

Ladies' Man: The Strange Career of Colonel Beaumont

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On Wednesday morning the 7th of February 1878 the citizenry of Ukiah, California was shocked to learn of the sudden death of Mr. Thomas B. Edwards.¹ Edwards, describing himself as a printer,² was an up and coming member of the community. At the time of his death he was a partner in the Bank Exchange saloon.³ He had been a member of the Literary Union since at least October,⁴ and was elected to the "difficult and unenvious position of critic"⁵ of that society in November.⁶ His death seemed even more tragic as he had just been married six weeks before, on Christmas day, to Miss Aneta Grier⁷. Nevertheless, it seems that his business ventures were failing and his creditors were hard upon him,⁸ so that in despondency he took his life by an overdose of morphine. His last words expressed his love for his newlywed bride, bidding her farewell.⁹

Who was Thomas B. Edwards, and what might have caused this seemingly rash act? As his death was investigated, however, the story of the so-called Thomas B. Edwards began to emerge. It soon became apparent that Mr. Edwards was in fact the dashing Colonel Myron H. Beaumont, former commander of the First New Jersey Cavalry during the Civil War.

Myron Holley Beaumont was born into a prominent family on 26 August 1837¹⁰ in Wayne County, New York. His father was Dr. Abram L. Beaumont, of Lyons, New York and Tecumseh, Michigan.¹¹ His mother was Clarissa, daughter of Myron Holley, the abolitionist and

¹ *Ukiah (California) City Press*, 8 February 1878, pg. 5, col. 2.

² *Mendocino Democrat* (Ukiah, California), 9 February 1878, pg. 3, col. 1.

³ *Dispatch Democrat* (Ukiah, California), 9 February 1878, pg. 3, col. 2.

⁴ *Mendocino Democrat*, 20 October 1877, pg. 3, col. 2.

⁵ *Ukiah City Press*, 8 February 1878, pg. 5, col. 2.

⁶ *Ukiah City Press*, 2 November 1877, pg. 5, col. 2.

⁷ Mendocino County Marriage Book 3:8, Edwards-Grier marriage, filed 26 December 1877.

⁸ *Dispatch Democrat*, 9 February 1878, pg. 3, col. 2.

⁹ *Mendocino Democrat*, 9 February 1878, p. 3, col. 2.

¹⁰ Baxter-Beaumont Family Bible Records, *The Comprehensive Bible; containing the Old and New Testaments according to the Authorized Version...* (Philadelphia, Pa: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1853), privately held by Megan Devlin-Petty, Illinois, April 2009.

¹¹ 1840 U.S. census, Wayne County, New York, population schedule, p. 44 (stamped), Abm. L. Beaumont; NARA microfilm publication M704, roll 350. 1850 U.S. census, Lenawee County, Michigan, population schedule, Tecumseh, p. 114 (stamped), dwelling 855, family 855, A. L. Beaumont; NARA microfilm publication M432. Roll 355.

co-founder of the Liberty Party.¹² Myron's sister Ellen married the attorney W. Walton Murphy, who was appointed consul general at Frankfurt am Main, Germany, by President Abraham Lincoln.¹³ Another sister, Sally, married John M. B. Sill, who was consul general in Korea from 1894 to 1897.¹⁴ Yet another sister, Alice, married Witter J. Baxter, a well-known attorney and state senator from southern Michigan.¹⁵

Myron was a printer in Baltimore, Maryland in 1856 when he enlisted in the Army. Assigned to the Mounted Rifles, he was discharged a year later, however, when it was learned that he was still a minor.¹⁶ Having been posted at Fort Union, New Mexico Territory, he must have spent time in Kansas where he made the acquaintance of Samuel C. Pomeroy and James H. Lane, later the first senators from the state of Kansas.¹⁷

Young Beaumont turned up in Rahway, New Jersey at the beginning of the Civil War. Having had military experience, he became a lieutenant and quartermaster in the Third New Jersey Infantry.¹⁸ He then enlisted in the 1st New Jersey Cavalry at Trenton on 20 August 1861, entering the regiment with the rank of major.¹⁹ On the surface he appeared to perform well, eventually rising to the command of the regiment by war's end.

A closer look at his service, however, reveals that all was not well. To begin with, Major Beaumont was not well much of the time. Like many soldiers in the Civil War he suffered from bouts of chronic diarrhea. He also seems to have been afflicted with malaria from time to time. Much of his service record consists of requests for extended medical leave. He had a sympathetic friend in the regimental surgeon Dr. William W. L. Phillips, who seemed ready and willing to endorse requests for leave.²⁰ Beaumont's character also seemed flawed. Major Walter R.

