

I believe it was Shakespeare who first asked “What’s in a name?” He was talking about roses. My subject was a man; specifically, how to spell his last name correctly. On the surface, it appeared to be a simple name, easily spelled; not a complicated, tongue-twisting mixture of vowels and consonants a mile long. Ah, but to quote the great Bard again, “The best laid plans of mice and men oft’ go astray.” His first name was Prosper. That should have been a hint right there as to what lay in store. Was his surname “Durfey”, “Durfy”, “Durphey”, “Durphy”, or “Durfee”? Thirty-four individual times his name appeared on documents consulted for his biographical sketch. Statistically, “Durfey” was on nineteen of them. “Durfee” showed up nine times. On the only document examined, his enlistment papers, which contained his own signature he seemed to have signed it “Durphey”. But, due to his cursive penmanship, it could have been “Durfey”. So, since we live in a democracy, at least for the present, where the majority rules, I went with “Durfey” as the most likely spelling. Future researches may find additional and more definitive information on this enigma and be able to settle the matter once and for all time.

Before coming to Vermont, Prosper Jr. spent his early years in Connecticut. He was born in Ellington on November 14, 1829.^[1] His father was also named Prosper (1791-1879) and he, too, was born in Ellington, Connecticut May 5, 1791.^[2] Junior’s mother was Sophia White of Uxbridge, Massachusetts. She was born on August 1, 1792, the daughter of Seth White (1756-1837) and Jemima Keith (1758- 1818).^[3] Senior seemed to have been a laborer/farmer most of his life. He and Sophia were married June 27, 1822 in Ellington, Connecticut. Their marriage lasted for forty-eight years before Sophia passed away in 1870. The couple had two daughters: Melinda, 1821-1873, and Susan A., 1823-? The rest of their eight children were sons: Moses W., 1825-1852; Milo Q., 1826-1890; Wolcott, 1827-1897; Prosper Jr., 1829-1864; Liberty, 1830-? and Timothy, 1836-? All of them appeared to have been born in Ellington as well. It seemed that the Durfey family moved north to the frontier region of Vermont after the birth of their last child, Timothy about 1836. Senior’s mother, Sarah Newton Durfee (sic), died in Addison, Addison County, Vermont in August, 1838.^[4] And when the 1840 Federal Census was taken, Prosper Sr. was listed as a resident of Lincoln, Vermont working on a farm there.^[5]

After being in Lincoln for a decade, Prosper Sr., fifty-nine, and his wife, forty-nine year old Sophia, had reduced their family size by more than half. Only Wolcott (23), Prosper Jr. (21) and Timothy (14) remained living at home with their parents. Prosper Sr. was still working as a laborer. Wolcott was employed as a iron maker (made pig iron in a foundry). Prosper was labeled as a farmer and his youngest brother, Timothy, was a student at school. Sophia, of course, tended to the needs of the men and the home as any good 19th century wife would do.^[6] Then, in 1854, Prosper Jr., now twenty-five, became tired of being a single man living with mom and dad and graduated to being a husband. His wife was a local

Lincoln woman named Clarissa Harriett Kelton, age twenty-one. She was the daughter of John (1785-1861) and Abigail Kelton (1788-1860). She had been born in Lincoln on October 13, 1833. She and Prosper Jr. tied the knot on January 14, 1854. They did not wait long before starting a family of their own. Their first child, a daughter named Mary Jane, arrived on December 30, 1854 (1854-1878). During the next ten years, (1854-1864), four more girls were born into the clan: Sophia, (1856-1870); Sara Ann (1858-1884); Polly (1861-1900); and Phebe (1864-1946). Where exactly Clarissa and Prosper Jr. settled after their marriage remained somewhat debatable. Different sources put them in one of two places: either Lincoln or Ripton.^[7]

