

MATTHEW HUGHES

SECTION K, BLOCK 89, LOT 6

Matthew Milton Hughes, pioneer, inventor, Civil War veteran, promoter of education, and friend to all, was born July 10, 1840 in Buck County, Pennsylvania. Described by local journalists as irrepressible, he fought hard for what he believed in but was not too proud to admit when he'd made a mistake. These qualities, as well as his contributions to Northern Michigan, the Union Army, and the United States of America, made him a well-respected and well-liked man wherever he went.



Not much is known of Hughes' early life, however he must have been loyal to his country and anti-slavery as he was arguably the very first man to enlist in the Civil War on April 16, 1861, two days before the call went out. While working in



Indianapolis at a mill he stopped to read the news posted on a writing board: Fort Sumter being fired upon. That same day he searched out John Fahnestock, captain of an independent military company, to sign up. Captain Fahnestock said the company was full, but one of the men was too ill to contribute. Fahnestock discharged the ill man and Hughes immediately enlisted in Company B of the 11th Indiana Infantry, making him the first man to enlist. When discharged on August 28, 1865, his papers were signed by then colonel Lew Wallace, who would later become known as the author of Ben-Hur.

Hughes reenlisted in September as a sergeant in Company A, 8th Indiana infantry. He fought in many battles, including Vicksburg and joined the Shenandoah Campaign. On October 20,

1864 Hughes was promoted to Captain. His only marked injuries occurred after the war had ended. He was told to get the keys to a courthouse in Abbeville, Georgia and the keyholder set his bloodhounds upon him. The animals did considerable harm before his men could get them off, leaving Hughes as one of only two men receiving pensions due to dog attacks. His body was covered with wounds which, left untreated, became infected and troubled Hughes for the rest of his life. The skin on his face became so sensitive that he could not wash it with soap. When Hughes mustered out on August 28, 1865 in Savannah, he had served continuously through the entire war.

On October 31, 1865 Hughes married Julia Etta Loomis, the love of his life. They had seven children and settled briefly in Ohio, then Indiana before moving north to the village of Canby in Center Township in

1876. He worked as a farmer, carpenter, and millwright. While there he was also an advocate for education, requesting that a school be built for the area children. When no one stepped up to the task Hughes built a school in 1883 on his own property with his own limited funds. He even bought an organ for the building. His only request for help was for items to decorate the school. Julia,



Matt Hughes, the inventor, solemnly promised us last Monday that he would wash his face and shave at least twice a week during resort season. Water makes his delicate skin rough and from October to May he never allows it to touch his face, depending wholly on "dry wipes" with a crash towel. However for the good of the town while so many strangers are here, he will take the chances of injuring his complexion at least twice a week.

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who had taught for several years earlier, served as the school teacher. Matthew had an ally in the newspaper. The Petoskey Record reminded its readers that the local children should take advantage of the free educational opportunity provided by the Hughes. It also publicly commended both Mr. and Mrs. Hughes for their hard work and dedication to the children in the area. After successfully completing a few school terms on their own, Hughes transferred the school to the Bliss district.

During this time fire was a very real and ever present danger. Log homes and other buildings burned quickly, often trapping those inside to suffer a horrible death. Hughes invented and patented an early collapsible fire escape ladder. The

ladder could easily attach to the window sills to allow individuals to escape 60-feet down if necessary. The ladder was easy to store and handle; the Petoskey Record was so impressed that it recommended it to all area hotels. The National Fire Preventative Association invited Hughes to display his ladders at their annual convention in New York and offered to pay his travel expenses. Eventually Hughes accepted and sold the patent for a royalty fee to a South Bend manufacturer.

Hughes was very well liked in the Canby area. Articles in the newspaper praised him for his generosity and stick-to-it-ness, as well as poked fun when he publicly removed his allegiance from the Greenback party to the Republican party. He served as the president of the Emmet County Pioneer Association, appointing eleven association directors representing every township in the county.

Hughes also received the first letter ever addressed to Canby, although it was routed from Indiana to Harbor Springs to Conway to Cross Village to Petoskey to Pellston and finally to Levering before reaching its destination.

In 1885 the Hughes family moved to Petoskey. The *Emmet County Democrat*, a Harbor Springs newspaper, wrote "The irrepressible M. M. Hughes, of Center, has moved to Petoskey. Sorry to see him go. Mat is a good and energetic worker in school matters and all public affairs." His return visits were always welcomed.

In the early 1900's Matthew's wife Julia became very ill and was diagnosed with cancer. According to his great-granddaughter Margaret Kingsford, "Matthew loved her so much that when she got cancer, he sold the farm piece by piece trying to find a cure." Unfortunately she died on May 18, 1906. Within two years Matthew had moved into a home for disabled veterans in Indiana. He returned to Petoskey, but spent much time visiting his son Sheldon in Hot Springs, Arkansas. On April 15, 1921 the irrepressible Matthew Hughes died of heart trouble at his daughter Lyda's Petoskey home. He was 81 years old.

M.M. Hughes has received the patent on his fire escape ladders, dated May 31st, 1887, and running 17 years. He is offered \$1,500 cash for it with 15 percent of sales of territory but he has declined for the present. The managers of the National Fire Preventive Association have sent Mr. Hughes a complimentary railroad pass and invite him to exhibit his ladders at their annual convention in Troy, N.Y. next August, in addition to this valuable invention Mr. Hughes has another patent pending which promises to be even yet more valuable.

