



Remembering a Man and his War

Nelson Norton of Whitestown, at the age of 105, is the oldest surviving veteran of the Spanish - American War. BOONE Magazine and all of Boone County join in a respectful and loving salute to the 'Old Soldier.'

by Norma Cramer

His blonde hair and solemn blue-grey eyes scanned the great expanse of the Illinois farm. Long legs walked once more through the green fields. He didn't want to leave.

It was April, 1898, and it had to be soon. The United States had declared war on Spain for their tyranny in Cuba. They were calling it the Spanish-American War.

The excitement and mystery of war overcame trepidation in June of that year. Of the 4200 volunteers requested as the apportionment from Indiana, Nelson Norton was one.

This month of April, 1975, is the 77th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish-American War. And, per the Veteran's Administration News Release, Boone County has the oldest living veteran in the person of Mr. Norton.

Presently, at the miraculous age of 105 (birth date January 5, 1870), he resides with his only child Mrs. Leland Hackett, and her husband, near Whitestown, Indiana, and has since July, 1962, when he left his Davies County farm to move to Boone County.

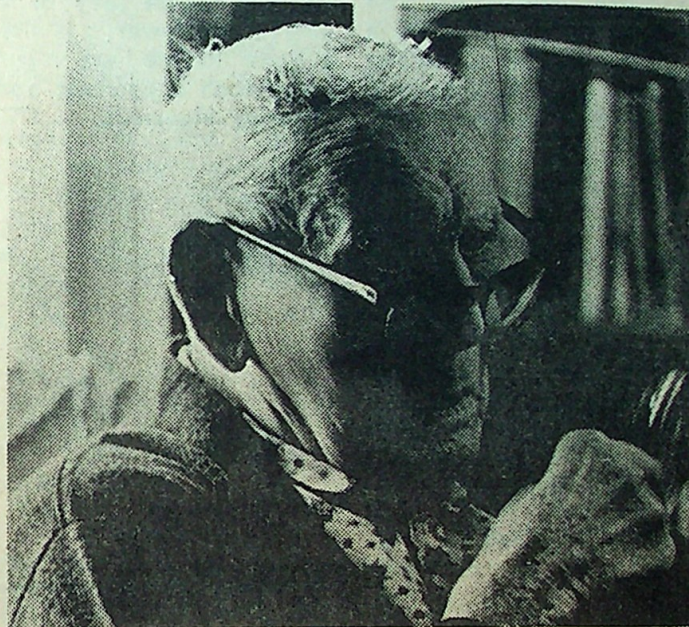
Nelson Norton was born on a farm in Crawford County, Illinois, the second child of ten. When the difficulty with Spain arose, he, as the oldest boy, felt obligated to join in defending his country.

On June 30, 1898, Mr. Norton enlisted in the 159th

Indiana Volunteer Infantry at Vincennes. He was assigned to Company I, and was later transferred to Company B. Leaving Savannah, Georgia, December 12, 1898, he was afloat for three days, arriving in Havana, Cuba and ready for action. There was none. Spain and the United States had already

disposition of the islands was decided.

The ultimate decision, approved on February 6, 1899 by a single vote, was that the U.S. was to keep the Philippines. This treaty was vigorously opposed and, as a result, guerrilla warfare was carried on against the United States troops.



Mr. Norton in his 100th year.

begun peace negotiations.

The armistice negotiations ended with a peace agreement on August 12, 1898. This signing pledged Spain to surrender all authority over Cuba and to cede Puerto Rico and the island Marianas to the U. S. In the Philippines the United States were also to occupy the city and harbor of Manila until the final

Inasmuch as the protection of the U.S. territories was required, Nelson Norton decided to reenlist. On July 27, 1899, he volunteered again. This time his jumping-off point was Terre Haute, Indiana.

The destination this second go-round was the Philippine Islands. After camping in San Francisco until October, he sailed

for Manila via Honolulu. Previous to this eight-day journey, he was elevated to the rank of corporal in Company K of the 161st U.S. Volunteer Infantry.

The voyage upon leaving Honolulu was memorable but less than desirable. The ship encountered a storm and all power ceased. For three days they drifted. So much water leaked in, they were kept busy bailing, working for two hours and resting four with Nelson Norton as "captain". This continued for ten days but when enough water had been dispatched, the boat was repaired and the trip continued. Another undesirable memory was of being draped over the railing with an 8-day attack of sea sickness.

"I thought I was going to die," he reminisced. The ship finally arrived at its destination on November 28, 1899.

Working diligently in a climate remembered mostly for its extreme heat, Mr. Norton was promoted to the rank of sergeant. He remained in the islands until his time in service was over. Again he was honorably discharged. This time in San Francisco on June 18, 1901.

The insurgents in the Philippines continued to fight for three more years before deciding their efforts were futile.

Meanwhile, when Nelson Norton left the warm



Mrs. Hackett,
Nelson's daughter.



Nelson in 1970.



Nelson Norton

Mrs. Norton

climate of the Islands, he settled in South Dakota. It was 40 below zero but he was "foot-loose and fancy free" and ready to begin farming.

He later farmed at Robinson, Illinois and did some mining near Sullivan, Indiana. He ultimately settled down on a farm southeast of Washington, Indiana with 60 acres.

"If I remember right, it

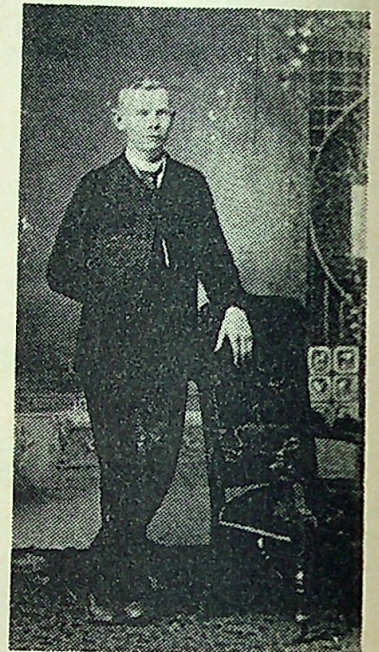
cost me \$2000." he sighed.

Mr. Norton has been married twice. Each union was terminated by death.

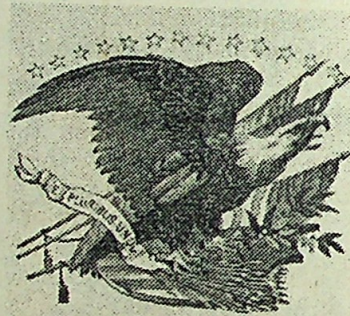
Always an avid fan of baseball and basketball, his failing faculties prevent reading or watching television. There is, however, the radio and nothing stops him from listening to the basketball antics of the Indiana Pacers.

All his life, sports have been his special joy.

His once blonde hair has become the silver badge of age and his solemn blue-grey eyes are dimming, but Nelson Norton has many lasting memories of the four-month crusade 77 years ago. On this anniversary of a long-forgotten war, it is nice to know that we have in our midst such a patriotic and enduring American.



Nelson as a young man.



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