The Federal Census records for his father always said he lived in Lincoln. The 1850s Federal Census showed Junior living in his father's household in Lincoln. The 1860s Census showed Junior, his new wife, Clarissa, and three of their five daughters (Mary Jane, Sophia and Sarah Ann) living under his father's roof along with Junior's twenty-three year old brother, Wolcott. There was nothing unusual about extended families living together in the same household in the 1860s. It was common practice throughout the 19th century. What was strange was that Prosper Senior's homestead that was listed in Lincoln ten years earlier was now located in Ripton according to the 1860s census taker. The only explanation that made any sense was that the property lay on or very near the town line between the two townships and no one was too sure exactly which town had the rightful claim to it. And it was somewhat debatable as to whose farm it belonged to also; Junior or Senior. The form for the 1860 Census put Senior as the head of household by placing his name first in the list of occupants of the home. Junior and the others were listed on lines below his name as members of the household. To make it more curious, the census enumerator placed the value of the real estate (\$400) and personal property (\$150) associated with the farm after Junior's name as though he was the owner of the property. The positioning of the names and value of assessment of the property made the issue of ownership questionable. Both Senior and Junior were identified as farmers. Wolcott's occupation was given as "bloomer".^[8] This was the first time I had ever come across this particular occupation. I had no idea what it was (except for the name of a lady's under garment). According to the Oxford Dictionary, it can be someone who shapes a mass of poured pig iron into a bar like a brick. That made sense since in the previous 1850 Federal Census, Wolcott's occupation had been listed as "iron maker".^[9]

When America went to war with itself in April of 1861, males of all ages, sizes and backgrounds lined up to be first to defend their country. The patriotic fervor was especially high in the breasts of the youngest members of society. Men like Prosper who were middle-aged, in their thirties, married with children and having a farm to tend for the livelihood of themselves and their families, were the last type of recruit the Army was looking for. But, as the war drug on from months to

years in duration, and as the war machine chewed up and spit out more and more dead and disabled men, it became increasingly difficult to find willing volunteers who wanted to put themselves in harm's way. When monetary incentives also failed to yield sufficient numbers of replacements, the Federal Government resorted to the unpopular draft system whereby eligible men were compelled to enter the service of their country. At the beginning of 1863, two years into the war, Congress passed the Conscription Act. Now, if a town did not fill its allotted quota of volunteers to fill the President's call for more troops, then the Selectmen of that town could draft enough men to meet their quota. It was an unpopular move on the part of the Government, but was necessary to replenish the losses in the field and to pursue the objective of preserving the Union. May and June of 1863 were very busy months for the Provost Marshals in the Congressional Districts throughout the Northern state as they went from town to town in their districts to enumerate the names of eligible male citizens subject to the draft. Prosper Durfee (sic) Jr. was one of two men listed eligible from Ripton in May/June, 1863. Edward Donner was the other man put on the eligible list, but he was very unlikely to be drafted as he had already served one hitch in the Fifth Vermont Volunteers and had been discharged at the end of his term of service prior to the draft becoming effective.^[10] Therefore, he should have been exempt from the draft. However, the Union Army's need for recruits of any kind was severe enough that it wasn't long before the Selectmen of the town of Lincoln sent word to Prosper Durfee, Jr. that his presence was requested by his country. He was thirty-five, married with five children, a wife and a farm and the sole bread earner for his family, but the military needed him more.

The Selectmen for Lincoln, where Prosper Jr. was supposed to be a resident, had him sign his enlistment papers on December 24, 1863. The conscript stood five feet six and one half inches tall. He was a handsome devil with his brown hair, blue eyes and light complexion. He was immediately entered into the Sixth Vermont Infantry, Company A for three years.^[11] Unfortunately, his term of service in the United States Army was going to fall far short of that time. Drafted the day before Christmas, 1863, he was at least allowed to spend one more holiday with his family before he had to leave. On January 6, 1864, he was officially mustered-in. Now a private in the Union Army, he was sent off to Brattleboro, Vermont for further processing by January 12. He received payment of \$25 bounty with another \$242 owed him by the Government. He also was paid \$35 from the Commutation Fund. The Commutation Fund was a pool of money the State/Federal Government had which was created from \$300 fees paid by eligible males to be exempted from serving in the armed forces of the United States. It was one way in which a man could avoid being drafted. It also was responsible for the expression that the Civil War was "A rich man's war but a poor man's fight". Since Private Durfee was eligible for payment from this fund of money, it meant that he was a substitute for another man from Ripton. In addition, he received a premium of \$2 which was a fee that usually went to the

