

WILLIAM NEWTON MONROE

William Newton Monroe was born June 4, 1841, at Flat Creek, Scott County, Indiana, three miles from the little town of Lexington. His parents, Sanders Alexander and Katherine Elizabeth Monroe, were both natives of Virginia, and of old Southern stock of Scotch-Irish extraction.

When the blue-eyed lad, whose red hair had a perfect wave, was eleven years old, the family went to Liberty Bell, Iowa. From there they moved to Soap Creek, Iowa, where the father bought a large farm. After finishing grammar school young William went to Ashland University, Iowa, and was graduated when eighteen years old.

In December, 1857, when he was sixteen years old, he joined the Baptist Church at Mars Hill, Iowa. A hole was cut in the ice of Soap Creek for the baptism of William and his sister Lucy Ann.

Following graduation from Ashland University, he taught school in the John Wiley district, on the Des Moines River. Thirty-six pupils received his instruction and he, in turn, received a salary of forty dollars a month. He took turns boarding around with parents of his pupils.

At the age of twenty the young teacher answered President Lincoln's calls for volunteers, going to Ottumwa, Iowa, where he enlisted in the Union Army. August 3, 1861, he was sworn

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into the First Regiment, Iowa Volunteer Cavalry. His first cavalry mount was a horse from his father's farm.

After many months of drilling the regiment was sent into southern territory, in the States of Missouri, Arkansas and Texas, taking part in many hard-fought battles. While serving there William Monroe was commissioned First Lieutenant.

In 1863 Lieutenant Monroe was transferred to the Seventh Iowa Regiment and sent back to Ottumwa, where he formed four companies - "A", "B", "C" and "D". They marched over-land to Omaha and Fort Kearney. After arrival at the fort it was found that Lieutenant Monroe was the only one capable of drilling these cavalry-men, and he had to drill all four companies.

Later he was sent out ~~from~~^{from} Fort Kearney to push Westward the Sioux Indians living along the Platte River. They were willing to move and the army fed them and helped them move their goods as far as Fort Hallock, Wyoming. There was no fighting during this "quelling the Indians."

The junior cavalry officer was grateful for the opportunities of service under so excellent an officer and so fine a man as the commanding officer of the fort, Colonel FitzHenry Warner. The major commander of the fort was H. H. Heath, but part of the time Monroe was acting as Major. William Monroe was mustered out of service in 1865 with the rank of Major. He never used the title and few people who knew him later in life realized he had been a Major in the United States Army.

While stationed in Kearney he met Mary Jane Hall, who was teaching school there, and married her at Fort Kearney December 24, 1863. The marriage service was read by Captain Foutz, a Methodist minister, who later was killed by Indians. Mrs. Monroe was the daughter of Milton S. and Nianna Hall. She was born January 1, 1846, in La Grange, Marion County, Missouri. She was graduated from the Presbyterian College at Philadelphia, Missouri. Throughout her life she was the constant companion and helpmate of her husband.

The decade following the Civil War was divided between life in Omaha, Nebraska, the farm at Soap Creek, Iowa, and Lawrence, Kansas. During this time, Mr. Monroe was engaged in railroad construction work, being associated with his father-in-law Milton S. Hall, in the building of twenty-five miles of railroad from Omaha to Fremont, Nebraska.

While residing at Omaha two sons were born to Mr. and Mrs. Monroe, Milton Sanders and George Otto. Myrtle Mignonette joined the family when they were living on Grand-father Monroe's farm at Soap Creek. A son, Jesse Lee, was born a couple of years later when the family residence was established at Lawrence, Kansas.

When the railroad was completed to Fremont, Mr. Monroe secured the contract to furnish ties, secured in Grand Island, to use on the Union Pacific, being built west from Fremont. While thus engaged he met Charles Crocker, who had charge of the building operations of the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific Railway.

This acquaintanceship resulted in Mr. Monroe's being sent to California to construct railroads for the "Big Four", - Stanford, Hopkins, Huntington and Crocker.

In 1875 the Monroe family moved to California and established headquarters in Los Angeles. Ten acres of land were purchased out on West Adams Street but the family resided in a hotel which Mr. Monroe bought at River Station in down-town Los Angeles. Mrs. Monroe managed the hotel while her husband was occupied building road for the Southern Pacific from Spadra to Yuma, and later from Los Angeles to Lang. Many miles of railroad were also laid in Alameda County by Mr. Monroe.

