
THOMAS & ELIZABETH HARRIS

A Civil War Soldier and A Soldier's Friend

Thomas, who was born in Ireland in 1820, moved to Canada as a young man. Upon hearing of the "broad and fruitful prairies" in Wisconsin, he made a claim on land in the town of Ceresco where he and his brother developed farms. In 1862, he enlisted as a Second Lieutenant of Company B, 8th Minnesota Infantry and saw active service in Tennessee. His poor eyesight led to his appointment as Commandant of the post at Sauk Center in 1864. After the war, he returned to Ripon. According to family members, Thomas "never for a moment" regretted his service to his adopted country. He died in 1882.

Elizabeth married Thomas Harris in 1848, and began her new life in Wisconsin. During the early years of the Civil War, she remained in the Ripon area managing their home and farm affairs. When Thomas became Commandant of Sauk Center in 1864, he asked her to join him. She and their children not only lived at the Post, but Elizabeth became a friend to the soldiers and their families. According to soldiers at the post, she nursed them with "unremitting kindness and attention."

Elizabeth Arnold VonderMuhll, granddaughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Harris, remembers her grandparents in a written account from the Harris Family Papers:



Elizabeth Hargrave
Harris, 1829-1917



Thomas Harris, Jr.
1820-1882

"During the hardships of the Civil War, so my Grandmother once told me, he often longed to forget his sufferings by getting drunk as so many of his fellow officers did, but that some inner restraint refused to let him go on beyond that point at which he was still master of himself."

"I am sorry to say that in general my Grandmother had a rather low opinion of men. The Good Lord had included them as necessary in His scheme of creation and so they must be tolerated, but if this world was to be improved it was up to women of practical ability and sound moral judgment to do it."

*— Elizabeth Arnold VonderMuhll,
Granddaughter of Thomas & Elizabeth Harris*
