

# *Annals of Iowa*

ESTABLISHED 1863

VOL. XXXII, No. 5

DES MOINES, JULY, 1954

THIRD SERIES

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## Eminent Iowan Series

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HERBERT MELVILLE ("HUB") HOXIE

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By ORA WILLIAMS

History runs like a ribbon through the calendar of time; but biography and the narration of the story of the builders, is like broken reeds laid at random. The mechanics of progress seem not always to click. On the new frontiers the trail blazers travel alone. Each generation develops its own heroes. A century ago the line of pioneer progress ran across Iowa. Here were great deeds, great events, great men and women.

But you must go to the graveyard for reminders. Out in Woodland cemetery, in Des Moines, there is a fine granite shaft with this inscription:

Herbert M. Hoxie

Born in Palmyra, New York, Dec. 18, 1830

Died in New York City, Nov. 23, 1886

That is all. No record, no biography, no boast; the casual visitor passes by with perhaps a glance. But that is a marker for a famous man of Iowa and the scene of the most spectacular funeral ever held in the state. At the graveside stood about 200 persons who had come on special trains, one from Chicago and New York, the other from St. Louis. There had been a procession through the city with streets for long distance lined with old friends. In the report of that event, I then

wrote, and it was published in the *Iowa State Register*, that many about the grave were notable, and added:

Grey heads were plenteous, and the presence of so many noted men made a scene of dignity and pathos never seen except at the graves of heroes, rulers and the most famous men. Nearly all the cities of the West and Southwest had contributed from their noblest men, to the group, and it was a gathering such as is seldom seen in any community or about any grave.

In an extended editorial in the same newspaper, "Ret" Clarkson wrote of the event:

The large company of men who stood around Mr. Hoxie's grave represented the controlling powers of the business interests of the west; represented hundreds of millions of dollars of capital; represented the life of western trade. Such a group of men, such a lot of faces of strong men, seldom appear about any grave save that of presidents and men highest in power in government.

The special train from New York had been brought from Chicago by favor of the Rock Island management; that from St. Louis was a Missouri Pacific train, brought over the Wabash. It had been expected that Jay Gould would be among the visitors, but he was unable to come and he was represented by his brother. Mr. Hoxie was vice-president and general manager of the Missouri Pacific railroad. His oldest friend, Thomas Mitchell, was present.

If there was not abundance of evidence even more convincing, the above recited matters would serve to show that the modest shaft in the old cemetery in Des Moines marks the grave of a man of much more than common ability. Not far from it is the impressive mausoleum of Mr. Hoxie's old friend, "Ret" Clarkson, and the fast fading sandstone marker of General Crocker, one of Iowa's great soldiers.

This is really the end of a worthwhile story that commenced when a strong boy from New York swept the floor of the first store established in the town of Fort Des Moines. Much more of the story may well be told to the end that it ought to inspire future generations to notable achievements.

## TRAINED BY THOMAS MITCHELL

Hoxie, Herbert M. Hoxie, or "Hub," in the vernacular of his day, a name completely unknown to the present generation of Iowans, remembered by only a few of the old timers, once a name to be conjured with in business and politics, calls for an addenda to the admirable article in the ANNALS OF IOWA for April, 1953, concerning Thomas Mitchell.

Much was written and has been printed about this most versatile Iowan of early days. It seems worth while to make a new attempt at gathering together the bits of scattered information that they may inspire others to follow his giant strides across the pages of Iowa history. Such an assembling of references will show quite well Mr. Hoxie's great versatility, his command of the friendship of many of the great, his zealous and prudent patriotism, his force and strong character. Such men come upon the history scene but seldom. He was a fine product of the times and the opportunities that lay before the Iowa builders a hundred years ago.

Hub Hoxie came with his father from Vermont and the father opened a store in Des Moines where the boy clerked for some time. After the death of the senior Hoxie, and the closing of the store, Hub went out to the country tavern of Tom Mitchell in the eastern part of Polk county. He is said by Will Porter, in his Polk county book, to have been a relative of Mitchell. This seems probable, since later on the Hoxie House, at Mitchellville, was operated by his brother, D. L. Hoxie. Porter was not always the best authority, but the writer recalls that Tom Mitchell often spoke of the two Hoxie brothers with affection.

