

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF THE LATE GEN.
B. J. SWEET. HISTORY OF
CAMP DOUGLAS**

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Biographical Sketch of the Late Gen. B. J. Sweet. History of Camp Douglas by William Bross

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WILLIAM BROSS

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HISTORY OF CAMP DOUGLAS.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL
SOCIETY,

TUESDAY EVENING, JUNE 18TH, 1878,

BY

WILLIAM BROSS, A. M.,

Lieutenant Governor of Illinois, 1865-9.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ROOMS,

Chicago, June 19th, 1878.

Ex-Lieutenant Governor William Bross.

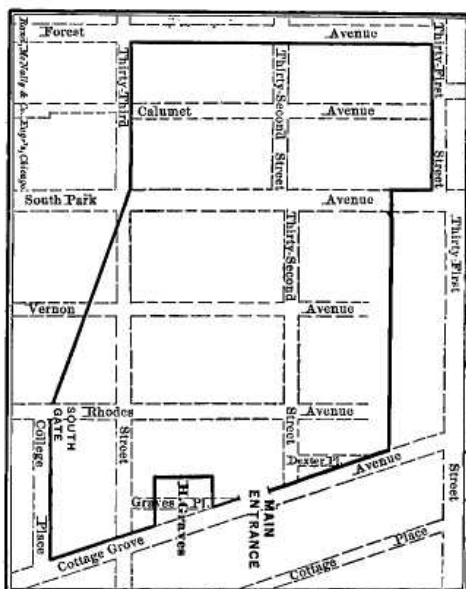
DEAR SIR: *I have the honor to inform you that at a meeting of the Chicago Historical Society, held last evening, the following resolution was adopted:*

"RESOLVED, That the thanks of this Society are due, and are hereby tendered to Hon. William Bross, for his valuable and interesting historical paper relating to Camp Douglas and the late Gen. B. J. Sweet, and that he be requested to furnish the Society with a copy for publication."

Very Respectfully,

ALBERT D. HAGER,

Secretary.



CAMP DOUGLAS, 1864-5.

DOTTED LINES SHOW STREETS AS NOW LOCATED.

For Description of the Camp, see Page 11.

GEN. B. J. SWEET.

History of Camp Douglas.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

CHICAGO, with the exception of San Francisco, the youngest of the leading cities of the Republic, has abundant reason to be satisfied with her patriotic record made during the Rebellion. From that quiet Sabbath morning, when the news flashed through the streets, that the rebels had fired upon Fort Sumpter at 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon, April 12, 1861, and the people left their churches, with the organ pealing out the "Star Spangled Banner," till treason was stamped out by the capture of Jeff. Davis, on the 10th of May, 1865, a very large majority of them seemed deeply imbued with the same spirit that inspired their fathers when "they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor," to preserve the integrity, and to establish the liberty of their country. The Board of Trade, though purely a commercial organization, was accorded the leadership in raising regiments and batteries, and they, and our merchants and citizens generally, poured out their money without stint for this purpose, and to send hospital stores to the front; the ladies got up sanitary fairs, and generally, from the beginning to the end of the war, all the energies, the wealth, and the power of the city were at the service of the Government. The treason and malignity of the few slimy copperheads, that crawled about the dens of the city, seemed only to render the patriotism of the people the more conspicuous and inspiring. But though few in number, the traitors were ever active, and if Chicago escaped the bloody riots, the murders, and the incendiaries' torch that were rife in New York

Baltimore, and it was simply because she had a small force of "the bravest of the brave" at Camp Douglas, commanded by an able general, whose energy never faltered, and whose vigilance never slept.

The State has recorded, too briefly, it is true, the deeds of our brave boys on the battle-fields of the Republic. The National Sanitary Commission has preserved the benevolent acts of our people; but the complete History of Camp Douglas, and more especially, the means by which Chicago was saved from destruction, remains to be written.

Prof. Elias Colbert in his "History of the Garden City," published in 1868, gives much valuable information and very important facts and figures, for many of which I am greatly indebted, but I shall confine myself, in this paper, mainly to what I know personally about these matters, to statements of men now living in our midst, and accurate sources of information now in my possession.

What the public may remember of the modest but brave soldier who commanded Camp Douglas during Chicago's greatest danger in 1864, and to whom the city owes her escape from burning and massacre, is derived mainly from brief newspaper articles at the time of his death. I therefore beg your attention to a short

Biographical Sketch of Brigadier General B. J. Sweet.