Between 1880 and 1882 he served on the City Council of Los Angeles.

Mr. Collis P. Huntington was determined to make the Southern Pacific a transcontinental road in its own right. To accomplish this it was necessary to carry the railroad beyond Yuma, through Arizona and Texas; and so in 1882 Mr. Monroe was sent to Texas on another construction job for the "Big Four".

Comfortable living quarters were established in especially equipped box cars, which were moved along the new tracks as the work progressed, and so Mr. Monroe had the pleasure of living with his family even though he was on the move through western Texas. Their residence in San Antonio was marked by the loss of little seven-year old Jesse Lee, and by the birth of a daughter whom they named Mabelle Huntington.

The portion of the Southern Pacific road through Texas, built by Mr. Monroe, was from San Antonio westward to El Paso. When that was finished he built another railroad from Spofford Junction (on his newly ~~constructed~~ ^{constructed} line), to Durango, Mexico. This railroad crossed the Rio Grande between Eagle Pass (on the American side) and Piedras Negras (on the Mexican side).

In 1884 Mr. and Mrs. Monroe bought up a car-load of mules which he shipped to the Los Angeles market, selling most of them at two hundred dollars apiece, but keeping sixteen of the best for his own purposes. The profits from the mules and the savings from the railroad contracting gave him a secure outlook for the future coupled with a desire for a permanent home. Before starting to look for a home site he bought a spring-wagon and a span of ponies. With the family loaded into the wagon, drawn by "Ruth and Naomi", he and "Mother" Monroe, in April, 1884, began their search for an ideal country home. When they paused under the magnificent oak trees, located at the corner of present-day Primrose and Oaks Avenues, Monrovia, they told their guide and the owner of the land, E. J. Baldwin, that there was the location they desired. He bought two hundred seventy-acres from Mr. Baldwin, the price being one hundred twenty dollars an acre. An adjoining hundred and sixty acres were purchased from Mr. Beal for five thousand dollars.

They moved onto the newly acquired property immediately. Temporary living-quarters were established for the family in a tent. With the mules which he had retained, Mr. Monroe put a large crew of men to work clearing the land of rocks and underbrush. By the middle of the summer of 1884 a small cottage had been built and was ready for the family. With the family thus comfortably housed, time enough to build a more comfortable and palatial home was taken. This house was known as "The Oaks", as it was placed among the beautiful oak trees which had first attracted the Monroes to the region.

In 1885, friends of Mr. Monroe, the Hon. E. F. Spence, former Mayor of Los Angeles, and Judge J. D. Bicknell, a Prominent Los Angeles attorney, together with Mr. J. F. Crank, Purchased land adjoining Monroe's from Mr. Baldwin. In the spring of 1886 they and Mr. Monroe decided to found a town upon the land. After it was laid out the new townsite was given the name of Monrovia, in honor of Mr. Monroe.

He served the new town as its first mayor and headed all the early constructive movements of the community. Monrovia flourished in the superlative form until the boom burst in 1888.

Dull days and inaction made it possible for distant lands to again receive from Mr. Monroe a response to the call to build more railroads. This time it was Chile, South America, which claimed him. The family accompanied him, but political unrest in the country made it necessary for all the family except George and Mr. Monroe to return to Monrovia. There in Chile during the year 1889 he laid one

hundred miles of railroad, the furthestmost south of any railroad then built on the Western Hemisphere. The railroad was being built for the government. A revolution resulted in placing a new government in power with the result that everything pertaining to the railway construction was confiscated, and father and son were glad to leave the country.

Building fifteen hundred miles of railroad for the Mexican government next occupied the construction engineer from Monrovia. While working there in Old Mexico his family joined him again. There Myrtle Monroe met the young civil engineer, Bruce C. Bailey, whom she married in Zacatecas. After George returned to California he met and married Annetta Evans, the daughter of Monrovia's pioneer merchant tailor.

A gold mine in Old Mexico next attracted Mr. Monroe's attention after the construction job for the government was finished; but the Mexican mining fever was short-lived and soon Monrovia discovered its founder in the role of manager of its palatial hotel, the Vista Grande.

