

THE STORY OF MY LIFE

GEORGE WILLIAM GOODGE



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The following story was written by George William Goodge in 1921. This story was dedicated to his children, of whom each received a copy. The original copy from which this was taken is now, (1964) in the possession of George William Goodge's grandson, Roger Goodge of Concord, Tennessee.

I, George William Goodge, was born in the City of Evansville, Vanderburgh County, Indiana, on the eighteenth day of December, 1841, in a log house situated on the same lot that the Parsonage of St. Paul's Episcopal Church now stands, adjoining the Sunday School Room. My parents lived there for three years after my birth. Evansville was at that time a town of about twenty-five hundred people, with only a tavern, and two other brick buildings. The rest of the buildings, stores, and homes were either log or frame. Cows were milked and hogs were fed on Main Street.

All the schooling that I ever had was before I was fourteen years old, under three different teachers, a Mr. McAvoy, in the old Catholic Church, situated on Second Street between Main and Sycamore Streets. He used to whip with a lash across the hand. The lash or whip, it might be called, had a knot in the end with a sting in it. My second teacher was called old Father Chute, a Christian in a true sense of the word, always opening the school in the mornings by reading a Chapter in the Bible, and asking God's blessing on the labors of the day. Father Chute always kept a long cane in his hand, and with one (his?) eye open watching the boys; and if any one was not attentive he would be sure to get a tap on the head with that cane. The school was held in the basement on the old Locust Methodist Church, now Trinity M. E., corner of Third and Chestnut, which was finished in 1865.

At the completion of Evansville's first Free School Bldg., known as the Canal St. School, between 3rd and 4th Sts., (built in the year 1854), I went there for two winters to old Daddy Knight as teacher. He whipped his scholars across the palm of the hand with a ruler when they needed it. The Wabash and Erie Canal ran along the north side of the School Building, up to Second St. That was the Second St. branch, with a wharf built out of large timbers in front of the old Denby home. There was a man named George Gred who conducted a grocery store on the corner. The river bottom farmers made it their headquarters, as Evansville was a dry town at that time. The men got their whiskey on a plate out of sliced sausage which was soaked full of corn juice. The canal proper ran up Fifth street to Sycamore. From Sycamore Street it ran across the block, between Sycamore and vine, into what was called The Basin, which took up quite the whole square where the Court House now stands. There was a cemetery on that spot of ground and the bodies were removed and the Canal Basin was dug, and the building of Canal Boats was begun. From that Basin the Canal ran out First Avenue to Indiana Street, thence west two blocks, where in case of an overflow it could empty into the creek. The canal became such a nuisance and breeder of sickness, that in 1864 the bridge across Main, Locust and Sycamore Streets were taken down and the Canal filled with dirt.

It was at the corner of 4th and Canal Streets that I first learned to swim. There was what we called a gunnel across the canal at that point to allow people from what was called Goose Town to cross over on to get down to Main Street to do their trading. At the age of fourteen I left home and came to Evansville to learn the Marble Cutters' trade. I worked at it about one and a half years, but the dust settled on my lungs causing hemorrhages, and I returned home for a few months until I got recruited up. I was about sixteen years at that time. Mr. E. Q. Smith came to Evansville from Cincinnati and built a Chair Factory on the old Canal on First Avenue near where the Transfer Track is now located. He visited my father quite often so I asked him for a job when he got ready to start.

He said certainly. So I started at the opening of the factory. A great part of the lumber that he used came to the factory on Canal boats which were making regular trips at that time. While working there I boarded at home. Walking out on the road, now Columbia St., from the old E & T. H. Railroad tracks to the cemetery was all woods, with only a toe path through the woods, and always in the winter months when I went home my mother used to put a light in the window of an evening so that I would not get lost.

I well recollect the old Evans Home, just over the Canal bridge on Main Street to the right out from the river. It stood on quite a hill, several feet above the street, and was well shaded by trees. In the spring of 1859, I quit working at the Chair Factory, not liking the confinement and dust, which affected my lungs, and after trying the Carpenter trade a while, I quit that, and went with the Lant Bros., George and William to learn the brick laying trade, at which I stuck for a year and a half, until, at the call of my Country, through the most beloved American citizen and President, Abraham Lincoln, I enlisted as a member of Company A, Forty Second Indiana Volunteer Infantry, and was mustered in as a private on the 22nd day of August 1861, to serve for three years. On the 31st day of December, 1863, at Chattanooga, Tennessee, I was mustered out of the three years service and on the first day of January, 1864, I reenlisted for three years, or during the war.

In the spring of 1862, our Regiment marched from Wartrace on Green River, to Owensboro on the Ohio River, for the purpose of reinforcing our army at Ft. Donaldson. On the way down the river on steam boats, we learned of the Surrender of the Fort to the Union Army. So we were ordered to proceed on to Nashville, Tennessee, as our Company was on the leading boat. I was so near the head of the wharf. There were many loyal people in the city of Nashville and the stars and stripes, (Old Glory) were waved at us out of the second story windows of the buildings on the street fronting the river which made us boys feel good, and we answered with cheers. From Nashville we marched on to Huntsville, Alabama. The regiment lay there about three months, and when General Bragg with his army started for Louisville, Kentucky, in the fall of 1862, we were ordered after him. It was then that we started our first long march, hardly stopping for a day's rest, until we arrived at Louisville, dirty, ragged, and such a crop of body lice that we drew new army suits, stripped from head to foot, and were clean for the first time in three months. After a rest of two days, we started after the Confederate Army again, overtaking them at Perryville, where they stopped to give us a battle. Our Regiment being in the advance, received their first heavy fire. That was about one o'clock P. M., and we were under constant fire until dark. We drove the geese out of a pond, and filled our canteens with water rather too thick, but we were glad to get it. We needed no cradle to rock us to sleep that night. The next morning the sun was up when we awoke. The rebels had gone, leaving their dead on the battlefield, lying in rows. Our dead were lying where they fell. Four of our Company, with our Captain, had met a soldier's death, thirteen were wounded.

I was one of a squad detailed to gather and bury our dead. The next night we slept on snow-covered ground. Before we laid down, Colonel Denby came to where we were to bid us goodbye, as he was going to leave us the next morning, promoted, to be the Colonel of the 80th Indiana Volunteers. The tears flowed freely down his face as he talked to us, the soldier kind of a man who knew no fear. It was through him that the 42nd Indiana was the best drilled regiment in our brigade. We, for the second time, headed for Nashville, this time on foot. It was tramp, tramp, the boys a marching for us, from Huntsville, Alabama, through Tennessee and Kentucky to Louisville, and back to Nashville. I was taken sick for a few days, and only Colonel Jones, sending an ambulance after me at the hospital saved my life. He was sick at a private house in Nashville and wanted me for company until his wife came to him from Evansville.

The Colonel's doctor gave me some medicine, and getting away fromhardtack and fat pork, and coffee made in the same boiler that the meat was cooked in, and with good home-cooked food, mixed with a little corn juice and the best of wine, I soon began to improve, but was not strong enough to be with the boys at the battle of Stone River. But from Stone River to Chattanooga we were under fire quite often with the rear guard of the rebel army. We crossed over Lookout Mountain, about twenty miles from the point of Chattanooga, and it was not long until we were engaged in the great battle of Chickamauga. It was on a Sabbath morning. Up to eight o'clock everything was quiet—A Calm Before the Storm—first a single rifle shot, then coming faster as the rebels advanced. It was but a short time until the armies were engaged in the desperate conflict, and the roar of the cannon was so great that one could not hear a single shot, just a constant awful roar. The Confederates were too much for us Yanks, and we were driven into Chattanooga where our army threw up breast works across the valley from Missionary Ridge to Lookout Mountain. The armies lay there facing each other until General Hooker's army took Lookout Mountain. Our Regiment watched the progress of the battle from where we were in camp in Chattanooga.

About dark that evening our Regiment was ordered up on the mountain to relieve part of Hooker's men, who had been fighting all day; we were under fire all night. A good many of our regiment were killed or wounded and had to be brought down to the hospital the next morning. The day after Lookout was taken the Union army captured Missionary Ridge from the Johnnies. From that time on to Atlanta the fighting was almost constant, either battles with the rebels or driving back their rear guard.

At the reorganization of the army preparatory to the march to the sea with General Sherman, the whole army was examined and those not physically fit were not allowed to go. I was one of the rejected ones and among many others was sent to Madisonville, Indiana, where on the 15th day of June, 1865, at the close of the war I received an honorable discharge. So my military life practically ended. It has been my regret that I could not have gone with the boys to the sea. I was in the Service three years, ten months, and twenty-four days, having two honorable discharges, one from the three year service, and one at the close of the war. When I got home, I had six hundred dollars, spent two hundred of it for clothes and bought a lot on Oak Street, second door from the corner of Sixth with the other four hundred. Four hundred was given me as bounty; the other two hundred I saved out of the thirteen dollars a month that Uncle Sam gave us for fighting to preserve the Union. I lost no time in discarding my soldiers uniform.

Eighty-five dollars of the two hundred spent for citizens clothes was spent for a combination suit, that is, a suit that would do to go to church in, and also when I found the right one, for a wedding suit.

Like most of the boys getting a wife was in our minds. As it is now, in 1919, so was it in 1865. Marriageable girls were plentiful and so anxious were they that they were a little careless and got the worst end of the bargain sometimes as in my wife's case. Sparks were of short duration. I commenced keeping company with Miss Sarah Grey Ruston in July 1865, and in the evening of the 21st day of November 1865, we were married at the home of her brother who lived at that time on Sixth Street near Chandler Ave; the Rev. C. N. Sims, who at that time was the Pastor of the Trinity Methodist Church, performed the ceremony before a house full of relatives and friends.

I received a shock when asking for her from her Father, he said "NO", but before

leaving him I rallied and told him that the wedding would come off just the same. A few days afterwards we were married. On Thanksgiving Day we visited her home, with her brother and his wife. Her father in coming into the house, passed everybody and shook hands with his new son-in-law first.

The first year of our married life was spent at my father's home. Then I built us a home of two rooms and a lean-to at the rear, and then we moved to it we were in debt, six hundred and fifty dollars. Then came some hard knocks for a few years to pay off our debt. Living was high, flour, twenty-five dollars a barrel; butter, fifty cents a pound, and everything else in proportion.

In the fifty-five years of our marital life, we moved only three times, living at our home, 1308 Walnut Street forty-two and a half years, moving to our present home 313 Kentucky avenue on the twelfth of February 1918.

Wishing to finish my trade, immediately upon returning from the war, I started to work again with the Lant Brothers. The first job that I worked on was the First National Bank Building at the corner of First and Main Streets in 1865. I finished my trade with the Lant Brothers, and after a year or two with them, worked as a Journeyman, but soon got tired of that and started to put in foundations and building chimneys, and worked my way up to larger and better jobs, always seeking to build up a reputation for good work and fair dealing with my customers, until with God-given ability to manage men, I got the confidence of the good citizens of Evansville, and I am thankful to be able to say, with truth, that I never betrayed that confidence.

I have put up some of the largest brick buildings in the city; among which are the Blount Plow Works on Main St, in 1881, the residence of Major Rosencranz on First St., the Mackey building, also the Gans building, First and Vine Sts., and the Princeton Railroad Shops at Princeton. In 1878 Evans Hall, St. Lucas School Hall, Masonic Block, Second and Locust Sts., the Akin and Erskine Flour Mill on Ill. St., Igleheart Bros. Flour Mill on First Ave., Parsons and Scoville, wholesale grocery building on Main Street.

In the year 1884 I was employed by the School Board to build the Canal Street School Building, the one that now stands next to Third Street. I had to wreck the old building that had stood there for just thirty years before I could put up the new one. Reid Bros. were the architects for the new building, and in my seventy-fifth year, the residence of Samuel L. May, corner First and Cherry Streets, also in the fall of that year the residence of Miss Emma Bernardin, on Lincoln avenue. On account of my health and age, Miss Bernardin's dwelling was my last job.

