

GENERAL ISAAC
DEGRAFF TOLL
1818-1908



“Here his grave will long be kept green, and his memory long be revered by his neighbors and friends.”¹

Isaac DeGraff Toll was not born into riches or to royalty but to respectability and patriotism. “The General” began his life where many generations of Tolls before him had begun, in Glenville, three miles from Schenectady, New York. His great-great grandfather had come to New York in 1680, only 60 years after the pilgrims landed on America's shores. The DeGraff family, his mother's maiden name, had also come to this country in the late 1600s or early 1700s. The stock from which he came was patriotic and loyal to their new country. They passed their name, along with their strength, their courage, and their love of liberty to the many generations that followed.

Isaac DeGraff Toll was born on December 1, 1818, the first of seven children to Philip R. and Nancy D. Toll. He attended school in New York, graduating from high school and then moving on to Union College where his father was on the board. Barely into his first semester in 1834, his father decided to move the family to Michigan. He needed 16-year-old Isaac to help the family start a new life in a new part of this vast country. They moved to Centreville in St. Joseph County, Michigan which, to a New Yorker, was considered 'way out west' at the time. Philip Toll started a mercantile and manufacturing businesses of which Isaac was a part. Isaac grew from a youth to a man while working with his father, impressing those around him with his work ethic and integrity.

1 Words from General Toll's obituary.

When he was 21 years old, Isaac was elected as town assessor and later was elected to the office of township supervisor. In 1846, at roughly 27 years of age, he was elected to the lower house of the state legislature. The historical reference work, *The Grand Traverse Region* said, “His record as a member of that body was unusually brilliant” and continued: “As chairman of the committee on militia, he framed what was said by the Detroit press to be the best bill for the organization of the state militia that Michigan ever had.” The bill was passed into law. Nearly 60 years later Toll’s reputation still held respect, as he was asked to serve on a committee to secure legislation to prevent desecration of the flag.²

In 1847, he was elected to the state senate and upon close of the session for that year he accepted the rank of captain in the Fifteenth United States Infantry and prepared to enter the Mexican War.

Captain Isaac DeGraff Toll was commissioned a captain in the United States Army. According to *The Biographical History of Northern Michigan*: “He accepted a commission as captain in the regular army, though it was most injurious to his business affairs to leave home.” He formed a company of men and went through the Mexican campaign with General Scott—from Vera Cruz to the city of Mexico. He proved himself to be a man of action.

The Mexican War is the first war that the young country participated in that was not to defend a cause. This battle, born out of greed of politicians out east, was simply to gain land for the United States. One young congressman from Illinois by the name of Abraham Lincoln spoke out against the war. Later he would count General Toll as one of his friends, despite Lincoln being a Republican and Toll a Democrat.

Captain Toll gained national recognition in his role at the battle of Churubusco. Surrounded by the fallen men of his company, Captain Toll braved the fire of the Mexican Army and made his way back to the commanding officers, asking them for permission to charge the enemy. He was denied. He returned twice more to ask permission to charge the enemy positions but was denied each time. Now he was severely outnumbered, sources saying as badly as six to one. He and his men charged the enemy forces and won the battle, which led to the winning of the war.

² We don’t think of the ‘desecration of the flag’ being an issue back in 1906 before Woodstock and the Vietnam War peace movement—but evidently it was serious enough that legislation was deemed necessary to curtail it.

His disobedience of orders was overlooked and his name was written in the history books of great men of the day.

Two months after the war with Mexico was won, Captain Toll resigned his commission and left the military. In 1849, he was a candidate for the Michigan constitutional convention. He won every vote from his township except for three. In 1849, at age 31 he married Julia V. Moran. Three children were born during their marriage, Anna J. who died in infancy, Charles Philip, and Julia Josephine.

From 1854 to 1861 Mr. Toll was a patent examiner in Washington D.C. During this time such innovations as cable cars, barbed wire fencing, and the internal combustion engine were coming into use and their patent applications were processed in this office.

In 1861, with the threat of war hanging over the Nation's capital, General Toll was elected to lead a group of volunteers who would fight to defend the capital against any Confederate aggression. When the elections caused a change in political parties in Washington, the General was replaced in his position and returned to Fawn River, Michigan.



General Toll's years of battle could not have prepared him for the sorrow he would encounter in his personal life. Not only did he lose his first-born child as an infant, but Mrs. Toll died on April 14, 1865, leaving him to raise his son and daughter. She was only 36 years of age; they had been married 16 years.

