

Captain John Cleveland Robinson

Charter member and first Master of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M.

By George F. Winters

You may be familiar with John Cleveland Robinson, the first Master of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M. (Missouri Registry) at Camp Floyd, (1858 through 1861). Much has been written Robinson's military career, and there are many more facts out there if one does a little digging. Little has been written regarding his Masonic history and personal life before or after his time in the Utah Territory, but again, the information is available to those seeking the facts. When he and others signed the request for a charter, they noted M.M., K.T., or R.A next to their names inferring that they had already received their degrees. I am sure more information will surface in the future and this biography will be amended as it does.

John Cleveland Robinson was born in Binghamton, NY, April 10, 1817, to a prominent New York family, Dr. Tracy Robinson (1777-1855) and Sarah Cleveland (1776-1866). He has eight siblings including; Ambrosia Robinson (1801-1853), Livonia Robinson (1803-1807), William Edson Robinson (1806-1807), Erasmus Darwin Robinson (1807-1887), Sidney Thompson Robinson (1810-1845), Henry Lee Robinson (1812-1901), Charles Lynde Robinson (1819-1894), Mary M. Robinson (1820-?)¹,

He was educated at Oxford Academy, at that time one of the best-known educational institutions in the State of New York.²

On July 1, 1835, at the age of eighteen he entered the military academy at West Point, New York, where he remained for three years, and then left on March 4, 1838, before graduating with the intention of studying law.

15 May 1842 John C. Robinson and Sarah Maria Pease (1822-1892) were married in Green Bay, Wisconsin. They eventually had six children, Sarah Marshall Robinson (1843-1847), Lorraine Tracy Robinson (1845-1846), Helen Morgan Robinson (1849-1851), John Marshal Robinson (1851-1910), Cleveland Robinson (1856-1916), and Caroline Pease Robinson (1866-1941).

After a year of civil life, Robinson joined the army of occupation in Texas at Corpus Christi in September 1845 as regimental and brigade quartermaster. He received a commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the Fifth Infantry. He was promoted to 1st Lieutenant in 1846, the rank which he held during the remainder of the Mexican War, in which he fought with distinction at Monterey, and was present, also, at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma.

While in Mexico, Robinson joined the Aztec Club formed on October 13th, 1847. Colonel DeLancey Floyd-Jones a founding member is quoted, "The Club was organized for the purpose of forming a resort for officers, as a promoter of good fellowship, and of furnishing a home where they could pass their leisure hours in social intercourse..."³

Home on leave, Robinson joined Valley Lodge No. 109, F. & A.M., Rochester, New York (1848).⁴

He served in 1856, in the Florida War against the Seminole Indians, a campaign in which he made a further record for bravery and efficient services. At the close of the Seminole War he was ordered to Utah Territory, where during the winter of 1857, he was assigned to the command of Fort Bridger.

He traveled with the troops sent to Utah during 1858 and sometime after arriving at Camp Floyd, he and twenty-Two other officers and men at the base submitted a request to form a New Lodge at the camp to the Grand Master in Missouri. He was assigned to Company B 5th Infantry. When the Dispensation arrived, he was a charter member and the first Master of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M. (Missouri Registry) at Camp Floyd in Utah Territory.

Returning east late in 1859 he was on military leave until he was placed in command of Fort McHenry, at Baltimore, where he was stationed at the outbreak of the Civil War. The Confederate conspirators contemplated a seizure of this important point, the capture of which would have inflicted a serious blow on the Union cause at that critical period. As the fort was garrisoned by only sixty men, Robinson felt apprehensive as to the result, but succeeded, through a clever ruse, in making the Confederates believe that reinforcements had arrived, and so their plans were abandoned.



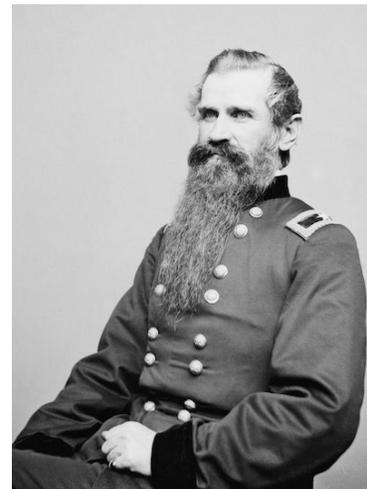
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With the progress of the war, promotion was rapid in the regular army. Robinson, who had been ordered on duty at Detroit as a mustering officer, was made colonel of the First Michigan Volunteers, in September 1861; and, soon after, he received a commission as major of the Second United States Infantry. On April 28, 1862, he was commissioned a brigadier general of volunteers, having already been placed in command of a brigade at Newport News, VA. He was transferred soon after to the Army of the Potomac, where he was assigned to a brigade in Kearny's Division of the Third Corps.