The Mitchell tavern in the Apple Grove settlement was a good school for young Hoxie. Mr. Mitchell had established the tavern by special permit of Captain Allen, of the U.S. army stationed at Fort Des Moines, so that travelers might have a resting place not too far from the Raccoon fork. It was about half-way between Tool's Point and the fort. Even before arrangements were made to open the country west of the Red Rock

## Office of Secretary of State,

Des Moines, \_\_\_\_\_ 1860

Abraham Lincoln

President of the United States

Sir,

Having learned that George W. Vanhorn, of Muscatine, Iowa, will be an applicant for the Consularship at Glasgow: The undersigned Judges of the Supreme Court, and State Officers of said State of Iowa, take pleasure in recommending him, as a man of strict integrity, pure morals, great application, good scholar with fine talents: is an influential and working Republican. His appointment is one eminently fit to be made and could not but give good satisfaction.

Very Respectfully

R. P. Lowe *Clk*C. Baldwin *J.*Samuel S. Withrow *Gov*Elijah Sells *Secy of State*J. W. Cattell *Auditor of State*Josh Jones *Treasurer*

" "

No. S. Withrow

Dep. Let. Reporter.

H. M. Hoyle *Chairman Rep State Central Comtee*

A Recommendation by Iowa State officials to President Abraham Lincoln for appointment of George W. Vanhorn, of Muscatine, Iowa, for the Consularship at Glasgow, Scotland, and approval of same by H. M. Hoxie, as Chairman of the Republican State Central Committee. Original filed in the Manuscript Division of the Iowa State Department of History & Archives.



line to white settlement, many travelers came up the ridge between the Des Moines and Skunk river valleys looking at the fine prairies and the woodland fringe. It will be recalled that Jean Faribault once bought beaver pelts from the Indians at the place where now is the capital of Iowa, and that Gen. John C. Fremont came this way once and wrote of the trees and flowers that adorned the river. So, also, there once trod the ground near the capitol, Major Albert Lea, and Col. Boone and Stephen Kearney. But the hotel register at Apple Grove had many other signatures of notables. The smiling greeter at the desk made friends of all who came. Most of the early settlers of this immediate region had stopped at one time or another with "Uncle Tommy" at his tavern, and Hub gathered wisdom from all.

#### AN "UNDERGROUND RAILWAY" STATION

It was quite natural that the "underground railroad," operated through Iowa in the later days of the anti-slavery rumpus, should attract the attention of most of the Yankees who had come to Iowa. The Apple Grove station became one of the easy stopping places for the trains. It had importance along with one at Grinnell, another at Tool's Point, and the homes of Isaac Brandt in Des Moines, and James Jordan a short distance west of Des Moines. Hub called the squads who usually traveled under cover in wagons properly arranged, shipments of "fleeces of wool."

His wide acquaintance soon led him into local politics and he was elected to be county clerk of the courts. Then he became chairman of the Republican county committee. Frank Herriott refers to the delegation that went from Iowa to the convention that gave first nomination to Abraham Lincoln and says: "The delegation contained at least three 'Black Republicans,' H. M. Hoxie of Des Moines, who had been an expert as to the best time and route for shipping 'fleeces of wool' and was then secretary of the Republican state central committee," and also M. L. McPherson and J. B. Grinnell.

These delegates, it may be recalled, with others composing a majority of the Iowa delegation did not vote for Lincoln. They had other choices. But President Lincoln appointed Hoxie to be United States marshal for Iowa, in which position he demonstrated his great ability as an administrator and greatly helped the cause of the government. He continued to hold that position through the war and he played important parts in that struggle.