In the same cemetery in Fawn River that General Toll's infant daughter lay, was a plot reserved especially for the destitute. These individuals' families did not have the money to spend on markers to honor their loved ones. General Toll donated funds for all burial plots to have a marker (of similar size to others in the cemetery) commemorating the lives that had been lived.

In the late 1870s, General Toll began to visit Petoskey in the summer for his health, moving here permanently in 1880. He im-

mediately was accepted in this young town, just as he had been everywhere he went. He became the village's second president in 1881, succeeding H.O. Rose, the "father of Petoskey" who had served one year prior. It was common in the early days of Petoskey for men to serve in local government positions for short periods of time.

General Toll's organizational skills served him well during his time as president, as he presented an itemized account of all expenditures for the general public to see. The only funds he received for his two years of service was \$.50 to reimburse himself the price of some stamps.

General Toll, in his role as president, became known as the "father of the breakwater" for garnering the funds for its construction and overseeing the project. His hard work helped make Petoskey's harbor a safer place for the large number of boats which docked here daily. He also kept the sidewalks and streets in repair which improved the physical appearance of the town. It was under his administration that the city installed a water system to serve the business district.

He owned property in town on Elm Street that he had offered to the Lombard Post, G.A.R.³ but the post decided to erect a monument in Greenwood Cemetery instead. Rather than selling the property for profit, he gave the site for the original Lockwood Hospital. His generosity helped many, and his donation helped the hospital become a reality much sooner than expected.



General Isaac Toll died March 27, 1908, at age 89. Despite his advanced age, his death came as a shock to the citizens of Petoskey, who regarded him with affection and respect. His obituary reads "*None knew him but to love him, nor named him but to praise.*" With his death Petoskey did indeed lose a "*most popular citizen and fine old gentleman.*"

3 Grand Army of the Republic.



TOLL PARK IN GREENWOOD CEMETERY
COMMEMORATES VETERANS BURIED IN GREENWOOD WHOSE GRAVES ARE
NOT OTHERWISE MARKED

OBITUARY AND STORIES

GENERAL I.D. TOLL.

Sudden Death of Petoskey's Veteran Soldier and Most Popular Citizen, and Fine Old Gentleman.

The city was startled, last Friday morning, by news of the sudden death of Petoskey's veteran soldier and most popular citizen, General Isaac DeGraaf Toll. He had been in about ordinary health and spirits all day Thursday. About noon he sent a short letter to the RECORD (probably the last letter he ever wrote), the handwriting of which showed that he was then in his customary health, while the contents showed the interest he took in the coming city election and that he was in good spirits. It was not until evening that indications of illness were manifest which his age made serious and, presently, fatal.

General Toll was born in Glenville, N.Y., December 1, 1818. He was, therefore, 90 years of age on the first of December last. He married, in 1840, at the age of 31, Miss Julia Moran, of Detroit, by whom he had three children, two of whom – Charles P. Toll, and Mrs. F.H. Croul, of Detroit, are living. There is also a granddaughter, Miss Croul. Gen. Toll's wife died, April 14, 1865. She was buried in the little old Catholic cemetery in Detroit, which has long been closed.

Gen. Toll served with the army during the war with Mexico, and won deserved promotion for gallant conduct. During part of the war for the Union he was in the government civil service in Washington, and was a valued member of the volunteer military organization of government officials and clerks for the defense of the capital which took part in the repulse of the confederate forces which attacked Washington. The title of general, by which he was generally known, was really his militia rank.

General Toll was by nature a soldier, officer and gentleman, courteous, frank, brave, ready and helpful. He was always ready to "look up and not down; forward and not back; and lend a hand." "None knew him but to love him, nor named him but to praise."

He served the country in many positions, always with credit, and had been offered and declined many more. But the offices sought the man, never did the man seek the office. He was acquaintance and friend of President Lincoln, Chandler, Howard, Lewis Cass, Governor Blair, and many other historic notables. For some time he held the office of examiner of patents in Washington, a position requiring unusual technical abilities and training.

Gen. Toll possessed a sound constitution, with much vital force. His habits were regular and temperate. Hence, until he had passed the allotted years of the life of man, "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated."

His funeral was celebrated in the Episcopal church, Monday afternoon, the solemn service for the dead being recited by the rector, Rev. W.J.W. Bedford Jones.

Gen. Toll was one of the early citizens of Petoskey, having lived here about 20 years. Here his grave will long be kept green, and his memory long be revered by his neighbors and friends.

