

Civil War Chaplain From Fulton

By Barbara Mask

Did you know that the Methodist minister from Fulton was a chaplain during the Civil War? Probably not. Members of the Fulton Historical Society recently attended a program in Prophetstown, IL on the Battle of Perryville and learned that William Hutchinson Smith, a Fulton pastor, served for eighteen months as a chaplain. He kept a diary which has been typed and annotated by Mr. Fred South, a retired history teacher, who also wrote a book about the Battle of Perryville. Smith's diary is an insightful and captivating read about life on the front lines and a personal account of Fulton during the war.

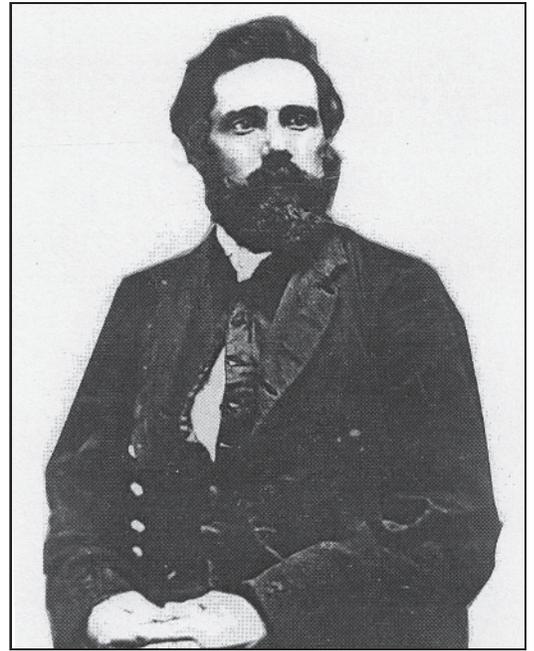
Smith writes, "First then, how I came to be a Chaplain of a Regiment?" He was asked to present a sword to Lieutenant Fife at a ceremony in Fulton and then was asked to make a similar, formal presentation to Captain Robert Hall (also of Fulton) of Company I of the 75th Regiment. Members of the 75th were impressed with Pastor Smith and requested that he serve as their chaplain. Dr. W. C. Snyder, the local post master, responded in the affirmative and appointed Smith. "You must certainly go then," was his formal announcement.

Chaplain Smith's diary begins on September 13, 1862 which is three weeks before the Battle of Perryville on October 8, 1862. Whiteside County historical societies have commemorated the battle on its 150th anniversary. Many of the soldiers at Perryville were from Whiteside County. The last entry is on September 22, 1864. He served for 18 months and believed that his family and church needed him to return to Fulton. The Methodist Church was then located on the southeast corner of 11th Avenue and 7th Street (formerly the apartment building destroyed by fire in 2004).

Because he was a chaplain, he moved about the troops and front lines experiencing the great difficulties of daily living that they endured. He was also privileged to return to Fulton periodically and one of the most impressive points of the diary are the interactions with the boys in camp wanting to know all the news from Fulton and vice versa. He served as a payroll courier delivering the needed dollars to the families here at home.

On Sunday, October 21, the Fulton Historical Society will sponsor our tribute to the Whiteside County soldiers. The program is presented by Mr. Ron Koehn, a retired history teacher in the River Bend School District. He traveled to Perryville, now a national historic site, to research the topic.

The program is at 2:00. Civil War newspapers and other military items will be on display. Refreshments will be served. Please join us.



William Hutchinson Smith