

The Grinnell Register

PUBLISHED SEMI-WEEKLY—MONDAYS AND THURSDAYS.

GRINNELL, IOWA, MONDAY, JULY 31, 1916

THE OLDEST MAN IN THE STATE IS DEAD

MUMPFORD HOLLAND OF GRINNELL WAS 108 YEARS OLD.

He Was Born in Slavery and Was a Union Soldier—Came Here 45 Years Ago.

Mumpford Holland is dead. He died Friday evening, July 28, 1916, at 6:45. Mumpford Holland was a colored man and from the facts that have been learned he was about 108 years of age and probably the oldest man in the state of Iowa.

Mumpford Holland was born a slave near Princeton, Kentucky. The exact date of his birth is not known as he had no official record, but as nearly as can be figured out by old acquaintances he was born about the year 1808. His first master was the owner of a tannery by the name of William Bush. He, with other slaves was sold many times and saw many hardships. He was a servant of an army officer during the Mexican war. Later during the civil war he enlisted and served as a cook in the Union army. At the close of the war he was mustered out at Davenport. In 1870 or 1871 Hon. Geo. M. Christian brought him to Grinnell where he worked for him in the old Grinnell House for many, many years. All these years he has made Grinnell his

home. He has been an industrious and honest citizen. He bought property in South Grinnell and lived in his own home many years prior to his death. He was converted and joined the Salvation Army early in the eighties and was a faithful member of that organization and has lived a Christian life ever since. He was respected by all who knew him. He was a patient sufferer for more than a year and died in the triumph of the living faith. He had no family, being sold from his wife in slavery.

The funeral services were held on Sunday afternoon in the Uncle Sam club house, conducted by Rev. E. W. Cross and Rev. John Lucas, an old friend and former citizen of Grinnell, but now of Buxton. The club house was filled with people and a great many could not obtain seats. A token of respect that was due this faithful old man whom all Grinnell knew so well.

Henry Barnes was telling the Register man that his first wife taught this old slave his letters away back in the latter sixties down at Davenport. George Christian tells us that he was one of the best colored men he ever knew and that he was absolutely honest and honorable.

He has always been industrious and frugal. Years ago he would buy a bunch of hogs and call at the various homes in Grinnell, picking up the garbage, fatten these hogs and sell them which brought him good money for his time and labor.

Rev. John Lucas said in his remarks that he had known Mumpford Holland ever since he was a little tad and he never knew him to be any other way than happy and light-hearted and that he had a pleasant smile for everyone. That he was ever cheerful and thoroughly dependable.

Mumpford was quite a unique character around town. Robert Coutts tells of a time when Mumpford was janitor of one of the banks here in Grinnell when he was heard to say, "Golly, I wish I had a million dollars." Sam Pooley asked him what in the world he would do with so much money. The old colored fellow replied: "I would eat and eat and eat 'til I was fit to bust." "Why you couldn't begin to eat up the interest on a million dollars," replied Mr. Pooley. "Chile," solemnly declared the old man, "you all don't understand what a powerful appetite I has."

Almost everyone you talk with has an anecdote about Mumpford. John B. Lucas, of Buxton, who was here for the funeral and who was appointed his executor by the old gentleman in his will, said he had occasion to laugh at him one time when he was on the streets with the Salvation Army here in Grinnell, exhorting the sinners to repentance. No one responded and the old man shook his head "more in anger than in sorrow" and said: "When all of us

what is done saved gits up to heaven and looks back on you all, you all's goin' to look right green."

There has been a great deal of speculation about his age. John Lucas says that his father, Henry Lucas who used to own a farm down near Ewart was born in 1811, and he has often heard his father and Mumpford talk and discuss the things they remembered as boys and by comparing events they in that way determined that Mumpford was at least three or four years older than the senior Lucas.

The poor old fellow has been bed-fast for about a year and has been cared for in his home by Mr. and Mrs. Gus Renfrew and Mrs. Field. Mrs. Field was formerly Mrs. Good the mother of William Good to whom Mumpford bequeathed all he owned. Ed Good, the father, died in 1901 and at his death Mumpford promised to look after his son to the best of his ability, which he did and went a step farther by leaving him the income from his property during his lifetime and at his death to be divided among his heirs.

The deceased had retained his faculties to a remarkable degree. This spring Ed Brande was appointed by the court to act as his guardian to the end that he might be properly looked after personally and his property conserved. He has known of and appreciated the many kind acts and thoughtful remembrances of his acquaintances in Grinnell. Mr. Lucas said he especially appreciated an electric fan which Carl Phelps had installed by him at his own expense.

