



PORTRAIT OF GEORGE G. WRIGHT

(At the age of 31, from a daguerreotype presented by Mrs. J. C. Knapp of Keosauqua, to Edgar R. Harlan, and in his collection of "The Van Buren County Group of Famous Men.")

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

JUDGE GEORGE G. WRIGHT

Last June there was held at Keosauqua memorial services in remembrance of the late Judge Robert Sloan. Just previous to that occasion the Curator of this department received from Hon. William W. Baldwin, a distinguished former citizen of Keosauqua who was to take part in the services, an inquiry as to when Judge George G. Wright, who was perhaps Keosauqua's most prominent lawyer at the time Judge Sloan was beginning the study of law, was "first elected or appointed to the Supreme Court." In preparing to answer the question it was discovered that from the sources at hand there is not in any one place such a detailed biography of Judge Wright as would satisfy a student or investigator. Judge Wright was one of the most prominent and popular men in the history of the state. The inadequate collection of facts relating to his life form a poor commentary on the work done in the newspapers, journals, encyclopedias, biographies, and other writings of the state. We therefore assembled in brief space the salient features of this notable life from the following authorities:

E. H. Stiles's Recollections and Sketches.

ANNALS OF IOWA, biographical sketch by B. F. Gue.

Official Register of Iowa.

Census of Iowa, 1895.

Journal of the House, Fifth General Assembly, 1855.

Keosauqua Republican of January 23, 1896, quoted from the *Des Moines Capital*.

History of Van Buren County.

Memorial exercises of Supreme Court held February 8, 1896.

House Journal, page 11, 1896, containing joint memorial resolution.

Executive Journal of Iowa in Public Archives Division of Historical Department of Iowa.

Journal of Senate and House, Thirteenth General Assembly, 1870.

Files of *Ottumwa Courier*, January, 1870.

Congressional directories of the Forty-second, Forty-third, and Forty-fourth congresses.

Care was taken to verify the facts so far as possible.

In connection with this study it was found that under the old constitution, from 1846 to 1857, the General Assembly elected the judges of the Supreme Court in the same way that it elected United States senators, a historical fact almost unknown to the people of today.

We append the sketch prepared:

GEORGE G. WRIGHT

George Grover Wright was born in Bloomington, Indiana, March 24, 1820, and died in Des Moines, Iowa, January 11, 1896. His parents were John Wright and Rachel (Seaman) Wright. He entered the Indiana State University at Bloomington in 1836 and was graduated in 1839. He then began the study of law with his brother, Hon. Joseph A. Wright, at Rockville, Indiana, was admitted to the bar in 1840 and in September of that year removed to Keosauqua, Iowa, coming by way of the Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers, and began the practice of law. In 1844 he formed a partnership with J. C. Knapp, the firm being Wright & Knapp. H. C. Caldwell studied law with the firm and for a time was associated with them as Wright, Knapp & Caldwell. In 1846 Wright was appointed by the court prosecuting attorney for Van Buren County and served two years. In 1848 he was elected senator and served in the Second and Third general assemblies. In 1850 he was a member of the joint committee on the revision of the laws of the state which resulted in the Code of 1851. In 1850 he was nominated by the Whigs of the First District for Congress, but was defeated by Bernhart Henn, the district being strongly Democratic. In 1853 when George W. Jones was re-elected to the United States Senate, Mr. Wright received the votes of the Whig members of the General Assembly for that position. On January 5, 1855, he was elected by the joint convention of the General Assembly as chief justice of the Supreme Court for the term of six years, receiving 53 votes to 45 for Edward Johnston of Lee County, and 1 for H. W. Starr. He served as chief justice until the reorganization of the court after the adoption of the new constitution. At that time, or in the election of 1859, he declined to be a can-

didate.¹ The three who were elected at that election were Ralph P. Lowe of Lee County, Lacon D. Stockton of Des Moines County, and Caleb Baldwin of Pottawattamie County. Lowe drew the two-year term and became chief justice. Baldwin drew the four-year term and Stockton the six-year term. On June 9, 1860, Stockton died and ten days thereafter Governor Kirkwood wrote the following letter to Judge Wright:

Des Moines, Iowa, June 19, 1860.

Hon. Geo. G. Wright.

