

# Paper chronicles life and death of a local war hero

*"The death of Major James B. Mulky, one of the city's oldest and best-known citizens, occurred at nine o'clock Saturday night at the residence on west Kirkwood Avenue."*

— *Bloomington Evening World*,  
Nov. 30, 1903.

The 19th century in America was a time of high patriotism reflected in the honor with which veterans of the Revolutionary, Mexican and Civil wars were buried. Major James B. Mulky had had his love of country tried in battle and was respected for willingness to serve in two wars.

The front-page story of his life was one of a man determined to do the right thing by his family, community and his country. Born in Crawford County (Ind.), Mulky came with his parents to Washington Township in 1834.

Chores on a farm were con-



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

sidered essential to family survival, but young Mulky managed to sandwich in education at subscription schools between planting and harvesting. It is likely that the family placed a high premium on education, since the boy was sent to an English grammar school at Milltown when he was 16.

Presumably that qualified him for teaching. In May of 1844, Mulky began teaching subscription schools in Owen County. According to the *Evening World*, "In the following January he entered the State University (IU) and remained until October, when he went to George-

town, Ind., and taught school for a time."

In other words, Mulky was, dropping in and out of teaching to earn expenses for his next round of university classes. The year, 1846, found him in the Second Indiana Regiment, which was heading for Mexico.

The newspaper skipped over what happened to that particular regiment, but the account of that unit's performance in the battle of Buena Vista is handled gently in a history of Hoosiers in the Mexican War. It was explained that the Second retreated in the face of odds of 4,000 to 400.

Returning from the war, Mulky dabbled in teaching, managing his father's farm and running a drug store in Bloomington. Finally, he entered IU Law School and graduated in 1859.

A partnership he formed with

the honorable James Hughes was short-lived, because the latter was appointed judge of the Court of Claims in Washington, D.C. Mulky practiced for another year with Professor John Young before joining the Indiana Fifty-fifth Regiment with the rank of major.

That tour of duty was less hazardous, but also less exciting. The unit was sent to Kentucky to resist any invasion of Confederates.

Later, he returned to Bloomington and resumed his law practice. He had married a woman by the name of Mary J. Coffey, and they had six children, three of whom were living in 1903.

At Major Mulky's death, there was no funeral in the home, because a little grandson (who lived with him) was ill with chicken pox. The house was quarantined. As the *Evening World* explained it, "The body will be taken to Rose Hill at

ten o'clock tomorrow morning, and at the grave the Masons will use their burial ceremony. Rev. J.E. Brant will also offer prayer."

Perhaps the old veteran was best known for the company he kept. As the newspaper put it, "Major Mulky was known well and intimately by every governor of Indiana since and including Gov. Whitcomb, and by every United States Senator which represented Indiana during the last half century and attended every National encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic..."

Even a short graveside service was a fitting tribute to a respected man who was considered a war hero. And it came at a simpler time in history when unabashed admiration and sentiment were not despised or belittled.

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