recruiting officer which in Private Durfey's case appeared to be the Selectmen of the town of Lincoln. Besides all these bounties and fees and payments he was showered with, Private Durfey was also fortunate enough to receive a month's pay in advance (\$13).^[12] Altogether, Private Durfey had \$75 hard money in his new uniform pants' pockets, enough money to support his family for the next four months, if Clarissa was frugal in her spending.

By January 17, Private Durfey had been forwarded from the Recruit Depot to the Sixth Vermont for active duty at Brandy Station, Virginia. He was forced to spend the night of January 17 in a cold rain without benefit of any shelter. On January 19, he was taken "violently" ill and on the 20th of January he went to the Regimental Hospital where he was confined to his bed. E. Phillips, Surgeon of the Sixth Vermont, examined Private Durfey and found him "wholly incapacitated for any department in the service" due to a case of "paraplexia" (paralysis of the lower extremities due to a severe injury of the spinal cord). In other words, thirty-five year old Private Durfey was completely paralyzed from the waist down. He was discharged due to total disability on February 6, 1864.^[13] Durfey's condition was bad enough that he could not be sent home immediately even though he technically was no longer a member of the United States Army. He ended up being placed in the Regimental Hospital where he died on February 14, 1864.^[14] He had been in the service only a total of forty-two days. Most of those were spent in being enrolled, processed, outfitted and transported. He was at his first, and only, duty station for twenty days before he was declared unfit for military duty and was discharged from the service. By the end of the day eight days after becoming a civilian again, he was dead.

Normally, soldiers were buried near the place where they died and as soon as possible for sanitary reasons. In Prosper's case, that would have been near Brandy Station, Virginia. However, in Durfey's circumstances, it appeared that his family had his remains brought back home for burial. It was an expensive thing to do in 1860. Before the invention of refrigerated boxcars, the body had to be embalmed first. Then the deceased had to be placed in a metal coffin which then had to be placed inside a wooden crate. Finally, the body had to be escorted the entire trip by at least one other person day and night. These expenses were in addition to the actual charge for rail travel from point of origin to final destination. The amount could easily exceed a year's wages for a common laborer in Vermont. It seemed that whatever the expense, The Durfey family was determined and capable of paying it despite living on a \$400 farm in a rocky hillside mountain town like Ripton-Lincoln.

Research revealed that Prosper Durfey Jr. may have had as many as three headstones made up. Two appeared to have been ordered through the Federal Government and one was made of granite rather than marble and was fashioned in the typical family modern style. The free Government style stones were ordered at

different times: the first, in July of 1898 and the second in June of 1908.^[15] The 1898 military headstone was ordered through Gross Bros in Lee, Massachusetts and was to be sent to Lincoln, Vermont when finished. Who ordered it was unknown. The second 1908 headstone was ordered by Prosper's widow, Clarissa Gove. The order did not specify where to ship the completed headstone to. The modern looking granite stone is located in the Maple Cemetery in Lincoln and has "Durfey-Kelton" chiseled on it. The military style Government supplied stone was found in the Briggs Hill Cemetery located in Bristol. Most likely this was where Prosper Jr. was laid to rest after being returned from Virginia.^[16] In death, Prosper Jr., just like in life, makes us wonder exactly where he hung his hat.

