

## Joseph Edgar Montgomery

By Frances Harrington



Joseph Edgar Montgomery was one of six children born to Joseph and Frances (Bagby) Montgomery. He was born on February 3, 1847 in Rushville, Illinois, and was one of six children. His father was born in 1810 and his mother in 1820, both were born in Kentucky. His father worked in public administration in Rushville as a Circuit Court Clerk, Justice of the Peace, and as a Lawyer. His mother died when he was nine, in 1856. His father lived until 1882.

Somewhere around the age of twenty, Joseph E. Montgomery came to Muskegon. He worked for David McLaughlin in his general store. Joseph had previously worked with Mr. McLaughlin at a store in Illinois. In 1870, he married Fannie Tillotson. Fannie was the daughter of George J. Tillotson, early pioneer lumberman of Muskegon. Joseph & Fannie had their first child in 1873, a son they named Dallas after Fannie's brother. The baby only lived three months. That same year, Joseph E. Montgomery, along with John VanderWerp, and William S. Hofstra went into partnership to form J. E. Montgomery & Company Furniture & Undertaking. It was a very successful business venture for all involved. September 22, 1876 saw the birth of the Montgomery's second son, George E. Montgomery. Their daughter, Florence T. Montgomery was born on August 28, 1880. In 1883, W. S. Hofstra left the partnership and it became known as Muskegon Furniture Company, Montgomery & VanderWerp. In 1887, John VanderWerp bought out Joseph's interest in the furniture and undertaker business, which would from then on be known as J. D. VanderWerp, and was one of the longest operating furniture stores in Muskegon. John VanderWerp died in 1919.

Over the years, Mr. Montgomery went on with many other business ventures, mostly focusing on lumber and real estate. He was a partner in McCracken, Hume & Co. (lumber and shingles), he partnered with R. K. Mann in the R. K. Mann & Co. (retail lumber yard and jobbing), he owned Joseph Montgomery & Co. (retail lumber), he was President of Edwards Lumber Co. (wholesale & retail lumber), and a stock holder in the Muskegon Realty Company (it was organized to provide a more convenient way of handling local real estate). Mr. Montgomery dealt heavily in the real estate business, at times, owning complete city blocks in the downtown area, with multi-floor buildings, including the Torrent Block. He owned a beautiful Victorian home on the southwest corner of Clay and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave., and later purchased from Mrs. H. H. Holt,

the old Hackley/Holt home at Clay and 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Along with Mr. David Christie, he bought Interlaken Park in North Muskegon, (a large parcel of land between Bear Lake and Muskegon Lake that was owned by the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad). He was a very active member of the Chamber of Commerce, helping to bring new businesses to Muskegon. He belonged to the Muskegon Mason Lodge No. 140, Chapter No. 47 of the Royal Ark Masons, and Commandery No. 22 of the Knights Templar.

Joseph's son George was the proprietor of the Lakeside Fuel & Ice Company. He married Ella Wagner on April 2, 1902, and had a son George Jr., who was born in 1904. George and his family moved to Pasadena, California, in 1905, in hopes to improve his failing health. He died there in 1908 of tuberculosis at the age of 31. Ella and George Jr. moved in with Joseph and Fannie and lived in their home for many years. Florence, Joseph's daughter, who had gone out to help care for her brother during his illness, died in 1910 in Phoenix, Arizona, of the same dreaded disease at the age of 29.

Joseph and Fannie would usually travel to warmer climate during the harsh Michigan winters, especially during their senior years, to help with their own health issues. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1912, they were returning from Florida, onboard the "Dixie Express". After having eaten lunch with Fannie on board the train, he decided to get some air. He walked through the cars until he reached the last car, where the observation deck was. The train was traveling approximately 50 mph and Joseph was enjoying the fresh air, by himself. The train made a rather sharp curve at Nortonville, Kentucky, and Joseph must have lost his balance and fell off the platform, landing on his head and shoulder. Some local people, who had seen what happened, rushed to his aid. He never regained consciousness. No one on the train knew that this had taken place, and the train kept rolling on. After a time, Fannie asked for help from other passengers because she couldn't find Joseph. They searched and searched but of course, didn't find him. It would have taken about 7 hours from the time he fell, until they reached their next stop in Indiana. It was at that stop that they had to inform Fannie of the death of her husband. He was 65. (There were rumors that Joseph had won a large sum of money while playing poker with some men on the train, and that they had actually pushed him off the observation deck, but from all I've read, I don't find this story plausible.)

After the accident, it was feared that Fannie would not live long herself. Having lost both her adult children and her husband in the span of four years, they thought it would be too much for her to bear, but she proved them all wrong. She continued to be very active in the community and especially in her church. She died January 15, 1938 at the age of 86. Fannie, Joseph, Dallas, George, and Florence are all buried in the family plot at Evergreen Cemetery in Muskegon, MI.

Sources: Ancestry.com, findagrave.com, Hackley Public Library Local History & Genealogy Dept., Genealogybank.com (Muskegon Chronicle), Interlakeassociation.com, Lakeshore Museum Center, and Holland's Muskegon City Directory 1879-80.

