

Civil War Orders Interrupt a Wedding

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

Suppose you have volunteered in Company A, 6th Wisconsin Infantry, and your outfit is training for the Civil War at Camp Randall in Madison. At age 20, you have for sometime courted Katherine Fuller in Baraboo, the home town of both of you. It is July 23, 1861.

With the optimism of youth, you and Katherine have decided to marry despite your uncertain future as a soldier. Leaving your outfit in Camp Randall in Madison, you have walked home, yes walked, along the stagecoach trail. Now you and your bride to be stand before Elder Teel in Baraboo, saying your vows.

At this critical moment in your life, official word arrives, ordering you back to Madison for the immediate departure of your unit. What do you do?

Well, we know what Philip Cheek Jr. did. Immediately after the ceremony, assuming he kissed the bride, he immediately departed on foot walking back to Madison. There's a loyal and dutiful soldier for you. His brother Rob drove his new sister-in-law Katherine home. More on the wedding at the end of this story.

We have already written of that brother, Rob, soon to be killed in the Civil War. Philip himself will be wounded on September 17, 1862 at the battle of Antietam. He was discharged on December 8 of that year, and returned to Baraboo to claim his bride.

In 1865 Philip and Katherine will have a son, whom they name Robert after the fallen brother. As we learned in a previous article, that son will be killed by lightning in 1880.

Early Years

Despite the rocky start and the 1880 tragedy, Philip and Katherine became significant leaders in the Baraboo community in the remaining years of their marriage, and that is what we want to address in this article.

Historian Cole, in his 1912 History of Sauk County, devotes two full pages extolling the life of Philip Cheek. Here we learn that Philip was actually an Englishman, born in Somersetshire. We can assume that he spoke with an English accent, as did many local settlers from the New England area.

The family immigrated in 1853, settling first in New Jersey, then Rhode Island, and then Wisconsin in 1856, when Philip was 15. His father was a farmer and carpenter, and Philip had four sisters and the brother Rob, mentioned above.

A Lifetime of Service

Upon his return to civilian life, it did not take long for Philip Cheek to become a significant member of his community. He was elected Clerk of Courts and "filled that office with characteristic fidelity and efficiency for four years." Having studied law, he was now elected District Attorney, as well as practicing law.

This was followed by election as the Insurance Commissioner of the State of Wisconsin, following which he became a special agent for the Hartford Insurance Company. Cole says that his business duties took him all over the state for a period of twenty years.



The Cheek Stained Glass window in the First Methodist Church

Below: Philip Cheek on Left, Mair Pointon on Right





Pictured here is Philip Cheek's cousin in Gawler, Australia, also named Philip Cheek,, and submitted to us by his grand-daughter, Miriam Smith.. This Philip lived from 1837 to 1922, His wife Olivia is also pictured.

From private correspondence with Mrs. Smith.

As a veteran, he became active in the veterans organization of that day, The Grand Army of the Republic, serving not only state offices but was a member of the national Executive Board. He retained a lifetime friendship for fellow soldier Mair Pointon.

That family name is still prominent in Baraboo, Mair Pointon being Philip Pointon's Great Uncle. There are no descendants of Phil and Catherine Cheek's line. Philip Cheek also served on the board of the Waupaca Home for Veterans. Philanthropic memberships included the Masonic Order.

Apparently Katherine was not a stay-at-home wife, for she is listed as active in the Women's Relief Corp, an auxiliary to the Grand Army, as well as in the Methodist Church. In her youth she had been educated in the Baraboo Female Seminary, of which we have written on the past. It was sort of a finishing school for girls, on the college level.

Golden Anniversary Reminiscences

The golden anniversary of the somewhat interrupted wedding was celebrated in July, 1911 at the Cheek's spacious home on Cheek's Hill, 212 10th Ave., over-looking Baraboo from the North. Philip would die within two months after the occasion, with Katherine surviving until 1920

There is more information on the 1861 wedding, as reported in the 1911 anniversary newspaper report. Philip and Katherine were visiting at the farm of his parents. "Elder Teal came along looking for his cattle. Mr. Cheek says it all happened in a few moments. They called the elder in and were married. Philip was in his soldier's clothes."

The newspaper reported that "the parents of Mrs. Cheek resided southwest of the city, and the wedding was, of course, somewhat of a surprise to them...Mr. Cheek hurried away to the war almost as soon as the elder had performed the ceremony. The regiment did not leave Madison for a few days, so that a day or so later would have made no difference." Philip's reaction to this delay is not known.

Memorials

There are two memorials to the Cheek family in Baraboo. One of course is the impressive tombstone in the Walnut Hill Cemetery, where the remains of Philip, Katherine, and young Robert are interred. Also on the lot are their other son, Arthur, and his wife and daughter. It is assumed that Rob was buried where he fell on the battlefield.

The other Memorial is a beautiful stained glass window in the First United Methodist Church. Contributed after Philip's death by Catherine, it fittingly includes a patriotic shield, denoting his patriotic service.