Digital Delights
By Alex Ames
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This is a special edition of “Digital Delights from Minnesota Reflections,” in honor of the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War.

Sometimes, memories are our only companions.

July 21, 1930, marked the 69th anniversary of the First Battle of Bull Run. In Stillwater, an old man named Charles Lockwood sat at a table surrounded by 33 empty chairs, drinking a bottle of burgundy wine. Why did this Civil War veteran relive his memories of the bitter conflict alone, with only a bottle of wine to console him?

The records of the “Last Man’s Club,” contributed to Minnesota Reflections (http://reflections.mndigital.org) by the Stillwater Public Library, answer this question.

Charles Lockwood was a member of Company B of the famous 1st Minnesota Volunteer infantry. The 1st Minnesota suffered heavy losses in the First Battle of Bull Run as well as Antietam, later showing heroism at Gettysburg. View an accounting of Company B officers and soldiers: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?spl,1724.

After the war, 34 surviving veterans of Company B formed an organization known as the “Last Man’s Club,” devoted to keeping the memories of the 1st Minnesota alive. The group held an annual banquet every year on the anniversary of the First Battle of Bull Run. View a book of “Last Man’s Club” member biographies: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?spl,1728.

As time passed, so too did veterans of Company B. View a list of deceased and living members of the Last Man’s Club by following this link: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?spl,1726.

In joining the “Last Man’s Club,” each veteran promised that, if he were the organization’s last surviving member, he would drink a bottle of burgundy wine in his comrades’ honor. Charles Lockwood was the “Last Man.” Thus, on July 21, 1930, he convened the final meeting of the “Last Man’s Club,” fulfilling his promise to drink the wine of memory alone.
Click the following link to view a soliloquy by the last survivor of the Last Man’s Club, entitled “The Wine of Memory:” http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/spl,1727.

Read a poem entitled “The Last Survivor to His Dead Comrades” by following this link: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/spl,1725.

To view other Last Man’s Club records, conduct an advanced search for “Last Man’s Club” in the Stillwater Public Library’s collection.

Minnesota Reflections contains other Civil War collections. The Hennepin History Museum (Minneapolis) contributed a ca. 1905 descriptive book of Hennepin County Grand Army of the Republic members to Minnesota Reflections. Follow this link to see a page from the book: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/hchm,1076. Search for “Descriptive Book of Members of the Grand Army of the Republic, Hennepin County, Minnesota” to find the item from the Minnesota Reflections homepage.

The Olmsted County Historical Society (Rochester) contributed letters and other materials documenting a Minnesota family’s Civil War experiences. Follow this link to read an 1863 letter written by soldier Jacob Dieter: http://reflections.mndigital.org/u/?/olms,928. Browse the entire Dieter family collection by using the advanced search feature to limit your search to the Olmsted County Historical Society. Then search for “Dieter.”

The Civil War ended long ago, but the conflict lives on in national memory. Though we will never know how Charles Lockwood felt as he drank the wine of memory one summer’s day in 1930, explore Minnesota Reflections to peer into the state’s Civil War past.

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