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Matt Hughes has placed his patent fire escape extension ladders with a large South Bend firm for manufacture on a royalty.

The Petoskey Record
December 14, 1887

Abandoned Indian Claims

As a number of our homesteaders proved up on Indian claims cancelled for abandonment about ten years ago, and the Department of the Interior during the present year, has re-instituted the Indian claims thus vitiating the title of the white men who settled up on said lands, thereby causing great loss and suffering, the following will be of interest to many. Quite a number of said white homesteaders have appealed from the decision of the Land commissioner, and the appeal is taking its course through the land office department, and will possibly reach headquarters and an adjudication about 1897. Mr. M. Hughes, however, wrote to the president some weeks since relating the facts as they affected the white claimants under the final receipt issued by the land office at Reed City, to which he received a reply stating that the president had referred the matter to the land office for examination. Last week in consequence of said action, Mr. Hughes received the following letter from the acting commissioner of the land office;

MATTHEW M. HUGHES,
Petoskey, Mich.

Sir, - Referring to your letter of Nov. 7th, 1887, relative to H.E. 8014, E.C. 5016, in your name for n.w. fl. 4 Sec. 3 Tp. 37 N. R. 5 W., Mich.

The above tract was covered by Indian homestead entry NO. 5126, which was canceled Janny. 17th, 1877, for abandonment.

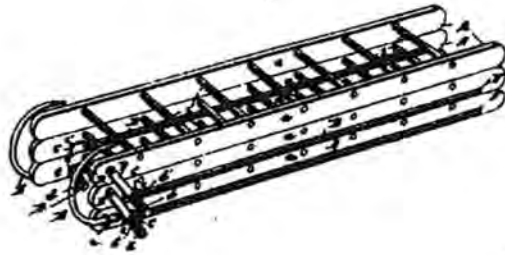
On Oct. 10th, 1887, by office letter "C." the local officers at Reed City were advised the H.E. 5126 was reinstated upon the records of this office and they were instructed to allow, the party in interest to submit final proof, in the usual manner, in support of the same.

No further steps will be taken in the matter until the Indian has been heard from, and you will be advised of any notion taken, and will be given an opportunity to be heard from before final action is taken.

Very respectfully,
S.M. Stockslager,
Acting Commissioner.

The Petoskey Record
December 21, 1887

364.173. LADDER. MATTHEW M. HUGHES, Petoskey, Mich. Filed Mar. 3, 1887. Serial No. 230.135 (No medal)



Claim. – 1. A ladder comprising a series of similar sections having longitudinal slots in their side bars and devices carried by the adjacent sections to engage said slots and thereby hold the sections together and permit their movement upon each other, substantially as set forth.

2. In a ladder, the combination, with the similar sections, of the hooked bars attached to the side bars of the section forming the upper and the latter by staples, in which their ends rotate so that the bars can either be turned outward for attachment to a support or inward against the sections, and means, substantially as described, whereby each section can be slid down to the end of its adjacent inner section, substantially as specified.

3. In a ladder, the combination of side bars, of the similar sections provided with the longitudinal slots, the retaining – pieces having the shanks sliding in said slots and their end plates on each side of the same, the links pivoted at one end to the side bars of a section, and having the slots on their outer ends engaged to studs standing outward from the retaining – pieces attached to an adjacent section, and means, substantially as described, whereby the upper section may be suspended from a suitable support, as specified.

4. The folding suspensible ladder composed of the sections A , provided with rounds b and slide bars a, having the slots B, provided at their lower ends with the pads F, the retaining – pieces C, provided with the shanks c and end plates e, the links D, provided with the slots d, engaging the studs d, on the corresponding pieces C, and the hooked bars E, turning in the staples e, secured to the side bars of the section forming the top of the ladder, substantially as specified.

The “irrepressible” Matthew M. Hughes has, at last awakened from his “Rip Van Winkle” slumbers to a state of sensibility. He denounces the Greenback party, and has notified the Independent of his withdrawal from that party. Guess Hampton in “shooting off his mouth” at Canby “dished up” too “hot and fast” for the special comfort of the “irrepressible” Matt, has an appetite for brain food as well as other kinds of food, and is particularly fond of “solid argument” and delights in masticating it too. If the appearances and looks of people are not often deceiving, Hampton is a prodigy to us. One would think from the proportion of his mouth comparatively, that he placed his principles of oratory upon a larger basis—that his weapon was capable of carrying a heavier charge. We do not find any fault with the loudness of its report. He shouts it off with a sham battle charge. It is something like an old fashioned shot gun whose barrel is the biggest part of it, and the muzzle larger than the breech, which causes an explosion and scattering of shot that nothing is hurt except he who stands behind and shoots it off. If Hampton would e successful in the practice of “shooting off his mouth,” he should not come to Centre to find his target. We do not care a green tamarind for the report of a little brass mounted pop-gun,—what we want is “solid argument.” Matt’s withdrawal from the Greenback party will be a heavy loss to the party, for under his irrepressible influence others will be converted to Republicanism, which party he has already joined. N.A.P.

The Petoskey Record
March 5, 1884



Dean Smith Portraying Matthew Hughes