

## CALVIN WEBB KEYES, IOWA CENTENARIAN

BY CHARLES KEYES<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks ago one of the real architects of our great new commonwealth passed to realms beyond. When called from this life Calvin Webb Keyes had almost attained the age of five score years. He came to the capital hamlet when the old fort on Raccoon Point was yet the social center of the straggling frontier settlement, and when a single block embraced all the trading activities of the new community. He left it a flourishing city, fifty square miles in expanse, and fiftieth in population in our land. What a tale of conquest of wilderness could our last pioneer unfold!

A few months ago, when a company of Iowa's early settlers sat down one evening to a good, old-fashioned New England dinner there stood before the host at the middle of the table a huge birthday cake brilliantly lighted by ninety-eight colored candles. Of a hundred people present the host was the eldest—oldest inhabitant, oldest citizen of their town, oldest living settler of their state. In doing homage to their leader old boys and girls brought in abundant cheer of other days.

Of all this group none was so alert, none so animated, none so fully possessed of all of his mental faculties as was the host of that joyous occasion. Physically more vigorous than any man in the neighborhood of half his age, he was brimful of witty reminiscence, and boundless in fund of pithy Lincoln stories. He royally entertained the whole evening. On getting up from the feast that night there was not one of the entire company but who felt convinced that their host would be the very last to break their circle. The Fates made him the first. A few weeks later an unseasonable zephyr stealing up in the dead of a night sufficed speedily to accomplish what the storms of a hundred years failed to do.

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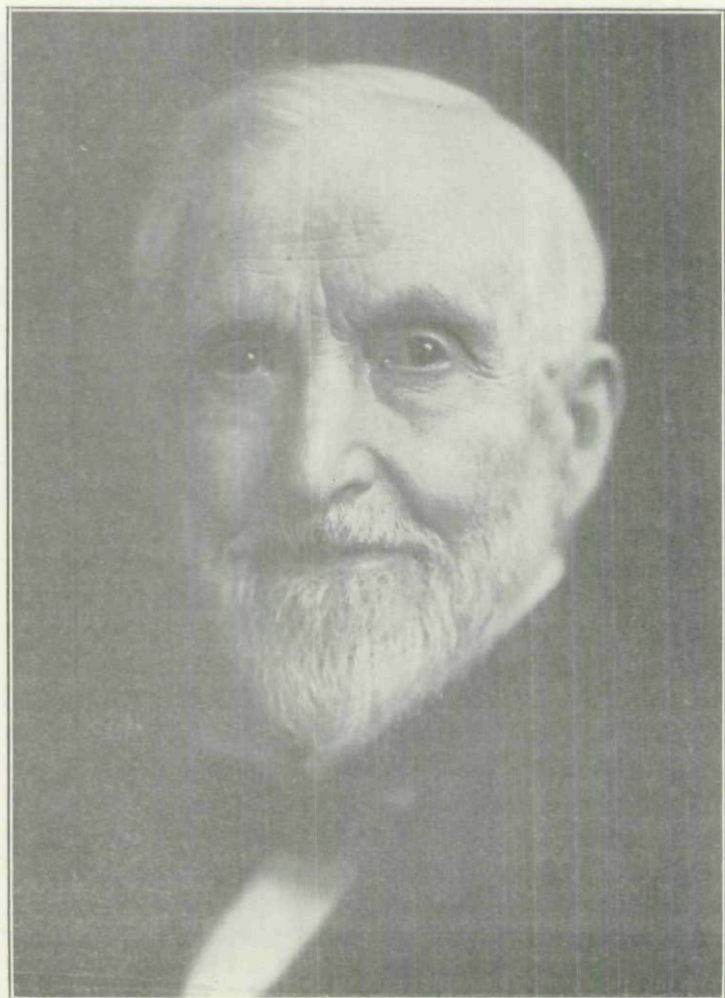
<sup>1</sup>At the request of the editor, Dr. Charles Keyes, son of the pioneer, prepared the following abstract from a biographical volume now almost ready for the press,

To within a day of his passing the patriarchal figure of C. W. Keyes was a familiar one on the streets of his home town. In full command of his senses, without ache or pain, or faltering step, he swiftly glided through the busy throngs, and every few moments stopped and was reverentially greeted by some one of the old boys of younger generations now, many of them, past three score years. Of a numerous crowd of relations he was the last but one of three generations. In a long letter to a nephew written a few days before his demise his pen lines were as firm and fine as the engine-ruling on a bank-note. Of such stern stuff were made those who for advancing civilization blazed first paths through primeval forest.

It was on the very tercentenary of the landing of his Pilgrim forebears on bleak Plymouth Rock and of the initial foundation of these United States that patriarch Keyes, ripe in years, rich in deeds, and rare in judgment was gathered to his fathers.

Keyes was a pioneer of pioneers. Not first hunter adventurer lured to interior wilds to bide his time with untutored savage, or to slaughter wild life for the paltry pelts it furnished, but advance agent of stable government, the bold and alert business giant with large views who helps to fashion a wild land into prosperous state, and who promotes industry, establishes large enterprises, and develops permanent commerce. His was a race of pioneers whose efforts for human liberty and happiness went back a thousand years. As Vikings his forbears came out of the dark fogs of the Baltic to reclaim England from savage Briton. His ancestors were found among the yeomen who wrested from King John the Magna Charta. They were with Cromwell at Marston Moor and Naseby. Had one of them not had the foresight to hurry away a score of years before to the New World the Keyes tribe would have become extinct with the execution of the regicides at the restoration of the Stuarts.

