



FRIENDLY SONS & DAUGHTERS OF SAINT PATRICK

ESTABLISHED 1771

A look back in History : The Friendly Sons & Daughters of St. Patrick – Philadelphia, Pa.

By: Joseph P. Heenan

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Corporal John A. Kelley

Pennsylvania 103rd., Infantry, Regimental History.

Obtained from the historical records of the Friendly Sons & Daughters of St. Patrick and article written in 2014 by Mr. Dennis Segelquist



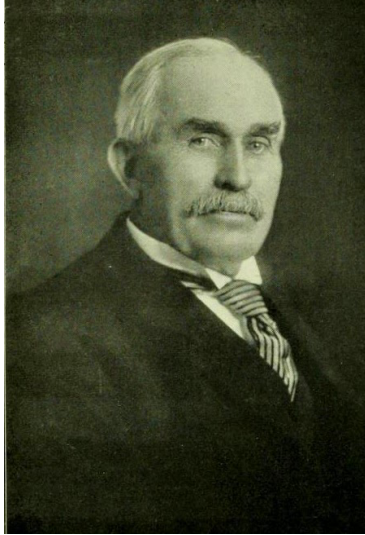
John A. Kelley Member of The Society of The Friendly Sons of St. Patrick

John A. Kelley, of Company I, was not only the youngest member of his company, but no member of his Regiment had a better record for duty. When he enlisted, he lacked four months and thirteen days of being fifteen, and after three years, six months and twenty-seven days of continuous service, when he was honorably discharged from the service, with only ten others of his original company left, he was then only two months and fourteen days past eighteen, the minimum age required at time of enlistment. A few years before his death, Capt. William Fielding, in conversation with his brother, Frank Fielding, an attorney at law, at Clearfield, Pa., said of Corporal Kelley : "John Kelley was the youngest soldier in the company. He never shirked a duty, never asked any favors, never asked to be relieved of any duties and never missed a battle in which the company or Regiment was engaged."

Corp. Kelley received a flesh wound at battle of Fair Oaks, but did not leave the Regiment. He was promoted to Corporal August 25, 1863, when he had only passed his sixteenth year by three or four months. He re-enlisted as a Veteran, Jan. 1, 1864, and was captured with the Regiment at Plymouth. He was a prisoner of war for ten months and eleven days; was confined in Andersonville Military prison five months and a week; in Charleston, S. C, race track three weeks, and over four months at Florence. He was paroled Mar. 1, 1865, after which he received a furlough for thirty days, his only absence from the company, except as a prisoner of war, during his term of service. To this furlough he was doubly entitled, by reason of being a paroled prisoner, and by virtue of his reenlistment as a veteran. He was discharged at Harrisburg, Pa., July 13, 1865, with his company, there being only ten of the original 105 members remaining.

There are many claimants for the honor of being the youngest soldier in the Federal Army, during the Civil War. In the judgment of Mr. Segelquist if Corporal Kelley was not the youngest to bear arms continuously, from 1861, until the close of the war, no other soldier of his age can, at least, surpass his record for duty well performed. Corporal Kelley was born in County Donegal, Ireland, April 29, 1847. His father was James Kelley, his mother Katherine McFadden Kelley. He came to America when a mere child. When the war broke out he was employed in a country store in the little town of Murrinsville, Butler County, Pa.

This small hamlet was then an important point for drovers and commercial men to meet farmers and people of the neighborhood. The war being the principal topic of conversation, young Kelley took a lively interest in the discussions which he heard. In Dec, 1861, when Fielding and Kiester were around recruiting, they suggested to Kelley that he enlist. Encouraged thereby, he slipped out in advance of the other recruits and enlisted the next day. When he returned from the army in 1865, both his parents were dead. He took a short commercial course in Sheaffer's Commercial Academy, at Pittsburgh, Pa., and in December, 1865, secured a position as commissary clerk with Charles McFadden, then a very prominent young railroad contractor, and was with him for some years.

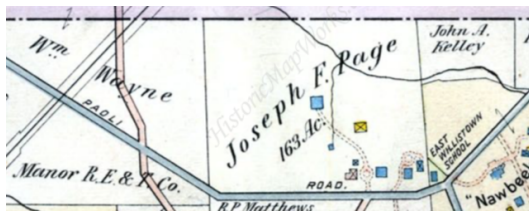


His rise was rapid from clerk to foreman and from foreman to superintendent and afterward a partner with his employer on some of his important contracts. He has been connected with some of the largest contracts in the East, with very successful results, in consequence of which he had amassed a comfortable fortune. He was viewed by his business associates, as one of the best equipped all around contractors in Philadelphia.

Corporal Kelley was married in February, 1876, to Katherine M. Sweazey, who was born in Hunterdon County, N. J. ; father Elias Sweazey, mother Charlotte Sweazey, nee Smith. Of this union there were four children, viz.; Agnes M, Katherine, John A. Jr., Charles L.

His first wife died January, 1884. He was married again on November 23, 1886, to Martha Ambrosia McGovern, born at Port Clinton, Pa. ; father Edward McGovern, mother Mary McGovern, nee Keane. Of this union there were seven children: Mary Martha, James, Francis A., Joseph Francis, Helen Mary, Edwin J. and Margaret.

Corporal Kelley was one of the substantial citizens of Philadelphia, and actively engaged in railroad building and in the execution of large building contracts. When a youth, for the three years preceding his enlistment into the army, he served as an altar boy (acolyte) at St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church at Murrinsville, Butler County, Penna. In his Company were many members of the same faith, who died while confined in Andersonville prison, and young Kelley, zealous in the teachings inculcated in him in his youth, was active in seeing the last rites of the Church were given his dying comrades by seeking the faithful servant of the church who daily ministered to the suffering and dying in Andersonville prison.



John A. Kelley was an active life member of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, of Philadelphia., and a life member of the American Catholic Historical Society. He resided in Chester County Pa.