



WILLIAM DUANE WILSON

Member of and Secretary of the first Board of Trustees of the Iowa State  
Agricultural College and Farm.

## WILLIAM DUANE WILSON

BY DAVID C. MOTT

William Duane Wilson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 21, 1809, and died in Des Moines, Iowa, January 7, 1877. Burial was in Woodland Cemetery, Des Moines. His parents were James and Anne (Adams) Wilson,<sup>1</sup> both of whom emigrated from County Down in Northern Ireland to Philadelphia in 1807.

As soon as James Wilson reached Philadelphia he obtained employment in the printing office of William Duane, editor and publisher of the *Aurora*, a daily paper and the leading political organ of President Jefferson and his party. James Wilson, then only twenty years old, proved to be an apt student and a faithful employe, and prospered. A year later he married Anne Adams, who came over on the same ship he did. A strong friendship grew up between employer and employe, so when the young Mr. and Mrs. Wilson's first child was born they named it William Duane Wilson.

Mr. Duane was a busy man and Mr. Wilson was more and more intrusted with responsibilities. When the War of 1812 broke out Mr. Duane was made adjutant general of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, and Mr. Wilson was given management of the *Aurora*.<sup>2</sup>

In 1814 James Wilson removed to Steubenville, Ohio, and purchased the *Steubenville Herald* which he and his sons successfully conducted many years.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Wilson became a prominent and useful citizen of Steubenville. He was justice of the peace and came to be called Judge Wilson. He was a vigorous and successful newspaper man. He founded a paper at Pittsburgh, the *Pennsylvania Advocate*, in 1832, and divided his time somewhat between Steubenville and Pittsburgh. James Wilson had seven sons and taught every one of them in his own office to be an expert printer. It was by their help that he conducted

<sup>1</sup>MS letter written from Bay City, Michigan, November 6, 1914, by Mrs. Susan Wilson Snyder to George G. Wright, of Des Moines, and now in possession of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

<sup>2</sup>*The World's Work*, October, 1911, pp. 14940-43.

<sup>3</sup>*History of the Upper Ohio Valley*, 1890, Vol. II, p. 434.

the two papers, but after the *Advocate* was fairly on its feet he left it in the immediate charge of his eldest son, William Duane Wilson, then about twenty-three years old.<sup>4</sup>

The youngest brother of William Duane Wilson was Joseph Ruggles Wilson. He was born at Steubenville in 1822. Like the other boys of the family he learned to "stick type," but did not stay long in that vocation but became the scholar of the family, took a liberal arts course, then a theological course and was licensed to preach by the Presbyterian church. Soon thereafter, in 1849, he married Janet Woodrow. To these two young people, on December 26, 1856, was born Thomas Woodrow Wilson, known to fame a little more than half a century later as President Woodrow Wilson.<sup>5</sup>

William Duane Wilson, who at six years old climbed up on a stool in his father's office at Steubenville and began learning to set type,<sup>6</sup> had advanced through every part of knowledge of the craftsmanship of a printing office, at sixteen he frequently had charge of the paper, and at twenty-three was conducting the *Advocate* at Pittsburg. He obtained a financial interest in the paper, but sold it in 1839 and it was afterward merged with the *Pittsburg Gazette*.<sup>7</sup> He then removed to Wheeling, Virginia, and became publisher of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*.<sup>8</sup>

In 1841 he was appointed general superintendent of lights on northwestern lakes with headquarters at Buffalo, but later, to better discharge the duties of his office, removed to Detroit where he remained until the office was abolished. It was because of holding this position that Mr. Wilson acquired the title of "General," which distinction was quite commonly conferred on him by the public, especially in the later years of his life. He then secured an interest in the *Detroit Daily Advertiser*, which he disposed of in 1845, went to Milwaukee and joined Hon. Rufus King in the publication of the *Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette*.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Wilson was living in a time of rapid changes in the frontier West, a period of building, development, and rapid

<sup>4</sup>*The World's Work*, op. cit., p. 14943.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 14944-47.

