

Reached Iowa Assembly on Muleback

By WALTER C. WILSON

[In early years when the capital of Iowa was at Iowa City, members of the General Assembly residing in the midsection of the state and more western counties experienced serious inconvenience in attendance at sessions. Resort was had to all manner of conveyances to make the long trips over poorly marked trails, as no general state highway system had yet been developed and settlements were few and in many sections widely separated by the prairies. Representative Walter C. Wilson of Webster City had a large district reaching far to the northwest section of Iowa. His recital in an address before the meeting of the Pioneer Lawmakers Association of Iowa reunion in 1894, concerning his experiences in traveling to the session of the Sixth General Assembly in 1856, revealed some difficulties experienced on the journey considered worth recounting 100 years later—Editor.]

In 1856, I was nominated for representative from the territory which now composes some nineteen counties of the northwestern part of the state, with a majority of something over nine hundred against me. I carried the election by eighty-five votes. I attribute my success somewhat to the fact that the state capital was so remote that my opponent did not care to undertake so great an enterprise and so much hardship as he would have to undergo in reaching the Capital of the state.

When it was time for the legislature to meet, I found the undertaking was somewhat embarrassing myself, but after providing myself with a mule I rode to Marengo and thence by the Western State Company Line to Iowa City. I found myself embarrassed with a mule upon my hands, and wishing to make some disposition of the animal, I remarked that I thought I would have to make some person a present of the mule. There was a Jew in the company who said he would take him, but I said to him being somewhat short of expense money that I thought I would have to receive

a small compensation, and finally agreed to part with the animal for \$80.

When I had reached Iowa City I was notified that my seat would be contested. I remarked then that I felt it was a mistake, as no man would venture an undertaking of that kind. I had received the votes of the whole northwest. My opponent never entered an appearance.

HAMILTON COUNTY ORGANIZED

As a matter of history, I will tell you something of the organization of Hamilton county. I introduced a bill forming Hamilton county, which then comprised a portion of Webster county. When I introduced the bill, I had Webster City designated as the county seat. My friend, W. T. Baker, suggested that it might be a mistake to designate Webster City as the county seat, as the custom had been to appoint commissioners to locate county seats. I said to him that would not do; if the bill was passed I wanted something that would be to my interest. I stated to him that I had named the new county Hamilton, which would bear the name of president of the senate, W. W. Hamilton, of Dubuque. He said he guessed that was right, and that would be sufficient to take care of it in the senate, and we would undertake to take care of it in the house.

The bill was introduced in the house and called up upon its first reading; the rules were suspended, and the bill read a second time and passed, and the title agreed to. It was immediately reported to the Senate by W. P. Hepburn, chief clerk. Governor Kirkwood was then in the senate. He asked to have the bill immediately taken up that had just been reported, as he understood it had some reference to the president of the senate. The bill was taken up and read the first time, the rules were then suspended and the bill read a second time, title agreed to and passed, and referred to the "committee on oysters," of which Judge Hamilton formed a very conspicuous part.

I might say to you, gentlemen, that the county of Ham-

ilton and Webster City have been the pride of my life, having been a citizen of Hamilton county for some forty years. The town of Webster City is now a town of some 4,500 inhabitants. At the time it took the name of Hamilton county it did not contain to exceed 100 inhabitants.

PROMINENT IOWA LEGISLATORS

I wish to mention the names of some of the prominent members of the house and senate. I will name W. T. Barker, of Dubuque, Mr. Cort, a gentleman by the name of Holmes, and the speaker, Mr. McFarland. In the senate W. W. Hamilton, Samuel J. Kirkwood, W. F. Coolbaugh, Mr. Grinnell and Test of Council Bluffs. There were many bills passed, and some that we have always looked upon with pride, that I feel were as essential to the welfare of Iowa as any laws passed before, or have been passed since that time. The disposition of our land grants, the railroads, and distributing the institutions of the State. I had the great pleasure of casting my vote for the removal of the state of Iowa from Iowa City to Des Moines.

There was a bill introduced locating a blind asylum in Oskaloosa, Mahaska county. I moved to amend the bill by striking out "Oskaloosa, Mahaska county," and inserting "Webster City, Hamilton county," and came within three votes of locating the blind asylum at Webster City. My amendment failed, and we defeated the bill, and Vinton in the next legislature following, secured that institution. I am very much pleased to know the institution was located in a pleasant and convenient part of the State, but I do think Webster City would have been much superior.

THE INDIAN DEPREDACTIONS

After the adjournment of the legislature and on my arrival home, the first evening, a messenger came from Fort Dodge, notifying us that the citizens of Spirit Lake had been massacred by the Indians, and wishing us to send a party of men, fifty at least. We went to work, and had our company ready to leave at 9 o'clock the next morning. They met with two companies at Fort

Dodge, and after a hard and tedious march, reached Spirit Lake just in time to bury the dead, and learned that the Indians had left. After their return, in about ten days, a messenger came rushing into Webster City saying that the Indians were coming down the Des Moines and Boone rivers, massacring the people, and the whole settlement on the Des Moines and Boone rivers rose in a body and fled for Fort Dodge and Webster City.

Immediately, I, sent a messenger to Iowa City with all possible dispatch, requesting Governor Grimes to send us the whole arsenal of the State, that the Indians were massacring the settlers all along the Des Moines and Boone rivers. He sent me four boxes of muskets, and requested that I should receipt for same. I did so, and armed the settlers, and never had a greater trouble in my life than I had in regaining the arms and satisfying the receipt that I had given; but, as I am satisfied that the Governor meant to favor me, he accepted what I returned, and said he thought I had done nobly.

Our next experience was from Boone county the day after the report of the massacre. Judge McFarland and Captain McCall started with a company of one hundred men, taking teams, provisions, and everything that was necessary to cope with the Indians. When they came within five miles of our town we met them with a delegation and escorted them into town. Judge McFarland straightened himself up on his bay horse and said, "If you have any Indians, bring them on, the Boone tigers are here; we are ready for Indians."

In answering the judge, I said to him I didn't think there was an Indian within a thousand miles of us, but the people were scared, and I saw no way that I could prevent it. We appreciated their presence as fully as we could if there had been balls six inches thick upon our public square, and if the Indians or any other trouble befell Webster City we should know just where to go for assistance.

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