On the withdrawal of the Army of the Potomac from in front of Richmond Robinson's Brigade moved with the rest of McClellan's army to reinforce General Pope and was actively engaged in the battles around Manassas. With his brigade, he next fought at Fredericksburg, after which, on December 29, 1862, he was assigned to the command of the Second Division of the First Army Corps. He was present at Chancellorsville with his division, but was not in action, the First Corps receiving no orders from General Hooker to advance.

At Gettysburg his division took a prominent part in the hard fighting of the First Corps during the battle on the first day, his troops holding the right of the corps line. Robinson maneuvered his troops rapidly and skillfully, holding a superior force in check for hours, and capturing, in an open field fight, a large part of Iverson's North Carolina Brigade. He was brevetted lieutenant colonel of the regular army for meritorious service at Gettysburg, and colonel, for services at Mine Run and the battle of the Wilderness.

On the reorganization of the Army of the Potomac in 1864, the First Corps was transferred to the Fifth, and, with it, Robinson's Division. After the battle of the Wilderness, General Grant ordered the army to Spotsylvania, with the intention of seizing that point before General Lee could occupy it. Robinson's Division moved first and arriving there found the advance of the Confederate army already on the ground. Realizing the importance of securing that strategic point, Robinson, without waiting for supports, attacked promptly and vigorously. In this engagement, known as the battle of Alsop's Farm, May 8, 1864,



Robinson, while leading his men in the fight, was shot through the left knee, and was borne from the field. The wound necessitated the amputation of his leg, and the gallant general, thus permanently disabled, retired from active service in the field. For his conspicuous bravery in this action, where he rode at the head of his troops in their assault on an intrenched position, he received from the War Department the decoration of the Medal of Honor and was brevetted major general in the United States Army.

As soon as his wound would permit, he returned to duty, having been placed in command of the Military Department of the State of New York. After the war, in 1866, he served as military commander and commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau in North Carolina. In 1867, he was at the head of the Military Department of the South, and, in 1868, of the Department of the Lakes. On May 6, 1869, General Robinson was placed on the retired list of the United States Army with the full rank of major general, and his long military career with its honorable and brilliant record was brought to a close.



But further honors were awaiting him as a civilian, and in 1872, he was elected Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York on the same ticket with Governor John A. Dix.

He was chosen commander-in-chief of the Grand Army of the Republic in 1877, and in 1887, was elected president of the Society of the Army of the Potomac. For several years before his death he was blind, and members of the Loyal Legion will long remember the pathetic scene at one of their banquets at Delmonico's, when the white-haired veteran, standing with sightless eyes in that brilliant scene, bid his old companions-in-arms a final farewell. With hearts softened by emotion the 600 officers present at the banquet arose and gave three cheers for their departing comrade.⁵

He died a few months later, on February 18, 1897, at his home in Binghamton, at the age of seventy-nine years. He is buried at Spring Forest Cemetery, Section D, Lot 12, Binghamton, Broome County, New York.⁶

A monument to Union Brigadier General John Robinson was dedicated by the State of New York in 1917. It is located northwest of Gettysburg on Doubleday Avenue.⁷

¹ Ancestry.com, Morton/Ress Family Tree; https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/16160887/person/170045298702/facts?_phsrc=FGk1&_phstart=successSource visited June 1, 2019

² Sir Knight John Cleveland Robinson, by Sir Knight Ronald L. Brown, P.C., Monroe Commandery No. 12, Rochester, New York, Knight Templar magazine, August 1, 1982

³ History of the Aztec Club, <http://www.aztecclub.com/history.htm> visited May 17, 2020

⁴ Knight Templar Magazine, vol XXVIII, August 1982 Number 8, p.13

⁵ Final Report on the Battlefield of Gettysburg, vol 111, Albany 1900 p.1349

⁶ Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/19104/john-cleveland-robinson> visited 6/12/2021

⁷ Monuments to Individuals at Gettysburg, <https://gettysburg.stonesentinels.com/monuments-to-individuals/john-robinson/> visited 2/12/2021