To Hub Hoxie, as to the thousands of other Iowans, the news from South Carolina came as a great shock. It was no news that the Southern leaders were infuriated over their failure to extend slavery to the whole United States and all its territory, nor that there were in Iowa many whose sympathies were with the slave holders. But when boasts, bluster and threats were translated into the treasonable firing upon the American flag flying over an American fort and Fort Sumpter was surrendered to the cadets from the Citadel, that was different. The present writer has told elsewhere in the ANNALS OF IOWA, in connection with the return of the sword of Gen. Marcellus M. Crocker to the state's historical department, of the events at Des Moines. Lawyer Crocker was trying a case at Adel when the news came to the old court house and the court having adjourned immediately, Crocker rode his horse swiftly to the state capital and called a meeting of citizens to decide what to do about it. Johnson Brigham in his Iowa History continues the narrative:

#### CROCKER APPEALED FOR VOLUNTEERS

Mounting a chair, young Crocker at once commanded silence and attention. Those who came to the mass meeting in anticipation of rhetorical appeals to patriotism were disappointed; but those who came to hear the word that should give direction to their patriotic impulses went away satisfied that the hour had brought the man. "We have not called this meeting for speech-making," said Crocker. "We are now here for business. The American flag has been insulted, has been fired

upon by our own people, but by the eternal, it must be maintained."

The emphatic utterance was greeted with a storm of applause. When quiet was restored he continued:

"I want now, just now, to raise a company to join the First Regiment of Iowa. I want a hundred men to come right up here and give their names to Hub Hoxie, pledging themselves to go with me to Dixie."

So they did, and more than a hundred; and Hoxie took down their names and helped to fully organize a company that was immediately offered to Governor Kirkwood. That it did not get into the First Iowa was not the fault of either Crocker or Hoxie, but because other companies near to shipping points on the Mississippi river filled the quota.

As United States marshal Hoxie had a job on his hands. There were bands of Knights of the Golden Circle in Iowa, especially near the Missouri border. He had a part in smashing the incipient rioting in several places. But, generally, those who had protested against a war to settle the slavery problem, joined in the war to prevent dissolution of the union. He came to be on intimate terms with many of the prominent men of Iowa. He continued after the war to take a hand in politics. He exchanged letters with Gen. Grant, Gen. Crocker, and others. He was delegate to most of the conventions.

It should be recalled that following the close of the war, there was an unfortunate sharp division among those who had helped to crush secession. On the one hand there were those who desired to follow the advice of Lincoln to treat the rebels as "erring brothers" entitled to "return quietly to the fold." The returning soldiers who had witnessed brutality of Confederate prisons, or had lost an arm or leg in open battle, had other ideas. They would not be satisfied without dire punishment of the traitors, and they formed a radical element in the Republican party. They came to be called "radicals" and were proud of the name. This difference of opinion affected the politics of the congress-

ional district in which the state capital is located. In congress, from this capital district, there was John A. Kasson, one of the great Iowa statesmen, who had been pretty close to President Lincoln, as assistant postmaster general for a time. The radicals decided that Kasson was not sufficiently radical. They wanted a soldier to represent them. So they induced Gen. Granville M. Dodge to be a candidate, nominated and elected him. But General Dodge had no taste for politics at Washington, and the district sent Frank W. Palmer to congress for two terms. In 1872, Kasson again sought the office. He got it and held it for two terms.

The retirement of Mr. Kasson for a time from public life was not due wholly to his lack of radicalism. Frank M. Mills in a letter from Sioux Falls to Curator E. R. Harlan dated Oct. 20, 1920, referred to the matter. Mills had owned the daily *Iowa State Register* for several years, as had Frank W. Palmer, before the advent of the Clarkson Brothers as head of "the Regency" with headquarters under the famous "clock tower" at Fourth and Court avenue. Mr. Mills contributed this little item about the defeat of Kasson after his first two terms:

In the meantime there was a great change in his following. Those who fought his first nomination had become his very warm friends, while Mr. Palmer of the *Register* and Mr. Thomas Withrow and Hub Hoxie, who had been his principal backers, turned against him on account of the divorce suit of Mrs. Kasson, in which Mr. Withrow had been her attorney, and supported General Dodge.

