

# **Chester W. Inman's Story**

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Narrated by Officer Mark Younie in 2012

I am Constable McDonald from the Hartley Police department of 1894. I'd like to tell you about Major Chester Inman who was buried here in Pleasant View cemetery in April of 1894, and how I became involved in the story.

Chester Inman served in the Civil War. He enlisted from Clarksville, Iowa in Butler County August of 1861. He served in the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of Iowa, and during the war participated in the battles of Lookout Mountain, Vicksburg and Bentonville. During the battle of Vicksburg in May of 1863, he was severely wounded in the thigh but recovered and continued to fight in the war. Different promotions occurred during his military service with the final promotion to Major a month before he mustered out in July, 1865.

After the war, Chester was always called Major Inman. He and his brother Daniel were among the first settlers in O'Brien County in 1866. It was said soldiers were given certain privileges at that time, which may be the reason they came to northwest Iowa.

Major Inman and his wife Kate settled on a 580 acre farm (later known as Cedar Cliff Farm) in Section 26 of Grant Township, which is in the southeast part of the county. They had eight children, five sons and three daughters. Their house, started in 1869, was located on a bluff near Waterman Creek. It was described as a three-story mansion, costing \$3,500 to build. The lower story was stone and the upper story was frame. A large hall was constructed on the third floor for the purpose of "large entertainments and gatherings." The lumber for the frame part was hauled in from Fort Dodge.

Their farm was located near the town of Old O'Brien. In 1869, Major Inman also built a hotel there, known as the Crego Hotel. The Major was the first postmaster of Old O'Brien, and being very civic minded served as Superintendent of Schools in 1869, County Recorder from 1868-1869, County

Treasurer 1868-1869, and County Supervisor from 1871-1872. He was also a partner in publishing the *O'Brien Weekly Pioneer* in Sanborn for a brief period.

He was described as a “good man of considerable breadth, having a kind heart and sympathetic nature.” Unfortunately a grasshopper scourge occurred at some point in time while the family lived at the Grant Township location, and they lost everything.

The Major lived in the Primghar area at one time and was one of the founders of the town. Each of the letters in the word Primghar is the beginning letter of one of the founders, and Major Inman was the “I.”

Now comes the part of the story where I, Constable McDonald became involved. W. J. Warner purchased property in the fall of 1890, in Section 16 of Lincoln Township, west and north of the city of Hartley. In the spring of 1891, the Major and his family purchased property in Section 16 of Lincoln Township.

There was a disputed property line by Mr. Warner and the Major, and there followed several lawsuits tried in Sanborn. The lawsuits involved Warner harvesting hay on Inman property and also his cattle running in the Inman cornstalks..... A newspaper article reported that Major Inman threatened Warner with a gun if Warner crossed the disputed property line with his farming. In 1893, a surveyor was brought out to Section 16, and he found the Inman property claim was over the line into the Warner property.

The Major went out in the evening and smoothed out the corner mark the surveyor had made and said he would have the survey done when *he* planned it. The surveyor did not want to go against the Major's wishes and did not come back. Mr. Warner consulted legal advice and found it would involve a long expensive lawsuit to establish the property line and let the matter drop as he did not have the funds to pursue it.

On April 2, 1894, Mr. Warner was sowing oats on or near the disputed property east line. While Major Inman was eating dinner with his family about 6:00 p.m. that evening, he looked out the

window and saw Warner seeding oats near that line. He rushed out to stop Warner's team of horses by grabbing the bridles. Warner tried to make the team of horses go ahead, but they wouldn't, so he got off the seeder.

Major Inman let go of the horses and struck out at Warner with his fists. Warner, being afraid he would be killed because of Major Inman's past threats, protected himself with his left hand, pulled out a knife, and struck Inman. Warner said he intended to strike low toward the Major's leg and didn't mean to kill him. The Major called for help from his nearby house and fell toward the ground. Warner took out after his team of horses that had run away, caught them and then headed to Sanborn to find a doctor to come and help the Major.

A messenger brought the news into Hartley that Major Inman had been murdered and a number of citizens rode their horses the seven miles to the Inman residence. With evidence and a coroner's inquest, I, Constable McDonald, arrested Mr. Warner at his home about 10:00 p.m. that night. He was brought back to Hartley where he was arraigned before the justice and bail was set at \$2500. Sheriff Carter then took charge of the prisoner, and they left on the 11:00 p.m. train for Sheldon where Warner could secure counsel.

Warner was later tried for the murder of Major Inman and sentenced to two years and three months for manslaughter. The jury was out for twenty-three hours and recommended the light sentence and clemency on the part of the court.

This was the first murder trial ever tried in O'Brien County.

Major Inman was laid to rest here in Pleasant View Cemetery April of 1894, at the age of 57 years.