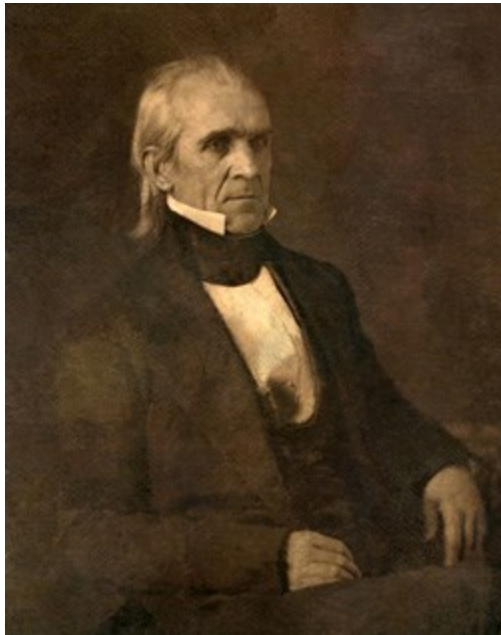


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January 22, 2014

THIS WEEK: Iowa's Connections to the Mexican War, Part 1

BACKGROUND:



President James K. Polk

President James K. Polk believed that obtaining land from Texas to California was crucial to the future of the United States. The President wanted to purchase the land, but Mexico turned down his offer.

Zachary Taylor's army was ordered into a disputed area between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers in January of 1846. Mexico considered American troops in this area an invasion. Mexican troops attacked a detachment of American Dragoons. The news of this attack reached Washington, D.C., and in May of 1846, President Polk asked Congress to declare war against Mexico.

Iowa's Connections to the Mexican War



**Iowa Territorial Governor
James Clarke**

Congress more than doubled the size of the regular army and also called for 50,000 volunteers from the territories and states. Iowa, still a territory under the leadership of territorial governor James Clarke, organized 12 companies, none of which went to Mexico. Three of the companies were kept on garrison duty at Fort Atkinson in Winneshiek County. It is unclear why another Iowa company was organized, but under special authority from the War Department, Company K was organized at Fort Madison. They traveled by steamboat to New Orleans, then by ocean steamer to Vera Cruz where they joined the 15th Regiment, United States Infantry.

Company K distinguished themselves as fine soldiers with a reputation for their bravery. Nearly 40 percent of the company was lost to death or disease. The roster for Company K is an impressive list of men tied forever to Iowa and its history. There are several Iowa counties named for these Iowa men and other U.S. heroes of the Mexican War: Guthrie, Hardin, Butler, Taylor, Ringgold, Mills*, Clay, Page, Scott, and Worth. There are also many Iowa counties named after battlefields: Buena Vista, Palo Alto, and Cerro Gordo.

The following information about Edwin Guthrie, Isaac Griffiths, Thomas McKean, George Washington Bowie, and Edwin Cutler comes from Harvey Reid's publication "Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers."

These were the only five of the nearly 100 men on the Company K Roster having some connection to Iowa's early government. (Reproduced here exactly as published.)

Edwin Guthrie. Captain. Residence Fort Madison, Iowa. Commissioned by President James K. Polk March 8, 1857. Assigned to Company K, Fifteenth Infantry, April 9, 1847. Wounded in the skirmish at Lahoya Pass, on the road between Vera Cruz and Perote, June 20, 1847. Died at Perote, July 20, 1847. Captain Guthrie was born at Smyrna, New York, Dec. 11, 1806, where he married Adeline Jewett Sept., 17, 1827. He was a manufacturer of chemicals and a distiller, at Sackett's Harbor, N.Y., and removed to Iowa about 1840, where he became Warden of the Penitentiary at Fort Madison, 1843-1845. [Edwin Guthrie, grandson, Washington, D.C., Nov. 15, 1909.]

Isaac W. Griffiths. First Corporal. (Iowa Historical Record list, Sergeant.) Enrolled May 1, 1847, at Fort Madison, Iowa, by Captain Guthrie. Mr. Griffiths was discharged Oct. 27, 1847, for disability from wounds received at Churubusco Aug. 20, 1847. (Right arm amputated.) He was born at Farmington, Trumbull County, Ohio. Removed to Lee County, Iowa, in 1839. Was Captain in the Territorial Militia from March 30, 1843. Member of the Iowa Legislature 1848-49. Bailiff in the Supreme Court of Iowa Territory 1839 to 1847. Register U.S. Land Office, at Des Moines, April, 1858, to 1861. Sheriff of Polk County, Iowa, 1861 to 1863. Coroner of Polk County, Iowa, twenty consecutive years, 1873 to 1893. Door-keeper U.S. Senate, three years, 1850 to 1853. Died at Des Moines, Iowa, Jan. 10, 1897. [Aldrich Autograph Collection, Iowa Historical Department, Des Moines, Iowa.]