Robert Keyes, the original ancestor in America, arrived in Massachusetts colony within a decade from the founding of Plymouth, and established himself at Watertown, near the present city of Boston. For a hundred years he and his descendants lived there, and then the Keyes family hastened on to the expanding frontier of English settlement to what is now the state



*Calvin W. Keyes*

CALVIN W. KEYES  
(At ninety-seven years)

of Vermont. There in due course of time, a century later, our Calvin was born and reared. The latter's grandfather served all through the Revolutionary War. He was with Gates at Saratoga, and with Washington at Yorktown, and lived long enough to see the lusty new Republic grow to the Pacific basin. It was eminently fitting that the grandson should cast his lot beyond the Mississippi River.

On his mother's side Calvin was a descendant, in the eighth generation, from William Bradford, who landed from the *Mayflower*, and who was first governor of Plymouth Colony. Like his father's ancestors his mother's relatives of a former generation served actively all through the Revolution, and in the French and Indian wars preceding. They were in the Boston Tea Party, at Lexington, and were foremost at the expulsion of Howe from New York.

Few men ever lived who witnessed, as did Calvin Keyes, human progress so marvelous, so multifarious, or so beneficent. The span of his life coincides exactly with the century of mankind's greatest material and intellectual advancement. His was the unique privilege to be eyewitness to the conquest of the land, the water, and the air. He came on earth's stage with the steamboat, and he was present at the birth of the railroad. He saw develop into practical use the telegraph, the telephone, the wireless, the automobile, the submarine, the airplane, the gaslight, and the electric motor. The germ theory of disease, the hypothesis of the conservation of energy, and the doctrine of evolution completely revolutionized human thought while yet he was in the prime of life. Three great quests of the ages were consummated as he closed his eyes on the world's progress: the discovery of the fountain of youth, the finding of the philosopher's stone, and the genesis of genius. He lived to see the aristocracy of birth go down to its doom after a supremacy of 10,000 years. He lived to see that the dissolution of the aristocracy of wealth was already well on the road to similar fate. He lived to find realized Napoleon's weird prophecy that in a hundred years the world would be all Slav or all Saxon. A World War, such as the great emperor never dreamed of, made, within his time limit set, Saxon supreme. His was indeed the fullest century of all time.

Calvin Webb Keyes first saw light of day on November 7, 1823, near the crossroads hamlet of Putney, ten miles north of Brattleboro, Vermont, in the Connecticut valley. Until he and his older brother, Rollin, went away to school to prepare for college, the two boys helped to run the farm, and they led lives of ordinary Green Mountain farmers. After attending the home schools Calvin was sent to the academy at Keene, New Hampshire, a famous school in its day. But Calvin after two years was unwilling to prepare to enter the ministry as his parents had hoped and planned, and left the academy to go into the mercantile business in his home town.

The old farm was the homestead for four generations, being purchased in 1778 by Calvin's great-great-grandfather, who built the fine two-story dwelling upon it in 1802. The site was one of the beauty spots of New England. It was one of the glorious hillside tracts which overlooked the Connecticut River valley for many miles. From it wide sweeps of country met the eyes. Across the river were the New Hampshire hills and mountains. The summit of a rocky eminence back of the house commanded on the east an unsurpassed panorama of the entire Green Mountains range. Famed Monadnock reared its lofty head to the southeast; Ascutney loomed up at the north; and far away in the hazy northeast were the shining tops of the White Mountains. Down below the house was a wonderful lily pond which in winter long served the Keyes boys as a skating rink.

In trade young Calvin prospered. With the usual pluck, force of character, and native shrewdness of the typical Yankee he was soon able to buy into partnership with the old owner of the store, and a few years later, to become sole proprietor of the flourishing business. By the end of a decade he acquired a competency.

In the meanwhile the young merchant, being somewhat undermined in health, was obliged to seek a dryer and less vigorous climate than Vermont. So, in the autumn of 1856, in company with George Crawford, one of his boyhood chums, he made a long western trip, leisurely upon the Erie Canal to Buffalo, and thence along the Great Lakes to Chicago. From the latter place he passed overland to the Mississippi River and down that stream

to St. Louis. Burlington especially pleased him, and the two travelers decided to stop there and try their fortunes. But cholera happened to be raging, so they hastened to make a side trip into the hinterland of Iowa. Going to Keokuk, they took a small steamer to The Forks, where the capital of the state had been recently moved. The state was prosperous. Railroads were building. Eastern settlers were flocking in and taking up homestead rights. The population had tripled in the few years previous.

After spending a few days looking around Des Moines the two Vermonters took team and buggy and drove out northwestwardly across the unbroken prairies a distance of more than one hundred miles, into what are now Greene and Sac counties. There were then no highways of any sort and the travel was as the crow flies, straight across the country. The weather being fine they slept on the ground each night. On returning to Des Moines and putting up at the hotel, the first questions that inquisitive citizens put to the newcomers were how they liked their town, and how they were impressed with the surrounding country. Without divulging his intentions Keyes replied laconically that he guessed he could get a living.