But that's another story. Many years later, General Dodge gave a historical address at the camp fire of the Crocker brigade at Keokuk, in fact, on Sept. 27, 1900, where he read a letter from General Crocker, never before published, dated Des Moines June 24, 1864, in which General Crocker wrote freely of his retirement from the army because of ill health and said:

There is no news. Kasson will be renominated without a dissenting voice. Hub Hoxie sends his regards; he lets on to be very busy and I suppose he is. He says he has a kind of general supervision of affairs, civil and military, in the state, and has divers times threatened me with arrest, and since



I find his office a very convenient place to sponge stationery, envelopes, &c, I have not seen proper to dispute his authority.<sup>1</sup>

General Crocker, the Des Moines attorney turned soldier, had been with General Grant at Vicksburg and was with the army headed for Atlanta when rumors came of his illness. Hub Hoxie received a letter from him. "I am not dead," he wrote, "persistent rumors to the contrary notwithstanding. I have no intention to give up the ghost without a struggle." But he was finished. He tendered his resignation, then withdrew it by request of General Grant and was sent to Arizona in the hope that he might recover strength. But he was buried in Woodland cemetery in August 1865.

The little sandstone marker that stands not far from the fine monument to Hub Hoxie, and back of the mausoleum of James S. Clarkson, bears the famous inscription: "He was fit to command an independent army,—U. S. Grant." Hoxie rests near his friends.

The later career of Hub Hoxie was largely outside the state and is not entirely clear. Frank Herriott, referring to Hoxie as one of the Iowa delegates to the Republican national convention of 1860, and his prominence for many years in Iowa affairs, wrote:

Mr. Herbert M. Hoxie became United States marshal for Iowa under President Lincoln and won great applause for the vigor of his administration. Following the war he entered upon an increasingly successful career in the construction of railroads and in railway administration, being at his death, in 1886, the virtual head of the Gould system of roads in the southwest and classed among the foremost railway managers in the country.

This estimate was in part quoted from *Harper's Weekly*. The Gould system had as its main stem the Missouri Pacific railroad. Quite likely Mr. Hoxie learned a great deal about railroads from his friends in Iowa. General Dodge was a great railroad builder. Peter A. Dey was engineer for construction of the Union Pacific. There were many others of Iowa who helped in the building and operation of railroads. To no one was ever paid the high compliment that came to Herbert M. Hoxie.

<sup>1</sup>ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. IV, p. 590.

The era of railroad building ended long ago. It was in that era that Iowa life took on the forms that will endure through the ages. Nor was the era so very far in the past. The writer well remembers being present at the forks of the Raccoon river, 20 miles west of Des Moines, when the first "Iron horse," as we called the early locomotives, proceeded past the Des Moines river valley, and gave the signal for a barbecue and rejoicing. The whistle gave forth a sound as strange to the ox-team drivers as the modern Diesel's moan seems to the drivers at the auto wheels.

Times do change, even in one generation. All honor to "Hub" and his friends.

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## Kasson and Hoxie Leadership

Supplementing his comment upon Dodge, Palmer, Kasson and Hoxie, in a letter to Edgar R. Harlan, referred to by Ora Williams, on page 328, Frank M. Mills wrote another letter to Mr. Harlan in which he touched upon the activities of the same parties. It was dated January 27, 1921, evidently in reply to a query from Harlan, and included the following:

I can add but little in regard to Mr. Kasson which is not covered by his autobiography published in the Annals, except what I wrote you last October. He was a good straight Republican, a first-class organizer. He and Hub Hoxie gave the trend to Iowa politics which it retained until of late years . . .

Mr. Kasson was courtly and would be conspicuous in the highest circles. It is understood that he was a great favorite in the courts abroad where he represented the United States. Except during the sessions of the Iowa legislature in which he represented Polk county for the purpose of securing appropriations for the capitol building, he was either at Washington or abroad in diplomatic service . . .

I am free to say that I think him the greatest character that Iowa has produced . . . I am glad that history of his life and services is to be published.

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