In true southern style he always addressed the ladies of his acquaintance, and especially those for whom he performed services as "Honey" or "Mah dear." When the men about town teased him and threatened him with bodily harm if he did not cease the use of such endearments in speaking to their wives, Mumpford would smile depreciatingly and say "What's de mattah ob you' chile don' yo' know I don' mean no ha'm."

He was buried in Hazelwood or the Good family lot.

THE GRINNELL HERALD.

PUBLISHED SEMI-WEEKLY

GRINNELL, IOWA, TUESDAY, AUGUST 1, 1916

GRINNELL SINCERELY MOURNS MUMPFORD

Aged Negro, a Town Institution For
So Many Years, Dies Friday
Evening.

BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN
ABOUT 108 YEARS OLD

He Was Brought To Grinnell By Geo.
M. Christian in 1871 To Work in
Old Grinnell House.

"There's no more work for poor' Uncle
Ned,
For he's gone where de good niggers
go."

Let these lines, taken from one of
the plaintive folk songs of his own
people, serve to convey the intelli-
gence that Mumpford is dead. One of
Grinnell's characters for these many
years, a negro typifying the best qual-
ities of his race, faithfulness, indus-
try and affection, has crossed the river
and rests under the shade of the trees.

The life of Mumpford Holland meant
more to Grinnell than many people
realized. He was the one link, even
though a humble one, through which
Grinnell was brought into touch with
the romance and the glamour of the
Old South, befo' de wah.

Not that there was much glamour in
Mumpford's own experience. He only
reflected it from those who had been
his masters in the days when men had
masters. For Mumpford had been a
slave. He had experienced all the vic-
issitudes of a slave. He was born a
slave, near Princeton, Ky. His first
master was named William Bush and
was the owner of a tannery. Like
other slaves Mumpford was sold many
times. When he reached man's estate
he married, but in one of the upheav-
als which came into his life his wife
was sold away from him and he never
saw her again.

When the Mexican war broke out
he went to the front as body servant
for his master, and at the outbreak of
the Civil war he was again called up-
on to serve in a similar capacity.
Down in Texas somewhere, according
to the story, he was captured, prob-
ably not making any serious resist-
ance, and soon he cast in his fortunes
with the Union army, and enlisted as
cook. He was mustered out of the
service at Davenport when the war
was over.

In 1871 George M. Christian, was
conducting the old Grinnell house here
and was in need of a porter and gen-
eral factotum. He had known Mump-
ford in Davenport and knew that he
was industrious and reliable, so he
sent for the negro and introduced him
to Grinnell. When he came from Davenport Mumpford was said to be sixty
years old and his hair and beard were
already touched with gray.

For all the years since 1871, Mump-
ford has been a fixture in Grinnell.
He worked for Mr. Christian many
years and later worked for himself
doing odd jobs about town. The sight
of Mumpford in his dilapidated old wa-
gon with the old horse which dragged
one foot as he walked was once too
familiar to excite comment. Men who
are now engaged in active business
here have known Mumpford all their
lives and have considered him as one
of the imperishable institutions of
Grinnell.

It almost seemed that Mumpford
couldn't die. The years passed by
and seemed to leave little impression
upon him. Always there were the
same quaint stooping walk, the same
deferential greeting, the flash of white
teeth from behind the gray, wooly
beard. In the old days when Mumpford
was about the streets everybody teas-
ed him and joked with him and he ex-
pected it and liked it.

No one knew how old Mumpford was.
The best estimate obtainable places
his age at time of death at 108 years.
During the past few months his health
had failed and he was seen no more
on the streets. He was confined to
his little home; his own home, in
south Grinnell, bought and paid for
with his hard earned money. It was
one of the substantial fruits of a life
of industry and frugality and he was
proud of it and loved to keep it neat
and clean. During the past few days
of intense heat he failed rapidly. The
end came on Friday evening at 7:30
o'clock. The funeral was held from
the Uncle Sam clubhouse on Sunday,
conducted by Rev. E. W. Cross, who
was assisted by J. B. Lucas. Mump-
ford's body sleeps in Hazelwood. Per-
haps his brave, cheerful soul has
found in the Great Beyond the wife
whom he had "loved long since and
lost awhile."

Mumpford was converted and joined
the Salvation Army in the early eight-
ies and remained an earnest member
of that organization all the rest of his
life. In the words of the obituary
read at his funeral he "died in the
triumph of the living faith."