

GEORGE ALONZO PURDY

George Alonzo Purdy was born on April 18, 1834, in Poughkeepsie, New York. Julia Lucinda Hurd was born on October 19, 1839. On December 24, 1858, they were married in Michigan. From there they moved to Clayton County, Iowa, where George worked a farm “*near the white springs at McGregor*” and raised their two daughters, May born October 4, 1859, and Ida born September 12, 1861.

During the Civil War, George enlisted in the military on August 11, 1862, and was mustered into Company B on August 18th. On September 9th, ten companies were mustered in as the state’s 21st regiment of volunteer infantry with a total of 985 men (enlisted and officers). Military training was received at Camp Franklin in Dubuque, but the training was brief and said one writer:

“The rendezvous was so near the men’s homes, that their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts, and friends, were too often present to allow either drill or discipline to any great extent.”

Aware they would soon be going south, a comrade, Jim Bethard who had a farm along Robert's Creek in Clayton County, wrote to his wife, Caroline (“Cal”), and asked her to join Julia Purdy in McGregor where “*you will get with her on the boat and we will meet you at the Mississippi in Dubuque.*” Caroline, with a three month old daughter, and Julia, with three year old May and one year old Ida, boarded a steamer at the landing, went down river, and spent the day with their husbands before taking an evening steamer north. Jim and Cal would not see each other for almost three years. George and Julia would never see each other again.

Jim and George were bunkmates during their initial service in Missouri where George received promotions from Private to 7th Corporal and then to 6th Corporal. In February 1863, the two friends were among those detailed to take the sick into the town of Ironton where they occupied the courthouse that still stands in the town square. It was there that George learned that typhoid had struck McGregor. Julia and Ida died. The *North Iowa Times* reported their deaths:

“In this city, on the 2d last, Mrs. Julia L. Purdy, aged 22 years. Also, on the 3d inst., Idah [sic] Purdy, aged eighteen months, daughter of the above.”

Julia and Ida were buried in Giard Cemetery in Giard. Caroline Bethard saw the news article and asked if that was the same Julia she had met in September. Jim said it was:

“I never felt so much sympathy for a man as I did for him when he got the news of the death of his wife and child it seemed as though his heart would break he was with us two nights after he got the news and he did not pretend to lie down to sleep at all but walked to and fro in the hall of the court house as steady as a sentinal on his beat the whole night Mr Purdy is a good fellow and is well liked by the majority of the company he has the true and full sympathy's of the whole company in his trouble.”

The regiment was under strict orders. A Vicksburg campaign was being planned and no furloughs were to be granted. William Croke, Captain of Company B, was from Strawberry Point and the regiment's Colonel, Sam Merrill, was a McGregor banker and merchant. They could not help but be sympathetic. Contrary to orders, personal feelings prevailed over military orders and George was given an off-the-record leave of absence:

“he got leave of absence from the captain and colonel and got some papers from the sutler and by putting on citizens cloths he hoped to pass as a sutlers clerk James Rice and I sent our money home by him”

Risking arrest, George returned home and, said Jim:

“he had found his circumstances at Mcgregor verry different from what he had expected that the sickness and death of his wife and child had been attended with a great deal of expense and that he had used our money to pay up his expenses incurred thereby and that he was going from there to detroit Michigan to leave his youngest child with its grandmother and get some money that was coming to him there and that he would return to the regiment the first of next week and make the matter satisfactory with us I told him before he left us that if he needed more money than he had to use mine as far as it would go”

George returned, repaid the money he had borrowed from Jim Bethard and Jim Rice, and remained with the regiment during the balance of its service in Missouri and throughout the Vicksburg Campaign. On September 2, 1863 he was furloughed on a Surgeon's Certificate and no doubt took the opportunity to see his daughter before returning to the regiment in December. George then served with the regiment in Louisiana, Texas, Alabama and Arkansas before becoming ill and entering a marine hospital in New Orleans. With the war near an end, there was no reason for him to remain on the rolls and he was mustered out on June 5, 1865, while the balance of the regiment would not be mustered out for another month.

Betsey Fitch, a Wisconsin resident, had married Norman Clark before the war. Norman served with the 20th Wisconsin Infantry and died from wounds received in battle. On March 5, 1866, George Purdy (with six year old May) and Betsey (Fitch) Clark (also with a six year old daughter) were married in McGregor by Samuel Pancoast, a minister of the gospel. They would have six children of their own: Ellen (born February 19, 1867), Frank (born January 17, 1869), Abigail "Abbie" (born September 8, 1872), Emily "Emma" (born January 18, 1886), George William (born January 8 or 9, 1878), and Earl (born April 22, 1882). Ellen, Frank and Earl apparently died young since they were not mentioned among the children still living in 1899

After short stays in Minnesota, in Cresco, Iowa (where George had a store and dealt in stoves) and in Colorado, they eventually made their home in Kaweah, California, on the edge of Sequoia National Park that was created in 1890.

The Kaweah Colony was intended by its founders to be a utopian society founded on socialistic principles and its possible George was aware of a similar Amana Society in Iowa. An historical marker explains:

"the Kaweah cooperative colony was a utopian project started in 1886. For several years it attracted international attention and many settlers came here and actually did much to further their ideals. Unable to secure title to the land, and because of internal difficulties, the organization ceased to exist after 1892, leaving as one of its tangible reminders the Kaweah Post Office."

George and Betsey continued to live in the area where George died on September 26, 1916, at age eighty-two. Betsey died on January 31, 1928, at age eighty-seven. They are buried in Three Rivers Cemetery, Three Rivers, California. While her name is spelled "Betsy" on a cemetery plaque, her marriage license has "Betsey," George gave her name as "Betsey," and she signed her name as "Betsey."

Their son, George William "Will" Purdy married Ida Wright who, for many years served as

the Kaweah Postmistress and branch librarian. Will and Ida are also buried in Three Rivers Cemetery.