<sup>6</sup>L. F. Andrews in *Register and Leader*, Des Moines, June 13, 1909, Third Sec., p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>*History of Allegheny County, Pa.*, Warner & Co., Chicago, 1889, Vol. I, p. 658.

<sup>8</sup>Andrews, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*



progress, and he was in the van of the movement. From the *Miners' Express*, Dubuque, in its issue of May 3, 1848, we find this concerning him:

Some little excitement prevailed in town yesterday among our telegraphic stockholders. The reason is that William Duane Wilson, a reputed agent for the Morse patentees, arrived in town with a quantity of circulars, pamphlets, &c, warning the people against being duped by the agents of O'Reilley. Mr. Wilson affirms that O'Reilley is entirely destitute of any legal authority which would justify him in entering into contracts for constructing telegraphic lines. This we are led to doubt. . . .<sup>10</sup>

From 1850 to 1852 Mr. Wilson was connected with the Census Bureau, Washington, D. C. In 1852 he joined with a syndicate of Whig politicians that acquired the *Chicago Tribune* which then had a circulation of 1,100 copies. Mr. Wilson was the leading political and editorial writer, while Thomas A. Stewart had charge of the news columns. In March, 1853, Mr. Wilson retired from the paper, his interest passing to Henry Fowler, Timothy Wright and Joseph D. Webster, and Mr. Stewart became the editor.<sup>11</sup> While on the *Tribune* he organized the merchants into what later became the Merchants' Exchange. Later he started the *Courant*, a daily penny paper, which developed eventually into the *Chicago Times*. In 1855 he removed to Burlington, Iowa, and became editor of the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*. This was the first agricultural paper published in Iowa. James W. Grimes and J. F. Tallant were the editors and Morgan, M'Kenny & Co. were the publishers. Its first number shows the date of May, 1853. It contained 16 pages, 6x9 inches, double column, and was published monthly.<sup>12</sup> By September, 1853, they increased the issue to twenty-four pages. In February, 1854, the two editors divided their work, Mr. Grimes being designated as agricultural editor, and Mr. Tallant horticultural editor. In the fall of 1854 Mr. Grimes was elected governor of Iowa and was inaugurated December 9. About that time Milton L. Comstock succeeded Mr. Grimes as agricultural editor of the *Iowa Farmer*.

<sup>10</sup>Dubuque *Miners' Express*, May 3, 1848. In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

<sup>11</sup>The *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. VII, p. 558. James T. White & Co., New York, 1897.

<sup>12</sup>See files of the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* in the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

It was sometime during the summer of 1855 that William Duane Wilson joined with Mr. Comstock as one of the publishers of the paper, and assumed the position of agricultural editor. Soon thereafter the paper began to acquire more advertising, and was somewhat enlarged. Concerning it the *Democratic Mirror*, published at Vernon, Van Buren County, has this to say of it:

We have received *The Iowa Farmer* for January, 1856, published in Burlington, Iowa, by William Duane Wilson and M. L. Comstock. Terms, 1 copy 1 year, \$1.00 in advance; 5 copies to one address, \$4.00; 15 copies to one address, \$10.00. We recommend it to every farmer in the West. If they would all take the *Iowa Farmer* it would save publishers of newspapers much trouble, and greatly benefit themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The March, 1856, number of the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* indicates its place of publication to be Burlington and Fairfield, with Mr. Wilson's address given as Fairfield and Mr. Comstock's as Burlington, and the direction is given to direct business letters to Fairfield and letters on other matters to either place. The number carries more good contributions on agricultural subjects than had previously appeared. Improvements in the make-up appear, also interesting illustrations of livestock, fences, agricultural machinery, and so forth.

In the May, 1856, issue there is a call for a meeting for June 4 at Muscatine of the Board of Control of the State Agricultural Society. The call is signed by William Duane Wilson, Corresponding Secretary. A list of the members of the board is given—one from each of twenty-four counties.

The June, 1856, number has thirty-two pages. An editorial advocates a seed exchange in Iowa, rather than to have to depend on getting seed from eastern dealers, and urges those favoring the plan to address their letters to "Iowa Seed Exchange, Burlington, Iowa."

