

Case 15: William Austin born 1831-1836 in Pennsylvania who died August 18, 1901 in Los Angeles, California.

The military history on the registers of the Pacific Branch of the National Home at Sawtelle, Los Angeles, California, shows that William Austin enlisted on April 27, 1861 at the arsenal in St. Louis, Missouri as a Private in Co. E. 1st Missouri Light Artillery. He was a Corporal when discharged on June 9, 1864 in Brownsville, TX after 37 months term of service. Although it was not mentioned in the Home records, the Muster Rolls for William show he first mustered in to his unit on June 10, 1861 at Boonville, Missouri. He served as a Teamster for the Company E, from October until December 6, 1861.

The muster roll record also shows that William joined by transfer from earlier service in the 5th MO Regiment by order of General Lyon. The name of his unit as Company E, 1st Regiment Missouri Volunteers was changed to Battery E, 1st Regiment Missouri Light Artillery. William's age was recorded as twenty-six when he enlisted in 1861.

William's service is also proven on the Pacific Register by his pension certificate #959548 which he applied for on December 8, 1896 as an invalid. William's disability was a rupture of his stomach and general debility. The rupture happened in August of 1862 at Henry County, Missouri. A Casualty Sheet in his service records shows that he was wounded on August 10, 1861 in a battle at Springfield, Missouri.

The domestic history for William Austin when he first was admitted to the Pacific Branch Home in Los Angeles on March 30, 1897; describes him as age sixty-six, five feet and eight and one half inches tall, of light complexion, with gray hair. He was born in Pennsylvania, a Protestant, and a stage driver by profession. His residence after discharge from the military was listed as Ukiah, Mendocino County, California. He was a widower and his nearest relative was not a relative, but a friend, named William H. Miller of Ukiah, California. This William H. Miller was shown on the 1900 U. S. Census of Ukiah as a liveryman operating a livery stable.

William Austin's military pension of eight dollars a month was listed as his income. He stayed in the Home for only four years and four months and eighteen days before he died on August 18, 1901. The cause of death was Pydo-Nephritis (kidney disease). The worth of his personal effects was appraised at five dollars. William had forty two dollars cash when he died. He was buried in the Sawtelle National Home Cemetery, Section 6, Row D-15, which is now the Los Angeles National Cemetery.

To find out more about the early history of this stagecoach driver and his trek from Pennsylvania all the way across the United States, many records were

searched. They are listed below. No matching record for this William was found in the AFAOA database. No parents were found on the 1850 U. S. Census for Pennsylvania that could be proved as belonging to William. No 1860 or 1870 U. S. Census for the states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, or Missouri had a record that fit the most possible name, age, place of birth and occupation for this William.

The earliest post-war record that can definitely be identified as belonging to this William is in Canyon City, Fremont County, Colorado on June 12, 1880. It shows that William Austin was born about 1836 in Pennsylvania. His parents were also both born in Pennsylvania. He was a single man, a stage driver who lived next to the largest hotel in town operated by Bernard and Cora Murray. He also was living next to T. B. Henry and W. B. Groseclose who were express agents. On the other side of William's abode was a Chinese laundry and a liquor store.

This new and prosperous little town was located west of Colorado City, at the mouth of the Royal Gorge and had steady traffic to the early silver and lead mines of Colorado. The Murray Saloon in the hotel next door to William Austin was said in the history of Canyon City to be the center of political activity and commerce. It is no wonder that the Murray Hotel was full of engineers, traveling salesmen, doctors, lawyers, and a wholesale liquor dealer. There were express mail stage routes to the surrounding mines and there probably was an overland stage route to Salt Lake City and beyond to California.

It is not known if William Austin's wife died before 1880 or if he married later. Whether he had any descendants is not known. He was a widower before 1897.

The only clue for further research that was found for an Austin in Canyon City, Colorado was the burial of an infant, sex unknown, named Collie Austin who died November 12, 1878 and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery. It is not known if this child was related to William. There was also a Collins Austin born 1794 in CT, a tinman who had a son named William Austin who was born about 1832, and was working as a turner. This family was on the U. S. Census of August 30, 1850 in Spring Garden District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is not known if this was the family of the subject of this study.

