

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



Loyal Legion Vignettes



**CAPTAIN NELSON THOMASSON, COMPANY E, 5TH INFANTRY, USA
(1839 Kentucky - 1933 Illinois)**

**Insignia Number 5136, Original Member of the Illinois Commandery
Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States**

**By
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Nelson Thomasson

(Civil War Photograph From a Private Collection, Sketch from *A Biographical History of Prominent Men of the Great West*)

Nelson Thomasson, Sr., was born on October 15, 1839 in Kentucky, one of seven children born to William Poindexter and Charlotte (Leonard) Thomasson. On his father's side, he can trace his genealogy back to the Huguenots and on his mother's side to the Pilgrim fathers.

William Poindexter Thomasson was born on October 8, 1797 in New Castle, Henry County, Kentucky, and although very young he served in Captain Duncan's Company in the War of 1812. He later studied law, was admitted to the bar, and commenced a practice in Corydon, Indiana, all before he was 21. William became a member of the Indiana State House of Representatives (1818-1820) and served as Prosecuting Attorney of Corydon in 1818. Corydon at that time was not only the capital of Indiana, but of the whole Northwest Territory. He soon after moved to Louisville, Kentucky, and was for elected as a Whig to the 28th and 29th Congresses (March 4, 1843 - March 3, 1847) from the Louisville District. He served in the same Congress with Abraham Lincoln, Chase, Hamlin, and others. He declined to be a candidate for re-nomination and then moved his family to Chicago, Illinois, where he resumed the practice of law.

Nelson Thomasson, Sr. received a good education, attending private schools and the academy at Louisville. When he was 18 years old, he moved to Chicago and became a student and clerk in the law offices of Messers. Morris, Thomasson, and Blackburn, and later held a similar position in the office of Mr. John G. Rogers, afterward judge of the circuit court of Cook County for several terms. He attended the law lectures at Louisville, Kentucky during the junior class of 1858-1859, and also attended the law lectures of 1860-1861 in Chicago. His name appears in the catalogue of the first year's graduates of the Chicago Law School with Judge Henry Booth delivering his diploma.

At the opening of the War of the Rebellion, Nelson abandoned his law studies, enlisted in the Army on August 26, 1861 as a Private in Sturges Rifles Illinois Regiment, and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant on October 31, 1861. The Sturges Rifles were one of the most noted companies that Chicago sent to the war, and being one of the only two companies in the Union Army not connected with a regiment. The companies were mustered into the service for the special purpose as General McClellan's bodyguard, and was mustered out at the time General McClellan was relieved of his command. After the campaign in Western Virginia, Nelson was discharged from the Sturgis Rifles to accept a commission as 2nd Lieutenant of Company E, 5th Regiment, United States Infantry on October 31, 1861. He was at once ordered to his regiment in New Mexico, and when on the way there he was retained to drill and instruct recruits, first at Fort Leavenworth, and afterwards at Fort Riley.