A very important article of more than a page entitled "Plan of an Agricultural School," is in this number, apparently written by Mr. Wilson. Its introductory paragraph follows: "An Agricultural School worthy of the name is one of the most evident and pressing needs of the country. We are to a great extent a nation of agriculturists, yet without an institution in

<sup>13</sup>*Democratic Mirror*, Vernon, Iowa, January 11, 1856. In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

the whole length and breadth of the land which furnishes the proper instruction to the agricultural community." The article then proceeds to set out a plan including a well-stocked and well-furnished farm with experimental facilities, and the means of instruction in all the sciences connected with the culture of the soil. The plan is elaborated and the needs emphasized.

In the July, 1856, number it is stated, "We are compelled, for the present at least, to print *The Farmer* at Burlington, in consequence of the greater facilities for printing. Our edition has become so large (thanks to our friends) that the ordinary mode of printing on a hand press is altogether insufficient for our purposes—hence we have to resort to the machine or power press of the *Hawk-Eye* in this place." However Mr. Wilson does not remove his family from "that beautiful town of Fairfield."

An article appears concerning the next state fair, which was to be held at Muscatine. Mr. Wilson appears to have been busy with its arrangements. He also reports about different counties over which he traveled, evidently in the interests of his paper.

Mr. Suel Foster of Muscatine writing an article for the August, 1856, issue comments on the article in the June number on a plan for an agricultural school, and says he sees this year several states are moving simultaneously toward that end, and suggests they make plans for such a model farm and a school and ask the Iowa legislature to create such an institution.

The proceedings of the State Educational Convention appears in this issue. It was held at Iowa City June 16, 17 and 18. Mr. Wilson made an address urging the principles of agricultural science should be taught in Iowa schools. He was elected second vice president of the association.

Mr. O. H. Harris, a practical and experienced agricultural editor, was secured, so it is stated, to aid Mr. Wilson, so he could have time to visit other portions of the state.

The September, 1856, issue contains the premium list of the State Fair which is to be held at Muscatine October 8, 9 and 10, also the names of the officers, directors and members of the board, etc. Mr. Wilson was corresponding secretary.

In the December issue, 1856, the announcement is made that hereafter *The Iowa Farmer* will be published semi-monthly, in



order to keep up with the rapidly moving business. The size will be as a rule only sixteen pages.

The January, 1857, number shows the place of publication to be Mount Pleasant, Iowa. The reason for removal to that city was not given.

During the latter part of July, 1857, Mr. Wilson, leaving his editorial chair temporarily to Dr. S. Stebbins of Mount Pleasant, went to Syracuse, New York, where he spent ten days attending the National Exhibition of Agricultural Implements. He served with several other nationally known agricultural leaders as jurors in a competitive trial between different makes of reapers and mowers. Mr. Wilson also attended the United States Fair which was held at Louisville, Kentucky, the first week in September, 1857. It was managed by the United States Agricultural Society.<sup>14</sup>

In January, 1855, the Fifth General Assembly passed an act providing for locating the capital of Iowa within two miles of the Raccoon Fork of the Des Moines River. By the fall of 1857 a suitable capitol building having been erected the offices were transferred from Iowa City to Des Moines<sup>15</sup> and the Seventh General Assembly convened there in January, 1858. Mr. Wilson had visited Des Moines the summer of 1856 and had said in the columns of his paper that he thought it was "destined to be the largest inland city of Iowa." Writing further of it he said:

Where it begins or where it ends, or rather what is to be its ultimate boundaries, is more than we could fully satisfy ourself or obtain satisfactory information of from those who think they have the lines in their hands. Suffice it in that regard when we say that its present dimensions are fully up to the most sanguine anticipations of us outsiders as being amply sufficient, when properly filled up with handsome public and private buildings and a busy people, to represent the glory and the prosperity for years to come of one of the most favored states for the residence of man in our broad Union. Its hills and valleys, swellings and flats, rivers and lakes give the greatest scope for the most beautiful landscape views, whilst the most fastidious or captious taste in the selection of building sites can be gratified to the fullest extent. . . . On the whole we were pleased, very much pleased with the sites of both the new and the old cities. Each is progressing in improvement beyond the belief of those who have not been witness to them. . . . They have a population, we think, of not less than 4,000, one-fourth of whom are

<sup>14</sup>*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*, October 1, 1857, p. 1, c. 1.

