

Orville had a very brief life. He was born September 9, 1837 in Leicester, Vermont and was dead by February 6, 1863 in Wolf Run Shoals, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> He was only twenty-five years old. Even by 18th century standards, that was a short life span for an adult male. And , if the historical record is accurate, he and his immediate family had no good luck at all during their brief time on Earth.

Orville's father was Lensir R. Sayles and his mother was Polly Sayles. Orville appeared on only two US Censuses by name: in 1850 and 1860. In the 1850 Census, he is listed as a twelve year old schoolboy. He lived with his farther, a forty-three year old farmer; his forty-five year old mother; his sixteen year old brother, Jonathan, also labeled a farmer; and one Prudence Barker, aged forty-four, probably a boarder and assistant to the lady of the house. Lensir's modest farm was valued at \$2,600.<sup>2</sup>

By 1860, a number of changes had occurred in the Sayles' family. The farm's value had risen to \$5,000. Prudence had been replaced by fourteen year old Lanfayette Gibbs, most likely to assist with the farm chores. Jonathan is missing from the household. But a new member of the family had been added - Eveline. She was Orville's bride.<sup>3</sup> They had been married October 28,1857 in Salisbury, Vermont.<sup>4</sup> At the age of twenty-three, Orville and his young wife were living with his parents on the Leicester farm. The most important change in Orville's life took place on or around March 22, 1861 when Eveline bore him a daughter named Gertrude.

Five years after his marriage to Eveline E. Barker, Orville enlisted as a Corporal in Co G of the 12th Vermont Regiment. His term of enlistment was for a mere ninety days. A fairly simple way of earning \$100 bounty money for his growing family. A decision, of course, with attendant risks. He "went for" Brandon on August 15, 1862 being signed up by Nathan F. Sprague. According to the "Company Descriptive Book". he was: "...twenty-three years old..." and stood "...five feet, nine inches..." tall. He had a "...dark complexion..." with "...brown eyes..." and "...dark hair...". It wasn't until October 4, 1862 that he was actually mustered-in at Brattleboro, Vermont leaving a wife and a one year old child behind in Leicester.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of January, 1863, the 12th and 13th Regiments of Vermont were camped in and around an important ford across the Occoquan River in Virginia called Wolf Run Shoals. They were there as part of the defenses of Washington, D. C. There, on February 5, 1863, Orville died of sickness (diphtheria). A letter from George Grenville Benedict dated February 22, 1863 may shed some light on what brought Orville's sudden demise:

" Camp Near Wolf Run Shoals, Va

....I am writing in the midst of the hardest snow storm we have seen in Virginia, and one that would not disgrace the bleakest hillside in Old Vermont. The diary of the weather for six days past may be interesting as a sample of a Virginia winter... Tuesday, a fall from ten to twelve inches of heavy snow... Wednesday, snow settling fast.... Thursday, pouring rain... Friday, high wind... Saturday, warm, bright sunshine... Sunday, opens dark and cold, with a heavy storm of dry snow falling at the rate of an inch an hour, drifted as it falls by a cutting east wind, and closes at nightfall with not much short of eighteen inches on a level, and promise of a cold snap of several days' duration.... Picket service is decidedly rough at such a time, and some mothers' hearts I know of would ache could they see their

boys out on the picket line, cowering under their booths of pine branches through which the snow and wind find easy entrance, and holding their wet and chilled hands and feet to the fires which struggle for mastery with the storm...." <sup>6</sup>

Diphtheria "... is an acute infectious bacterial disease with inflammation of a mucous membrane of the throat, resulting in...difficulty in breathing and swallowing." <sup>7</sup> Orville had contracted "...a severe cold while in the performance of his duty on or about the 24th of January, 1863...continued to decline until the 6th day of February 1863 when he died...in regimental hospital at Wolf Run Shoals Va....." according to an Officer's Certificate filled out by Ebenezer F. Ormsbee, Captain of Co G 12th Regiment Vermont. <sup>8</sup>

By June 22, 1863, Eva E. Sayles, Orville's widow, was in the process of filing a pension application. On November 6, 1863, she was granted \$8 per month retroactive to February 6, 1863 - the date of Orville's death. <sup>9</sup>

That's the end of Orville A. Sayles' individual story, but not of his family's. Look to the right of Orville's stone in the Brookside Cemetery in Leicester, Vermont and you will see two more headstones. The first is for Eveline, his wife. The last is for Gertrude, Orville and Eveline's daughter. Notice the dates of death. Gertrude died a little more than a year after her father at two years and ten months. Eveline died nine days after Gertrude! Seems like tragedy just would not leave this family alone.

## NOTES

1. Vermont In The Civil War.com, Cemetery Database, VT, Leicester, Brookside Cemetery, Orville A. Sayles, 2016.
2. Ancestry.com, 1850 US Census for Pruderil Barker; My Heritage.com, 1850 US Census, Orville Sayles.
3. Ancestry.com, 1860 US Census for Orville Sayles.
4. Fold3.com/image/221847692 under Orville A. Sayles Compiled Service Records.
5. Fold3.com, Compiled Service Records under Orville Sayles, pp 2-3.
6. Letters: From the Twelfth Vermont Regiment and Personal Experiences of Volunteer Service in the War For The Union, 1862-63,Chapter XXII, Burlington, Free Press Association, 1895.
7. The Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003.
8. Fold3.com/image/221847699.
9. Fold3.com/images/221847691 and 221847693.