

MARTIN M PRATT

PRESENTED A CHAIR

The "Owl Club" Observe Martin Pratt's Birthday.

It was no ordinary birthday celebration which occurred last Saturday in this village. It was the 77th anniversary of Martin Pratt, one of our honored citizens. Realizing that his birthdays were growing less, Mr. Pratt invited his comrades of the "Owl Club" to join with him in observing his birthday. Some sixty guests availed themselves of the invitation and gathered at Masonic Hall where the day was spent in recounting the exciting events of the civil war, the members of the Owl Club consisting of old soldiers and their wives. Addresses and remarks were made by Rev. N. B. Foot, of Amboy; John G. Graham, of Good Thunder; Alfred Davis, Fred Miller, Josiah Rodgers, J. N. Mullin, R. L. Potter; W. D. Sprague, Mrs. H. C. Hotaling, L. Garrett, J. M. Sprague, and H. C. Hotaling.

At the dinner hour Mr. Pratt invited his guests to the Mapleton House where a banquet dinner was served. The Sterling drum corps was present and entertained the day with patriotic airs. As a fitting climax of the day Elder Foot in behalf of the comrades presented to Comrade Pratt a substantial leather chair as a token of their high regard.

The guests from away were N. B. Foote, W. W. Wells and wife, Abe Van Arnum and wife, H. Schramlin, David Cross, S. Doty and wife, Amos Fisk and wife, Mrs. Andrew Robinson, James Crusen, Amboy; Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Graham, Good Thunder.

In this connection it might be interesting to tell something of the life of Mr. Pratt, who has been one of the prime movers in keeping alive the local G. A. R. post and in the organization of the "Owl Club."

The Pratts came to America among the Mayflower colonists and were built along Puritan lines. Their early history is unrecorded among us but representatives of the family are found among the first settlers in the Holland company of

Darius Pratt, the father of our family, was married to Janet Montgomery county. The Pratt's scenes along the old he slow weariness of journeyed over 250 miles of water to the city of Buffalo, then a place about the size of Mapleton, con-

taining possibly 1300 inhabitants. With the hardy determination of the pioneer Darius Pratt raised his cabin in the mountainous forest 37 miles south of Buffalo, and to the music of the wild wood commenced to hew out a farm among the giant Beech, Maple, and Hemlock trees. By 1835 the children were following a blazed trail to school for two miles, a school where the paddle was used as the primer and the arch rule as often in evidence as the rule of three.

The family grew with the clearing and life was a battle for food and clothes. Men fished in those days, angling had not yet come into fashion. They shot game and ate it, the time of the sportsman had not yet arrived. Their life was the discipline of independent poverty. Not the poverty of the incompetent and lazy, but poverty of the self reliant and energetic. The center of the social life was the church; of the intellectual life, the log school house. Spelling bees, log rollings, husking bees, etc., furnished the recreation. Of vacations they dreamed, but looked for them in heaven. By the time the clearing had broadened into 200 acres the boys were grown, and at the age of 23 Martin Pratt was married to Caroline Orr. He started out to found a home and 1850 finds our young farmer listening to the rumors of political storms to come. By 1860 Mr. Pratt had risen to the social distinction of commanding a company of "Wide Awakes" in the political campaign.

The year 1862 rolled around and war was at hand. He enlisted in company B, 154th New York volunteer infantry, and was assigned to the second brigade of the 11th army corps. The enlistment took place at East Otto, New York, the rendezvous at Jamestown, and the mustering in at Elmira, where the equipment was handed out. From that time on the story is best told in Mr. Pratt's own words, he says: "We were sent to the front, making our first camp at Alden Heights, the site of Gen. Lee's military school. Our first skirmish occurred at Thoroughfare Gap, where we were forced to retreat. After receiving reinforcements we marched all night long through the mud to Fredericksburg and paced the streets made famous by Barbara Fritchie, or rather by the poem by that title. After the battle of Fredericksburg, which was a veritable slaughter yard, we again found ourselves defeated and retired to Stafford Court House. This was in December, and

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Burnsides, who was in charge at Fredericksburg, was relieved by General Joe Hooker. In the spring, when the advance was to be made, Hooker took a part of his army and crossed the river below Fredericksburg and the remainder was to cross the Potomac at Kelly's Ford, 25 miles above. Stonewall Jackson spied out the plans and outwitted the Union forces at the battle of Chancellorsville. Our company in going 150 rods lost fully three hundred men, either killed or wounded. Many were left on the battle field for three days before their wounds could be cared for or their remains buried. The flag of truce was not recognized and the slaughter continued. At Chancellorsville I was in the ordnance department in charge of a wagon train, and for saving the wagons when deserted by the officers I received a promotion.