<sup>15</sup>*Narrative History of the People of Iowa*, by Edgar R. Harlan, Vol. I, p. 336.

domiciliated, many of them in capacious and tasteful residences, on the east side of the river, where the capitol grounds are located, and where there were not twenty-five persons living one year ago. The new capitol building is to be a fine three-story brick, and is progressing rapidly to completion. . . . The capitol grounds which we esteem well selected, have been so frequently described by the state press that we have nothing to add, except that it will require some liberal appropriations from the state to clear them out from the undergrowth, here and there cutting down a tree or two, and to enclose them with a suitable fence for preservation. This done it will be a delightful spot and afford from the highest point one of the most beautiful views in all central Iowa.<sup>16</sup>

Late in 1857, Mr. Wilson having sensed the advantages of location at the new capital city, removed the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* to Des Moines and changed it to a weekly publication.<sup>17</sup> The Seventh General Assembly, the first assembly to meet in Des Moines, convened January 11, 1858, and by March 27 it had enacted a measure, which was approved and had become a law by publication, that provided for the establishment of a state agricultural college and farm, which was to be under the management of a board of trustees of eleven members, and the governor and president of the State Agricultural Society were to be ex-officio members. Section 27 of the act named the eleven members as follows: M. W. Robinson of Des Moines County; Timothy Day of Van Buren County, John D. Wright of Union County, G. W. F. Sherwin of Woodbury County, William Duane Wilson of Polk County, Richard Gaines of Jefferson County, Suel Foster of Muscatine County, J. W. Henderson of Linn County, Clement Coffin of Delaware County, E. H. Williams of Clayton County, and E. C. Day of Story County. Clement Coffin and E. H. Williamson declined to serve and Peter Melendy of Hardin County and John Pattee of Bremer County were appointed to their places. In order that the farming interests of the state might derive immediate benefit from the duties imposed upon the secretary, the governor was authorized to appoint a secretary from among the members of the Board of Trustees, who should hold his office for one year, after which the board was to elect the secretary. Governor Lowe promptly appointed William Duane Wilson secretary of the board.

Soon after his appointment as secretary he disposed of his

<sup>16</sup>*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*, October, 1856, pp. 149-50.

<sup>17</sup>L. F. Andrews, *op. cit.*; also Mr. Wilson in *Iowa Homestead*, July 9, 1869.



*Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* to Hiram Torrey and devoted his energies to his new duties which were multifarious. The secretary's office was established at the Statehouse. The salary of the position was \$1,000 and expenses. The organization of the new institution, selection of the location, purchase of the land, construction of buildings, opening up the experimental farm, etc., involved many problems. Mr. Wilson had enthusiasm for the work. In editing and developing the *Iowa Farmer*, in aiding in organizing agricultural fairs in the new state, and his leadership in advocating the establishment of a state agricultural college, he had acquired a large and favorable acquaintance. He must have been efficient and well fitted for his work as secretary and chief administrator of the board, for after serving the year of his appointment by Governor Lowe he was elected by the board for a two-year term, and by reason of this and of re-elections, served until April 27, 1864, when a new act of the General Assembly went into effect.<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the personal appearance of Mr. Wilson at about this time, and of his enthusiasm for agriculture, Hon. Theodore B. Perry who was a member of the Iowa Board of Education from 1858 and for several years, in writing of the meeting of that board in December, 1859, speaks of Mr. Wilson as follows:

.... In this connection, the name of General William Duane Wilson, secretary of the Agricultural Bureau at that time, should not, by any means, be omitted. He was an old man of more than seventy years (he was only a few months past fifty years old at that time.—Ed. ANNALS), whose face was ornamented on both sides by quite a rich growth of gray whiskers. He manifested an unbounded interest in agriculture, and never could understand why the board [Board of Education] should not make extensive provision for his favorite subject, among the first and foremost of its enactments. He continually labored for the founding of the Agricultural College and Farm, and never would tire in conversation upon his favorite topic. He was a kind-hearted, good-natured old gentleman, and always enjoyed the friendship and esteem of the members of the board.<sup>19</sup>

June 20, 1859, the board having received offers of land for sale and in donations from six different counties, located the farm in Story County<sup>20</sup> where it now is.

