

George G. Carman (1838-1868)

George Carman was not a McLean County native. He was born in Casey County, Kentucky around 1838. Carman did not spend much time in Kentucky, as he later mentioned that he lived in Indiana during his school years. Following his schooling in Indiana, Carman spent time training as a printer in McLean County. According to his **obituary**, it is suggested that sometime during this period, Carman began to suffer from the **hardships** that characterized the profession of being a printer and writer. Thus, he chose to leave that life and follow his passion for theatre, drama, and acting instead. Although his acting career was not long lived, it was said that had he **devoted** himself to the art, he would have built a high reputation.

Carman returned to writing and editing following his acting **stint**. He took up a job as an editor and proprietor for the *Fayette County Democrat* newspaper in Vandalia, Fayette County, Illinois. The *Fayette County Democrat* began publishing in 1860, but it was only shortly after publication when Carman became acquainted with fellow editors for the Bloomington *Pantagraph*.

After the U.S. Civil War broke in 1861, Carman “dissolved his connection” with the *Fayette County Democrat* and moved to Bloomington where he then began working for the *Pantagraph* as the editor of the local department. He also frequently published editorials in the *Pantagraph* under the **pseudonym** “Boswell.” His work for the *Pantagraph* gathered a following for his “brilliant intellect and **facile** pen.”

During the summer of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln requested an additional 600,000 more men to volunteer for the Union Army and be deployed into battle. The men of McLean County promptly answered the call. As a pro-Union Democrat, Carman volunteered for what would become the 94th Illinois Infantry Regiment, or as it was commonly referred to, “the McLean Regiment.” In a matter of ten days, the Regiment, composed entirely of men from McLean County, were examined, inspected, and **mustered** in.

The 94th Infantry departed Bloomington for St. Louis, Missouri on August 25, 1862 with 945 men. Headed for the Benton Barracks, the Regiment boarded a southbound Chicago & Alton Railroad train from Bloomington. Upon arrival at Alton, the Regiment traveled by **steamboat** to St. Louis, Missouri to reach Camp Benton.

The 94th quartered at the Benton Barracks for two weeks until September 10, 1862. While at Benton Barracks, Carman wrote to the *Pantagraph* four times in a series dubbed, “Boswell’s Letters” and later, “Letters from Boswell.” In his early letters, Carman reported back in good spirits. In a letter dated August 31, 1862, he told of how the men received their military uniforms and how he had been learning extensively about how the military is organized. In the following letter, dated September 6, he told his readers that his regiment had finally received their guns: “We received our guns to-day—the Austrian rifled musket. A neat, light, elegant, efficient weapon, of a very good size, though not *Ostra-cized*.”

On September 10, the 94th moved by train to Rolla, Missouri, but Springfield was their final stop. It was in Springfield, Missouri that Carman and the rest of the men of the 94th spent the next six weeks learning battle tactics and being drilled in the art of war. At Rolla, it was reported that the 94th Regiment trained extensively in company, **battalion**, and **skirmish** drills. The 94th were considered pioneers in a type of skirmish combat not seen before or yet during the war. Instead of the commonly used line tactics, the 94th Regiment was taught to lay down while shooting and reloading in order to increase their aim precision and also to protect their bodies from **projectiles**.

The 94th Regiment engaged in their first battle on December 7, 1862 at Prairie Grove in Arkansas. The Regiment marched a total of 120 miles in 84 hours in order to reach Prairie Grove. Carman reported that his **battery** rushed up a hill upon reaching the battle front, “expecting a big fight,” only to be faced with an empty corn field. The Regiment made their stand at the top of this hill and were fixed into position mere hours later. This battle is where the 94th’s unique skirmish drill proved its value. The men maintained a long irregular line in which they took “advantage of every stump, fence and irregularity of the ground,” and they maintained “so destructive a fire that no troops could be brought against them without being cut into pieces.” They were able to maintain such steady fire that the Confederates were unable to push forward. In the end, the Confederates retreated during the night, leaving the Union forces victorious on the field of battle, and the Second Division was successfully received.

Without a doubt, many locals back home in Bloomington read the update from Boswell with pride in their hearts. Yet, some locals began to doubt Boswell had even participated in the battle, as rumor spread that Boswell had “shown the **white feather**” and had fled. A **subsequent** report published in the *Pantagraph* stated that Carman was indeed sent away from the battle, though not in an act of **cowardice**, but rather on orders as a **brigade** printer.

In the summer of 1862, President Lincoln had threatened the Confederates with an **ultimatum**—return to the Union and keep slavery, or on January 1, 1863, he would free all slaves from rebellious states. The Confederacy did not comply. So, on January 1, Lincoln issued his **Emancipation Proclamation**. News of the proclamation reached Carman by the third of January and in typical fashion, he responded to the news by **declaring** it was “as good for the Union cause as a hundred new regiments.” He echoed Lincoln’s reasoning for the emancipation: “Destroy it [slavery] and treason will die—protect it, and for years to come **rebellion** will spit its venom in the face of its **nourisher**.”

Carman contracted **tuberculosis** and was discharged from service in June 1864. He made no mention of his illness in any letters or editorials. By December 1864, Carman had returned to Illinois and was delivering lectures on Mexico and the Mexican people. In the last rediscovered “Letter from Boswell” dated December 28, 1864, Carman was in Decatur, Illinois residing in a **boarding** house.

No further writings or records have been rediscovered from Carman following this period, but from his obituary, it is gathered his disease started to take a toll on his body; “...he worked, when he could, at the case, wrote much, and for a short time last summer was associate editor, but found that his strength was not equal to the arduous duties.” In the winter of 1867, Carman had given up the hopes of making a recovery and spoke freely of his **imminent** death and his regrets; “...he said that his only regret was that he could not live longer to do more good than he had done, and see the **fulfillment** of some of the aims for which he had spent his whole life preparing.”

George G. Carman passed away at the young age of 29 on May 19, 1868. His funeral gathered those who knew him well and others who respected the work he had accomplished. Although young with the promise of fame, Carman was laid to rest at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington. “*And so he lived—and thus he died.*”

By: Kate Bass, 2021