During his five years' stay in New Mexico, he was an almost daily companion of the famous Kit Carson. After joining his regiment at Fort Craig, he served in the campaign against the Texans, the Texans being commanded by the Confederate Generals Sibley and Bailey, and against the numerous Indian tribes of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico, under General Canby. In addition the 5th Regiment, General Canby's command included several of the regular army, three Colorado regiments, four California regiments, and one company of artillery. The regiment took part in the action at Peralta, New Mexico on April 15, 1862. General Canby had concentrated his forces and on that date drove the Confederates out of their positions in front and in rear of the town. During the afternoon, preparations were made for continuing the action, but, that night the enemy evacuated the town and retreated towards Texas. A vigorous pursuit was made, and during the night of the 16th the enemy abandoned a large portion of their train and fled into the mountains. It was during this time that occurred the celebrated Navajo Campaign, led by the famous fighter, General James H. Carleton. His entire command was engaged in this campaign some three years, and he helped remove the Navajo Indians from the west of the Rio Grande to Fort Sumner on the Pecos River, and kept them there until they became semi-civilized, when General Sherman had them returned to Fort Wingate on the Rio Puerco. On the August 10, 1862 four companies of the regiment met General Carleton's column from California at Las Cruces, and at the end of September Companies D, E, F, and G were at Peralta under Captain Bristol. The regiment remained in New Mexico without further incident of note until the redistribution of the regular regiments in 1866. Nelson was promoted to 1st Lieutenant on July 1, 1863, served as Regimental Quartermaster from May 1, 1865 to November 18, 1866, and promoted Captain on January 7, 1867. In 1866 the regiment was then assigned to the Department of the Missouri, which was comprised of the States of Missouri, Kansas, and the territories of Colorado and New Mexico. On October 20, 1868, regimental headquarters and two companies were at Fort Riley, and the other companies were at Forts Wallace, Hays, Lyon, Reynolds, and Camps Davidson and Cottonwood Creek, all in Kansas. The service of the regiment in Kansas was far from being uneventful, yet few opportunities were offered for brilliant achievements. On several occasions, Captain Thomasson's regiment was ordered to return to the states, but the orders were countermanded by General Canby upon the plea that he could not spare the regiment from his command. After the close of the war, Captain Thomasson was engaged in recruiting service for one year at Chicago, and another year at Newport Barracks, after which he was ordered to join his regiment on the western plains, where he continued in service until December 1870. Upon the reduction of the regular army about that time, Captain Thomasson resigned from the service and was honorably discharged on December 28, 1870, receiving one year's pay in advance, as 600 other regular army officers did at this time.

Upon retiring to private life, Captain Thomasson returned to Chicago, and at once engaged in the real estate business, meeting with marked success from the start. His unusual success continued uninterruptedly until the financial crisis of 1873 swept over the country, when, like so many others, he lost nearly everything that he had made, but fortunately he was enabled to meet his obligations, and pay his debts dollar for dollar. During the several years succeeding the panic, when the real estate business was paralyzed, and the values were depreciated, and trade in all lines was dull, but he never lost heart, and with strong determination to regain his losses he worked with a will, much of the time 14 hours per day.

With the return of prosperous times, Captain Thomasson's business revived, so that he not only regained his former financial standing, but far surpassed it, and by the 1890s was counted among the wealthy real estate owners of Chicago. In connection with an extensive brokerage business, he handled much of his own property, and with facilities unsurpassed he was always prepared to buy, sell, lease or exchange city or suburban property of every description. His long experience rendered his opinion of value to those seeking his counsels. While Captain Thomasson owned a large amount of real estate, his investments extended into other channels as well. He was a large stockholder in all the Chicago street railway companies, and owned a large amount of stock in various buildings, among which was the Chemical Bank building, and in many of the industrial companies. In 1893, he was made a director in one of the big city railways.

Captain Thomasson was a man of fine personal and social qualities, and was exceedingly popular among his wide circle of friends and acquaintances. He was a Republican - neither a partisan nor a sycophant - but was content to work hard at every election for the success of good officers and honest government. He said he had been an "office-holder" for ten years of his life, and was satisfied to let others scramble for offices. He was a member of Oriental Lodge No. 33, A.F. & A.M., and also of the Apollo Commandery of Knights Templar. He was a member of the Union League, Washington Park Club, the Union Club on the North Side, and the Illinois Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Captain Thomasson was a man of fine literary attainments, and in his elegant library had probably one of the finest collections of Napoleana and Americana in Chicago. He was said to be an interesting conversationalist and a ready thinker, quick and active in his movements, and had a decidedly military bearing. His success in life was due to his own unaided efforts. He had earned for himself a name that will always be identified with the history of Chicago and few men were wider or more favorably known in the city of Chicago than was Nelson Thomasson.