¹² Elizur Wright, *Myron Holley and What He did for Liberty and True Religion* (Boston, Mass.: 1882), 177-178.

¹³ "William Walton Murphy," Michigan Historical Society Records, vol. 11, p. 41 (<http://files.usgarchives.org/mi/michigan/biography/m61007.txt> : accessed 28 March 2009).

¹⁴ "John Mahelm Berry Sill," *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: J.T. White, 1892-), vol. X, p. 353.

¹⁵ "Hon. Witter J. Baxter," *American Biographical History of Eminent and Self-made men: Michigan Volume* (Cincinnati, O.: Western Publishing Co., 1878), vol. 1, pages 7-8.

¹⁶ *U.S. Army, Register of Enlistments, 1798-1914*, digital image (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 12 February 2009), citing NARA microfilm publication M233, Myron H. Beaumont, Pvt., U.S. Mounted Rifles, enlisted 1856.

¹⁷ "James Henry Lane," and "Samuel Clarke Pomeroy," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* (<http://bioguide.congress.gov> : accessed 3 April 2009). Compiled service record, Myron H. Beaumont, Col., 1 New Jersey Cav.; Carded Records, Volunteer Organizations, Civil War; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780s-1917, Record Group 94; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ Joseph G. Bilby, "Col. Myron Beaumont, 1st New Jersey Cavalry, *Military Images*, Vol XI, no. 1 (July-August 1989) 8. Edward G. Longacre, *Jersey Cavaliers: A History of the First New Jersey Volunteer Cavalry, 1861-1865* (Highstown, N.J.: Longstreet House, 1992), 9.

¹⁹ Compiled military service record, Myron H. Beaumont, Col., 1 N.J. Cav., Civil War, RG 94, NA-Washington.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Robbins described him as “an excellent officer in camp but poor in the field, where he seldom got! He did not like bullets...Beaumont was not held in high esteem by the officers and men of the regiment. He had the habit of ... avoiding the harder part of the service, especially the battles.”²¹

The command of the regiment suffered from political in-fighting. In January 1862, Beaumont and Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Karge were placed under arrest by the commander, Colonel William Halsted. The charges were of no substance and they were released after a few days.²² In Beaumont’s case, this release was effected partly through the efforts of his Kansas friend Senator Pomeroy.²³

During one of Beaumont’s medical leaves in Washington on 2 July 1862, he took the opportunity to get married. This may or may not have been under doctor’s orders. The bride was sixteen-year-old Mary Randolph, the granddaughter of Margaret O’Neal Eaton, whose marriage to Secretary of War John H. Eaton in 1829 caused a scandal in President Andrew Jackson’s cabinet.²⁴

Colonel Beaumont seems to have overcome his fear of bullets enough to be wounded toward the close of the war. At Hatcher’s Run, Virginia, on 6 February 1865, he received a musket ball in the left leg, shattering the fibula and injuring the tibia. This was serious enough that he was eventually able to obtain a disability discharge on 28 July. As a result of his injury, he was awarded a pension of \$30 a month.²⁵

Myron and Mary Beaumont moved to New York City after the war.²⁶ He continued in the printing industry, working as an editor.²⁷ They eventually had three sons together: Myron, Jr., born in 1866; Walton, born in 1868; and John, born in 1873. Trouble began to brew, however, even before the birth of John. In October 1872, Mary filed for a divorce from the colonel on the grounds of several acts of adultery. The following June, Myron countered with charges of infidelity on Mary’s part. On looking into the matter, the court found her completely innocent. A final judgment was made in February 1874, which dissolved the marriage. There were, however,

²¹ Lilian Rea, ed., *War Record and Personal Experiences of Walter Raleigh Robbins, from April 22, 1861 to August 4, 1865* (Chicago, 1923), 24 and n., 106n; quoted in Longacre, *Jersey Cavaliers*, 10.

²² Longacre, *Jersey Cavaliers*, 26-27.

²³ Letter of S.C. Pomeroy, 14 February 1862; compiled military service record, Myron H. Beaumont, Col., 1 N.J. Cav., Civil War, RG 94, NA-Washington.

²⁴ Myron H. Beaumont (Col., 1st New Jersey Cav., Civil War), pension no. S.C.51,787, Case Files of Approved Pension Applications..., 1861-1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C. Samuel G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, 3 vols. (Nashville, Tenn.: Ambrose Printing, 1921), 3:325-333. 1860 U.S. census, District of Columbia, population schedule, Washington City, p. 345 (stamped), dwelling 1016, family 1025, Antonio Buchignani; NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 102.

