
THE STORY OF JOSEPHUS SUTTON

ON THE WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY, NO ONE SPOKE OF IT AFTER THE WAR

BY KATE MONTRESSOR

Josephus Sutton (aka Joseph) was one of four children born to Rev. Milton Ellis Sutton and Mary Wynn. Rev. Sutton was a well-known traveling minister, preaching and praying at a different places a couple of times a month. The entire family would travel with the father, and all were involved in the Baptist church.

It's hard to imagine the household conversations at the time, but everyone in the family had strong beliefs and convictions, as evidenced by their activities.

When living in Bonaparte, Iowa, Josephus crossed into the state of Missouri to enlist in the Confederate Army at Springfield. He was 17. The age of enlistment was 18, so he obviously lied about his age.

Iowa was a Union state, and men were required to register for military service. There were no Confederate recruiting stations in Iowa.

The Civil War was about slavery. But people joined the Confederate cause for many reasons. Josephus didn't own any slaves (nor did anyone else in his family) and didn't own any land. Many were angered by the prospect of the "invading Northern army" coming in and telling them what to do. Fear that free slaves would mean the end of society and the end of good jobs was also predominant. The same scare tactics that are used today were in full force during this time. And maybe Josephus was simply angry with his father.

No records have been found to explain why Josephus joined the Confederacy. If I could travel back in time, this would be one of the questions I would ask.

Josephus joined the 3rd Missouri Infantry, Company D, as a Private in January of 1862. His company was active at Iuka and Corinth. On 12 May 1863, during the Battle of Port Gibson, Mississippi (part of the Vicksburg Campaign), Josephus and his regiment were captured by Union soldiers and imprisoned at Port Gibson. On 12 Jun 1863, he was part of a prisoner exchange, and was released. Before releasing their prisoners, the Union would require the soldiers to sign a pledge to never fight against the Union again. Those who didn't sign weren't released. Josephus must have agreed, but no records have been found. He never returned to the war and not much is known about him at this time.

As required by law, he appears in Iowa's conscription records for the next 10 years but was never asked to serve.

Josephus returned to his parent's home in Iowa where he met Martha Jane Craig. On 14 Feb 1867 in Bonaparte, Iowa, they were married. They had 3 children before Martha died of tuberculosis. The children were pre-teens, and Josephus was not up to raising them, so his father, Rev. Milton, adopted them. His own mother had died by this time, but his father had remarried. It was thought that this was a better environment for the children because Josephus was traveling and preaching. He apparently came home frequently, so he wasn't a total stranger to his children.

Records about him are scarce. He seems to have done some missionary work among the Native Americans at Crow Creek, Dakota. Sometime after his children were grown, Josephus worked as a ward supervisor at a hospital. There is some evidence that he married later in life, but no marriage records are found. The 1930 census lists him as divorced.

Josephus was admitted to the Chicago Home for Incurables, where he passed away on 12 Sep 1932. It's likely that he contracted tuberculosis, as this institution was renowned for its care of such terminal patients.

He never owned any land and was never wealthy but never poor. He never pursued "money-making" ventures, nor work conventional jobs. What were his motivations for becoming a Confederate soldier? It wasn't fear of losing jobs or lifestyle. The Yankees never came and pushed him around. No one else in the family was on the Confederate side. Although never spoken of, the war experience must have affected his life. Families are complicated.

His only son, Ellis Craig Sutton, died in 1919 during the Great Influenza epidemic, and with him died any family stories and adventures. Josephus and Ellis share a grave marker at Forest Home Cemetery in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa.