

John Minot Daggett (1818-1905)

For the descendants of his granddaughter

Dorothy Ann "Billie" Daggett Wild (1900-1964)

By Janice Mattson Gallant, her granddaughter

John Minot Daggett grew up in Farmington, Maine, the 2nd of four children. He was probably named in honor of John Minot (1783-1814), a Farmington resident, saddler by trade, who was active in local affairs before dying of a "cold fever" at the age of 31.

When he was 18 years old, John M. Daggett went to New Bedford, Massachusetts where he engaged in whaling for a number of years. He was back in Maine by 1850 where he appears in the US census at his parents' home in Houlton, with an occupation of "seaman". In 1852 he married Martha Matilda Cates in Houlton. John was 34 years old; Martha was 20.



In 1853, John, Martha and the extended Daggett family -- including John's parents, brother Holmes and his family, and John's unmarried sister Mary Sewall Daggett -- moved from Maine to Linn County, Iowa. Iowa became a state in 1846, and its population grew very rapidly during the 1850s. The population of Linn County (highlighted in this map) tripled between 1850 and 1860. John and his brother Holmes obtained a land patent for 120

acres in Linn County in 1854. The 1856 Iowa census finds all of the Daggetts living on a farm there, raising cattle and growing wheat, corn, and potatoes.

Three children were born to John and Martha in Iowa: a daughter Carmine Belmont and two sons, Walter Scott and Harry Bertram. John's father Holmes Sr. died in 1858, and John's mother died less than a year later. In 1860, John and Martha left the farm in Linn County and moved to Dunleith, Illinois, across the Mississippi River from Dubuque, Iowa. They were to remain in Dunleith for the next 20 years.



Dunleith was in Jo Daviess county, highlighted in the map of Illinois. Next to that is an enlarged map of Jo Daviess county showing Dunleith township at the very tip of the state. As late as 1849, Dunleith was only noteworthy for a ferry across the Mississippi river to Dubuque, Iowa. But things changed when the railroad arrived.

The railroad came to Dunleith in 1855 but did not cross the Mississippi river into Iowa. Dunleith became a major connecting point for railroad and river traffic, and was a boom town when the Daggetts arrived in 1860. A number

of hotels opened in Dunleith to accommodate the river and rail passengers. Tax records from the 1860's shown that John M. Daggett was a hotelkeeper in Dunleith and that he also had a livery stable. The Daggett family enjoyed a degree of prosperity during these years. The tax records show that John M. Daggett paid taxes on a carriage (\$2), piano (\$2) and gold watch (\$1).

Two more children arrived in Dunleith: William Smith (future deputy US marshal) and Wallace Minot. And sadly, young Walter Scott Daggett died in Dunleith in 1864.

The boom times ended in Dunleith in 1868 when the railroad opened a bridge across the Mississippi. The 1870 census finds John M. Daggett and family still in Dunleith; his occupation is Justice of the Peace. The value of his real estate was \$1800, and the value of his "personal estate" was \$2000. The Daggetts remained in Dunleith for another ten years until 1880, when they moved to Allison in Butler County, Iowa. As in Dunleith, John M. Daggett's livelihood in Allison would depend upon the railroad.

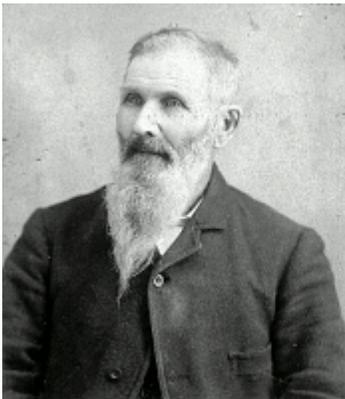


The railroad came to Allison in 1879. From "The History of Butler and Bremer Counties, Iowa", page 755:

Early in the fall of 1879, the railroad company erected a neat and substantial depot, over which Harry Daggett was placed in charge. Harry went from here to Hampton and his father, J.M. Daggett, is the present agent. He came here April 8th, 1880. He is a native of Maine, born in 1818.

When but a boy he engaged on a sail vessel for a whaling voyage. He has sailed around the world a number of times. He settled in Linn county, Iowa, in 1853, and went to Dubuque in 1860. He located at Allison as stated, April 8, 1880.

John M. Daggett continued to work for the railroad in Allison for the next several years. He also briefly served as postmaster. A lifelong Mason, he was present at the founding of the local Masonic Lodge in 1882 and served as its first secretary.



In 1888, the Daggetts moved once again, this time to St. Paul, Minnesota. John M. Daggett appears in the 1890 and 1891 St. Paul city directory as an insurance agent, residing at 155 E. Congress. In 1898, John and Martha moved to nearby Minneapolis. In the 1900 US census, John M. Daggett's occupation was "retired".

In 1904, when he was 86 years old, he was featured in a newspaper article in the St.

Paul Globe. This article included a brief biography, no doubt as recounted by the old man himself:

Mr. Daggett was born in Houlton, Me., in 1818, and was the eldest of a family of seven boys. At the age of 14 years he ran away from home and shipped on a whaling vessel; and for the next

fifteen years he followed the sea, working his way from the humble position of cabin boy to that of captain. He has been around the world five times, and has attended Masonic lodges in Port Elizabeth, Port Natal, in Africa, in Bombay, and on the island of Ceylon.

The following year, John M. Daggett was mentioned again in the St. Paul Globe:

At the annual meeting of the Minnesota grand lodge A.F. and A.M., interested and earnest as ever, was J.M. Daggett, the oldest Mason in Minnesota. Mr. Daggett is eighty-seven years of age, and has been a Mason for sixty-four years. During this time he has been connected with many lodges, having been sixteen times a past master and has visited lodges in many parts of the world.

Mr. Daggett was born in the town of Strong, in Maine, of Puritan stock, and first became a Mason when he joined the Star in the East lodge in New Bedford, Mass. In earlier years he was a sea captain and has thus been able to be with many foreign lodges. The West side lodge, No. 171, now claims Mr. Daggett, who resides in Minneapolis.

John Minot Daggett died a few months after this article appeared. His obituary made much of the fact that he was "the oldest Mason in the Northwest". Martha Matilda Cates Daggett died in 1911 at the age of 79.