

DR. VINCENT P. KENNEDY

5th Regiment Minnesota Veteran Volunteer Infantry

Surgeon: Vincent P. Kennedy, age 41

Mustered in September 3, 1862

Mustered out May 1, 1865

The 5th Regiment was the last of Minnesota's quota under the first call of President Lincoln for 500,000 men. It rendezvoused at Fort Snelling and was recruited during the winter of 1861-62, the first detachment being mustered into service 12/19/61 and the organization completed 3/20/62 by the appointment of the following field and staff officers:

Col. Rudolph von Borgersrode
Lt. Col. Lucius F. Hubbard
Major William B. Gere
Adjutant Alpheus R. French
Surgeon Francis B. Etheridge
Asst. Surgeon Vincent P. Kennedy
Chaplain James F. Chaffee.

The 5th Regiment numbered 860 men at the time of its recruitment.

Early in November the 5th Regiment was ordered to Grand Junction and there joined General Grant's column that had been organized for a campaign through Central Mississippi. The objective point of Grant's movement through Mississippi was Vicksburg but he fell far short of reaching it. His Army penetrated as far south as Oxford where his communications were cut at Holly Springs by a Rebel Cavalry force and his depot of supplies destroyed. This compelled a retrograde movement to the line of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad, the command reaching La Grange, Tennessee, late in December.

While the Army lay in winter quarters along the railroad line it underwent a complete reorganization and became a part of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division, 15th Army Corps, commanded by W. T. Sherman there were some staff changes during the preceding summer. Surgeon Francis Etheridge resigned and was succeeded by Dr. V. P. Kennedy.

Participated in the siege and capture of Vicksburg.

Vincent P. (Pellet) Kennedy was born July 11, 1824, in Western Pennsylvania, about 20 miles from Pittsburgh. On his father's side he was of Scotch-Irish ancestry, two or three generations removed from the old country, some of his ancestors bearing an honorable part with the Scotch forces under William of Orange and settling in North Ireland after the Battle of the Boyne; of French and Irish ancestry on his mother's side, the grandfather Pellet having been forced to flee from France when a child after losing his parents for their activity on the popular side of the French Revolution. The maternal grandmother was of Irish descent.

When the subject of this sketch was about 2 years of age his paternal grandfather died, and his father, Martin Kennedy, decided to seek his fortune in the remote West of that time, that is, Indiana or Illinois, where an older brother had preceded him. With the earliest wave of migration to these parts he proceeded down the Ohio river by boat - the up-to-date means of travel - and part of the way on foot, and made homestead entry in Parke County, western Indiana, near his brother, sending back glowing descriptions of the new country, its fertility and magnificent forests of walnut, oak, sugar and beech trees. He returned to Pennsylvania for his family and settled in Parke County in about 1826.

As stated, western Indiana of those days was on the edge of the frontier, and life was primitive, with few comforts and conveniences. The struggle against the wilderness was full of hardship and self denial, and a description of the experiences of his boyhood - as of that of others at the time - would practically be a repetition of that of Lincoln. Soon after their arrival his mother (Elinor Pellet Kennedy) died, and when he was about 5 years of age his father also. The family was separated, and his lot cast with an uncle. This until the age of 13, with abundance of hard work of the backwoods clearing kind. During this time 3 months was his portion of schooling. Then he took a step that certainly indicated an early and uncommon decision of character. Far from satisfied with life and treatment at his uncle's he left the latter's roof "between two days" with one shilling (12½¢) in his pocket and with that financial start thenceforth fought his own battles and shaped his own career.

For the next few years he divided his time in Parke County between farm work and carpentering. His elementary schooling was rounded in 3 months, as stated, but his liking for books was such that somehow he acquired self-education and book-knowledge sufficient to teach country school for

several terms, at the munificent salary of about eight dollars per month, choring for his board. His teaching and inclination for books inclined him to college and of his own initiative and relying on no assistance he entered Asbury College, now De Pauw University, at Greencastle, Indiana, with the class of 1849.

He remained at Asbury for 2 years, his intention originally having been to complete his college course and then seek admission to the bar. But midway in the course he was persuaded to embrace medicine as a profession instead of the law - the wisdom of which decision probably no doctor would dispute. After a few months reading at Bowling Green, Indiana, in the office of a local physician whose name cannot be recalled, he entered Rush Medical College at Chicago with the class of 1851, with which he remained until graduation. For several years following graduation the years and dates in his personal history cannot be given, but they partly were spent in practice at Kickapoo, Illinois, for nearly a year, in a winter's attendance at lectures in Louisville, Kentucky, and in prospecting for a new location in the then "remote West" which by that time was advancing just beyond the Mississippi. His excursions took him to the territories of Kansas, Iowa and as far as Texas. Finally in 1856 he located a homestead and set his stakes in Meeker County in the new Territory of Minnesota.

