

NATHANIEL A. GEARHART

(September 25, 1843 – January 11, 1906)

The number of casualties during the Battle of Gettysburg cannot be determined with exactitude. There were about 23,000 Union and as many as 28,000 Confederate casualties — men killed, wounded or missing during the three day battle in July 1863.¹ Of the wounded, many suffered from those injuries the rest of their lives. Nathaniel Alward Gearhart was such a survivor.

Born in New York in 1843, he enlisted in a company of local volunteers in 1861. Two years later, in the battle of Gettysburg, he suffered a serious leg wound from which he never fully recovered. Mustered out, he convalesced at home, studied law and became a member of the bar. About twenty years later he and his family moved to Duluth, Minnesota.

It seems they relocated because he had been offered a job. He arrived on April 7, 1887, and made deputy register of deeds the next day. He was admitted to the bar sometime thereafter. He joined local veterans' organizations and several fraternal societies, and became active in city politics and society.² In 1891 his son Harry graduated the Law Department of the University of Minnesota, and was admitted to the bar; they then formed a partnership.³

¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* 664 (Oxford Univ. Press, 1988).

² He was prominent enough to be included in Warren Upham & Rose Barteau Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912* 250 (14 Collections Minn. Hist. Soc., 1912).

³ The following entry appears in the 1916 law alumni directory:

Harry G. Gearhart, LL. B., 91; Sigma Chi; Attorney-at-Law; mem. Commercial Club; Palestine Lodge, No. 79, Duluth Commandery, No. 18, Duluth Consistor, No.3, A. & A. S. R., Odd Temple, A. A. O. N. M. S. 513 Palladio Bldg., and 118 E. 3d St., Duluth, Minn.

Alumni of the College of Law, 1889-1915, at 243 (1916) (online). Harry remained in Duluth, practicing law, until death in 1949.

This was a time when candidates for minor, part-time judicial posts ran with party endorsements. In 1898, he ran for Special Municipal Court Judge ⁴ as a Republican, with the endorsement of *The Labor World*:

The Judges.

So much has been said on the mayoralty question in this campaign, that voters are liable to overlook the importance of the judicial ticket. The municipal court is an ever busy court. It is, on account of its limited jurisdiction, pre-eminently the laboring man's court, and it needs men of learning and ability coupled with experience to sit as its judges. The poor man cannot afford to appeal on account of the expense, so it is very important for him to get justice in the first instance. In Judge Edson and Mr. Gearhart all of these elements meet.⁵

He was elected by a majority of 1,006 votes on February 1, 1898,⁶ and re-elected on February 5, 1901:

Nathaniel A. Gearhart (Republican).....3,000
C. W. Stilson (Democrat).....1,700⁷

In 1903, the judge placed the following sketch in *The Book of Minnesota*:

Nathaniel Alward Gearhart, who was born in Livingston county, New York, September 25, 1843, went to Duluth April 7, 1887, and was made deputy register of deeds the day following, in which capacity he served until January 1, 1889. In the meantime he was admitted to the bar. A partnership of law was soon after formed with his son, Harry G., which has continued until the present time. He

⁴ The act establishing a Municipal Court in Duluth was enacted by the 25th Legislature on February 26, 1887. 1887 Special Laws, ch. 323, at 921-931. It was amended in the next session, 1889 Spec. Laws, ch. 83, at 698-701 (March 20, 1889).

⁵ *The Labor World* (Duluth), January 29, 1898, at 3.

⁶ *St. Paul Globe*, February 2, 1898, at 1.

⁷ *Minneapolis Journal*, February 6, 1901, at 3. The totals are probably rounded.

was elected as special judge of the municipal court in February, 1898, which still continues.⁸

On February 2, 1904, he was re-elected, winning all eight city wards, and 66% of the total vote:

Nathaniel A. Gearhart (Republican).....4172
E. A. Tinkham (Democrat).....2116⁹

It was his last election. Soon his health began to deteriorate and by late the following year he was confined to his home. He resigned the judgeship in November 1904.¹⁰ He died on January 11, 1906, at age sixty-two. His obituary was carried by the *Evening Herald*:¹¹

DEATH ENDS SUFFERINGS

Judge N. A. Gearhart
Passes Away After a
Long Illness.

Was Prominent Old Resi-
dent Mason and Grand
Army Veteran.

⁸ *The Book of Minnesota* 49 (1903). It is subtitled "Development, Resources, Enterprise and Beauty of the North Star State." A fragile copy is available at the Historical Society.

⁹ *Labor World*, February 6, 1904, page 1 ("As a result of balloting Tuesday, Judge N. A. Gearhart was re-elected to his position as special municipal judge. His Democratic opponent, E. A. Tinkham, fell by the wayside badly, in the game of vote getting and the result was never in doubt.").

¹⁰ *Minneapolis Journal*, November 29, 1904, at 7; *St. Paul Globe*, November 29, 1904, at 10 (both newspapers reporting Governor Van Sant's appointment of Duluth lawyer Judson D. Holmes to succeed Gearhart).

¹¹ *Duluth Evening Herald*, Thursday, January 11, 1906, at 7. "Bright's disease," an antiquated term referring to various kidney diseases, is no longer used by the medical profession.

Death mercifully ended the sufferings of Judge Nathaniel A. Gearhart, at his home, 118 East Third street, shortly after 10 o'clock this morning.

For two years Judge Gearhart has been a helpless invalid, and for a year and two weeks has been confined to his bed. Chronic Bright's disease was the cause of his death, which has been expected at almost any time during the last two years.

Judge Gearhart was one of the prominent figures in the history of Duluth, and had a very wide circle of friends and acquaintances in the city. He was born in Livingston county, N. Y., in 1843, and on Sept. 25, 1861, he enlisted in Company A of the 104th New York volunteers. At Gettysburg he received a wound in the leg which prevented him serving through the war. He received his honorable discharge and returned home to nurse the wound, from the effects of which he never fully recovered, always using a cane to assist him in walking during his later years.

In 1887 he moved to Duluth, and the following year was admitted to the bar. For ten years he practised law in this city, and in 1898 was elected to the position of special municipal judge. He was re-elected once (sic), and served until January, 1904 (sic), when he was compelled to resign on account of ill health. Since that time he has been slowly sinking, and his death was in some ways a relief to himself and family

Judge Gearhart was closely connected with the Masonic order in this city, being a thirtieth degree Scottish Rite Mason, and a member of Palestine lodge. He was also a member of the Eastern Star order, and at one time held the highest office in the gift of that lodge, the Most Worthy Grand Patron.

He was also a member of the J. B. Culver post of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Judge Gearhart was a kindly man, and his death will be deeply regretted by all who knew him.

His wife and two sons, Donald and Harry, survive him. He also leaves two brothers, O. A. Gearhart of Buffalo and C. H. Gearhart of Wausau, Wis.

The funeral services will be in charge of the Masons and the G. A. R. members. They will be held in the Scottish Rite room of the Masonic Temple, Saturday afternoon, at 2 o'clock. ■



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