

Biography of William Henry Pierce (1830-1902)

July 15, 2012

William was born in Hamburg NY on February 28, 1830, the first son of Joseph Arnold Pierce who had moved to Western NY from Vermont in 1814 with his father Giles. Giles had lived in Vermont for about 15 years, having moved there in 1799 from Rhode Island where the family had lived since before 1645. The farm he purchased in 1799 a couple miles north of Clarendon, Vermont has been passed through family member (but not Pierces) to this day. Although the original house burned in 1962, it was rebuilt, and Giles' brother Christopher's house still stands next to the cemetery in Clarendon.

The family was descended entirely from early New England settlers of the 17th century. Joseph's middle name Arnold was the maiden name of his mother, who was the great-great-great-grand daughter of Benedict Arnold, the first Governor of Rhode Island.



On October 7, 1849 William married Maria Jane Maltby who was descended from the Maltbys of Lincolnshire, England and counted among her ancestors Peter Bulkeley who immigrated in 1635 and was one of the founders of Concord, Massachusetts. His ancestry is traced to William the Conqueror through 17 generations.

After the birth of their first two children in 1850 and 1854, William and Maria moved their young family to Wisconsin, following several aunts, uncles, and cousins who had gone there earlier. By June of 1855 they were in Exeter Township in Green County near William's cousin Catherine Peckham, her husband Nathan Park, and their two young children. William and Maria's third child was born there on Christmas eve of 1857 and Catherine and Nathan Park named their son William at about the same time.

By 1860, William and Maria had moved about 10 miles away to Spring Valley township in Rock County where they lived near another of William's cousins, Mary Williams, her husband Sylvester Northrup, and their two children. The Northrups had lived in Wisconsin since before September 1848 when they received a land grant of 40 acres in Section 32 of Spring Valley township. (Mary's father was Sanford Williams, apparently the origin of the name Sanford in the family, first being given to William's younger brother in 1839.)

On May 21 1861, William and Maria purchased a 40 acre farm from Luther Heath in the SE quarter of the NE quarter of Section 21 of Spring Valley township, three miles west of Orfordville. Four months earlier on January 11, his cousin and her husband Sylvester Northrup had sold their land nearby and moved a few miles west to Decatur township in Green County where Sylvester died and Mary remarried in 1872.

Other relatives and friends who came to Wisconsin with William or who were there before him, were:

- William's uncle and aunt Josiah and Asuba Morse and their three grown children, were already in Exeter township in Green County in April 1848 when they received a land grant of 120 acres in Section 3. They later moved back to New York.

- William's uncle and aunt Milton and Maria Morse and their three grown children lived in Exeter township in Green County as early as 1860. They moved back to New York where they died in 1891 and 1890, respectively.
- Alden and George Frary, who were neighbors of William in NY in 1850 and in Wisconsin in 1855. Their fathers, John Frary and Joseph Pierce, had been born near each other in Vermont and may have known each other there. In 1850, William and Maria probably named their first daughter Maryette after Alden's wife. In 1870, Alden again lived near William back in NY. Alden and George's younger brother was Lyman, possibly the origin of that name in the Pierce family.

William enlisted in Company G of the 13th Wisconsin Infantry commanded by Captain A. N. Randall on September 21, 1861 in Spring Valley. He mustered in at Janesville on October 17 when the unit was formed and sold 37 of the 40 acres back to Luther Heath on October 29. William's friend George Frary also enlisted in the 13th Infantry.

On January 13, 1862, the 13th Wisconsin Infantry left Wisconsin for Leavenworth, Kansas where William caught cold on a march through ice from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Scott on March 1-7, a distance of 125 miles. After duty at Ft. Scott until March 26, the unit went to Lawrence, Kansas where William caught a further cold and was left deaf and having difficulty "passing water". On April 21, William was recorded as having been unfit for duty for the past 2 months and was discharged on April 24 in Leavenworth due to deafness. At the time of his discharge, he was 5' 6" tall, light complexion, grey eyes, and black hair. After his discharge, the unit served in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas during which time they lost 5 men killed in battle and 188 died from disease.

