DeWitt Clinton Smith

Minnesota State Librarian

January 14, 1864 – April 30, 1864

DeWitt had a keen interest in politics. In 1859 he was elected County Commissioner for Brooklyn Township, and in 1861 he was appointed Postmaster at Osseo. However, he left this second position after only a few months to join the Union Army. A sense of his commitment to the Union cause can be gleaned from the following excerpt of a letter he wrote to friends on January 10, 1861:

> ***...Well Luther I would like to say something about Secession. But when I commence on that I cannot stop. Suffice it to say it is treason of the blackest dye and should be punished as such.***

DeWitt fought with the famous 1st Minnesota Regiment of Volunteers. He was seriously wounded and permanently crippled in 1862 at the Battle of Antietam. After a slow recovery, he returned to Minnesota and sought to reclaim his old position as Postmaster. He was unsuccessful. DeWitt then began a determined effort to be appointed to the Paymaster Corps. In the meantime, an old friend and fellow soldier, Stephen Miller, had been elected Governor of Minnesota, one of whose appointments was that of State Librarian. DeWitt was appointed to this position on January 14, 1864, but his tenure as State Librarian was a short one. His effort to be appointed to the Paymaster Corps was finally granted, and he rejoined the army in April, or May, 1864, with the rank of Major.

In October 1864, after having made payments to troops in Tennessee, DeWitt and other Paymasters left Memphis for St. Louis aboard the Belle St. Louis steamboat. At Randolph, Tennessee, the steamboat was boarded by guerrillas. Everyone on board would have been captured, had not the guerrilla officers been killed and their band repulsed, through the heroic efforts of DeWitt and one Major Beeler. They fought side by side, saved the boat, passengers, government funds and the national flag. However, it cost them both their lives.