Thomas J. McKean. Private. Enrolled April 12, 1847, at Fort Madison, Iowa, by Captain Guthrie. Promoted to Sergeant Major of the Regiment May 10, and joined the Regiment at Covington, Ky. Wounded at Churubusco, Sept. 13, 1847. Mustered out at Covington, Ky., Aug. 7, 1848. Residence Marion, Linn County, Iowa. Born in Bradford County, Pa., in 1810. Appointed Cadet U. S. Military Academy July 1, 1827. Graduated nineteenth in his class July 31, 1831. Brevet Second Lieutenant, Fourth Infantry. Resigned March 31, 1834. Adjutant First Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, in Florida War, Nov. 1, 1837, to May, 1838. Removed to Iowa and settled in Marion, Linn County. Member of First Constitutional Convention in Iowa Territory, 1844. Chief Engineer Dubuque South-western Railroad, 1848-1851. U S. Deputy Surveyor and General Assistant to Surveyor General of Iowa and Wisconsin, 1851-53. Commissioner to locate seat of government of Iowa, 1855. Sheriff of Linn County, Iowa, 1859-1861. Additional Paymaster, U.S. Volunteers, June 1, 1861. Brigadier General U.S. Volunteers, Nov. 21, 1861. Mustered out Aug. 24, 1865. Mayor of Marion, Iowa, 1865. Died at Marion, Iowa, April 19, 1870. [Cullum's Biographical Register, Graduates U.S. Military Academy.]

George Washington Bowie. First Lieutenant, U.S. Infantry, March 8, 1847. Assigned to Company K, Fifteenth Infantry, April 9, 1847. Captain, July 8, 1847. Brevet Major for gallant and meritorious conduct at Contreras and Churubusco. Mustered out with the Company Aug. 4, 1848, at Covington, Kentucky. Colonel, Fifth California Infantry, Nov. 8, 1861. Brevet Brigadier General of United States Volunteers, March 13, 1865. Honorably mustered out Dec. 14, 1864. Native of Maryland. It has not been ascertained when he came to Iowa, but he settled in Burlington as a lawyer. He was elected to the Constitutional Convention which met in 1846, and was a member of the Territorial House of Representatives the same year. He took an active part in the organization of a company in Burlington, for the proposed Iowa regiment for the Mexican War, and was First Lieutenant of the Company under Captain F. D. Mills. He returned to Burlington after the war, but emigrated to California in 1850. He was a candidate for the Governor of California on the ticket of the American party, in 1857. Became Colonel of the Fifth California Infantry Nov. 9, 1861, to succeed Colonel John

Kellogg, an officer of the Third Artillery, U.S. Army, who resigned on that date. He commanded the District of Arizona, with headquarters at Franklin, Texas, where he was mustered out Dec. 14, 1864. Died in an accident March 18, 1882. [Heitman's Historical Register, U.S.A. Reverend William Salter, D. D., Burlington, Iowa; California Historical Society, by Irving B. Richman; Rebellion Records, Vol. XXXIV.]

Edwin R. Cutler. Private. Enrolled April 12, 1847, at Keosauqua, Iowa, by Lieutenant Beckett. Mustered out with Company Aug. 4, 1848, at Covington, Ky. Born in Boston, Mass., in 1816. Brother of Elisha Cutler, who was the first Secretary of State of the State of Iowa, in 1846. Came to Iowa in 1841. Treasurer of Van Buren County, Iowa, in 1849. Recorder in 1851. Emigrated to Oregon in 1852, where he was frozen to death on a flat-boat on the Columbia River, which became frozen in the stream. [George C. Duffield, Pittsburg, Iowa; Capt. V. P. Twombly, Des Moines, Iowa.]

**Frederick Mills served as Major for the 15th Infantry, which incorporated Company K into its ranks. (Reproduced here exactly as published.)*

FREDERICK D. MILLS, who rendered a great service to Iowa when a young man, has left no record of his youth and place of nativity. We only learn that he graduated at Yale College in 1840 and came to Iowa in 1841, locating at Burlington where he became the law partner of J. C. Hall. He was a brilliant public speaker and in 1845 rendered a voluntary service to Iowa which has immortalized his name. He opposed the efforts of his party to secure the adoption of the Constitution of 1844, under which the entire Missouri slope would have been cut off from the State as defined in the enabling act of Congress. Uniting his efforts with Theodore S. Parvin and Enoch W. Eastman, he canvassed the Territory, urging the electors to vote against the adoption of the Constitution which would do away with the symmetrical proportions of the State. The three young lawyers who opposed its adoption solely on the ground of obnoxious boundary on the west were able to defeat it and thus preserve for all time the fair proportions of the State when it was finally admitted.

At the beginning of the War with Mexico in 1846, Mr. Mills received a commission as major in the army and was with the command of General Scott in his march to the City of Mexico. After the Battle of Cherubusco, Major Mills led a detachment in pursuit of General Santa Anna to the walls of the city where he was slain on August 20, while leading a charge. The federal government had his name inscribed on a mural tablet in the chapel of the Military Academy at West Point as one of the heroes of Cherubusco. The General Assembly of Iowa recognized his service in civil affairs by giving his name to a county.

(From Ancestry.com)



Battle of Cherubusco