

Colonel James Hiram McLaughlin

26th New York Volunteers

James Hiram McLaughlin was born into a Scotch-Irish family on June 8th, 1844 in Oriskany, Oneida Co, NY. Large and strong even as a boy, McLaughlin became interested in wrestling, specifically in the collar-and-elbow style that was popular among those of Irish descent. He wrestled and won his first match at the age of 15, beating and injuring a man called Hiram McKee. With the outbreak of war in 1861, he enlisted in the 26th New York Volunteers. In 1863, he mustered out, having attained the rank of Captain. That same year, he helped to form the 24th New York Cavalry. While with the Cavalry, he rose to the rank of Major, then, by the end of the war in 1865, Colonel.

As an enlisted man and then an officer, McLaughlin had made a name for himself as an unbeatable wrestler. Once the war was over, he capitalized on that reputation and began to travel the country, competing professionally in wrestling matches for cash prizes. For many years McLaughlin was recognized as the American Collar-and-Elbow Champion, and was one of the very first people to compete for a prize belt in lieu of a cash prize. Though he had a reputation for being unbeatable, even McLaughlin lost matches. His rivalry with a man called Henry Moses Dufur was particularly fierce, as the two were very evenly matched in skill and in their professional record. In between bouts of wrestling, McLaughlin worked as a farm laborer and railway conductor. Always on the lookout for new opportunities, he was one of the first men to travel to Alaska for the late nineteenth century Klondike Gold Rush. It was in Fairbanks, on September 12th, 1905, that McLaughlin would die. According to his obituary, published in the Utica Daily Press, McLaughlin was survived by a wife and a daughter, Grace.