In 1896 and part of 1897 the Monroe's lived in Visalia, California while he was putting in the Visalia City Water System. When the Klondike gold field called to the world in 1897, one of the first to respond was Wm. N. Monroe. He went directly from Visalia to Dawson, Alaska. Mrs. Monroe did not accompany him. Unmined gold had the power to attract but not to hold him, so his stay in Dawson, Alaska, was brief.

His next activities were centered in the vicinity of Long Beach where he put in the Bowton Water System and laid four miles of pipe to Terminal Island. For an engineer by the name of Hawgood,

he laid several miles of pipe-line at Ranchita, near Compton.

In the latter part of 1900, Mr. and Mrs. Monroe lived for a while in Seattle, Washington.

In 1902, Mr. Monroe received a contract from the Edison Company to build a ditch from the Kern River, at Kernville, to Bodfish, to carry water needed for creating electric power. His son George, and his brother, Felix Milton, were left to complete the contract when Mr. W. N. Monroe was summoned to Nome, Alaska, to construct the "Wild Goose Railroad" for Mr. Charles K. Lane. This was the railroad farthest north of any on the Western Hemisphere; thus he gained the distinction of having built the railroads of the New World lying farther to the north and south. After building the road and a wharf at Nome, he filled the position of General Manager of the Nome Arctic Railway for ten years.

Living with him in Alaska were Mrs. Monroe and his daughter Mabelle, who met and married Thomas Dyer in Nome, where he was engaged in the hardware business.

When Mr. and Mrs. Monroe returned to the states from Nome Alaska in 1915, they lived for a time in Monrovia at 324 North Magnolia.

1916 and 1917 were spent living on a homestead near Inyokern in the Mojave Desert. Being a civil war veteran, it was not necessary for them to stay the accustomed three years to prove up. He was seventy-six years old at that time.

When they left the desert, they purchased property on the water-front at Long Beach. Their residence was in Long Beach during 1918. Most of 1919 was spent in Inglewood where their

daughter Mabelle was living. Then they traded the Long Beach property for a ranch near Escondido, and in 1920, announced that they were going to move onto the ranch. The children remonstrated that father and mother were too old for ranch life, but age was never a barrier to that young hearted couple and onto the ranch they moved. Soon father Monroe demonstrated that he could pass a Civil Service examination at the age of seventy-nine. As a result, he secured the contract for building a ditch on a nearby Indian reservation.

After the children were married and gone the large house in Monrovia known as "The Oaks" was sold, and the handsome old house where many visitors to the locality had been entertained for weeks and months at a time, passed into other hands. But early Monrovia will continue to picture as its kind host and gracious hostess Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Monroe, who during the early days of Monrovia entertained many people of outstanding culture, wealth, and fame.

When the Monroes drifted back to Monrovia to live again in the town they had founded and nourished, they moved into a small cottage, independently maintaining their own home until death took Mother Monroe away on February 8, 1932. The owner still of a brilliant and keen mind, but somewhat broken physically by the loss of his faithful companion, Mr. Monroe disposed of his home and since then has divided his time between the homes of his three surviving children, - George, Myrtle, and Mabelle. Milton, the eldest son, was killed in a train wreck at Pomona December 25, 1900.

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At the time this is written, Daddy Monroe, as he is affectionately referred to by his fellow townspeople, is celebrating the ninety-fourth anniversary of his birth. Two weeks ago he led the Monrovia Day parade, when Monrovia celebrated the forty-ninth anniversary of its natal day.

Few people's lives have been so versatile, so useful and so filled with kindness and attainment in many fields of achievement, as has his. The fact that he has given away most of this world's material goods, which he has earned, speaks of itself for his generous nature. A man beloved for what he is and for what he has done, William Newton Monroe.

I am indebted for this material to Mr. W. N. Monroe, himself, and to Mrs. Myrtle Bailey, Mrs. Mabelle Dyer, and Mr. and Mrs. George Monroe. Their time and patience answering countless questions is greatly appreciated.

This short biography was read to Mr. Monroe. A few corrections in the original manuscript were made by him. The corrected manuscript received his approval. Seven months later, during the holiday season he slipped from this world and joined his beloved companion, on December 26, 1935.

Edith Harbison Hathaway