Before departing for his Vermont home, Keyes leased a large storeroom on Second Street, near Vine, then the trade center of the community. Going back to his native state, he wound up his affairs there during the winter, and early in the spring returned to Des Moines with a full stock of general merchandise. The following year Crawford came back and, under the firm name of Keyes & Crawford, the goods were removed to the fine, three-story brick West building, adjoining the Allen Bank, corner of Fourth and Court Avenue.

The firm of Keyes & Crawford soon branched out into enterprises other than merchandising. It purchased 1,000 acres of fine bottom land and gentle hillside, six miles north of town, now known as the Saylor bottoms, where it built a spacious country mansion, large barns, and extensive cattle, sheep and hog sheds, and soon had in active operation a great stock ranch. Crawford, releasing his interests in the store, devoted all of his time to this new enterprise. In the autumn of 1858 the firm made the first

shipment of wool to eastern markets, 400 pounds being sent to Boston. In a few years the wool business developed into large proportions. Besides handling the wool of its own animals the firm became the chief market for all the state. For some years several millions of pounds were shipped annually. In 1864 an entire railroad train of wool went through on fast time from Iowa direct to Boston. This marked a commercial epoch in the history of the young commonwealth, and widely established Iowa throughout the East as a great wool state.

After Crawford took management of the stock farm Keyes induced Randolph and John Knight, boyhood friends in Vermont, to come out to Des Moines and help look after the merchandising enterprises. These expanded so rapidly that further subdivision of efforts soon became necessary. Wholesaling had grown up with the retailing. The grocery end of the business was turned over to certain of the head clerks, and the stocks moved to the Exchange Block, on the corner of Third and Walnut streets. Among those who were connected with this part of the concern were Charles and Edwin Hewitt, who in a little while bought out the other interests. Edwin Hewitt withdrew after a few years and the business was conducted by Charles. Later Charles took his sons into partnership, and the great wholesale grocery house of Charles Hewitt & Sons of today, one of the great mercantile establishments of the Mid-west, was the result.

A few years after the Knight Brothers became ensconced in their new western home, further specialization of the original Keyes business became imperative. The dry goods and millinery were segregated in the West building, under the firm name of Keyes & Knight. Under this title, Knight Brothers, or J. M. Knight Co., this house was for more than a quarter of a century the leading emporium for goods of this description in the state. Its transactions in the jobbing trade extended throughout the West, even to the Pacific coast.

When in 1869, the Knight Brothers took over the dry goods department, the crockery business was moved into a two-story frame building which Keyes erected on Court Avenue immediately east of the West building, on the alley between Third and Fourth streets. This store was operated under the name of C. W.

Keyes. A considerable wholesale trade had already developed in connection with the general store. This feature was emphasized. Importing was begun, since in those days all queensware came from abroad. The first consignment of this kind consisted of 100 crates of assorted queensware which came direct from England to Des Moines. As an innovation each piece of china had a wreath and the name C. W. Keyes, Des Moines, Iowa, burnt into it. Even to this day, half a century later, old housewives can show samples of this original importation with the Des Moines impress.

Shortly the queensware business began to be conducted under the firm name of Keyes & Gray, Charles Gray having already, for several years, been manager of the store. When in 1871, Keyes took on the interests of Captain James W. Davis, in the wholesale grocery house of Davis & Dennis, he sold his holdings in the crockery store to Oliver H. Perkins, a gentleman of means who had recently come out from New York state to make Des Moines his place of abode. The firm then became Perkins & Gray. A few years afterwards, upon the death of Gray, Elwood Gatch took up his brother-in-law Gray's interest, and the title of the firm was changed to Perkins & Gatch. Subsequently Gatch withdrew, and the firm became Perkins & Brinsmaid, and finally Brinsmaid & Co. Under the latter designation it is now one of the great chinaware houses of this country. From its present palatial, white stone home on Seventh Street it conducts not only a large retail business, which is state wide in extent, but it carries on a wholesale traffic that covers half of the continent.

On assuming control of the wholesale grocery business of Davis & Dennis, stress was put upon the pork packing feature which had already attained considerable proportions. A special sugar cured ham was pushed until the Dennis & Keyes brand was reaching from ocean to ocean. Car lots of hams and breakfast bacon were shipped weekly to all of the large cities of the East, where a special trade for this choice product grew up. As the financial panic of 1873 began to develop, Keyes, with usual shrewdness accredited to Yankees, disposed of a large portion of his mercantile interests, so that when the storm broke his sails were nicely furled. Notwithstanding this fact, his bark was crippled some-



what, yet it was able to ride the angry waves better than the craft of most of his associates. Through adjustment, combination, and reorganization, the growing grocery business developed and expanded and finally emerged as the present Warfield-Howell-Pratt concern, the greatest mercantile house of our state.

For several years previous to withdrawal from mercantile activities Keyes had backed a number of other enterprises—industries which acquaintances had inveigled him into. Among them several sawmills had been left on his hands. With time to devote to resuscitating these defunct local industries he at once turned his attention to making them pay their way. In eastern markets there was at this time a very brisk demand for hardwood lumbers, especially black walnut, for the manufacture of furniture and home furnishings. Black walnut burls were so especially sought that they sold by the pound for veneers, a large burl two feet in diameter bringing as much as \$150.

Although early settlers had cleared the country of most of the primeval forest growth which clothed the stream valleys and bluffs, there still remained in the Des Moines valley especially a number of majestic groves of giant black walnuts. These comprised trees 25 to 100 in a group, huge monarchs 5 to 6 feet in diameter, and 100 feet to the nearest branch. Their preservation was due in large measure to the fact that they were too large to handle by ordinary methods and no interior sawmill in the state could rip up logs of such huge proportions. As a result, these noble trees, superb examples of our state's varied flora, stood out in all their original splendor. There was one fine grove of these giants a few miles above Ottumwa, another at the lower end of the Rattlesnake Bend below Des Moines, and a third grew on Middle River, near its mouth. The finest group of them all rose high above the surrounding forest in the Devil's Gap, on the bottoms west of Sixth Avenue bridge in north Des Moines. At the mouth of Beaver Creek, also, was a pristine group which attracted much attention, and five miles above was still another. The most extensive grove of this kind, the noblest Roman of them all, the greatest single botanical wonder ever displayed within the limits of our state, was at High Bridge. It contained upwards of 150 largest individuals among large trees. Boone River bottoms harbored a fine group, and there was a good stand near Fort Dodge.

Altogether there were not less than ten superb companies of these black walnuts—comprising over a thousand giants, still standing as late as 1878. But they quickly vanished from the face of earth. They are now gone forever. When shall we look upon their like again?

Either because he never heard of Morris's earnest plea for "Woodman, spare that tree," or else for reason that stern realities of business smothered all sentimentalities, Keyes found way to handle the giants of Iowa's forest, notwithstanding the fact that all others before him had utterly failed in the undertaking. He turned his several sawmills into cutting into salable lumber the smaller black walnuts, butternuts, oaks and hickories. The giants he felled, cut their trunks into long lengths, removed the bark and white sapwood, and partly squared them with the axe. These great logs were then loaded on railroad cars, a single log on a car, so large were they, and shipped to New York City, where they brought almost fabulous prices. Iowa's was the last available supply of wide walnut lumber in the United States. It lasted scarcely a year. With such lightning rapidity do we demolish the resources which Nature in her infinite beneficence bestows upon us!

Finally, the black walnut giants were all safely garnered and turned into the base uses of civilized man. Thus perished the last of Iowa's great trees and the noble remnants of her primeval forests. What an unique, attractive, and beautiful park would the Devil's Gap make today, when we are just beginning to realize the irreparable ruin already wrought in our land, and, too late, are striving to save from complete destruction and desolation the few remaining scenic spots of our dear state.

With the passing of the noble black walnuts the Keyes Lumber Company wound up its affairs and the interest of its head turned to other things. About this time a group of capitalists in Des Moines desired to establish a local packing house. The C. W. Keyes Packing Company was organized with ample capital, and a prosperous business initiated. Competition soon grew keen because of the militant attitude of the big packing interests of Chicago. Finally, through a satisfactory compromise and consolidation, the general business became adjusted and Keyes became general salesmanager for the state. Soon he saw a good oppor-

tunity to withdraw from active participation in the affairs of the company and to retire from mercantile life altogether. He was now passed eighty years of age.

In pioneer days the striving for social position, for fortune, or for the public eye was not nearly so keen as it became as the community grew older. The struggle for existence was not so fierce. It was all for one and one for all. Good or happiness of the many held first place. Public spiritedness was high. But in the frontier town money was always scarce. It was especially wanting during the years immediately preceding the Civil War. In 1858 a court house was well under construction when the funds gave out. There was nothing with which to pay the laborers. Finally, by happy thought, old County Judge Napier, who was a law unto himself, conceived the notion of floating bonds. Forthwith he himself issued a block to the extent of \$30,000. No one, however, would advance a cent on such securities. Everything remained at a standstill as before.

As a last resort the problem was presented to C. W. Keyes for advice, partly because he was an eastern man, and partly for reason that he seemed to be a first-rate financier with abundance of ready cash. Moreover, he had then recently cast his lot with the community. To the utter astonishment and consternation of all he himself took the entire issue at the liberal discount offered, endorsed the bonds himself and carried them to Boston with him when he went a few weeks later, and sold all at a considerable profit. This advance was his legitimate profit also. But on his return to Des Moines, to the further wonder of all, he turned this profit over to the Judge for furnishings for the court house. Where today would we find in our state such unselfishness and practical solicitude for the public welfare?

By 1860 enough Episcopalians had arrived in Des Moines to form a very respectable congregation and they had erected a fine brick house of worship on Seventh Street, north of Walnut, where now stands the Younkers' Department Store. There was nothing in the church to furnish the music but a little old-fashioned melodeon. Without saying anything to any one Keyes, before returning from one of his annual eastern trips to buy goods that autumn, shipped home a fine large pipe organ for the church, which, on arrival, he proceeded to have installed. But the parish-

ioners would not countenance such maneuver. Only on condition that the amount paid for it would be regarded as a temporary loan until they could raise the necessary funds to reimburse him would the church accept the gift. Such was the sensitive pride of early Iowa churchmen.

Education received much attention from the early settlers. A decade previous to the church episode, in May of 1855, the Lutheran church of Iowa decided to establish a college. It purchased about four blocks of land lying between Pleasant and Woodland avenues and between Sixteenth and Eighteenth streets. Building began and the corner stone was laid in the spring of 1856. Then things lagged. There were many delays. Funds failed to materialize. The project was finally given up. The unfinished building and property was turned over to Elder John A. Nash, of the Baptist church, who undertook to convert it into an institution of higher learning for his own persuasion. After many difficulties Nash at length completed the structure. But he had no funds left to meet the operating expenses. He had raised his last nickel. In his quandary he went to his old friend Keyes for sympathy and advice. Keyes quickly entered into the spirit of the project and asked how much it would take to get the college going. Nash thought that \$4,000 or \$5,000 would carry the institution through the first year—and then, God help us. After getting from the reverend gentleman his full plans, Keyes turned to his desk and wrote out his check for the amount and deposited it with the astounded Elder. Then, reaching for his hat and taking Nash by the arm, he went out next door to B. F. Allen, banker; then to R. W. Sypher, merchant; F. R. West, capitalist; and E. M. Hooker, stage line owner; from each of whom he obtained a check for \$1,250, and laid them in the hands of Mr. Nash.

So with this precarious endowment, but with vast hopes for the future, with Elder Nash as president and professor of philosophy, Mrs. Nash as teacher of *belles lettres*, and two others, instructors in the ancient languages and mathematics, the Des Moines University was launched in November, 1865. Surely these were humble beginnings for the great educational institution which now occupies a campus of many acres, and a dozen fine large

buildings in Highland Park, on the northern city limits, with its great faculty and thousands of students.

There had always been more or less musical talent in the Keyes family, and Calvin W. was not lacking in this respect. He played with ease upon no less than twenty-seven different instruments. When, then, in 1869, a band was organized by Des Moines votaries of Terpsichore, Keyes was chosen conductor and played the bass trombone. He ably performed bandmaster's duties for nearly ten years. The band's first experience was a notable one. Upon organization it at once proceeded to practice. The tune of "The Old Pine Tree" was gone over and over that evening, until the different instruments were made fairly to harmonize. On the following day there was a public function at the Capitol, and the band was proudly called upon to supply the music. This it willingly proceeded to do, albeit it had only a single tune in its repertoire. Heading the procession, and without halt or break, it stretched that "Old Pine Tree" from Court House to Capitol, where it met with rapturous applause.

In the spring of 1861, when the clouds of civil war were fast gathering in dark serried banks over the nation, and southern states were daily seceding from the Union, Republicans, who had been so victorious at the November elections, were all very greatly exercised over what action northern Democrats might take if worst came to worst. Firing on Sumter clarified instantaneously the local situation. So spontaneous and unequivocal was Democratic support of the Union that Republicans could only wonder that they should have ever doubted their neighbors' loyalty. Nathaniel B. Baker, staunch Democrat recently from New Hampshire, became Governor Kirkwood's adjutant-general and began to organize the military forces of the state with keenest discernment and surprising dispatch. M. M. Crocker and J. M. Tuttle, also strong Democrats, took high position in the first recruited regiment—the Second Iowa Infantry. Because of physical disabilities C. W. Keyes, lifelong Democrat, could not pass enlistment requirements.

When Keyes was deepest in his state of despondency over the matter, Crocker, who was a West Pointer, went to him and attempted to console him by explaining that wars were not altogether won on the front. He pointed out how the North

without organization and money, and the state practically bankrupt, dependence would have to be put entirely upon the credits which business would lend the government. Victory would rest with the side which could feed its army the quickest. He urged Keyes to devote all his splendid business energies to getting sufficient commissary supplies to the Iowa troops at the front, and to send them direct to him for visé. Payment was in the Lord's hands, but would be made sometime, provided the North was victorious, as it doubtless would be. Keyes was not slow to realize that, although he was physically disabled from going to the front, he could do his bit. With light heart he immediately set about to wheel himself into line accordingly.

The Second Iowa Infantry, composed of companies from Polk, Lee, and several other counties, was mustered into the United States service on May 27-28, 1861. S. R. Curtis was made colonel, J. M. Tuttle, lieutenant-colonel, and M. M. Crocker, major. Two weeks later the regiment was on its way to the front. Going first to St. Joseph, and then to Easton, in south Missouri, it did not get to St. Louis until October. Before it arrived at the point of western rendezvous it was not possible to follow it with supplies from home. Prior to leaving Iowa Major Crocker had figured out that everything should be planned for forward movement by the first of the year. In this prediction he was not far amiss. In the meanwhile Curtis became brigadier-general, Tuttle was advanced to colonel of the regiment, and Crocker was transferred and promoted to the colonelcy of the Thirteenth Iowa Regiment.

Even before the Second Iowa got off Baker and Keyes had matured plans for adequate commissary aid. There being no railroads out of Des Moines at that time the only means of transportation was by the river to Keokuk, whence Mississippi River steamers could be employed. Work was started on several large barges which were constructed of native lumber from the Hall sawmills at the foot of Center Street. These were completed and made ready for their fateful voyages by the first of October. In the meanwhile the country about was scoured for hogs, which were brought in and driven to the Keyes & Crawford stock farm north of the city, where a small packing plant was erected. Before the river was closed by the winter's ice five barges, carrying each about fifty tons of bacon, flour, and beans, were started

south, reaching St. Louis in due course. These stores were consigned directly to Colonel Tuttle. They arrived at their destination at a most opportune time.

Early in 1862 the Second Iowa Regiment was scheduled to join General Curtis' command in southwest Missouri. Colonel Tuttle was making hurried preparations to carry out General Halleck's orders to that effect when he fell in with General Grant, who had come to St. Louis to personally convince his superior officer of the feasibility and advantages of opening up the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, and thus force the Confederate lines a hundred miles back at a single blow. Tuttle, thoroughly in accord with Grant's plan as the one to adopt, called upon the commander at his headquarters at the Planters Hotel. Fortunately he found Grant alone on the hotel balcony and had a long confidential talk. Finding that Tuttle's regiment was fully manned, well equipped, and overflowing in commissary, Grant at once said that he wanted the Iowa regiment to go with him, provided he could get permission to make the campaign. Together the two visited General Halleck, at the latter's headquarters, won him over to the project, and had Tuttle's order to go west replaced by one to report to Grant on the Cumberland. With full commissary, which no other regiment in the West at that time enjoyed, the Iowa command could at a moment's notice go almost anywhere.

Because of the foresight of its first major the Second Iowa Infantry was able immediately to embark on boats, steam up the Cumberland River at top speed, and arrive before Fort Donelson in time to land, wheel into line, and lead the attack which broke the Confederacy in the West. Well might General Halleck wire Adjutant-General Baker, at Des Moines, his famous words, "The Second Iowa Infantry proved themselves the bravest of the brave." Immediately upon receipt of this telegram Baker rushed over to Keyes to show it to him even before he took it to the Governor.

So soon as the ice was out of the river in the spring other barges of provisions were sent downstream. On one occasion sufficient hands could not be found to make the trip. Keyes himself went with the boat, serving both as sailing master and roustabout with four others. Near Red Rock the barge struck a sharp rock and went to the bottom. Courier was dispatched to Ottumwa

for another barge or steamer. After ten days a flatboat appeared with a fresh crew, and the pork was transferred from the sunken vessel and safely landed at Ottumwa, going rapidly on to its destination.

During the Civil War frontier politics ran high. Even life-long Democrats were strongly and whole-heartedly supporting President Lincoln. In the mid-war campaign there was a well-known local politician by the name of Alexander Bowers, a loud-mouthed, burly German, who, as deputy United States marshal, had openly bragged that so long as he was in office no Democrat would be permitted to vote at an election. Anticipating possible friction at the polls and having long before decided that they would warmly support the President, a dozen good war Democrats, as loyal as any Republican living, went in a body to vote. Among them were Crocker, Tuttle and Keyes. Sure enough "Alex." was on hand watching at the voting booth. As the first man of the group stepped up to cast his ballot Bowers barred the way, and declared in loud voice that he should not vote. But Iowa's greatest general, the hero of Donelson, and the quiet yet stern man, who, perhaps, made Shiloh possible, and gave first ray of hope to Union cause, were not to be so lightly deterred from the solemn exercise of their rights and duties as good and loyal citizens by any blatant stay-at-home. In a twinkle of the eye and as if by a single impulse, Crocker, Tuttle and Keyes threw off their coats and proceeded to make for the huge form which blocked the way. The path cleared instantaneously. Away flew the United States marshal, out the back door, up the street, and out of sight, far to the west end of town. Twelve Democratic votes were soon recorded in support of the Union. It was several days before the Federal watchdog ventured back to town to get the election returns.

Misguided patriot Bowers was soon doomed to even greater trial and tribulation from the hands of the Keyes Democratic crowd. The ridicule imposed lasted to the end of his days. In the later years of the Civil War the public heart was deeply stirred to secure sufficient commissary aid for the men at the front. On the occasion of one of the mass meetings held for the purpose of devising ways and means to aid in this undertaking Keyes, who was leader of all affairs musical, volunteered to get



up a grand concert, the proceeds from which should go to the boys in blue. The only hall large enough for the purpose was the third floor of the Sherman Block. The owner was away, and Bowers, custodian of the building, letting his abhorrence for Democrats override his patriotism, peremptorily refused to permit the hall to be used for concerts. Undeterred thereby, the concert company hastened to get one of the large unfurnished rooms of the Court House then building, carried chairs and settees from the Methodist Church across the street, and began the entertainment on time. The concert proved a great success. One of the numbers, which was most popular for many a day thereafter, was rendered by a quartette. It was an improvised song, set to the tune of "Gideon's Band," the chorus of which ran:

"They say this new Court House of ours  
Is surely as big as Alec Bowers."

For many months afterwards the tune of "Gideon's Band" was whistled, hummed, or the couplet sung thereto on the streets by nearly everyone in town. The smart Alec never got over his wrath. He was thoroughly humbled ever afterward. Ridicule touched where nothing else would. Lincoln Democrats were avenged.

Merchant Keyes was thirty-three years old when he made his first pilgrimage from the East to the newly admitted state of Iowa. After deciding to make it his residence he continued to remain for several years a single man. On January 12, 1864, he was joined in wedlock with Julia Baird Davis, youngest daughter of Captain James W. Davis, who a few years previously had moved to Des Moines from Ohio. From this union two sons issued: Charles Rollin Keyes, who early went into scientific pursuits, followed his researches to the frontiers of geology, and finally carried his investigations far into realms unknown; and James Davis Keyes, who soon became a prosperous business man, and, in due course, a director of large affairs, and a foremost citizen of his native town.