For the record, much of it in her own language, previous to his taking command of Camp Douglas, I am indebted to his accomplished daughter, Miss Ada C. Sweet, Pension Agent of this city.

BENJAMIN JEFFREY SWEET was born in Kirkland, Oneida County, New York, April 24th, 1832. His father was the Rev. James Sweet, and his mother was Charlotte, daughter of the Rev. Jeffrey Newell.

The Rev. James Sweet was a man of large heart and a fine, vigorous intellect. He was a speaker of great power, but his life was clouded by ill health and inadequate opportunities.

Mrs. Sweet was a woman of remarkably strong mind and character; a warm hearted, affectionate wife and mother, whose courage never faltered, though tried by care, sickness, and grief almost beyond the strength of human endurance to bear.

Benjamin Jeffrey was named for his two grandfathers, Benjamin Sweet and Jeffrey Newell. He was the eldest of fourteen

children, and after his tenth year he was one of the bread-winners of the family—often its main stay—as his father's health was broken. His boyhood was one of hard work and independent exertion.

When he was nine years old he worked in a cotton mill, and soon became the most expert and accurate weigher in it—too expert, indeed, for his own good, as his employers refused to advance him at all because he was so valuable in his place as weigher. For several years, while a growing boy, his deep sleep was often broken by the clanging of the factory bell, at four o'clock in the morning. Sometimes he would get time for several weeks of school, and he studied at all times and seasons whenever a spare hour could be snatched from his long working days.

In 1848, the family moved to Stockbridge, Calumet County, Wisconsin, and made their home there, on a small piece of wild forest land.

Benjamin worked like a young giant, clearing away the trees and bringing savage nature under subjection. The first winter he spent in Wisconsin, he stood, day after day, knee deep in snow, swinging his axe with his strong young arms, dreaming dreams of future health and usefulness. After a year of hard work he took his small earnings and entered Appleton College, Wisconsin.

In the spring of 1850 he returned home, and taught school at Brothertown, a settlement near by. Wherever he was and whatever his occupation, he was always an earnest student. After a hard day's work, he would read far into the night, and many a time the dawn found him still bending over his books.

At the age of nineteen he was in appearance, and indeed in experience and maturity of mind, a man. He was strong and athletic, and well skilled in all bodily exercises. He was genial in manner, warm hearted, full of gentle and playful humor, and a general favorite wherever he went.

In his home, then far removed from cities, there was a lack of books, but those which fell into the hands of the ambitious young man, were read and re-read. About this time he first made the acquaintance of Shakespeare's works, which he studied with passionate interest. Shakespeare remained, during his life, his study in leisure, his solace and comfort in grief, and his recreation

at all times. His father and many of his friends wished him to enter the ministry, but he turned his attention to the study of law.

I give these particulars the more freely, for they show the kind of stern discipline to which most of our leading generals and statesmen have been subjected. From necessity they learn what hard work is in their youth and early manhood, and hence their success and usefulness in after life.

In May, 1851, at the age of nineteen years, he married Miss Lovisa L. Denslow. She was a daughter of Elihu Denslow, and from the same place in New York as the Sweet family, and an old school and playmate of her young husband.

February 23d, 1852, a daughter was born to the young couple, and named Ada Celeste; in 1854, Lawrence Wheelock; in 1858, Minnie; in 1865, Martha Winfred; and his youngest son Benjamin Jeffrey, named for his father, was born January 11th, 1871.

In 1859, Gen. Sweet was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate. He was a Republican and a strong Abolitionist.

He clearly foresaw the great impending struggle, and at the beginning of the war advocated the raising of more troops than was thought necessary at that time. When the war broke out, he was one of the very first to enlist. He was commissioned Major, and went out with the Sixth Wisconsin Regiment.

The Regiment was stationed on the Potomac, and in the summer of 1862, weary with the inactivity of McClellan's army, Maj. Sweet resigned, came home, raised two new regiments, the Twenty-first and Twenty-second, and started again for the field as Colonel of the Twenty-first Wisconsin. The Twenty-first was ordered to the front before it had been mustered in three weeks, and was soon in its first battle at Perryville, Ky., on the 8th day of October, 1862. All day one corps of the Union forces sustained the whole force of Bragg's army, which was on its retreat from the East Tennessee raid.

The new regiment was poorly armed and composed of raw recruits, but it had been well drilled and disciplined, and, considering the short time it had been organized, the men fought like veterans, and sustained a terrible loss of life. Three hundred were killed or wounded. The major and three captains were killed, and Col. Sweet, it was thought, was mortally wounded.