

Pvt. Sylvester Butler from Maine to Nashville and Beyond

by RICIGS member, Kathy Elliott

Sylvester Butler enlisted in Company "K" 86th Regiment of Illinois Infantry Volunteers on August 11, 1862 in Princeville, Peoria County, Illinois. He died at Nashville, Tennessee on March 5, 1863 of chronic diarrhea. This brief statement covers the extent of my great-great grandfather's service as a Union patriot during the Civil War. But as I became interested in the possibility of applying for membership in the National Society Daughters of the Union I discovered much more about him and the family he left behind.

Sylvester was born in South Berwick, York County, Maine in 1826, the son of Ivory and Sarah Butler. During the time the Butlers lived in Maine their two sons Ivory C. and Sylvester were born. By 1840 the family has moved to Colchester, Chittenden, Vermont. In addition to the parents and two sons they also have a daughter less than 5 years of age. By 1850, like so many other families of their generation, the Butlers had moved west and were living in Peoria County, Illinois. Ivory Butler and his two sons Ivory C. and Sylvester, were engaged in farming. About this same time another family, Daniel and Sarah Pike and their six children, had moved west from New York. The Pike family is listed in the 1850 census in Lake County, Illinois and includes a 24 year old daughter Maria and a 19 year old son James who were both from New York. However, the census taken at Washington Island, Wisconsin on September 24, 1850 lists a James Pike living as a boarder in the Samuel Graham household. This James Pike is also 19 years old, was born in New York and now works as a fisherman.

The marriage record of Sylvester Butler and Celista Maria Pike indicates they were married at West Harbor, Washington Island, Wisconsin on December 21, 1853 by a Samuel Graham, probably the same man her brother boarded with, since he lived in West Harbor, Washington Island is located in Lake Michigan about 70 miles NE of Green Bay and is accessible only by boat. How did Sylvester Butler from Peoria County, Illinois and Celista Pike from Lake County, Illinois meet and marry on Washington Island, Wisconsin? I'll probably never know, but Wisconsin entered the Union in 1848 and was actively recruiting settlers so this may have been the reason. In June of 1855 the State of Wisconsin took a census.

While information is limited, Sylvester Butler is listed as head of household along with two females. The 1860 Federal Census for Illinois shows the family living in Princeville, Peoria County, Illinois. At that time Sylvester is working as a farmhand and, besides his wife Celista Maria, the family includes four daughters; Sarah Jane (born in Wisconsin), Mary Augusta, Frances (my great-grandmother) and Vesta (who died in 1866). The three younger daughters were all born in Illinois. In August of 1862 Sylvester Butler enlisted in Company "K", 86th Regiment of Illinois Infantry Volunteers in Princeville, Peoria County,

Illinois. A fifth daughter, Emma Sylvester, was born in January of 1863 and was only six weeks old when her father died on March 5, 1863 in Nashville, Tennessee.

Sylvester died at General Hospital #7 in Nashville and was buried in the temporary burial grounds associated with that hospital. In July of 1866 the Nashville National Cemetery was established in Davidson County, Tennessee approximately six miles northeast of Nashville's city center. The remains of soldiers removed from temporary burial grounds around Nashville's general hospitals and surrounding Civil War battlefields were interred in the newly established cemetery. Sylvester Butler was buried in Section E, Grave 1302 at that time.

Celista Butler applied for a widow's pension for herself and her daughters in July of 1863 and was awarded \$8.00 per month for herself and an additional \$2.00 per month per child until they reached the age of 16 years. Celista managed to support herself and her family on this amount by working as a washerwoman. Her in-laws were still living in Peoria County and possibly they were able to help her as well.

According to the 1870 census of Princeville, Peoria County, Illinois all four surviving daughters were enrolled in school.

Celista never remarried and continued to reside in Princeville, Illinois until her death on October 17, 1905.

When I started I knew that I had Edwards relatives buried in the Princeville Cemetery because we would put flowers on the family plot on Memorial Day when I was a young girl. I really did not know anything about them though. After getting involved in genealogy I not only found out just who those relatives are, but also discovered that my great-great-grandmother, Celesta Butler, is buried there also. As the old saying goes, it's a small world.

