

Fourteen: An Agricultural Legacy

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SPRINGFIELD - Horace Capron Sr.: farmer, entrepreneur, family man, Soldier, statesman, and nation-builder, an all round renaissance man who has tie to the 1-14th Agricultural Development Team (ADT). He is a small piece of the historical fabric that is woven into the Illinois National Guard legacy.

Born Aug. 31, 1804 in Attleboro, Mass., to enterprising parents he spent his childhood learning the how to be a successful entrepreneur. His father, Seth Capron, was a doctor who established the first cotton mill in the state of New York, the Oneida Factory. Seth also formed Oriskany Woolen Mills, now believed to be the oldest existing textile factory in the United States, currently called H. Waterbury and Sons, Inc. Horace learned about textiles long before the industrial revolution hit at the turn of the century. The family while wealthier than most, suffered the typical financial hardships that came with business ownership.

Horace began adulthood with his share of disappointment. First, financial setbacks kept him from attending college. Next, his hopes were dashed when he failed to receive a commission from West Point. Undaunted, Horace aspired to work in the family trade of manufacturing. In 1829, Horace moved to Maryland and quickly set to work running a mill on the Gunpowder River. Misfortune struck a cruel blow when the mill burned down. From 1832 to 1835, Horace ran the Savage factory, another textile mill on the Patuxent River. Extremely involved in his community, he helped suppress labor riots on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. The Governor gained notice of Horace's leadership abilities and commissioned him a major and then colonel in the Maryland Militia.

Horace married Louisa Snowden June 5, 1834 bringing wealth and land holdings into his fortune. He established ownership of the Patuxent Manufacturing Company. The marriage brought six children. Soon, his wife died, finances collapsed and his business resulted in another failure. After a short government career in Texas, he put down roots in Alden, Ill., in 1852.

Starting over, he remarried and with his children in tow bought his mother's farm and settled down to a life of agriculture. Eventually, farming took over as Horace's new passion, especially his heard of Devon cattle that won several prizes at the Chicago World's Fair. Soon, a second farm in Peoria was purchased. Life remained enjoyable until war broke out in 1861 and in 1863, Horace joined his three sons in service. In the fall of 1862, at 59, Horace raised the 14th Illinois Cavalry Regiment and Gov. Yates appointed him colonel and commander of the unit. The war brought more tragedy and hardship to the Capron family.

Capron excelled in the leadership role, evidenced by the numerous times he temporarily commanded larger units on the field. The 14th Cavalry participated in the pursuit and capture of Morgan's Raiders, the battles of Knoxville and Dandridge, the East Tennessee Campaign of 1864, the March to the Sea, and the battles of Franklin and Nashville. February 6, 1864, Horace

Capron, Jr., fell mortally wounded while heading a charge upon the enemy in North Carolina while serving in the 8th Illinois Cavalry. This son had previously received the Medal of Honor for gallantry at Chickahominy. Two other sons, Albert and Osmond were never quite the same, having suffered from their time in rebel prison camps. Horace suffered a bad fall from his horse that led to his release from service in January 1865. Upon return to the farm, Horace found his precious herd and farm nearly destroyed due to the incompetence of the hired help in his stead. At 60, Horace once again found himself starting over.

Through his political connections Horace obtained the title commissioner of the Department of Agriculture in November 1867. He served under Presidents Johnson and Grant. In this capacity he oversaw the distribution of seeds, exports, farm tool inventions, experiments and agricultural colleges. He held this position until 1871 when he accepted an offer to provide agricultural expertise to the country of Japan.

Son Osmond depended on his father financially after injuries, including being blinded, while rescuing people from a hotel fire. Financially drained, Horace decided to undertake the challenge proposed to him by Japan. He introduced American farming methods to inhabit the island of Hokkaido with Japanese citizens. While serving as special advisor to the commission in Hokkaido, Japan, he introduced American farming practice and equipment. Horace introduced wheat and rye, which led to the creation of Sapporo beer, one of the first breweries in Japan that is still in existence today. Before his death he sold his home in Washington D.C., to be the site of Japan's first embassy.

Horace spent his last days working on his memoirs. Feb. 21, 1885 he witnessed the dedication of the Washington Monument. The cold temperature was too much for his 80-year-old body to handle and he passed away of a stroke Feb. 22, 1885. The legacy of Horace Capron Sr., lives on within the 1-14th Agricultural Development Team.

The 1-14th ADT named after the 14 of Capron's Cavalry unit in the Civil War is currently deployed to Afghanistan.

“It is important for the team to understand how those in the past have sacrificed to serve our country and how we are now being called on to do the same,” said Col. Fred Allen, commander of the Illinois Army National Guard 1-14th ADT. “There is also great pride in the long history of the Illinois Army National Guard which the 14th Regiment belonged to.”

Before the deployment Soldiers in the unit were briefed on the life of Horace Capron and the importance of the number 14. Horace overcame many obstacles, eventually found a life that he loved and through his expertise improved agriculture for the United States and Japan.