

Captain Nelson Preston Miner

O B I T U A R Y

Nathan Preston, Nathan Preston, Nathan, Samuel, Thomas, John, Thomas

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On Wednesday, the 22d inst., the citizens of this place were pained and startled with the intelligence that Capt. Nelson Miner was seriously ill. A council of physicians was called that morning, and all that medical skill could do was done to alleviate his sufferings, and, if within the probabilities, to save his life. All efforts were in vain. He gradually sank and by the next morning all hopes were given up and it became certain that very soon death would claim him as another of his victims. All day long he clung to life with an almost unyielding struggle, and with a tenacity characteristic of the man. His wife, his family, and many of his friends, gathered around the deathbed of the dying pioneer, hoping against hope, and clinging to him in his last hours on earth with the same fervent attachment that they stood by him in his many struggles through life. Slowly and surely the hour came when he who had faced death in so many forms, when he whose whole life was midst scenes of danger—when he, the hero of many an Indian campaign—the loving husband—the kind father—the firm friend—would pass away, his work on earth done; his eventful life lived, and he be numbered with the dead.

At half past eight P.M. Thursday, October 23d, Capt. Nelson Miner died at his home, in this city, surrounded by nearly all his family and many of his friends. On last Sunday afternoon he was buried in the cemetery. This funeral was the largest that ever took place in this city. Many friends came from this and adjoining counties to pay the last sad rite to his memory, and to follow the remains of him they loved in life to the grave. And thus, on a bright Sunday afternoon, was committed to the grave the remains of Captain Miner.

The death of a man occupying the position Capt. Miner has, would naturally create a great void in any community, and his loss would be, and is a public loss. During his whole period of residence here he has occupied a public position. As a Captain in the army—Register in the U.S. land Office—member of the Territorial Council—lawyer—large real estate owner—and the first settler in this city, he could not be else than a noted public man. He died with fewer enemies than any man in this community and with as many friends as any man here ever had.

He was born September 29, 1827, at Hortland, Huron County, Ohio. Until his nineteenth year he worked on his father's farm. At that age he commenced attending school at Oberlin, Ohio, and continued his studies there for three years supporting himself by teaching school during vacations. His father died when he was fifteen years old. At the age of twenty-two he quit school and was elected a Justice of the Peace of Hortland and served for two years, at the same time teaching school and studying law. In 1852 he organized, at St. Joseph, Missouri, a company of about one hundred men, and crossed the plains for California, and remained there for one year, mining. At the end of that time he returned to Hortland. When he was twenty-four he married Miss Cordelia Gates and after a married life of twenty-eight years he now leaves her

a widow, with eight children—three boys and five girls; some of whom have arrived at years of maturity and one an infant of three months.

In 1852 Capt. Miner moved to Adel, Dallas County, Iowa, and remained there practicing law and frequently filling the office of Justice of the Peace. In 1860 he came to Dakota and settled in Vermillion. From that time until his death his history is the history of Vermillion. He was thoroughly identified with its interests and did as much as any one man to make it the place it is today. Its prosperity was his prosperity and its backsets was a misfortune to him. A man endowed with his characteristics could not remain here long without becoming a prominent man—a public character.

In the fall of 1861 he organized a military company which was, in the spring of the next year, mustered into the military service of the United States as Co. A. Dakota cavalry, with him as captain. The company was ordered to duty in the Indian country, and during its time of service, Capt. Miner became one of the most noted Indian fighters in the West. After three years of active, dangerous and efficient service the company was, on January, 1865 mustered out of service.

In July, 1865, he was appointed Register of the U.S. Land Office, at this place, and in that month took charge of the office. From that time and until January 12th, 1879 he performed the duties of the office acceptably to the government; with credit to himself, and to the great benefit of the people, who, during that time came to Dakota, for, be it remembered that during all that time this was the only land office in the territory.

Again his rest from office was for a very brief period. In the fall of 1869 he was elected a member of the Territorial Council, again in 1872, 1876 and 1878 dying with harness on, his last term not having expired.

This, in brief is the history of the man who every one in this community mourns. Such a life is not, and cannot be, filled by an ordinary man. His virtues were many, his faults trifling and very few. From early age until past the meridian of life, almost always in public office, and yet the tongue of slander never uttered ought against his fair name. With thousands of dollars of public money passing continually through his hands—with great interests of his clients often in his hands, and yet not one interest was ever sacrificed, and not one cent of another man's money ever found its way to his pocket. Always honest, ever honorable and true to every trust, is it any wonder that those who knew him most loved him best.

He was a remarkable man—his life was a peculiar one. Judged by many it was wholly devoid of interest, but here among this people and in this western community it is looked upon as a marked life and he was looked upon as a leading man. His pursuits were diversified and in each calling he had the requisite tact to make that business a success.

As a lawyer he was not the most profound, still he was peculiarly successful. This skill was not in knowledge of books and his mind was not filled with precedents; his manner of conducting a case did not require these. His forte was jury trials. His mode of warfare was to annoy the

enemy, his objective point to obtain the verdict of the jury. No adversary, no matter how skillful, could cover all the points of his attacks and when a weak point was found in his opponent's case, the attack on that point was incessant, persistent, and only ended with the verdict. His perceptive faculties were very quick. Details were cast aside as useless. His memory was prodigious. He never forgot anything he ever learned. Had he devoted his whole energies to the law and had he made that profession his life's object, he would have ranked among the very first lawyers of the Territory. As it is he never sacrificed a client's interests and he won many a legal battle which no other lawyer but he could have been successful in. Although self reliant, he was not above seeking the aid of those who could and would assist him in any peculiar emergency. As a lawyer he was, as in everything else, a thoroughly western lawyer.

In politics Capt. Miner was different from many men—from the majority of men. No cause, convention of nomination ever bound him unless it was fair, open and above board, and was in just accord with his idea of the eternal fitness of things. In his judgement the people placed implicit reliance. He never appealed to them for an injury or a wrong done his political fortunes in vain. He would not take the stump and with burning eloquence picture the iniquity done and demand redress. This mode he left to others. It was useless to him. In a quiet, peculiar way, with sound reasoning and much common sense, he told his story at their own firesides. The people always heard him and stood by him. He never was defeated for any office that he asked, and had he appealed to the source of all political power—the people—for years, he never would have been. He had all the elements of a successful western pioneer politician.

In his domestic relations he was a king. No kinder husband, or a better or more indulgent father ever lived. His family was a more than an ordinary happy one. For nearly thirty years his family altar was perfect, and death never robbed one gem from it. The young husband started on the voyage of life as many have; children bright, smart intelligent children, came to them until their number was eight—children any father would delight in, and any mother could not be proud of, and then as the steps of this couple was turned toward the setting sun, that wife is deprived of him who has been her mainstay for nearly thirty years, and the children have lost the wise counsels of a kind and good father. Their loss is great, almost insupportable, but it is not their loss alone. The city he founded has lost, in him, a firm and steadfast friend—the county has lost one who ever stood by its every interest, and shielded it from any and all assaults—the territory has lost a wise, prudent and careful legislator, and mankind has lost one who was, in every position and under all circumstances, an honest man. No more shall we see him as he has often been, the life and center of the social gathering—no more shall we listen to his keen wit and humorous stories—no more shall we see him stand, as he ever stood, the protector and defender of the weak and friendless. 31 No! No! He has gone. His death has left a void it will be hard to fill. He has performed his allotted tasks; his work is done; he passed through the valley where we all must go to render an account of our stewardship to a merciful God. Good Bye! Captain, we say to you in truth, as you in charity would have said to us if we had gone first. Good husband, kind father, firm friend, Hail and farewell!