Captain Thomasson was married on June 10, 1873 to Miss Nanniene Mason Norton (born December 25, 1852, died March 1918), and they had three children: Leonard Thomasson, Nelson Thomasson Jr., and Nanniene Norton (Thomasson) Offutt. His wife descended from the celebrated Douglas family, which emigrated from Scotland and settled in Virginia. No lady was more popular or more admired in her growing circle of friends in Chicago, Louisville, and New York, the first place being her home, and the other two where she frequently visited. Nelson died October 20, 1933 in Chicago, Illinois and is buried with his wife at the Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago, Illinois.

Captain Thomasson was elected an Original Companion of the Illinois Commandery of Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS), Insignia No. 5136 and was an active member the rest of his life. Captain Thomasson's grandson, Nelson Thomasson III (1913-1999), also belonged to the MOLLUS (Illinois Commandery, Insignia No. 21046). In addition, Captain Thomasson's wife, Bette Sue (Cantrelle) Thomasson (1918-1993) (Illinois Society #1541), and daughter; Nelson III's wife; and their daughter, Mary Lee (Thomasson) Nelson (Member-at-Large #1797) belonged to the auxiliary to the MOLLUS, the Dames of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

Descendants of Civil War officers, as well as their siblings are eligible for hereditary membership in the MOLLUS (founded by Civil War officers on April 15, 1865) and the Dames of the Loyal Legion of the United States (founded in 1899). For more information on either or both organizations, please visit each organization's national website:

[Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States](#)

[Dames of the Loyal Legion of the United States](#)

Additional Notes:

1) Nelson Thomasson's eldest brother, Charles L. Thomasson, also served as an officer during the Civil War. He was born February 1, 1829 in Kentucky, the eldest children born to William Poindexter and Charlotte (Leonard) Thomasson. Charles was one of three organizers of Rousseau's Louisville Legion. *From the beginning until the close of the Civil War, the old "Corn-cracker" State was proud of the gallantry and daring deeds of the Third regiment it sent to fight for the Union cause and gave it a right royal welcome.* After its' formation, the regiment was converted into Fifth Kentucky Infantry US Volunteers. Charles enlisted on July 3, 1861 as a Private in Company H, 5th Kentucky, served in the battles of Shiloh, Corinth, and Stone's River, and was promoted to Major on February 23, 1863. While commanding the Louisville Legion, he was killed in battle on September 19, 1863 at Chickamaugua, Georgia. Some records including the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors website list him as "Charles L. Thomas" instead of Thomasson, which is part of the reason his service is often overlooked.

2) As a Companion of the MOLLUS, Nelson Thomasson Sr. authored and read on March 1, 1928 before the MOLLUS Illinois Commandery the paper entitled, [Recollections of Kit Carson](#).

3) For additional information on Kit Carson, see George H. Pettis' 1875 article entitled, [Kit Carson's Fight with the Comanche and Kiowa Indians at the Adobe Walls on the Canadian River](#).

4) For additional history on the 5th US Infantry see:
5TH INFANTRY Regiment Homepage (see: <http://www.lewis.army.mil/15inf/>) and
5TH INFANTRY Regiment Chapter Homepage (see: <http://www.bobcat.ws/index.html>)

Sources:

- 1) Membership Records of DOLLUS and MOLLUS
- 2) Congressional Biographical Record for William Poindexter Tomasson (1797-1882) (see: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000190>)
- 3) 1894. *A Biographical History of Prominent Men of the Great West*. Manhattan Publishing Company, Donohue & Henneberry Printers & Binders, Chicago, Illinois, pp 460-463.
- 4) HISTORY OF THE FIFTH INFANTRY REGIMENT (see: <http://www.bobcat.ws/history.htm>)
- 5) Harris, A.W. 1895. Rousseau's Louisville Legion, How and When It Was Organized, Why it was Called the Fifth Kentucky. *Louisville Commercial*, September 11, 1895 (see: <http://www.geocities.com/ky5thinfantry/loulegion.html>)

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