²⁵ Myron H. Beaumont Civil War pension no. S.C.51,787, RG 15; NA-Washington.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 1870 U.S. census, Westchester County, New York, population schedule, Morrisania, p. 171 (stamped), dwelling 1018, family 1825, Martin [sic] Beaumont; NARA microfilm publication M593, roll 1117.

²⁷ *New York City Directory, 1869* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2 April 2009).

some strange and punitive provisions laid out against the Colonel. Mary Beaumont was legally allowed to remarry “as if the said Myron H. Beaumont was actually dead.” He, on the other hand, was forbidden to remarry during the remainder of Mary’s lifetime. Furthermore, Beaumont was required to pay alimony to the tune of \$40 a week, as well as three hundred dollars worth of fees to her attorney. Not trusting Colonel Beaumont to come up with the money, the court required him to give Mary “reasonable security” for the payment of the alimony. Needless to say, Mary gained custody of the children as well, who were apparently staying with Myron during the proceedings.²⁸

Apparently the Colonel was overwhelmed by the decrees of the court. He certainly would realize that his thirty-dollar monthly pension would hardly cover expenses. Therefore Beaumont executed a tactical retreat and skipped town. There is some indication that he left New York and went west in the company of his brother-in-law’s wife, a Mrs. Randolph. He may have taken his eldest son, Myron, Jr. along. The party ended up in Coos Bay, Oregon, where Beaumont became editor of the *Coos Bay News*. Apparently the damp coastal weather did not agree with the new consort of the Colonel as she became terminally ill. As she lay dying, Beaumont struck up an acquaintance with a young woman, girl really, named Susie Davis, who was visiting from Oakland, California. If she is the same Susie Davis as that found on the 1870 census in Oakland, then she was quite young indeed. That Susie was ten years old in 1870. Upon the demise of “Mrs. Beaumont,” young Susie became the third to bear that title. When her parents back in Oakland learned of this union, they quickly fetched her home.²⁹

Colonel Beaumont seems next to have sauntered on down to San Francisco.³⁰ There he became acquainted with one Samuel F. Schwartz, who worked in the Pension Office. Beaumont entered upon a new career with Schwartz, which consisted chiefly in defrauding veterans out of their pensions. This succeeded for a time. He then entered into a business arrangement with a certain Colonel Georgi, who invested several thousand dollars into the venture. Georgi was called to Visalia on some personal business and returned to San Francisco about April 1877 to find that Beaumont and Schwartz, and his investment, had vanished.³¹

It was then that Thomas B. Edwards appeared in Ukiah. He initially found employment at Vichy Springs as a cook, but soon entered into the saloon business.³² He seemed to be a charming man of great talent and ability, becoming a lively member of the Literary Union. Never one to remain alone for long, the so-called Thomas Edwards once again entered upon matrimonial pursuits, this time with twenty-year-old Aneta Grier.³³ It seems that at age forty he could finally choose as his companion a more mature woman, or at least one who had passed the

²⁸ Myron H. Beaumont Civil War pension no. S.C.51,787, RG 15; NA-Washington.

²⁹ *Ukiah City Press*, 1 March 1878.

³⁰ *City Directories for San Francisco, California, 1877*, p. 125, digital image (<http://www.footnote.com> : accessed 9 April 2009).

³¹ *Weekly San Francisco Chronicle*, undated clipping from about March 1878.

³² *Dispatch Democrat*, 9 February 1878, pg. 3, col. 2.

³³ Mendocino County Marriage Book 3:8, Edwards-Grier marriage, filed 26 December 1877.

teenage years. This was probably his most suitable match, as Aneta herself probably left a husband of her own in San Diego and was actually known by the name of Lena Ortenaga.³⁴

But six weeks later, when his financial world began again to crumble, the so-called Thomas B. Edwards, alias Col. Myron H. Beaumont, took his own life, on the thirteenth anniversary of his Civil War wound.

He would probably have quietly disappeared into oblivion had not his widow—the most recent one—made the trip to San Francisco to collect his back pension, which amounted to \$270. It was then that the great rush for this money brought to the surface other claimants. The original Mrs. Beaumont had the better claim, especially with the judgment of the New York Supreme Court in hand, and was able to collect.³⁵ By 1880 she had remarried,³⁶ as if Myron H. Beaumont were actually dead, which by this time, he was.

³⁴ *Ukiah City Press*, 1 March 1878.

³⁵ Myron H. Beaumont Civil War pension no. S.C.51,787, RG 15; NA-Washington.

³⁶ 1880 U.S. census, District of Columbia, population schedule, Washington, enumeration district 47, p. 83-C (stamped), dwelling 310, family 315, Dunbar Fry; NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 129.



Col. M.H. Beaumont, 1st New Jersey Cavalry

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