<sup>18</sup>Reports of the Secretary of Iowa State Agricultural College and Farm, Second Report, p. 1; Report of 1867, p. 3; Fourth Report, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. III, p. 203.

<sup>20</sup>*History and Reminiscences of I. S. C.*, by the Class of '97, p. 13.

One of the early acts of the board was on January, 1860, to declare it inexpedient at that time to elect a president of the College.<sup>21</sup> At the 1860 session of the General Assembly an attempt was made to repeal the act of two years before establishing the college and farm, and it was only by vigilant care that the friends of the enterprise prevented the repeal.<sup>22</sup> All the meetings of the board had been held in Des Moines until January 5, 1861, when the first meeting was held in the farm house on the college grounds. Improvements of the farm and farm buildings were progressing. The farm was being rented.<sup>23</sup> The first few years of this embryo organization was proving rather precarious. Agricultural education was something new and the financial conditions of the new state were depressed. The Civil War began early in 1861 and that great catastrophe occupied almost the entire attention of the state. Then came the Morrill Act of Congress which granted certain lands to the states for the endowment of institutions devoted to giving instruction in agriculture and mechanic arts, which passed both houses of Congress and was signed by Abraham Lincoln July 2, 1862.<sup>24</sup> The Ninth General Assembly in extra session passed an act approved September 11, 1862, accepting the grant and the conditions,<sup>25</sup> and by wisely handling the proceeds that came from the grant, together with modest appropriations from the state, the Board of Trustees were within a few years able to make progress in building and improvements.

The Tenth General Assembly passed an act which went into effect by publication on April 27, 1864, which made several changes in the law relating to the Board of Trustees of the Agricultural College and Farm. It repealed certain provisions of the act of 1858 and gave the board power to select a superintendent of the Agricultural College Farm, that the superintendent should reside on the farm, and that he should be secretary of the board.<sup>26</sup> Peter Melendy, who had been a member of the board from the beginning and had been on its most important committees, was made superintendent. This terminated Mr.

---

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14-15.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>25</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1862, Ch. 26.

<sup>26</sup>*Laws of Iowa*, 1864, Ch. 121.

Wilson's official connection with the college and farm. He had served as secretary from the beginning, March, 1858, to this time. As to his efficiency the *Daily Register* of March 27, 1862, said:

We had occasion to state some weeks since that the report of General William Duane Wilson, secretary of the State Agricultural College, would be found to contain a vast amount of practical information for our farmers. Since the publication of that notice the reports have been distributed to a considerable extent, and they have been received by the people with the most flattering attention. It was due to Secretary Wilson to say that, since he was appointed in 1858 to the position he now occupies he has labored intelligently and devotedly in his office, his labors have been untiring. He has been active and liberal in the distribution of seeds. He has won many friends by the intelligent interest which he takes in agriculture, and by his genial and accommodating manners.

In 1865 Mr. Wilson published *Description of Iowa and Its Resources*, in which every county in the state has separate mention, with valuable tables in regard to agriculture, education, religious denominations, railroads, manufactories, stage routes, etc., being a guide valuable to the immigrant. It contained the official vote of Iowa for the previous ten years, and a list of the state officers and of the county officers in the different counties for 1865. It contained 150 pages, 4 by 7 inches, and carried 34 additional pages of advertising, which are almost as interesting now as the main contents of the volume. The volume is a tribute to the industry and enterprise of the "Secretary of the Iowa Agricultural College," William Duane Wilson.<sup>27</sup>

About the time Mr. Wilson finished his work as secretary of the Board of Trustees of the Agricultural College and Farm he accepted a position with the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C., and remained there until 1869, when he returned to Des Moines where he continued to reside the remainder of his life.<sup>28</sup> The *Des Moines City Directory* of 1869 gives his residence as East Sixth Street between Sycamore and Chestnut. The directory of 1873 gives it as Sixth and High. In its issue of July 9, 1869, the *Iowa Homestead and Western Farm Journal*, published in Des Moines, has the following concerning him from the pen of Dr. G. Sprague, the owner of the paper:

<sup>27</sup>See copy in Historical, Memorial and Art Department library.