The most interesting information that was found about William comes from a San Francisco newspaper, *The Daily Alta California*. It reminds one of the Old West cowboy movies of Tom Mix, Audie Murphy and John Wayne. William Austin, was, indeed, a stagecoach driver on a route from San Francisco to Ukiah, California from sometime before 1893. The stagecoach line was owned by Jeremiah DePuy "Doc" Curtis of Ukiah. Census records show that the "Famous" Doc Curtis was first a livery stable keeper in Sonoma County,

California in 1870. Then he married Fannie “Tiny” Walker about 1878 and moved to Powellville, Humboldt County, California where he was a stock farmer. So, Doc Curtis must have started his stage line after 1880, and hired William Austin as a secondary driver.

The story of the terrible stagecoach accident of William Austin and Doc Curtis follows:

Fall Over a Precipice, Narrow Escape of Two Men in the Overturning of a Wagon

“17 March 1893. Ukiah – Dave Sawyer, a farmer of Little Lake, rode galloping his horse to town this afternoon, announcing the death at Blue Slide Pass, thirteen miles from Ukiah, of “Doc” Curtis, the famous mountain stageline-owner and driver. He reported that a slide had carried the driver, four horses, and the stage into a deep canyon; also that William Austin, another driver, who accompanied Curtis, was dying.

The town was shocked by the news, and over a score of men on horseback and in light buggies and carts accompanied also by a wagon with mattresses, started for Blue Slide on the Little Lake Road, to learn particulars and render assistance.

Shortly before 8 o’clock this evening the first returns were received to the effect that the stage loaded with furniture, had rolled down a precipice 100 feet deep and had been smashed into splinters, the horses being killed.

Curtis, it is said, had received several serious scalp wounds and was unconscious for ninety minutes and Austin was severely but not seriously injured; also that the wounded men would be transported here tonight by slow stages.

Curtis and Austin started this forenoon for Round Valley with household goods belonging to Lieutenant Connelly, the new Indian Agent, intending to return next week with the Round Valley Commissioners.”

Ukiah Cemetery records show that Jeremiah D. Curtis died May 4, 1894, if this date is correct, Doc Curtis lived another year after the accident. If the date on the monument is incorrect he might have only lived for a couple of weeks. Some descendants say that he died as a result of the accident.

In spite of his injuries from the stage wreck of 1893 and old war wounds, William Austin was able to live in Ukiah four more years, on his own, or perhaps with the help of his friend, the livery stable operator, William H. Miller and his large family. Maybe it was Miller, or another stage driver friend, who took William to the Pacific Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Los Angeles to rest for his final years.

Source: *Historical Register of National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, 1866-1938*; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M1749, 282 rolls); Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C. .

U. S. Census, 1880, Canyon City, Fremont County, Colorado. 12 Jun 1880, Page 49A, Dwelling 212, Family 222. William Austin, age 44, stage driver, single, b PA, parents both b PA.

U. S. Census 1900, Los Angeles County, California, Sawtelle. Pacific Branch National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. 14 Jun, page 243A. list of inmates. William Austin, b Jun 1831 PA, father PA, mother PA, single, age 69, can read and write.

California Digital Newspaper Collection. Daily Alta California, San Francisco, California, Vol 73, No 107, 17 Mar 1893. Article: “Fall Over a Precipice”

Footnote.com U. S. Military Pension Files William Austin, Co. E, 1st Regt. MO Inf. Date filled Dec 8, 1896, App # invalid 1.183.755. Certificate 959548. Note: A5 MO Inf and E 1st MO L A.

Footnote.com U. S. Military Records, Muster Rolls. William Austin Co E 1st Reg MO Light Artillery.

National Cemetery Administration. U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006 National Cemetery Administration. Nationwide Gravesite Locator

Findagrave.com Greenwood Cemetery, Canon City, Fremont Co, CO and Ukiah Cem, Mendocino Co, CO.

Genforum.com. Curtis Family Forum. Search for “Doc” Curtis of Ukiah, CA.

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