From Chancellorsville we went back to the old camp ground at Stafford Court House. By this time Lee had an idea that we couldn't fight, he had whipped us on every occasion, so he passed on over into Pennsylvania, cleaning out our forces at Harper's Ferry and other points enroute. This aroused our forces and we followed him up, going on a double quick the entire eleven miles from Emmetsburg to Gettysburg. Our



M. M. PRATT.

...moving ~~the~~ the my corps at three in the afternoon of the first day's fight. We arrived none too soon as they were badly cut to pieces and practically without ammunition. I was

detailed to deliver ammunition to our corps along the firing line. A battery was turned on to my ammunition wagon and despite the storm of lead and steel I delivered the ammunition without receiving a scratch, although in making the run along the front I had to run over dead and dying men, mules and horses. It was a terrible task, and one only witnessed on the field of war in the midst of battle.

I viewed that great and memorable fight with a glass and witnessed the First Minnesota being cut to pieces by the cyclone of fire and lead, and after Lee had retreated passed over the field of battle while the dead were being buried. It was in hot weather and the stench was something awful and I wonder to this day how we were able to stand it as we passed over the field gathering up the guns left by those who died on the field or by those who had dropped them in their mad endeavor to escape from the sea of death. The night General Lee retreated I went to the quartermaster and asked permission to go over to the picket line. He gave me permission and I stepped out in the quiet of the midnight hour. I was halted by the picket upon the edge of a little valley, the only sound that could be distinctly heard was that of the whip-poor-wills calling out "whip-poor-will" and I wondered which side they were on. Then a low moan could be heard, that of the thousands who lay wounded and dying upon the field. "For God's sake give me a drink of water," came distinctly from a distance. It was too much for me and I was overcome. Death would be a consolation to such as that. It wrought a deep and lasting impression upon my mind, having been brought up a Scotch Presbyterian with the belief in future punishment, a veritable hell of fire and brimstone for all who had not been converted. It changed my whole belief. A just God would not condemn these thousands dying without an opportunity of being baptized.

After Rosenerans was defeated at Chickamauga the 11th and 12th army corps were united and called Hooker's grand division. Hooker was intrusted with the task of opening the "hard tack line" to supply the army with provisions and he accomplished it by forcing his way from Bridgeport, Alabama, to Chattanooga, Tennessee. There were many hard fights enroute. After the opening of the hard tack line General Grant took charge and the struggles at Lookout Mountain and Missionary ridge occurred.

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The next spring on the 8th of May we started with Sherman on his march to the sea, fighting all summer long. Our division charged on Atlanta, but was defeated. While Sherman was making his way seaward he had to have new mules and I was detailed among others to go back to Chattanooga to break mules and send them on to Atlanta. After reaching Atlanta we pushed through North Carolina following General Joe Johnson and at Ashland learned of Lee's surrender. It was a day of rejoicing, a day of Pentacost, strong men cried, while others sang, and still others prayed. Glad of the home coming which now seemed near at hand, we moved on to Raleigh where our gladness was turned to sorrow. Here we were informed of the assassination of President Lincoln. It was indeed a sad message, and cast a pallor of sorrow over all, as the soldiers to a man loved Lincoln. Some of the events of that day when Southerners rejoiced at our sorrow are too terrible to relate.

Then came the surrender of Joe Johnson. It was one of the saddest sights I ever witnessed. Bronzed men who had fought for over three years for a cause which they believed to be right stacked their guns and furled their flags. They cried like children, and there was no sign of rejoicing on our side. They made a hard fight and lost, brave men that they were. The next morning after the surrender, the papers censured Sherman severely for the liberal terms which he had granted to his vanquished foe. He had given them their horses with which to till the soil, realizing far better than some others the great devastation which war had wrought and the necessities which now faced these men when they should retire to their respective homes to follow peaceful pursuits. Time has shown the wisdom of General Sherman's action. The censure of General Sherman aroused a great deal of feeling among the men and General Grant made a personal visit to our forces and brought about peace in the warring factions.

Peace was at hand, the great strife which had threatened to sever the Union was over. We moved on to Alexandria, Virginia, where we went into camp and fitted for the grand review. Of the 1,000 men who originally enlisted at Jamestown in our regiment only 80 were present at the review. ^{troops were} presented with a ^{very} flag by the governor of New York. It was a beautiful banner with its glistening stripes and silvery stars and when it was unfurled was greeted with cheers, but those cheers were hollow beside those which greeted the old tattered banner which was thrown to the breeze immediately following. With its rents and tatters, the results of twenty-two battles, it was far more sacred than any banner which we might ever behold.

Following the grand review we were mustered out at Gladensburg, Maryland, and on June 11, 1865, were on our way home. Our reception home was cordial but the desire had been awakened for greater worlds to conquer, and selling out I moved westward with my family, arriving in Mankato on my birthday October 29th, 1865.

Mr. Pratt on coming to Minnesota, located in Sterling township where he lived for thirty years. For twenty years of this time he was a member of the town board and a director of school district No. 33 for twenty-five years. He was one of the instigators of the building of the town hall; was treasurer of the Good Templars lodge for three years, the lodge having a membership of 130. Mr. Pratt has always taken a prominent part in politics and at one time was a delegate to the Peoples Party national convention at Omaha and has frequently attended conventions of the Democratic party. As a member of the G. A. R. he was prominent in arranging for the first Decoration day services ever held in this county outside of Mankato.