After being discharged in 1862, William stayed in Wisconsin for a short while, where his fourth daughter was born in June 1863. On May 23, 1864 he sold the remaining 3 acres to Mason Purdy and by mid-1865 was back in Hamburg, New York with his family, staying at the farm of Rowena Salisbury, a widow, who was probably the mother-in-law of another of William's cousins.

Sometime before 1870, William and Maria moved to Evans where they were again a neighbor of Alden Frary, and where they had four more children, including Sanford in 1873 (his youngest). William was a carpenter and a builder in NY according to the 1870 and 1880 census, however, in 1900 he listed his occupation as retired farmer. Although William lived there for at least 30 years, it appears that he never bought land in New York.

William's father died in 1885 and his mother Rachel died (of old age debility at 82) in 1890. She willed \$3,500 to her eldest daughter Mary Ann who was then unmarried at 62. When the 132 acre farm was sold, each of the remaining 7 children, including William, were to get 13% and a grandson Allen Hoag was to get 9%. In 1892, William transferred his "1/9 interest in the farm or whatever it may be" to his brother Charles for \$500. The probate action on the will was not settled until 1914, long after all but one of Rachel's children had died. The final agreement papers were witnessed and notarized in 1914 by William's nephew Allen Hoag, the other surviving original heir to Rachel's will. There was \$450 left to be divided among all the heirs.

William's wife of 40 years, Maria Jane, died in January 1890 of inflammation of the liver. For companionship (and probably some care) William married Harriet Smith on September 1, 1890. Her husband Joshua had been killed a year earlier in a train car accident. William had known Harriet for a long time, since she had been his younger brother Charles' mother-in-law for nearly

20 years. Harriet died in February 1897 and William had to initiate court action against the executor of her will, Daniel Titus, to get \$150.

At age 69, William once again left New York and moved to Wisconsin to Belleville near Madison, only a few miles from where he had lived 45 years earlier. On November 6, 1899 in Oregon, Wisconsin he married Catherine (Peckham) Park "by joining hands" in a marriage that was allowed by "court order" due to the fact that Catherine was his first cousin. Their mothers had been sisters. Catherine's husband Nathan Park had died in 1890 in Belleville.

William and Catherine lived in a house which Catherine owned on Pearl Street on Lot 3, Block 19. The 1900 census shows their renters as Elijah and Mary Ace, Catherine's daughter and son-in-law. Elijah was also a Civil War veteran.

William had applied for a disability pension in 1890 for deafness, kidney problems, and rheumatism. At that time, he was 5' 5 ½" and weighed 145 lbs. He applied for a pension increase on March 20, 1902 due to increasing disability and "inability to earn a support by manual labor" (at age 72) "by reason of losing use of his limbs and at times his mind". At that time he could not sign his own name, leaving only his "mark" on the declaration, which was attested to by Elijah Ace.

Less than ten weeks later, on June 2, 1902, William died and was buried in West Dayton Cemetery next to Nathan Park. His son Sanford came to town from Fargo, ND for the funeral. Catherine died two years after William, leaving her property in Evansville consisting of a house and four lots to her son Charles and the house in which she resided in Belleville to her daughter Katie Ross, "because she is most in need". (Kate was living in Chicago in 1900, but divorced by 1910.) After a funeral held at her house, Catherine was buried between her two husbands in West Dayton Cemetery.

Compiled by a great-grandson of William:

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Sources of information:

- New York Census: 1850 - 1890
- Wisconsin Census: 1850 - 1900
- Journal of George M Pierce, William's brother, 1886-1900, Abstract published in Western New York Genealogical Society Journal, Vol XXI No 3, December 1994. Original deposited in the Hamburg NY Historical Society.
- Military pension files of William H Pierce
- Civil war service record of William H Pierce
- Death certificate of William Pierce
- Death certificate of Maria Pierce
- Will of Catherine (Peckham) Park Pierce
- Probate records of Surrogates Court, Erie County, New York
- Marriage certificate of William Pierce and Catherine (Peckham) Park

- Record of land grants in Wisconsin (available on the World Wide Web at <http://searches.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/wisconsin/wisconsin.pl>)
- Deed records of Erie County New York
- Deed records of Green, Rock, and Dane Counties Wisconsin
- Sugar River Record and Belleville (Wis) Recorder