indians in the part of Missouri in which we lived. One day one came to our house and mother offered him a pipe which he refused to smoke. A boy who was staying with us began to mold some bullets and the Indian began to smoke. Whenever an Indian refused to smoke with you it was a sign that he was on the warpath.

In 1845 we came to Liverpool and settled in this township. I went to school in an old log schoolhouse located on what is now the Harvey Wilcoxon farm. The school was heated by a fireplace. The principle business of the teachers was to teach reading, spelling, writing, a little arithmetic and put in a good deal of time whipping the children. I also went to school to the late Marshall Wilcoxon at a school house situated on the Charles Shaw farm now owned by Frank Hummell. Mr. Wilcoxon was a good teacher and kept order without doing much whipping. He governed by kindness.

On March 26th 1857, I was married to Sarah Jane Collins. The ceremony being performed by Squire Kelley.

We are the parents of 10 living children: Charles, an engineer at Hoopston, Illinois, Mary Anderson, of Chariton Iowa, Hija Hayes of Center Nebraska, William and Jesse of Maywood Nebraska, Nellie Morris of Hettinger North Dakota, Fred in Nebraska, Allie in Canton, J.L. commissioner of highways of Canton township and Charlotte Wilson also of Canton.

I helped clear a great deal of the land in the Clark and Wilcoxon settlements and I have helped build many a log house. There was plenty of game, such as turkeys, prairie chickens and squirrels. Raccoons were also plentiful.

I followed farming and clearing until August 14, 1862 when I enlisted in Company one hundred and third Illinois infantry, company A was a Lewistown company and was at first commanded by Captain Willison, but after Willison's promotion to Major, W.W. Bishop became captain.

[Type text]

We were mustered into the U.S. Service at Peoria, October 2, 1862. From there we were ordered to Bolivar, Tennessee. I had left my wife with several small children and I got a letter from some of the neighbors telling me that my family was in a starving condition and I came home without leave to provide for them. But I wrote to Captain Bishop telling him where I was and that I was coming back to the regiment which I did voluntarily and when I joined my regiment I took part in all the battles until I was captured. I was in the battles of Kennesaw mountain, Dalton, Resaca, New Hope church and Atlanta. I never was absent from duty for a single day while I was with the regiment. I had never asked to be excused for any cause until the day of my capture.

At the battle of Dallas Georgia on May 28, 1864 I heard Colonel Dickerman's last order. We had been driven back and Colonel Dickerman stepped out from behind a tree and said; boys shoot low. They are down there by the branches. As he gave this order, he was struck by a rebel bullet and he died a few days later.

While the army was on the Atlanta campaign, and during the early part of August 1864, I forget the exact day, I awoke one morning feeling quite sick and for the first time in my army life I asked to be excused from duty. The request was granted. I walked back to the rear of our army and went to a peach orchard where I heard the order "come here". Three rebels were there with a gun leveled at me. I was alone. I had a choice of two things, run and die or obey the command. Not being anxious to take up a permanent residence in the other world at that time, I obeyed the command. I was taken to Catawba Alabama where there were 2100 other prisoners and we were kept there three months. From there we were taken to Millen Junction Georgia and there I met Stephen Nott, another Fulton county soldier who had been captured. From there we were taken to Blackshire station and then to Florence South Carolina. Our treatment had been bad ever since our capture, especially in the way of food. When we were first captured we were given cornmeal and meat and wheat flour once a week. Later the flour was cut out of our rations and also meat and we had to be content with cornmeal, two or three spoonfuls of beans daily and soured sorghum molasses. At Gold borough we were told to get ready to march to Wilmington, that we were to be exchanged. The order was countermanded and we lay in a pine wood all night on the ground surrounded by guards. This was in February and we had no blankets and very poor clothing. Many of the prisoners died from exposure. We drew salt beef here and many of us ate so much of it we became sick. From the sickness and exposure, my legs and feet became diseased and a confederate surgeon amputated my left leg. The toes rotted off my right foot. My leg instead of being buried was thrown out on the ground and a hog ran off with it. I heard the guns of the union army as they approached Gold borough and it was the sweetest music that I have ever heard. Out of seven prisoners who had been with me since my capture, only one besides myself had survived the horrors of prison life.

When the union army captured Gold borough, I was given the best of care by the union surgeons and I was discharged on the following order: Disability of Private William Fitzgerald by the loss of left leg, the result of exposure while in the line of duty. Discharged by orders from the war department, May 31, 1865 by order of Major General Dix.

[Type text]

This will show that I was not then considered a deserter. Years afterward when I applied for a pension, an enemy sent into the pension department the charge that I had lost my leg in the confederate service. This caused me a great deal of trouble to clear up again.

During a part of time we were confined in stockades, timbers were set on end and top of the stockade, guards were always on duty. The time was called every hour, thus eight o'clock and all right. We slept out during all weather, prisoners were dying daily and many a prisoner would pass on to his comrade anything they had of value. If I die before you, I want you to have any trinket or article of clothing that he might have. One day I was very sick and was told by the commander of the prisoners that I could enlist in the confederate service and get better treatment. I told him that I would stay in the stockade until the ants carried me away before I would fight against my comrades.

One time I stole the food from one of the guards. It consisted of two chunks of meat and cornbread. I traded a part of this to some other union prisoners for the chance to share their blanket that night.

I remember seeing a prisoner have his hands, feet and head tied to a tree in such a position that he could not move.

When I went into the army I was a strong healthy man. When the union army recaptured me at Gold borough, I was a physical wreck. Any man who survived the cruel of a southern prison must have been a strong man.

My brother, Hanan was a member of Company E one hundred and third and was killed at Missionary Ridge, November 23, 1863. I believe that he had the regimental flag in his hands at the time.

After the war I came home and resumed farming in Liverpool township. A few years ago I went to Nebraska and got a farm of 440 acres which I sold to one of my sons. Upon my return I settled here in Canton where I suppose I will end my days. I get a pension of \$15.00 a month.

During the war my wife had a very hard time. She spun and wove and washed three days out of a week for the Snell's and Guthrie's. These families were loyal during the war and did all they could to help a soldiers family.

I always tried to do my duty as a soldier and also as a citizen”.

The father of a rambler was a member of Mr. Fitzgerald's regiment and is glad to say that he never believed the charge that Mr. Fitzgerald had deserted and gone over to the confederates. He always believed that the story originated in the mind of a personal enemy. Mr. Fitzgerald was always held in high esteem by the citizens of Liverpool Township and notwithstanding its large democratic majority, he was elected to the office of commissioner of highways in that township on the Republican ticket.

[Type text]

This old soldier after the war met with quite a serious accident. While out hunting one day, a gun cap burst and struck him in the right eye. Finally causing the loss of the eye. So he surely is a badly maimed soldier – one eye gone, one leg gone and the toes of his remaining foot gone.

Mr. Fitzgerald served his county faithfully from the time of his enlistment in August 1862 until his capture in August 1864. No comrade will ever say that there was any duty that he attempted to shirk – be it in camp or on the firing line.

From August 1864 until March, 1865 he was a prisoner of war and received the most cruel treatment. Yet he was willing to endure the suffering rather than enter the ranks of his country's enemies.

Little did William Fitzgerald think as he lay on the cold ground at Gold borough North Carolina that some of his comrades thought that he was a deserter. When his comrades found him at Gold borough in an almost dying condition and learned his story, they could not help but feel proud of the heroic devotion that their comrade had shown to his country. No child or grandchild need ever be ashamed of the war record of William Fitzgerald.

Submitted by Dean Gray.