Petoskey Evening News
Wednesday, April 1, 1908



A YOUNG NEWSPAPER REPORTER INTERVIEWING GENERAL TOLL
PORTRAYED BY ANDREW SMITH AND JOHN HOLEC

Gen. Isaac D. Toll.
A SKETCH.

For more than twenty years dwellers in Petoskey have been wont to see upon its streets the tall, erect and slender figure of a man who holds the crown of his head high and chin out – in fact, the bearing and carriage of one used to command; a soldier you can readily see. Watch him. Possibly as we are looking he meets some lady friends; the proud head bows, off comes the hat, which is deferentially held in the hand as the conversation goes on. At parting note the sweeping bow. Could Chesterfield have saluted with more grace or courtliness? Doubtful. Let us meet and greet him. There was a hand clasp for you; the salutation of a gentleman of the old school, a class now unfortunately fast becoming extinct. You have doubtless heard oft repeated “The days of our years are threescore and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore, yet is their strength labor and sorrow.” Labor I make no doubt they be, but sorrow not always. No, say fourscore and four, and marvel that when the Maker formed man in his own image he occasionally fashioned him so well he became the exception to the psalmist’s rule. ‘Tis the difference between the patrician and plebian, between the thoroughbred and cart horse, that makes eighty-four years sit lightly; the fire in the black eyes burn brightly still, and the weight of years is borne up bravely by the stout heart within. If he meet a child, it gets a kindly word or gracious caress, generally a gift of coin or candy. Everybody and everything seems to recognize his kindly nature; even horses and dogs delight to obey him.

This old soldier comes of fighting stock, a race of fighters back to pre-revolutionary times. To mention even the more important of them would take too much of the allotted space, but let us note the one among his ancestors who was captured with his ship by Algerian pirates and made his escape by swimming six miles to a British ship, which brought him to New York; of another who was thrice elected to congress and loaned his country \$100,000, which he gave to Commodore McDonough to assist in building a fleet to meet the British on Lake Champlain; and further back, before Revolutionary times, of another ancestor who was killed in a battle with French and Indians, along with nineteen others, at the farm bearing his name. He himself served his country faithfully and well as captain in the Fifteenth Infantry in the battle of Contreras, leading the forlorn hope at the assault of Pueblo,

and ordering the charge at Cherubusco when he was twice refused permission, reforming the regiment and charging the enemy at the critical moment. He was the commandant of the Interior Guard, the first organization in Washington for its defense, and a member of the National Rifles in 1861. He has served his state as colonel, brigadier and major general, representative and senator, although he has always shunned political preferment.

His civic honors are equally worthy of mention. Justly can he be called the "father of the breakwater" by those who know of his untiring efforts in contending with the greatest difficulties and overcoming them all until the present appropriation of \$125,000 was secured, which, when properly applied, will give our city the safe and secure harbor which she needs.

Our system of water works was established during his presidency, and under his watchful and economic administration, assisted by an able council, the system was founded which is the pride of Petoskey today.

Among his gifts to Petoskey is the land for Elm street, an east and west road, and the present beautiful location for Lockwood Hospital, first given to Lombard Post, G.A.R., 170. The post concluding to erect a soldiers' monument in Greenwood, he gave the present site to the Lockwood Hospital. High upon the hillside, the fair city embosomed in the hills below and embowered with trees, caressed by cool breezes bearing healing in their wings, below and all about the clear, blue waters of the most beautiful bay in America – if beauty of location will bring health, what more would you!

In after years, when the city has grown great and enlarged her boarders, why should we not, as was done in the brave days of old, "Make a graven image and set it up on high," and say "Thus shall it be done unto the man that the city delighteth to honor." And among the donors to the Lockwood Hospital, from the man whose name it bears, down to the least of the givers, chiefest among them all will appear the name of Petoskey's Grand Old Man, GENERAL ISAAC DEGRAAF TOLL.

Petoskey Evening News
Thursday, July 17, 1902



GENERAL ISAAC DEGRAFF TOLL
PORTRAYED BY JOHN HOLEC



ISAAC DeGRAAF TOLL.

Sketch of His Life and Public Services.

