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## FOUNDER OF POPE COUNTY, GEN JOHN POPE DIED THIS WEEK 100 YEARS AGO

by D. L. Ouren

General John Pope (1822-92), after whom Pope County is named, died Sept. 23, 1892. The centennial of his death, so far as I know, is not being celebrated elsewhere. (There is another Pope County in Illinois, but that is named after his father, the judge.) This brief article shall have to suffice as our modest memorial. Fortunately, there is a good recent biography of General Pope, "Abandoned by Lincoln: A Military Biography of General John Pope" (University of Illinois Press, 1990) by Wallace J. Schultz and Walter N. Trennary, Twin Cities Civil War buffs.

This labor of love sets out to give a fuller and fairer account of General Pope, a man often dismissed in popular Civil War histories (including the recent PBS series) as a swaggering braggart, a man "not worth a pinch of owl dung." He was, we are told, merely one in that string of incompetent generals Lincoln tried until at last General Grant came along and won the war. (Grant County to our northwest is named after him.)

Since Pope lost the second battle of Bull Run (Aug. 29-30, 1862), he must have been a "dunderhead." Yet battles are rather complex affairs, and blind luck often plays as much a role in the outcome as competence. Their case is much too complex to be summarized here.

Thus popular historians often make fun of Pope's address and Lee's supposed reply: "The address also resurrected an ancient military joke. Pope was supposed to have begun his address with the heading, 'Headquarters in the Saddle.' Lee was then supposed to have said, 'If so, his headquarters are where his hindquarters ought to be.'"

As Pope himself noted in 1887, this joke was old long before he was born – only the names were changed. To be sure, not all the charges against Pope can be so easily rebutted. Those wanting a fuller account will have to read the book. The library now has a copy.

John Pope was born in Lexington, Ky., March 16, 1822. He grew up in Kaskaskia, Ill., where his father was a judge. Pope was a distant cousin of President Washington, whose great-grandmother was a Pope. He was connected by marriage to President Lincoln. Pope's cousin, Gov. Ninian Edwards, had a son who married Mrs. Lincoln's sister. Todd County to our northeast is named after a cousin of Mary Todd Lincoln.

John Pope graduated from West Point in 1842; he was in the military most of his life. At West Point he played a role in the revolution in army trousers from flap to fly.

He began as a topographical engineer, surveying in Florida and Maine. He fought in the war against Mexico at Monterrey and Buena Vista.

In 1849 he was in Minnesota as part of the Woods' Expedition which passed through what would become Pope County. He was in New Mexico from 1849-53. Over the next six years he surveyed a route for the Pacific Railroad and searched for artesian wells in the desert. He was in Maine from 1859-61 on lighthouse duty. In 1861 he became a brigadier general in the Missouri area. His victory at the strategic Island Number Ten in the New Madrid area was the basis for his reputation which led him east and the command of the Army of Virginia and later McLellan's Army of the Potomac.

In August 1862 he was, of course, defeated at the second Battle of Bull Run or Manassas. He was then given command of the Department of the Northwest, bringing him in on the tail end of the Sioux Uprising in Minnesota. Eight days after Pope arrived in Minnesota, Colonel Sibley defeated the Sioux at Wood Lake. What remained for Pope was mostly mopping up operations. Still this was the main reason why in 1866 our county's organizers named the county after Pope. Pope County, of course, had only a handful of settlers at the time of the Sioux Uprising.

Here Pope became best known for some loose talk about wanting to "exterminate the Sioux." Richard Ellis has written a book showing that Pope's considered attitudes toward Native Americans was somewhat more enlightened than this. ("General Pope and US Indian Policy," Albuquerque 1970.) From 1865-67 Pope held the command of the Division of the Missouri, then the largest Union territorial command, from Minnesota to Utah.

In 1867 his command was the Third Military District (Georgia, Alabama and Florida) and then in 1868-70 it became the Department of the Lakes, headquartered at Detroit. From 1870-83 it was once more the Department of the Missouri.

Centered at Ft. Leavenworth this was an important command during the settling of the west. This was also Pope's longest tour of duty in one place. His last command in California from 1883-86 was largely ceremonial. In 1886 he retired to Missouri. He died at a soldiers' home in Ohio in 1892. He certainly covered a lot of territory in his life.

Though survived by four children, he had but one grandchild. There are no living descendants. We, the inhabitants of Pope County, are his "adopted" children.

There is not much about Pope County in the Pope biography: "On June 6 Major Woods and his party marched on a 56-day hike to Pembina covering 497 miles..."

Although Pope said that his trip was without adventure, the party had one memorable night when lightning struck the tent and knocked a lieutenant unconscious. Pope and the other soldiers then christened the two nearby lakes the "Lightning Lakes."

This storm on June 26, 1849, apparently occurred near Grove Lake. Lieutenant Nelson was revived by Dr. Sykes and "bled." An account of these days in Pope County can be found in Roy Johnson's "Red River Valley" (1982).

The expedition camped for six days near Grove Lake while Lt. Nelson recovered. Only July 31 they arrived at White Bear Lake (Lake Minnewaska) where they remained six days, awaiting the return of Lt. Castor, sent to Sauk Rapids for a supply of lariats (picket ropes). This was possibly the first Fourth of July celebrated in Glenwood. The fireworks were supplied from on high as there was another violent electrical storm that day.

Major Woods noted, "The lake is full of fish." The soldiers fished, not worrying about a game warden. They also bought some elk meat from wandering Winnebagos. They saw many swans and killed one. As Woods wrote,

"It being the moulting season, they were at our mercy."

They then set off for what would become Elbow Lake. Later they met Kittson and a train of Red River carts. Pope County would not be settled for another 15 years or so.

To paraphrase Lincoln, "it is altogether fitting and proper" that on this 100th anniversary of the death of John Pope we recall that man whose name our county bears. "It is for us the living" to ensure than his name and what he stood for not "perish from the earth . "