

JOHN STERLING MATHER

Prior to the Civil War, Ohio residents Fortner, Darius, John H., John Sterling and Squire Mather, sons of Southworth and Philena (Rice) Mather, immigrated to northeastern Iowa. Also immigrating were Joel and Sarah Rice and their children George, James, Caroline ("Cal"), Robert, Marshall and Tero who were related by marriage to the Mather boys. Not long thereafter James Bethard, an Ohio neighbor of the Rice family, also immigrated and soon after arriving Jim and Cal were married.

John Sterling Mather, normally called Sterling ("there being another John in the family"), was born on November 19, 1843, in Bellefontaine, Ohio, and, after immigrating to Iowa, attended school in Waukon. A year younger and attending the same school was Frances DeEtta Adams, a 5th grader who was born in Chautauqua County, New York, on October 28, 1844.

Sterling was working as a farmer during the election campaign of 1860 when Southern states threatened to secede if Abraham Lincoln were elected but few in the North believed the threat. As the Clayton County Journal said, "we do not believe that the people of South Carolina desire a dissolution of the Union simply because a Northern man was elected President. There are only a few hot-heads in our opinion who make all this disturbance and they cannot effect anything," but Southern states did secede and, on April 12, 1861, General Beauregard's Confederate cannon fired on Fort Sumter. Still, the Journal wasn't worried and told readers "There are men enough in Pennsylvania alone to subdue South Carolina without the aid of Iowa volunteers."

When the initial 90-day regiments were unable to quell the rebellion, it became obvious that more volunteers were needed. By then, Sterling and Frances were engaged but decided to put marriage plans on hold when Sterling decided to enlist. On September 9, 1861, Sterling, his older brother Squire and George Rice enlisted together at Castalia, Iowa, as privates in what would be Company I of the state's 9th regiment of volunteer infantry. With William Vandever as Colonel, they left Dubuque on September 26th and received initial training at Benton Barracks in St. Louis.

Sterling was marked "present" on bimonthly company muster rolls as the regiment saw several months of service in Missouri and participated in the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, where it suffered heavy casualties. On June 23, 1862, Sterling was promoted to Corporal and he remained with the regiment during a march to Helena, Arkansas, where it arrived on July 17, 1862, while enlistments continued. On August 9th Daniel Mather joined Iowa's 40th Infantry, on the 11th John H. Mather and Jim Bethard enlisted in the 21st Infantry and on the 14th Darius Mather was enrolled in the 27th infantry.

Jim wrote frequent letters to Cal and he was near Rolla, Missouri, when he wrote on October 15th that "John Mather got a letter from Squire and Sterling a few days ago they were all well they were camped near Helena in Arkansas they were under marching orders but of course did not know where they were going." In November he wrote again and said "John Mather received a letter this evening from Sterling they were still at Helena and all well he says they are looking for us down there in a few days but I am afraid they will be disappointed." Jim wrote again on December 13th and said "the mail has just come and brought a letter for John from Squire and Sterling they are all well they are still at Helena." In December of 1862 Sterling's regiment finally left Helena and on the 28th and 29th fought at Chickasaw Bayou in Mississippi before camping along the Yazoo River.

In April of the following year, General Grant organized a large three-corps army at Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, for the purpose of capturing the city of Vicksburg. Participating as part of General McClelland's XIII Corps, the 21st Iowa was among the first to start a long march along muddy roads, across bayous and through swamps west of the Mississippi River. It was followed by General

Sherman's XV Corps and General McPherson's XVII Corps. The advance units began crossing from Disharoon's Plantation to the Bruinsburg landing on April 30th, but Jim Bethard was no longer with them. Jim was among many who had become sick during the march and had been left at Ashwood Landing. He was still there on May 9th when he wrote, "The 9th regiment passed here last Tuesday and I saw all three of the boys George and Sterling are as rugged as bears."

After crossing the river, the 9th Iowa participated in the capture of Jackson, Mississippi, before joining others on the line around the rear of Vicksburg on May 18th. They then participated in assaults on the 19th and 22nd and were present during the ensuing siege when men often visited friends in other regiments. Jim Bethard was able to rejoin his regiment during the siege and on June 15th wrote that "Sterling has got to be orderly and cannot get time to come and see us." Sterling had been promoted to 4th Sergeant the previous month and the added duties as orderly were keeping him busy.

On June 19th, Sterling's brother, John H. Mather, died from the debilitating effects of chronic diarrhea. Two days later Jim wrote to Cal and told her, "The boys of the 9th are well with the exception of the diehreens which is a very common complaint here." After Vicksburg's surrender on July 4th, the 9th Iowa participated in a pursuit of Confederate Joe Johnston to Jackson and skirmished at Brandon, Mississippi. Sterling's brother, Squire Mather was granted a furlough to go north but on September 26th was in Postville when he, like John before him, died from chronic diarrhea.

In October, Sterling was promoted again, this time to 2nd Sergeant, and the following month the regiment participated in battles at Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Ringgold, Georgia, before moving to their winter quarters in Woodville, Alabama. While there, Sterling reenlisted as a veteran, received a \$60.00 advance on the reenlistment bounty and returned to Iowa to enjoy the 30-day furlough granted to veterans.

On March 30th, Darius became the third of the brothers to die when he passed away at Vicksburg from erysipelas at age thirty-two while Sterling was on the way back to his regiment. He was present on May 1st when they left Woodville for Chattanooga and on August 31st when the regiment engaged the enemy at Jonesboro, Tennessee, before moving to Georgia. Atlanta was abandoned to Union forces on September 1st and a week later the 9th Iowa arrived at East Point, Georgia, southwest of Atlanta. Jim Bethard was in Arkansas when he wrote to Cal that "we received an interesting letter last night from George and Sterling which we intend to answer soon the letter was dated East point Ga Sept 13th they were well and in high spirits rejoicing over the final triumph of their long and wearisome campaign".

From East Point, the regiment joined General Sherman on his march to Savannah and, on December 31, 1864, still in Georgia, Sterling was discharged so he could be commissioned and remustered as 1st Lieutenant of his company. In April, they accepted the surrender of Joseph Johnston's army in Raleigh, North Carolina, before going to Washington, D.C., where they participated with other Union regiments in a Grand Review on May 24, 1865, before leaving for Louisville, Kentucky. There, on June 16th, Sterling was mustered in as Captain and two days later the regiment was mustered out of service. It was then transported to Clinton where it was disbanded.

Six months later, on December 23rd, Sterling and Frances, who had known each other since grade school, were married in Prairie du Chien. Their children included Squire Rice Mather (born February 12, 1867), James Adams Mather (born November 28, 1870), Marion DeEtte Mather (born December 6, 1872) and Emma Mable Mather (born August 16, 1878).

The family moved several times and eventually settled in Woodland, California, where Sterling

joined the William H. Seward Post of the G.A.R. and worked as a stationary engineer. Three of his brothers died while in the military but Sterling had maintained his health well. In the postwar years, however, he suffered a series of strokes, his health gradually worsened and he was granted an invalid pension. By 1906, he had lost most of the sight in one eye, his left arm and leg were impaired, and he needed a cane when walking. Sterling died of a cerebral hemorrhage on January 8, 1908, at sixty-four years of age and was buried in Woodland Cemetery. His daughter, Marion, supplied family information for the death certificate while his son, Squier, notified the Pension office of his father's death.

Frances applied for and received a widow's pension that she received at the rate of \$12.00 monthly until her death on March 16, 1915. Like Sterling, Frances is buried in Woodland Cemetery.