Cato said: "I would rather have people ask why they did not erect monuments to me than why they did." If a monument were ever reared to memory of a man, a mere sketch of whose life I herewith present, the question: "why was it done?" would never be asked by any who had ever known him, and as for others, let them read of his early exploits in the wilderness of Michigan, where amid the Pottawatamies and the hardships of pioneer life, he helped his parents hew out a home in this unknown west: let them follow the fortunes of the youth, who, though descended from parents of great prominence, was obliged to struggle against adverse circumstances, until finally, by his own efforts, he achieved political, social and military distinction: let them read history and learn how, amid the fire of battle, Isaac DeGraaf Toll, the brilliant young captain commanding the colors in the 15th U.S. Infantry, gloriously sustained the honor of his state at the battle of Churubusco, Mexico, where he thrice went back under the severe fire of the enemy (who outnumbered us six to one) to get permission to charge, and being thrice refused, reformed the regiment, ordered the attack and drove the enemy from the field: also as commandant of the Interior Guard, and member National Rifles, at Washington, D.C., April, 1861, previously lieutenant-colonel, colonel and brigadier and later major-general of state troops, also recruiting officer by Governor Blair, October, 1863.

"If peace hath her victories no less than war," see the reports of the proceedings of the legislature of Michigan, house 1845, senate 1847. In the former, representative Toll prevented the route of the Michigan Southern R.R. from going south of St. Joseph county, although \$100,000 (then a large sum) was offered by the corporators for the privilege. As chairman of committee on militia he was an author of an entire new code, by which independent companies were encouraged. His many friends in St. Joseph county and here desired to present his name for congress, but he firmly declined. For St. Joseph county, before the state board of equalization in 1876, he effected a reduction of six millions a year for six years of assessments for state taxes. As an examiner of patents for seven years at Washington, D.C., he had charge of cases of electricity, instruments of precision and other subjects. In his presidency of Petoskey for two years, 1881 and 1882, he gave his personal attention to the erection of our water works and an itemized account was

given to the public, prepared by Hon. Clay E. Call, then clerk. Against many obstacles he was justly called "the father of the breakwater." He gave the site of the Lockwood Hospital to the city, first giving it to Col. Lombard Post, G.A.R., the post later giving up its right. A genial post-master in 1886, and ever in demand on public occasions as a speaker of acknowledged eloquence.

I have never met a man more revered as a citizen, friend and public benefactor than General Toll. I have chosen to write this for two reasons: first, because I know the man well – his kindness and friendship – and it is a pleasure to state these impressions, and secondly, however poorly they may be given to the public, I feel that the personality of the man will make this article interesting.

Isaac DeGraaf Toll was born December 1, 1818, at the family home of 1687, near Schenectady, N.Y., and on the site of the battlefield of the "Toll farm" of 1748, where his great great grandfather, Capt. Daniel Toll, and three great great uncles were killed. (See history by W.E. Griffis.) Educated at Ovid Academy, was admitted to the sophomore class of Union college in 1834, but his services were needed by his father whom he joined at Centerville, Mich., in November, 1834. The family removed to Fawn River in 1838 and engaged in building saw and flouring mills and opening new lands. Toll was supervisor fourteen years. He accepted a commission as captain in the regular army, March, 1847, though it was most injurious to his business affairs to leave home. He was engaged at Rinconada Pass, Conteras, Aug. 19th and 20th, 1847, Churubusco, El Molino del Rey, and was garrisoned at Chapultepec. (See letters of General Morgan, Col. B.E. Beach, Lieutenant Merrifield and report Secretary of War, Jan. 6, 1848.) Two months after the cessation of hostilities he resigned his commission, which resignation was accepted with honorable comments, and he received three months' extra pay for meritorious service.

The following incident illustrates the courage, bravery and presence of mind of General Toll. It explains in a measure his influence over his fellow men: In 1848 while on his way to Sturgis, Michigan, he was asked by the sheriff of Wabash county, Indiana, to assist in the capture of a horse thief by the name of Ward. Toll agreed to do so and the posse was divided into three parties. Ward was finally located and a constable by the name of Fanning, who led the larger party, approached him. Ward drew a large hunting knife and mortally wounded Fanning.

The cowardly sheriff was with Fanning and never pursued Ward. The latter's companions, instead of endeavoring to capture Ward, gave all their attention to Fanning who soon died, and allowed the murderer to escape. He went in the direction of Toll, who met him. When he was seen, Toll's companions, young Hathaway, deserted him and the latter was left to face the desperado alone. Ward, a tall muscular man, stood defiant, with his hunting knife still in hand. Toll was unarmed. He said: "What are you doing with that sticker?" Ward replied: "You will soon find out." Looking him square in the eye, Toll said: "You can have your choice of giving up that knife or have your neck stretched." Ward hesitated a moment and then handed over his weapon, allowing Toll to take him into custody. The knife is still among Mr. Toll's collection of souvenirs.

In January, 1840, Mr. Toll was united in marriage to Julia Victoria Moran, of Detroit, Mich., daughter of Judge Charles Moran. There were two children from this union, Charles Phillip and Julia Josephine. Mrs. Toll died at Fawn River, April 14, 1865.