<sup>28</sup>L. F. Andrews, *op. cit.*



General William Duane Wilson has returned to his home in this city after several years of close application to duty in the Department of Agriculture at Washington, having cherished the hope that on his return he could, through this paper, renew his acquaintance with the agricultural public, and have an acceptable opportunity to devote what active life remains to him to the advancement of the agricultural interests of the state, with whose interests he has so long been identified. . . .

Mr. Wilson returned to the editorial work with apparent pleasure. His age was then sixty years and he rightfully expected many years of usefulness. The *Homestead* was a continuation in part of the *Iowa Farmer* which Mr. Wilson had disposed of in Des Moines in 1858. At this time, 1869, it was a weekly paper 12x18 inches, 5 columns, 8 pages, and had a good healthy looking line of advertising. He ambitiously began a campaign to increase its circulation. He was soon receiving many valuable contributions from interested subscribers, and ran articles of genuine interest on many agricultural topics, as well as on the meetings of the State Agricultural Society and its committees, on the state and county fairs, on the State Agricultural College and Farm, on the meetings of the Board of Trustees of that institution, and was making of it a worth while organ for the farming interests.

The farmers of this section of the Union were becoming more and more assertive about their rights. High rates of transportation on their products to eastern markets was a just cause of complaint, high prices on machinery and other materials they had to buy was another, while the prices on the grain and stock they sold frequently were exceedingly low. Largely because of these conditions many farmers began to devise plans to relieve the situation.

"The Patrons of Husbandry" was the name of a secret organization that started in the East. Its chief purpose was the co-operation of its members in buying groceries, lumber, wire, machinery, etc., which could be got at lower rates when purchased in quantities. Each local organization was called a Grange. Another purpose of the organization was social.

Mr. Wilson had advocated some such co-operative plans for years. By the time he returned from Washington to Iowa the Grange was just beginning to appear in the state, and before

long we find he was a leader in the movement. In the September 9, 1870, issue of the *Homestead* there appears a list of the general deputies of the Patrons of Husbandry appointed by the national Grange consisting of sixteen men. General William Duane Wilson is given as one of the two general deputies from Iowa, the other one being Dr. James L. Enos of Cedar Rapids. They were authorized to organize new granges. Nine local granges were organized in Iowa in 1870, chiefly through Mr. Wilson's influence.<sup>29</sup>

The *Homestead* of January 20, 1871, page 5, contains an article about the organization of the Iowa State Grange, as follows:

A State Grange for Iowa was organized on Thursday evening last by William Duane Wilson, general deputy, under the authority of the National Grange. The large attendance of delegates and deputies gave gratifying evidence of the interest our farmers feel in this organization, and their statements were unanimous in regard to the beneficial influence that has already resulted from it. The following persons were duly elected officers: Master, D. W. Adams, Waukon, Allamakee County; lecturer, Isaac Brandt, Des Moines, Polk County; overseer, J. L. Enos, Cedar Rapids, Linn County; steward, Peter Melendy, Cedar Falls, Black Hawk County; assistant steward, J. D. Whitman, Dallas Center, Dallas County; chaplain, C. D. Beeman, Waukon, Allamakee County; treasurer, William Anderson, Madison County; secretary, William Duane Wilson, Des Moines, Polk County; gatekeeper, W. H. Shower, Denison, Crawford County. Several applications were received for the opening of granges in different portions of the state. . . . Applications for subordinate granges should be made to the secretary of the State Grange, as above.

In the same issue of the *Homestead* which contained the above, January 20, 1871, Mr. Wilson says: "The great interest which the farmers of the state are manifesting in regard to the order of the Patrons of Husbandry induces us to devote a special corner to the movement therein . . ." and regularly thereafter the paper carried a department called Patrons of Husbandry, which chronicled news about the organization of granges in many counties, and sometimes many granges in one county.