By inclination and circumstance a large part of his life he was a pioneer. An optimism and persistence that never admitted defeat visualized for him a future for the new Northwest that has since been more than realized. Minnesota and Meeker County before the Civil War was the Indiana of older days repeated. He was one of the very first settlers in that section. Travel from the East was by way of the Mississippi and steamboats to St. Paul, thence by ox-team or by foot. Up to the time of their outbreak in 1862 Indians were plenty throughout the country. Until the war he lived the pioneer physician's life, building a home amid adverse conditions and responding to day and night calls in summer heat or dead of winter, driving miles and sometimes walking, to give medical aid when roads were bad or non-existent, times hard and prospects for fees the same. In the winter of 1859-60, he served the newly admitted state as representative of his section at St. Paul.

Then the war came. A good proportion of the sparse population of Minnesota responded and the subject of this sketch was commissioned as Assistant Surgeon of the 5th Minnesota Volunteer Infantry in the spring of 1861. In less than a

year he became Regimental Surgeon and so served throughout the war until its close and the disbanding of his Regiment at Montgomery, Alabama, in 1865. This 4 years of service was mostly under Grant in the Mississippi Valley campaigns, including the siege of Vicksburg - campaigns full of action and, as Regimental Surgeon, he must have become fully acquainted with the horrors of war.

Soon after returning to Minnesota he was appointed Government physician for the Chippewa Indians at Red Lake, Minnesota, where he served the Government in that capacity for 2 or 3 years. The Red Lake country at that time was a veritable wilderness; the number of families of whites there could be counted on the hands, and their safety was far from certain. About 1870, he returned to his Meeker County home and practice and farming and other interests which in time became considerable. In 1874 he moved to Litchfield, the county seat, thenceforth always looked upon as his home. In the winter of 1874 he attended lectures at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. Not being able to lose the pioneer spirit, in the early 1880's he became interested in the Territory of Dakota, acquired property interests in Brown County, now in South Dakota, for a time made his residence there and served in the Territorial Council at Bismarck in the winter of 1886. The remainder of a busy life, spent in practice, in looking after property interests and a lively interest in public affairs, was divided between Minnesota and South Dakota. During this time he was an interested and active member of local medical societies in both states, and especially of the State Medical Society of Minnesota. It is not too much to say that of the latter he was a prominent and well known member, and as an operating surgeon had a state-wide reputation. In the winter of 1902 he was elected President of the Rush Medical College Alumni Association at their annual meeting - a gratifying testimony from his brethren, sons of his Alma Mater, that she had been represented by him in active life not unworthily.

Thus in few words, are drawn the bare outlines of a strenuous life through strenuous times of one of Rush Medical College's earliest graduates, which it is believed is not far from typical of those of his fellow graduates of ante-bellum days. Of the later graduates, doubtless they will be found worthy successors of worthy predecessors.

Vincent P. Kennedy was survived at his death, which occurred in Litchfield, Minnesota, February 7, 1903, by his widow, Caroline Kennedy, later of Phoenix, Arizona, by a daughter, Julia A. Barrick, of Greenleaf, Minnesota, and by his sons Harry M. Kennedy of Phoenix, Arizona, and Lewis H. Kennedy of San Francisco, California.

[Compiled by Lewis H. Kennedy]

County historical sketches and events

No. 83 of a Series

As the *Independent Review* celebrates its centennial year and our nation celebrates its bicentennial year, items of historical interest and sketches of personalities who figured in the early history of Meeker County are featured in this column.

This week we feature Dr. V. P. Kennedy as published in the book "Medical Men of Meeker County to 1900", a book published in 1955 by Dr. Harold E. Wilmot, 816 South Sibley, Litchfield, Dr. Wilmot did a great deal of research before publishing his book, not only on Dr. Kennedy, but other doctors as well, and on the early medical history of Meeker County.

Dr. Kennedy was held in high esteem and was described as very well educated, extremely honest, capable and charming.

DR. V. P. KENNEDY

By Dr. Harold E. Wilmot

Existing photographs show Dr. V. P. Kennedy as a spare elderly gentleman of kindly mien surrounded by a good sized family on the front porch of a good sized two story frame dwelling. The picture was probably taken in South Dakota. The doctor became somewhat peripatetic in his more prosperous years and divided his time between Ordway, South Dakota and Litchfield, Minnesota, with trips to Washington Territory, Washington, D.C., Amarillo, Texas, and Florida as interesting side lights.

