

## "John Mitten, Nation's Oldest Newspaper Man"

Carroll County Times article for 6 February 2000

By Jay Graybeal

When John Mitten died in 1931, he was still editing this newspaper and was thought to be the nation's oldest newspaper man. Not surprisingly, The Times printed a lengthy obituary in their 11 September issue:

"On Friday, September 4, 1931, at 2:20 p.m., John H. Mitten, veteran of the Civil War, oldest in age and years of active service newspaper man in the United States, a widely known and highly esteemed citizen died at his home, Liberty street, this city.

Mr. Mitten was born September 12, 1844, the son of the late Henry G. and Catherine Mitten, and if he had lived until September 12, would have reached the age of four score and seven years.

He is survived by two sons and two daughters: George Mitten of Washington, D. C., and Mrs. Clara Loane, Baltimore, Md., children of his first wife, who was the daughter of the late George Shade, and J. Albert Mitten and Mrs. J. Thomas Anders, this city, children of his second wife, who before marriage was Miss Mary Elizabeth Hoff. Mrs. Mitten died December 13, 1928. Two sisters, one half sister, three grandchildren and five great grandchildren also survive.

In 1856 he entered the office of the Carroll County Democrat, to learn the printing trade, a vocation that proved to be his life work.

August 10, 1862, at the age of 18, he enlisted in Co. A., Sixth Maryland Regiment of the Union Army, the company of which Col. William A. McKellip was captain, Charles N. Kuhns, 1st. Lieutenant, when it was mustered into service. He was in many of the battles in Virginia and was wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness, May 5, 1864. He recovered from the wound, served until the close of the war and was mustered out June 10, 1865.

He was a charter member of Burns Post, Grand Army of the Republic, and Past Commander of the Post and his death leaves only one surviving member. For a number of years he has been the only Civil War veteran able to attend Memorial Day exercises, and other military events, and was always the guest of honor on these occasions.

When he returned to Westminster, after the war, he entered the American Sentinel office and as compositor, manager, editor, remained with the paper until 1909, when he resigned and with C. Levine Price engaged in the job printing business. In 1911, when George Mather began the publication of The Times, he accepted a position with the Mather Printing Co., and his wide acquaintance throughout the county and knowledge of newspaper work aided largely in the immediate success of The Times. In 1914 when the present Times Printing Company was organized Mr. Mitten became a stockholder and later a director of the company. He continued his duties as editor and until three weeks before this death was rarely absent from the office, happy in his work and always busy, preparing copy, reading proof, assisting in mailing publications and other duties.

He was a member and regular attendant of St. Paul's Reformed church and Sunday school and the church's oldest member.

For many years a member of Door to Virtue Lodge A. F. and A. M. No. 46, he served faithfully as Tyler for more than 30 years.

His membership in the Charity Lodge Knights of Pythias No. 58 and the Independent Order Mechanics, covered a long period of years and he was a Past Chancellor of Charity Lodge K. of P.

He was also the oldest member of the Westminster Fire Co. and perhaps the only 87 year old active Volunteer Fireman in the state.

Mr. Mitten was a Republican and always interested in the success of the party. Many years ago, when the Democrat majority in the county was large, he was a candidate for Judge of the orphans' Court, and while not elected, he received a large number of votes from his many Democratic friends. He served for several years as a member of the City Council.

Mr. Mitten's funeral was held Monday afternoon. After a short service at his late home, on Liberty street, the casket containing his remains, with a large American flag draped over it was taken to St. Paul's Reformed church, where the funeral services in charge of his pastor, Dr. Harry N. Bassler, were held. After the scriptural reading, Dr. Bassler read Tennyson's beautiful poem. 'Crossing the Bar.' 'I have kept the Faith,' was the text selected by Dr. Bassler, for a most fitting and impressive funeral sermon. At the close of the sermon he read the hymn, 'Abide With Me.' After the church service at the grave in the Westminster cemetery, the impressive Masonic burial service was conducted by the officers of Door to Virtue Lodge. General John R. King, Past Grand Commander of the Grand Army of the Republic and one of Mr. Mitten's most cherished and devoted friends placed a wreath upon the casket as the last personal and Grand Army tribute to a beloved comrade. Miss Mary B. Shellman, one of the few women ever given honorary membership in the Grand Army of the Republic read an original poem, and in closing placed flowers upon the casket. A firing squad from Co. H. fired the military salute of three volleys over the grave and the services closed with the sounding of 'Taps' by Corp. George N. Fringer of Co. H. and a member of The Times force. Co. H. paid a fine tribute to the old soldier of the Civil War, by turning out and acting as a military escort from the house to the church, the church to the cemetery, and standing guard during the services at the church. Captain John Magin was in command of the company.

A great number of large and beautiful floral tributes were sent by friends and organizations. The services at the church and cemetery were largely attended by a host of friends from Westminster, the county, Baltimore, and other places."

John Mitten's obituary prominently noted his service in the Civil War, the defining event of his generation. Mitten outlived nearly all of his Grand Army of the Republic comrades, hence the military escort by later veterans. The remaining G. A. R. comrade alluded to in the article was John R. Fossett who served as an honorary pallbearer at Mitten's funeral.

Photo caption: John Mitten was a co-founder of this newspaper and an editor until his death in 1931. He wore his Grand Army of the Republic uniform in this portrait taken at the turn of the century. In this image he reversed his G. A. R. membership ribbon to show the black background with an "In Memoriam" inscription, suggesting the image was taken at the time of a comrade's funeral. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. John A. Anders, 1988.