As time went on General Wilson gave more and more of his energies to the Patrons of Husbandry. Of course the interests of the grange and the interests of agriculture were so inter-

<sup>29</sup>W. A. Anderson in *Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. XXII, p. 13.

woven that while he was working for one he doubtless considered he was working for the other also. But evidently the duties of secretary of the State Grange became so great that they materially encroached on his work as editor of the *Homestead*, so that in the issue of the paper of July 12, 1872, he introduces former Lieutenant Governor B. F. Gue as editor. He says, "Having assumed other duties to aid the farming interests of the state [his work for the Grange] they grew upon us to such an extent as to seriously interfere with what we were striving to do for our paper." Notwithstanding that Mr. Wilson says in this three years' editorship and management of the *Homestead* its regular subscription list has trebled in number.

Thus relieved from his editorial duties Mr. Wilson was free to give much time in the field lecturing and organizing granges. "A person of attractive appearance, a fluent and forceful speaker, with his tall form, flowing white patriarchial beard, and courtly manner, he aroused enthusiasm to a high degree."<sup>30</sup>

This was the period of the rapid growth of the Grange. The movement had been growing by leaps and bounds. It is said there were five hundred local granges in Iowa in 1872 and that Polk County at one time had thirty-five. Mr. Wilson was its foremost organizer in Iowa. While not organized for partisan political purposes, the Grange was striving to relieve the farmers of burdens. In the session of the General Assembly of 1874 the famous Grange Law was enacted which regulated freight and passenger rates and otherwise controlled railroads. This was brought about largely by the power of public opinion which was made vocal and directed by the Grange. General Wilson had a considerable part in creating and organizing this public opinion. He continued as secretary of the Iowa State Grange until the close of 1873 when age admonished his retirement from its arduous duties.

In 1874 the *Western Farmer and Patrons' Helper* was established in Des Moines and Mr. Wilson became an associate editor and so remained until his death. That publication was made the state organ of the Grange.<sup>31</sup> He also became chaplain of the

<sup>30</sup>L. F. Andrews, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup>*Iowa State Leader*, Des Moines, January 8, 1877; also *Rowell's Newspaper Directory*, 1877, p. 90.



State Grange. He was confidential adviser, critic and earnest supporter of the order.

Mr. Wilson was an active and exemplary member of the Presbyterian church. It is said that in 1863 there were a number of Negro refugees in Des Moines who had escaped into Iowa. The Central Presbyterian church, then located on Fourth street, organized a mission Sunday school of which General Wilson was the first superintendent.

As to his personal characteristics L. F. Andrews says:

Mr. Wilson was of sanguine temperament, active, ardent, hopeful, confident, firm in opinion, had the courage of his convictions; did not hesitate, as the adviser of the Patrons and Granges, to criticize them, yet left no sting behind.

Socially he was affable and courteous to all. Reared in an atmosphere of intelligence and refinement, under the guidance of a mother noted for her Christian virtues, he enjoyed most the companionship of the refined and cultured. He was an honored member of the Masonic fraternity.

His was a long, active life, well spent; fraught with intimate business and social relations with thousands of men, without enmity; uprightness without harshness; a gentleman, whose sympathies were always with the laboring man; a loving, devoted husband and father; a wise counsellor and faithful friend.

In its issue of January 9, 1877, the *Iowa State Register* speaks of General Wilson's death in part as follows:

To him had come that good fame which follows in the footsteps of honor, that respect which arises from conscious worth, and that regard which is ever developed by kindly deeds and generous words. The appeal of the poor never passed unheard by him. With a generosity more lavish than his fortune, he gave when justice might have forbidden the donation. This was the man the city mourns today.

During the past two years his health has been gradually failing until about two months since he was missed from the streets, and last Sunday morning (January 7) he breathed his last, and the weary, worn soul was at rest. A wife who faithfully shared the good and ill of his checkered life, and two children, George, railroad agent at Grand Island, Nebraska, and Mrs. Judge Snyder, are left to lament him. . . . The funeral services will be at two o'clock this afternoon from the Central Presbyterian Church.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.