Back in Ohio Davis was a real captain of industry. He owned and operated large iron furnaces in the famous Scioto Valley, and he also owned and operated a great line of palatial river packets which plied between Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. When the Civil War broke out the iron business collapsed. All

of his fine river steamers were confiscated by the Confederates except two, which were soon burned at the Cincinnati levee by incendiaries. With shattered fortune Captain Davis moved with his family and belongings to Iowa and began life anew. He built a spacious new home on the site of the present Central State Bank building on Fifth Street. He established, with his son-in-law, L. W. Dennis, a wholesale and retail grocery business, which, before he died, attained large proportions.

A short time before his marriage Mr. Keyes planned a modest cottage for a home. The location chosen was the top of a sharp knoll at what is now the corner of Fourth and Chestnut streets where the Brown Hotel stands, but then far removed from the business center of town. There were no very near neighbors. The construction he entrusted to one John Browne, an English architect and contractor, who had newly come to America. Given rather free rein this individual, being somewhat ambitious and doubtless anxious to display his prowess in matters architectural, built an edifice far beyond requirements, or the demands of a frontier hamlet. This stately mansion long remained the most pretentious home in the growing capital, and for a score of years was a social center. The incident is of historical interest for the reason that it was the first attempt at architectural entity in the new community. It introduced a purely English style, which soon caught the local fancy. In succeeding years many homes were built after the Gothic form, some of which remain intact to this day. In the history of local architecture they mark a distinctive epoch. When in after years business invaded this select resident district, Mr. Keyes built another home in the suburbs, after the French chateau style of architecture, a type introduced from abroad by Mr. Clinton Nourse, architect of Des Moines. (See illustration.)

Few citizens took greater interest in public affairs than C. W. Keyes. Although he never sought public office himself, he was ever immersed in matters political, whether local, state, or national. His later insight into *weltpolitik* was little short of marvelous, and even up to the very hour of his demise he was keenly alive to every movement in diplomacy which effected the World War,



(Upper) KEYES MANSION, 608 FOURTH STREET, DES MOINES, 1864  
(Lower) KEYES HOME, 944 FIFTH STREET, DES MOINES, 1894

In national politics he was a consistent, yet not servile, Democrat all his life. Although not a prominent man in a political sense, he occupied the unique position of being the inconspicuous long man who by merely living far beyond the usual span, served to connect the two greatest periods of American democratic advancement and achievement. Like Isocrates of old, Keyes narrowly escaped rounding out a full hundred years of his activities. DeQuincy it is who compares this noble Greek with the bar of a dumb-bell joining the spheres of the two greatest epochs of antiquity, the Age of Pericles and that of Alexander the Great. Around these two centers are arranged all the glory and pomp of Greek literature, Greek eloquence, Greek wisdom, Greek art, and Greek philosophy. Isocrates was not what would be called a great man, but he was the long man connecting the total world of Greek genius.

In our American Republic the two great spheres of democracy gather around Jefferson and Wilson. They, too, are about a century apart. About them arrange themselves all our glory and the advance of human liberty in the New World and the new political freedom of mankind. Keyes served as the long bar uniting the two parts of democracy's dumb-bell. It was his strange fortune to shake the hand of every Democratic president from Jefferson to Wilson. It was his whim to vote for every Democratic presidential candidate except one from Jackson to Cox.

Socially Calvin Keyes was equally at home and precise in the drawing room of effete eastern cities and in the cruder halls of the nascent West. He could dance well, sing well, perform well on any one of a score of musical instruments; he was an expert at chess, and often indulged in cards and other games. A social gathering must have consisted of very ponderous interests if it could not be stirred into animation by a man with so much more quicksilver in his veins than falls to the lot of the average citizen. He was something of a Bohemian in his tastes and predilections, although always with a serious ambition. He could converse ably upon all such matters as interested ordinary literary, journalistic, political, or musical circles, and his wide knowledge of English writers made him an authority in some matters not shared by many of his associates or contemporaries.

He was indeed a ready and brilliant talker, fully able at all times to turn his vast knowledge to good account. His conversation abounded in lively and pithy anecdotes told with infinite zest. He was thoroughly genial and ready at good humored repartee and he was never hampered by any excessive reverence for ancestral proprieties. His *bonhomie* was proverbial and won for him a host of warmest friends from every walk of life.

Despite the multitudinous distractions of a busy man of large affairs, Keyes found abundant leisure to devote both to his family and to the study of mankind in general. At eventide, after office hours, after the long periods of strenuous business activities, after all the petty annoyances of the day, he completely forgot all business matters and found full solace in the solitude of his well stocked library. Confining social duties and entertainment to a single evening each week as a rule, the hours of early night for the rest of the week became times of mental expansion. When not devoted to family immediately after dinner, the interval between seven o'clock and midnight became a revel and a relaxation in literature, science, and philosophy.