He worked hard and well as a doctor and was beloved for his services, which had been rendered under the greatest natural vicissitudes of the times. He had prospered at it, and in later years spent increasing amounts of his energies and talents in politics and exploitation of newly developed agricultural territories.

Dr. Kennedy was a great Latin and Greek student and coached students. He could do anything with his hands and in his old age in Aberdeen, S.D., built a duplex doing most of the work himself. He was one of the most outstanding pioneers in the vicinity.

Dr. Kennedy was born in Butler County, Pennsylvania, July 11, 1824, and was given the name Vincent Pellett Kennedy. His father was Martin Kennedy, his mother Elinor Pellett. He was a very energetic type and rightfully found an outlet for his talents in our county.

At five years of age he and his parents moved to Indiana where he was educated locally. He went on to Asbury University at Green Castle, Indiana, for two years at twenty-one years of age.

From there he matriculated to Rockville, Ind. Here he became imbued with the idea of becoming a physician, and a year later we find him in Louisville, Ky. He entered Rush Medical College in Chicago and graduated there in 1851. He did post graduate work there again in 1875 and received an additional degree from Bellevue Hospital College of New York in the same year. He was a licensed pharmacist as well as an M.D. Little more is known of his whereabouts until 1856 when he entered Meeker County. He had been pretty much on his own, as his father died when he was ten years of age and his uncle had given him a home on his farm in Indiana. Apparently he earned his own education.

He pre-empted Dr. Ripley's claim on the banks of Cedar Lake in June, 1856, making the usual down payment and building a small dwelling thereon. He raised a few potatoes that year, but the Indians robbed him of his crop. In 1860, we find him elected to the Minnesota State Legislature and re-elected again in 1861. He accordingly spent most of his time in St. Paul,

though retaining the farm in Meeker County. In 1862, he enlisted as surgeon to the 5th Minnesota Regiment and served with them until mustered out at Montgomery, Ala., in May of 1865.

He spent this summer on his farm, and in the fall he received an appointment as physician to the Chippewa Indians on their reservation at Red Lake, Mn. Here he remained from Nov., 1865, until March, 1867, when he returned to Meeker County.

He bought the grist mill at Cedar Mills and ran that personally until 1869. At this time the railroad had been built through the county and Litchfield had been incorporated as a village, and the county seat had been moved to Litchfield from Forest City. Dr. Kennedy opened offices in the new village (Litchfield) and practiced actively for the next 11 years.

In 1880, he went to Brown County, Dakota Territory, and filed on a claim which he continued to hold, though returning to Litchfield for most of the time until 1883. At that time he established a drug store and practiced his profession at Ordway, S.D. He was also postmaster for the town.

In 1885, he was elected to the Dakota Senate and was actively interested in shaping territorial legislation including the site for the state capitol of South Dakota. In the spring of 1886 his family returned to Litchfield, and the doctor was back and forth between the two points but eventually remained in Litchfield.

The doctor was primarily a Republican in politics but at one time "jumped the fence" and came in for considerable newspaper castigation at the time. He was an active member of the G.A.R. In 1887, he was elected Medical Director for the Department of Minnesota G.A.R. and served one year. He joined Golden Fleece Lodge No. 49 A.F. and A.M. in Litchfield during the autumn of 1875. He was prominently identified with the Minnesota State Medical Association and had received considerably more education than most of his conferees at that time. His skill and integrity in his practice were unquestioned, and he had a large group of loyal followers. In later years he devoted most of his time to his extensive farming interests, having 360 acres in our county all improved and 640 in Dakota with 400 under the plow.

He was listed in the Official Registry of Physicians in Minnesota from 1883 until 1890. He was licensed by the Statute of Exemptions, having been engaged in active practice for many years before official registration was required.

Dr. Kennedy evidently was married in Chicago in 1849 while in Rush Medical College. Miss Julia A. Rudisell was his first wife and bore him two children: one, Julia A., married Nimrod Barrick, and they lived on the original claim in Meeker county throughout their lives. Under this name several grandchildren and great grandchildren are still actively contributing their share to Meeker county's economy.

The first Mrs. Kennedy died July 13, 1854. Her sister, Caroline, who had been housekeeper for the doctor at and after that time, and Dr. Kennedy were married July 2, 1860. Three sons were born to this union--Milford P., who farmed in Dakota, and Harry M. and Lewis H. who attended the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Kennedy died February 7, 1903, from Bright's disease and was buried with honors of the G.A.R. in Ripley Cemetery. He was 78 years, 6 months and 27 days of age.

He was a man of boundless energy, determination and foresight.