



Charles Aldrich and Wife (Matilda Olivia Williams Aldrich)
From a Daguerreotype 1851

TRIBUTE TO CHARLES ALDRICH.

BY REV. L. N. CALL.

At the funeral exercises held in Webster City, Iowa, the following address was made by Mr. Aldrich's old friend, Rev. L. N. Call:

It was eminently appropriate that the more elaborate and imposing services of yesterday should have been held in the city where are the greater and more enduring monuments of the labors of Charles Aldrich. But it is profoundly fitting that here, where the foundations of his work were laid, his old friends and neighbors should gather to pay the tribute of respect and honor to one of Webster City's most distinguished sons. Few men were more closely identified with the development of this place in its early days, and none can tell how much he did to mould public sentiment in this new country and to promote whatever would make for the best interests and truest prosperity of the community. So it is that to-day, while we remember the splendid achievements which make his name honored throughout our commonwealth, here in his old home we also remember what he was to our town.

The founding of our first newspaper by Mr. Aldrich may have seemed at the time a very small and unimportant thing, yet who can tell what was the influence of that little sheet in promoting intelligence, encouraging enterprise and inspiring education and morality, the bulwarks of a community, a state or a nation. In every way he showed that he was a man capable of forming high ideals and then working toward their attainment. Then, as now, Mr. Aldrich stood for what was best in local and national thought.

When the signs of approaching war began to threaten, his ably written editorials were strongly on the side of the Union, and after the first year of the war he closed his newspaper office and enlisted, going as adjutant with the Thirty-second Infantry of Iowa. Though his slight strength did not permit him to serve until the end of the war, his work as a journalist was steadily and earnestly on the side of freedom and right.

His education was largely self-acquired, but he was a

man of culture and fine literary taste. His library was large for a private collection and was always freely at the service of those who would use it. No one will ever know how many lives were influenced by the loan of his books, scarcer in early days than now in this western land.

He had an instinctive reverence for greatness, and early realized, as did few of his fellows, the historical importance of the memorials of great men. It was while he was still a resident of this place that he began collecting the documents and autographs which became the nucleus of the magnificent collection now in our capital. His rare conversational gifts, his power of gaining the confidence of those he met, together with his enthusiasm, gave him access in an unusual way to the autographic and historical treasures of this and other countries. In 1884 when he and his devoted wife gave their collection to the State, with the privilege of adding to it afterwards, it already contained a wealth of material rare and priceless.

Already he was realizing the necessity of inaugurating in Iowa the work which had been taken up in Wisconsin and other States of preserving and gathering important legal and historical papers belonging to our State and invaluable to the future student of its history, but liable to be destroyed or lost because there was no suitable place or way to care for them. Already the plan was forming in his mind which beginning with his own collection, grew to the establishing by the Legislature of the Historical Department of Iowa and finally to the magnificent Historical Building which is now the pride of our State.

You all know the story of this splendid work which has been told in every paper in this Western land during these last days. But only his friends knew how great were the difficulties he met and overcame—what barriers of ignorance and prejudice had to be melted away by his arguments and persuasions before the crowning of his labors was achieved. As was so beautifully said in Major Byers' poem read yesterday in Des Moines:

Fate willed that he should live to see
A crown on yonder work he led—
Yet dying, dream not there would be
A greater still upon his head.

During these years he never lost his interest in his old home, he never forgot his old friends, and found a great pleasure in keeping alive the memories of the pioneers whose hardships and labors prepared the way for the men of to-day. In his friendships he was genuine and loyal not only to those who had been prosperous and successful (as success is counted), but to all whom he called friends. I was impressed with this trait, as I had often been before, when looking with him through the volume which preserves the letters written him on the death of Mrs. Matilda Aldrich. There, with the letters from William Rossetti and other men of letters from across the sea, was the rudely written but no less sincere tribute from one of the early settlers in this county, long since gone away.

Many a one, in this, Mr. Aldrich's home town, will recall to-day not only the cheery greeting, the congratulation over any little success, but will remember too the warm words of sympathy in time of trouble, the beautifully written tributes of affectionate memory which brought a ray of comfort to the house of bereavement.

The public spirit and active interest which characterized him as a resident here were manifest in many ways and in enduring forms. In our Court House there will always be the memorial, secured by his efforts, of the brave men who went to the rescue of their imperiled neighbors on the north, at the time of the Spirit Lake Massacre.

You all know the great interest he felt in the founding of this Library, within whose beautiful halls he lies to-day. The valuable gifts which he gave to enrich it speak more strongly than words of mine. We remember, also, his efforts to make it possible that the hospital, founded by one of his early friends, should be kept open for the people.

So through all the years he has given proofs that he never lost interest in this place nor forgot his old friends. And he will not be forgotten here. Every Iowa citizen will feel that the stately building yonder in Des Moines is his monument, but methinks, in future years our people will feel a thrill of pride in its contemplation, as they remember that

the man who conceived this mighty plan, and perseveringly toiled and wrought toward its achievement, was one of our own citizens.

And so it seems fitting and right that here, in the town in whose history he has borne so honorable a part, he should have chosen his last resting place.

* As another has said, "To have lived uprightly, to have died serene and content is the lot of many and suffices. But to have done all this, and besides have left an imperishable monument of more than graven stone, to have created an institution that must endure while the State lives, is to have taken hold upon Fame."

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