

IMAGES

... then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

The Story of Joseph Meyer's Civil War Pension



Civil War veterans were entitled to pensions based on a series of Congressional acts of 1862 through 1870. Sending documentation of a pensioner's eligibility was the pensioner's responsibility, with the paperwork sent to the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Pensions.

Joseph H. Meyer sought a pension due to an injury and illness developed a year after his 1862 enrollment as a Private in the infantry of the Union Army's OVI 54th Regiment. After training, the regiment went to Tennessee to be commanded by General Sherman. Their first engagement was at Pittsburgh Landing (Shiloh) and later they saw battle in Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina. During its term, the regiment marched over 3,600 miles and participated in 4 sieges (including Vicksburg), 9 severe skirmishes, and 15 engagements.

In March, 1863, 28-year-old Private Meyer sustained the injury that led to his application for a pension. One of eight men on a boat doing river guard duty on the Mississippi, Meyer had remained in the water about 4 hours when the boat capsized. Believing that this exposure made him subject to rheumatism, neuralgia, and chronic diarrhea, he applied for an invalid's pension in March, 1890. The Bureau of Pensions requested records of enrollment, rank, discharge, a full medical history, and record of service. Meyer sent back paperwork to Washington D.C., including his birth certificate from Oldenberg Germany, and his honorable discharge papers dated August 15, 1865 from Little Rock, Arkansas, as a Private. The Pension Bureau researched their medical records and found that during the war Meyer had been treated a number of times for dysentery, diarrhea, and fever before returning to duty. This verified that he had served for all but the time of medical treatment.

In June, 1890, a more liberal pension law was enacted. Meyer resubmitted his application, including the appointment of William Dudley of Washington D.C., as his attorney. His witnesses to this document were F. Peckinpaugh and W. Cunningham, responsible citizens of the Indian Hill-Camp Dennison region. In April, 1891, Meyer sent other documents stating that he had been treated by Dr. John Davis immediately after his discharge and then by Dr. Alfred Buckingham of Indian Hill for his ailments. He documented that he had been treated at field hospitals on the battleground near Vicksburg and at the Marine Hospital in Cincinnati thereafter.

A physical exam by Dr. W. P. Evans of Miamiville, Clermont County dated August, 1891, found an additional ailment: an injury to Meyer's left jaw bone. In September the Bureau of Pensions replied that Meyer had to swear that his jaw injury was incurred prior to 1890 and that it was not due to "vicious habits." Responding, Meyer submitted testimony – his longest to date – in which he provided the specifics about his jaw injury. He stated that a fragment of a Confederate shell hit him while he was in Mississippi River near Vicksburg, and that slivers of his jaw protruded from his skin and were perceptible to the naked eye. By this time, Meyer was 54 years old. The Bureau of Pension responded that a credible witness had to verify the jaw fracture, as well as the rheumatism, diarrhea and neuralgia, and explain whether these ailments were disabling (November 1894.) In January, 1895, William Brinkmeyer verified Meyer's position. This must have been satisfactory, for no further correspondence between the Bureau and Meyer occurred for a long time. Finally, after 5 years trying, Joseph Meyer was declared partially disabled and began receiving his pension.

Two more records document Meyer's pension status. A 1912 letter accepted his validity as a continuing pensioner, verifying his age as 83. It was the custom of the Bureau to send letters every 10 to 15 years to track veterans. In February, 1920, Meyer was dropped from pension rolls due to his death the previous month at the age of 91. His last payment was \$40 in December, 1919. Meyer's repeated exchanges with the thorough and rigorous Bureau of Pensions over a five-year period had provided him with a pension to supplement his farmer's income.