

David Watson Rowe

Born November 12, 1836, David Watson Rowe was the son of John and Elizabeth Prather Rowe. He attended schools in Greencastle and in 1851 Rowe was admitted to Marshall College, in Mercersburg (now known as the Mercersburg Academy). When Franklin College, in Lancaster, merged with Marshall in 1853 to become Franklin and Marshall, Rowe transferred to Lancaster. He left the college in his junior year and returned to Franklin County to study law under William McLellan. On August 15, 1857, he was admitted to the Franklin County Bar, after which, he started his career as an attorney in Chambersburg. In 1867, Franklin and Marshall awarded Rowe an A.M. college degree.

When the war broke out, he and his brother, John, both stepped forward. The brothers both enlisted in Co C, 2nd PA Volunteer Infantry and were mustered in on April 11, 1861 in Harrisburg. They were then sent to Camp Curtin. Watson was six feet tall, with dark eyes and hair, and was of medium build. Within a month, he went from being a private to sergeant major to first lieutenant of Co C. The 2nd Regiment was organized on April 21, 1861 and the same day, it left Harrisburg by train. Its destination was Washington but the train had to stop in Cockeysville, MD because the rail lines were out. The regiment was then sent back to York, Pennsylvania where it remained for training, until June 1. The PA 2nd Regiment was under the command of General Robert Patterson, who commanded all the Pennsylvania troops, under assignment by Gov. Curtin. Patterson was then placed in command of the Department of Washington, which covered the defense of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington City. Patterson was ordered, "...to keep in front of the enemy." The 2nd PA Regiment left Chambersburg on June 16, 1861 and by July 2nd it was in Martinsburg, WV. The Rebels were in Winchester. On July 15, 1861, Patterson marched his men to Bunker Hill, and prepared for battle the next day at Manassas. Patterson's show of force drove the Rebels back. On July 17, Patterson's regiments were double timed to Charlestown. By this time, the three-month soldiers' term of service was up. They were mustered out of service on July 26, 1861, in Harrisburg.

Five days before Rowe was mustered into the 126th PA Volunteer Infantry, he married Anna "Annie" Fletcher, Leitersburg, MD, on August 5, 1862. Annie Fletcher was the daughter of Charles Augustus Fletcher and Elizabeth Ziegler, sister of George W. Ziegler. Charles was born in McConnellsburg, PA and Elizabeth in Leitersburg, MD.

Rowe became Greencastle's recruiter for Co. K in the 126th PA Volunteer Infantry and was appointed the company's captain. On August 13, 1863, he was promoted to lieutenant colonel. When Col. Elder was severely wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg on December, 13, 1862, during the charge to take Marye's Hill at "the wall," Rowe took command of the regiment during the assault, until the higher command ordered the Union soldiers to retreat. During the Battle of Chancellorsville, he suffered a gunshot wound to the cheek. And for his leadership, Gen. Tyler made the following remarks, in the official report of the 126th, "Col. Rowe exhibited the true characteristics of a soldier - brave, cool, and determined - and his spirit was infused into every officer and soldier in his command." In 1869, Rowe wrote Sketch of the 126th Pennsylvania Volunteers, as a fundraiser for memorials, which would be placed on battlefields, such as Fredericksburg, for Pennsylvania's Civil War volunteers. Regarding the Battle of Fredericksburg, Rowe wrote, "... the brigade, of which the 126th went into action two thousand strong, and lost in a few minutes of the charge, 33 officers and 423 men."

After the war was over, Rowe continued practicing law until 1868, when he was commissioned Additional Law Judge of the (Federal) 16th Judicial District, by then Pennsylvania Governor John Geary. The 16th District encompassed Franklin, Fulton, Bedford, and Somerset Counties. In the 1868 fall elections, Rowe was elected to a ten-year, full term. In 1874, the 16th District was split; Franklin and Fulton Counties became the 39th Judicial District, of which Rowe became President Judge. In 1876, the centennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence, he was the keynote speaker for Franklin County's celebration. Rowe was reelected to a second, ten-year judgeship term in 1878 and retired in 1889, after 21 years of public service.

After retiring from the judgeship, Rowe and Alexander Stewart formed a private law practice in Chambersburg, until Stewart's death in 1895. For a brief time after that, his nephew, Henry Prather Fletcher, was Rowe's partner.

In 1872, Rowe built the grand Victorian house, on the east side of Greencastle, that he called Rosemont. The Victorian "lady" faced South Allison Street with Rowe and Addison Avenues being the property's southern and northern borders. Ridge Avenue was its eastern border. The estate was a half-block square and was surrounded by a six-foot high wire fence, covered with honeysuckle vines. Huge iron gates opened to a circular driveway, in the middle of which was a golfing green. Rowe lived at Rosemont until 1883 and then he and his wife moved back to Chambersburg, where they lived on the northeast corner of Market and Second Streets. When the Rowes moved out of Rosemont, Henry P. Fletcher moved in. Henry P. Fletcher served 51 years under eight different presidents, from Theodore Roosevelt to Harry S. Truman.

Rowe was a member, and past post commander, of the Peter B. Housum GAR Post #309, in Chambersburg. He and Anna were members of the Trinity Episcopalian Church in Chambersburg. Rowe was also a member of George Washington Lodge, No. 143.

On March 18, 1907, in the general index to his pension file, Rowe is listed as an invalid. Rowe died six years later, at the age of 76 years, eight months, and three days, on July 15, 1913, in Chambersburg. Annie died two years later on May 1, 1915, aged 79 years and five months. Watson and his wife Annie had no children. They are both buried, with his parents, in the Rowe family plot in Cedar Hill Cemetery, Antrim Township, in Section E, Lot 2.

Thank you to Kathie Wolfinger and two of her second cousins, Cindy Gersony and Martha Alexander, who provided a "new" photograph of David Watson Rowe in his Civil War uniform, as well as a sketched portrait.

