

## REV. SHINN'S FAMOUS PRAYER

By Joan Muyskens, Editor

The Rev. Allen T. Shinn was a minister in Marshalltown, Iowa, from October, 1856, to February, 1858, at which time he and his family decided to move to a farm near Macedonia, Iowa. They loaded their belongings into two covered wagons and began the trip, arriving in Des Moines about Feb. 20. A heavy snow storm forced them to remain in Des Moines for three days; they stopped at the home of an old friend then living on the east side of the Des Moines River.

The state capitol had recently been moved from Iowa City to Des Moines and the first session was about to open. Mr. Shinn visited the House of Representatives the morning the session was to open, and while there, met Col. W. A. Hepburn, clerk of the House. Col. Hepburn had been a neighbor of the Shinn family when they lived in Marshalltown. Knowing the minister, Col. Hepburn asked him if he would open the session with a prayer as there was no regular chaplin. Mr. Shinn hesitated, stating, "Pete, I didn't come here to pray." But Col. Hepburn insisted and Mr. Shinn finally agreed.

When Mr. Shinn asked what kind of prayer was desired, Col. Hepburn explained, "Make it short Shinn. . . make it short for the members get impatient and worried at long prayers."

At that time, there were two major issues before the House; one was the repeal of the wine and beer clause in the then existing prohibitory liquor law. The other bill was for the establishment of state banks as Iowans were suffering hard times from an unstable currency. The feelings and discussions on these issues were intensely bitter within the legislature.

When the time arrived for the session to open, Mr. Shinn went to the speaker's desk with Col. Hepburn and it was announced that the session would be opened "by the Rev. Allen T. Shinn of Marshalltown." The members rose to their feet and the following prayer was offered:

"Great God, bless the young and growing state of Iowa. Bless our senators and representatives and chief officers. Give us a sound currency, pure water and undefiled religion. For Christ's sake, Amen."

With this, there was a round of applause by those who favored the sentiment of the prayer and Mr. Shinn was invited to take a seat by the speaker's side. However, he was so rattled by the applause that he quickly left the chamber. According to Allen Shinn's son, Frank, the minister felt that he had "made himself ridiculous, that he offered a prayer in the legislature that was applauded by the members and that as he marched out of the capitol, members looked him in the face with a glow of smiles which convinced him that he had acted very irreverent and disgraced himself."

But, when Mr. Shinn later talked to Col. Hepburn about the incident, he was told that it was the best and greatest prayer that had ever been offered in any legislature. This prayer was not only published in full in the Des Moines papers, but was also printed in the *New York Tribune*. And, according to the *Burlington Hawkeye*, Dec. 10, 1904, "Some time later the general appropriation bill contained an appropriation of \$10.00 for the prayer offered."

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#### A FEW FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR STATE

The Iowa State Banner or flag was made from a design drawn by Mrs. Dixie Cornell Gebhardt of Knoxville. The Iowa Daughters of the American Revolution presented it to the 39th General Assembly and it was officially adopted on March 29, 1921. It has three vertical bars of blue, white and red, bearing in the white section an eagle and the state motto, "Our Liberties We Prize and Our Rights We Will Maintain."

The Wild Rose, which is abundant all over Iowa, was adopted as the official State flower by the Iowa General Assembly, May 7, 1897.

The Eastern Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis* (Linnaeus), often referred to as a wild canary, was made the official State bird of Iowa by the General Assembly on March 22, 1933.

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