Dear Sir:

The death of Judge Stockton has made a vacancy on the bench of the Supreme Court which the exigency of the public service requires shall be promptly filled.

I have this day signed and deposited with the secretary of state a commission appointing you to fill that vacancy and I hereby notify you of that fact, with the earnest request that you will accept the appointment.

Your determination to decline an election last year was a subject of deep regret to the bar and people of our state, and I shall feel much gratified if I can distinguish my administration by inducing you to return to a position the duties of which you discharge with so much advantage to the state and honor to yourself.

Very respectfully,

SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD.

Judge Wright accepted the appointment, qualified on June 26, and was elected by the people November 6, 1860, for the remainder of the term. On October 10, 1865, he was re-elected for a term of six years commencing January 1, 1866.

In 1860 Judge Wright was elected president of the State Agricultural Society and served four years.

In 1865 he and C. C. Cole established the Iowa Law School at Des Moines. In 1868 it was removed to Iowa City and became the Law Department of the State University of Iowa. The Iowa Law School later was revived at Des Moines and became the Law Department of Drake University.

The Republican caucus of the members of the Thirteenth General Assembly on January 13, 1870, nominated him for United States senator, the informal ballot being George G. Wright 63,

¹It is thought that Judge Wright modestly withdrew from being a candidate at that time in order that the retiring one-term governor, Ralph P. Lowe, could have a place on the ticket, and not bunch the three judges in one corner of the state.

William B. Allison 39, Samuel Merrill 24, Samuel J. Kirkwood 1. The formal ballot was Wright 66, Allison 47, Merrill 13, Kirkwood 1. On January 18 the General Assembly elected Justice Wright United States senator by the following vote: George G. Wright 125 votes, Thomas W. Clagget 19 votes. On the following March 4 he thus became United States senator and served six years. There he served on the Judiciary, Finance, Revision of the Laws, Claims, Civil Service and Retrenchment, and Revolutionary Claims committees, rendering excellent service, but he declined being a candidate for re-election, preferring to return to the practice of his profession.

He joined his son, Thomas S. Wright, and C. H. Gatch in the firm of Wright, Gatch & Wright in the practice of law in Des Moines. In 1879 he was elected a director in the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad Company, a position which he held the remainder of his life. In 1881 he joined the law firm composed of himself, Thomas S. Wright, A. B. Cummins, and Carroll Wright, under the style of Wright, Cummins & Wright. In 1887 he retired from the practice. He was then chosen presi-



CAST FROM DEATH MASK OF GEORGE G. WRIGHT
(In Collections of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

dent of Polk County Savings Bank, and later, president of the Security Loan & Trust Company, which position he held at the time of his death. For many years he was a lecturer in the Law Department of the State University, and for six years he was president of the Iowa Pioneer Lawmaker's Association.

THE REBEL RAID IN DAVIS COUNTY

The bitter experience of Iowa people in the southern tier of counties during the Civil War has never been fully set out in print. Bushwhacking created constant fear of guerrilla raids such as Morgan's in Indiana and Ohio. It produced the Quantrell and James gangs of bandits. The report of Colonel S. A. Moore, in part contained in the Report of the office of the Adjutant-General for 1864-5, Vol. II, is now for the first time produced in full in this number of the ANNALS.

As for the authority for the action taken regarding the suppression of trouble in Davis County, it may be said that the constitution of the state requires the governor to see that the laws are enforced. And reference is made to Chapter 35, Acts of the second session of the Ninth General Assembly directing the organization of the entire militia, and to Chapter 17 of the same session, especially providing for the protection of the southern border of the state. Each of these acts was approved by Governor Kirkwood on September 11, 1862.

The ANNALS will from time to time present similar materials touching remote early affairs in Iowa of which the Archives of the state are so full.

ABSTRACT OF THE MINUTES OF THE STATE BOARD OF CONSERVATION

April 25, 1922

The new board consisting of L. H. Pammel, Mrs. C. H. McNider, W. G. Haskell, and E. R. Harlan met as stated above.

Motions.—Motions were adopted as follows: That Dr. Pammel be chairman of the meeting; that the Board join with the Executive Council in urging the county boards of supervisors of Winnebago and Hancock counties to improve the road leading to Pilot Knob State Park from the west; that the Board recommend to the Executive Council that

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