About the year 1903, I took in with me a full partner, my eldest son, James W. Goodge. Our first job together was the residence of Mr. A. S. Butterfield on the corner of First and Oak Streets, From that time on, until we quit business in the fall of 1916, we were constantly full of work. Several of the above mentioned jobs were done while we were in partnership together and to him I owe a good deal for our success.

I got the work and attended to the buying of material and the financial part of the business, while he managed the work. Our many years together was blessed with good feeling between us, and my idea that I had when I first started in business, of always trying to

leave our customers satisfied, was carried out to the end of our building operations in the fall of 1916. After we quit business, one of our fellow contractors paid us a very nice compliment in talking to a bunch of contractors about us, made the remark, "Well the Goodges' quit with a clean state."

I have been highly honored in many ways in my native city, for many years, as a member of the Board of Trustees of Walnut St. Presbyterian Church, and on the first of April 1920, closed the second third year term as president of the board. I resigned from the Board of County Charities and Corrections in 1919 after serving about twelve years. For a great many years I have been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Home, now known as the Home of the friendless, all of which came to me unsolicited in anyway.

And now close to my eightieth mile stone, after an eventful life, a life of hard work, I can fully realize that the truth of the Scripture, 1st Peter 1st chapter, 24th verse, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man, as the flower thereof falleth away," I am really realizing that what is in Isaiah 46:4, "And even to your old age, I am He and even to hoary hairs, will I carry you, I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry, and will deliver you." So with this promise on my mind I can only close by returning thanks to God, the giver of all good gifts, for His Many Mercies to me. I have been blessed beyond what I can think or express or deserve, with my family not broken into yet, by death or by any deed of any kind that would bring discredit to any member; and I hope my children will endeavor to forget my faults and my weaknesses, and try perhaps to even magnify the virtues that were mine, and let your judgment of me rest, at least, upon my worthy deeds alone.

My last wish is that at my burial everything be done in the simplest form possible, and the services at the cemetery be private, and without flowers. It is my wish that my pall-bearers be selected, four from my church, and two from the Grand Army, members of my own company, if possible; but only the regular church services, either at the house or the cemetery. This request is without the slightest feelings towards any of my old army comrades, for I have always had a feeling next to kinship for all the boys that wore the blue, and the comradeship has always been closer than to any organization to which I have ever belonged, outside of the church. I hope by the Mercy of Cod, and through the merits of the atoning Blood of Christ only, to have a home in heaven with the hope of meeting, sometime, all of my family there.

Yours with love,  
(signed) Geo. W, Goodge

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POST SCRIPT

In regards to my Father and Mother, I wish to add these few lines that will be of interest to you. My Father came to America from Chateras, England with a friend of his by the name of Emery. They both were married, and left their young wives in there homes in the old country. Mr. Emery and my father landed in Evansville in 1837, when Evansville was only a small town. They worked hard and at the end of a year sent for their wives who came over together arriving here all right. My Father's wife only lived about a year after getting here, leaving a little Daughter. She grew up and at about twenty years of age was married to William Lant one of the firm of Lant Bros, with whom I learned my trade. Some time in the

winter of 1839 and forty my Father remarried Miss Matilda Beidelman whose parents lived at Mount Carmel Ills. They were what the people of those days called Pennsylvania Dutch Stock. Speaking very broken english. I was the first born of a family of eleven children to that union. There are only four of the eleven living at this time. March the 15th 1921, my self one sister, and two brothers. I know nothing of my grandparents on my father's side, only that my father was left an orphan when quite young. My grandmother on my mothers side died before she was fifty years old. My grand father living to almost ninety. I well recollect him in my young days. He built the first brick vault in Oak Hill Cemetery.

My father died on the fifth day of June 1897 at the age of eighty one years and five months. He was superintendent of Oak Hill Cemetery for forty-six years, the last words that he spoke the evening before he died, at five o'clock the next morning sitting on his bed with his head leaning against my shoulder was o dear. I laid him down he breathed regular until within a few moments before he died. My mother died on the 20th day of March 1907 at the age of seventy-nine years. She was one of the best mothers, who never failed to do a mothers part to all of her children, if any partiality was shown it was to the afflicted one of the family, my brother Lewis.

With love,  
(signed) Geo.W.Goodge