General Toll has had a most interesting and honorable career and his anecdotes and tales of personal adventure would fill a volume: but it is in his home life and as a friend that one sees him at his best. Jovial, with a fund of knowledge and great memory, he never overlooks the little things in life, and many a heart has been made lighter and happier by his kind words and thoughtful deeds. Having long since passed the allotted "three score years and ten," he is passing the remainder of his days enjoying the respect and love of his many friends. No greater glory can come to a man than this. Is he not entitled to the term generally applied to him: "Petoskey's Grand Old Man?"

J.C. WRIGHT.

Petoskey Evening News

Petoskey, Mich., August 1, 1904

THE GRAND OLD MAN
General Isaac DeGraaf Toll Called to
His Reward

Nothing has so shocked this community as the announcement this morning of the death of that magnificent veteran and splendid citizen, General Isaac DeGraff Toll, "Petoskey's Grand Old Man," who died this morning from pneumonia.

General Toll has been practically confined to the house during the most of the inclement weather of the past two months, and for some days has been rather ailing, but retired at his usual hour last night with no special sensation of indisposition or illness, but was suddenly stricken and his passing, which was speeded by his advanced age, came as stated, and the whole community is cast into gloom and mourning.

General Toll was born in Glenville, New York, on the first day of December, 1818, and was, therefore more than ninety years of age, yet was his eye bright, his intellect clear and vigorous, "neither were his natural forces abated." He was one of those men to whom everyone naturally turned for advice and help, and he was never known to fail in an emergency, for his judgement was of the highest and safest order, and as he was well equipped for the emergencies of life everyone turned to him at such times.

General Toll has filled every office, and conscientiously performed the duties thereof, from supervisor to state senator, and was always found a valuable member. He was an efficient soldier and officer in the struggle of his nation with Mexico, and was rapidly promoted, after distinguished service, in which he was a number of times wounded.

At one time General Toll was examiner of patents at Washington, a position for which he was peculiarly fitted by his knowledge of techniques, and was offered many other places which he declined owing to press of business.

He was an intimate friend of Abraham Lincoln, and General Lewis Cass who deemed it an honor to count among their friends and advisors such a man as General Toll.

He has earned a well-deserved reward where he has gone, but our loss is great and we shall miss him more and more every day, as matters arise in which we need his sterling qualities.

As soon as out-of-town relatives can be communicated with, arrangements will be made for the funeral services.

Petoskey Evening News
Friday, March 27, 1908

CAMP TOLL MUSTERED IN

IMPRESSIVE CEREMONIES SATURDAY EVENING

Officers Installed, Banquet Served
and New Order Given Good
Start.

Saturday evening nearly one hundred persons gathered at the Maccabee hall to witness the mustering in of "Camp Toll" of the Sons of Veterans of Michigan. At eight o'clock Dr. L. C. Moore, of Detroit, the mustering officer, called the membership to order and gave the necessary instructions as to the manner in conducting the business sessions, the secret work and other private matters, after which those present were invited to enter the lodge room and witness the installation ceremonies.

The officers installed were Homer Sly, commander; Rollo W. Bird, senior vice-commander; Nathal J. Stone, junior vice-commander; N. J. Brown, E. J. Leveck and J. Howard Beach as camp counsel. Commander Sly appointed W. Bradley Lawton as treasurer, Fred H. Gilman, secretary, and Rec. C. E. Pickett, chaplain. Other appoints will be made later. The organization starts out with thirty-three charter members, which is said to be a very creditable start, and the members are working to get every eligible man to become a member. This organization is formed to perpetuate the Grand Army of the Republic which was organized at the close of the Civil war and which is fast losing its membership by death. Organizations of the sons and grandsons of these veterans to keep alive the spirit of Memorial day is growing.

At the close of the ceremonies all present were invited to the dining room where two long tables loaded with good things which had been prepared by the Woman's Relief corps under the direction of Mrs. W. R. Montgomery were disposed of. W. R. Montgomery acting as impromptu toastmaster called upon a number of those present, not forgetting the guests and ladies, who responded with much spirit and enthusiasm. The veterans and ladies thanked the new organization for the interest manifested in their behalf.

The Sons of Veterans promise to become quite a factor in the social and entertainment part of the city on state occasions.

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PETOSKEY EVENING NEWS
MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 1913



A9—BREAKWATER AND LIGHT HOUSE, PETOSKEY, MICH.



PETOSKEY BREAKWATER - THEN AND NOW