Clarissa, Prosper's widow, applied for a widow's pension in July of 1864.^[17] Her application included money for three minor children: Sarah, seven; Polly, two; and Phebe, less than a year old. They would be eligible for dependent minor's payments until they reached sixteen. Her father-in-law, Prosper Sr., became the main supporter of his son's family. By 1870, when the next Federal Census was taken, Clarissa was listed as head of household and keeping house. She had all three minor daughters living with her. And Prosper Sr. was a member of the household, too. He was seventy-six, a retired farmer and worth at least \$500. Clarissa had her widow's pension for support and the additional payments for each of her minor daughters. She also had a farm valued at \$1,500 plus personal property worth another \$200. What sort of farm she operated was unknown as was also who, besides her seventy-six year old father-in-law, helped do the work around the farm. But, for the time being in 1870, Clarissa seemed to be a solid financial ground.^[18]

Clarissa was not satisfied with the status quo, however. She had other irons in the fire. On April 1, 1871 in Lincoln, she remarried at thirty-one. Her new husband had a first name that people were constantly struggling to spell correctly. His name was Squire (Squier) Gove (1809-1895). It appeared in a variety of forms, the most bizarre of which was "Square" Dow Gove. He was from Lincoln, was a farmer and a widow too. He brought a batch of children with him to his marriage with Clarissa, but the two of them together would only have one child, a girl named Hattie M. (1877-1960).^[19] Although Squire was a farmer most of his life, he and Clarissa did dabble in keeping an inn for a period of time after they were married. They converted their home into the Lincoln House and managed it as a new endeavor in Lincoln. The local newspaper, The Middlebury Register, commented on the couple's efforts in an article in 1886:

"The trout supper at the Lincoln House, on the evening of the 20th inst. was a success in regard to the excellence of the supper, but we are sorry our townspeople did not patronize it better. Mr. Gove has fitted up his house very suitably and conveniently for the accommodation of the traveling public. Such a house is greatly needed here, and with a landlord of his principles,

and a landlady with Mrs. Gove's well-known ability to furnish a good table and otherwise provide for the comfort of her guests, we may be sure they will keep a well-conducted, temperance house, and our citizens should encourage them when such an opportunity as that of Thursday evening is afforded them.^[20]

Unfortunately, Squire died of old age in 1895.^[21] Rather than keeping the inn going by herself, Clarissa resumed farming. She was a life-long resident of Lincoln. She outlived two husbands, most of her own children and many of her siblings. She spent the last few years of her life being cared for by her daughter, Hattie, after moving into her daughter's South Lincoln home. Clarissa rarely, if ever, left her daughter's house in her final years. When she passed away August 15, 1923, her funeral at Hattie's home was well attended. Gifts of flowers were many and beautiful. Mourners came from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. Locals attended from Brooksville, Waltham, New Haven, Burlington, Benson and Ripton to pay their respects.^[22]

NOTES

1. www.ancestry.com, Novelle and Chatfield Clan Family Tree for Prosper Durfee (sic) Jr.
2. Ibid., for Prosper Durfey, Sr.
3. Ibid., Family Tree for Sophia White.
4. Ibid., Novelle and Chatfield Clan Family Tree for Sophia White and Prosper Durfey, Sr.
5. Ibid., 1840 U.S. Federal Census for Prosper Durfey, Sr.
6. Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Prosper Durfey, Sr.
7. Ibid., Poulsen-Davis Family Tree for Clarissa Harriett Kelton Durfey Gove.
8. Ibid., 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Prosper Durfey.
9. Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Prosper Durfey Jr.; *The Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.147.
10. Ibid., U.S., Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863-1865 for Prosper Durfee (sic) Jr.
11. www.fold3.com, Compiled Service Records Of Union Soldiers Who Served In Organizations From the State of Vermont, image 311504824. Hereinafter referred to as Compiled Service Records.
12. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311504828.
13. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311504847.
14. Ibid., Compiled Service Records, image 311504824.

15. www.ancestry.com, Headstones Provided for Deceased Union Civil War Veterans, 1861-1904 for Prosper Durfey Jr.
16. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #105365733 for Prosper Durfey.
17. www.fold3.com, General Pension Index Files, 1861-1865, image 19551149.
18. www.ancestry.com, 1870 U.S. Federal Census for Clarissa Durfee (sic).
19. www.findagrave.com, Memorial #55605970 for Square Dow Gove.
20. www.newspapers.com, Middlebury Register, Fri., May 28, 1886.
21. www.ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 for Gove, Squire.

22. Ibid., The Enterprise and Vermonter, Thu., Aug. 30, 1923.