Although this pioneer merchant recorded few of his reflections in print, he willingly gave freely to others the results of his musings and the reminiscences of his experiences. He was a great story repository for the local newspaper men, and few were the public topics which he could not vastly elucidate offhand as similar events presented themselves. Journalistic gleanings from his abundant store would fill many volumes if only they could be winnowed out and pieced together. He was, however, induced at rare intervals to express himself in print, and he was the author of a number of magazine articles and pamphlets.

For an unprofessional student Keyes had a most wonderful grasp of American history. Blessed with a retentive memory of unusual impress, his familiarity with public men and events was such as was enjoyed by but few of his contemporaries. Minutest details of national activities for three-quarters of a century were at instant command. His personal equation of their significance and topical bearing had perhaps but few equals in our land. This extraordinary faculty continued in full vigor to the day of death. A few hours before dissolution he sat discussing with his son, daughter-in-law, and a few others, the current political trend,

massing without apparent effort the conditions which insured in the coming election the overwhelming choice of Harding as president of the United States, and which absolutely prohibited the selection of Cox. Then joking at length with his daughter-in-law on the recent emancipation of women through universal suffrage, he partook of a hearty luncheon and lay down for his customary mid-day siesta, from which he failed to wake up. To the last moment were his analytical faculties robust and alert almost as in his youth. His was indeed a gentle passing.

Of European history and politics Keyes's intimacy almost bordered on the uncanny. There were few modern monarchies of Europe on which he could not discourse intelligently and at length, in all their genetic, developmental and declining aspects. With keenest zest a few years prior to his demise did he peruse Guglielmo Ferrero's "Greatness and Decline of Rome" in its five great tomes. He read this series of volumes not once, but thrice. Of them, as was his reading custom, he made copious notes. With him an outstanding circumstance of the long world supremacy of Roman Empire, on which he commented as affecting the life of a people and following the career of civilization, was the introduction among edible fruits of the humble cherry into Rome from Persia, by Luculus, and the transmission through the storms and vicissitudes of 2,000 years, of the simple but profound *De Natura* of Lucretius, whereas of the grand triumphs of the greatest generals of antiquity which made so many an imperial holiday, not even name or faintest memory remained.

In later years the sciences immensely interested Keyes. The great controversies on evolution which took place in the third quarter of the last century aroused keen appreciation in him. Darwin, Huxley and Spencer were eagerly devoured. Afterwards the basic influences of environment upon the development of civilization held his wrapt attention. Such fairy tales of science as Gilbert's "Ancient Lake Bonneville," Dutton's "Grand Canyon," and Geikie's "Great Ice Age," were thoroughly enjoyed. Who on the face of earth, even among most enthusiastic geologists, would read from cover to cover the twenty-five great volumes of the Iowa Geological Survey, or the fifteen similar tomes of the Missouri Geological Survey, in order to quench his thirst for information concerning local bygone days? Had he but

turned early to earth studies the same energetic attentions that he so successfully applied to mercantile pursuits he might have been one of the foremost scientists of his generation.

One great subject which especially appealed to Keyes, layman though he was, was the origin of the American Indian. Like his father before him he gave the topic much thought. More than once he sought to guess the riddle in the opening of the sepulchral mounds which crown so many bluffs of the Iowa rivers. But Sphinx refused to divulge the secret. Only a few weeks before his dissolution he read with infinite relish Madison Grant's "Passing of the Great Race." His alert mind at once visioned the strictly racial statement of the problem. He just missed dislodging the Rosetta Stone in the migrations of the human peoples because of repeated reversions to Glacial climates, the multiple stages of which were recently so fully discerned in the Iowa geological records.

A hundred years span for human life! A score and ten years beyond the limits set by the Psalmist! Beginning a second century of his existence without appreciable physical infirmities, without noticeable impairment of faculties, and without marked diminution of mental alertness; such did the famous Mitchnikoff seek in vain to test his claim that human body should normally live a hundred and fifty years before reaching the limit of its endurance. The usual span of human life is now twice doubled. Its demonstration comes from a most unexpected quarter. For in the lengthening of the allotted term of existence which has become so common in this century, Keyes would not have been called aged. Although not what one would term rugged he always in later years enjoyed excellent health. His eye was not dim, nor was his natural strength abated, and so far as showing any signs of intellectual senility or mental deterioration his last efforts embrace some of his most vigorous work.

On his very last birthday a small company of octogenarians, headed by an old time friend, Mr. Frederick M. Hubbell, called to congratulate him and to inquire of him how he managed always to enjoy himself so. With a merry twinkle in his eye, he quickly replied, "Yes, I am getting just as much fun out of life as ever, but I can assure you that the first ninety-five years are

the hardest." Thus was he, as tune-swept violin string that feels the master-melody—and snaps.

As Thomas Huston Macbride, sometime president of our Iowa State University, fittingly writes: "A successful human life is like a temple; it rises silently before us, unobserved of men; we perceive in part its trend and beauty; but its capstone is never laid; its culmination eludes our vision; upon perfected tower and roof the sunlight never falls. A successful human life is like a wedge of gold; its value deepens with its widening planes, but no law of art or builder determines its completion. Nay, a successful human life is life, and like all the story of the planet, of the world, is but a silent, perennial, beautiful unfolding."

Calvin W. Keyes passed to the better world on June 16, 1920. His departure terminated one of those truest lives which Doctor Holmes characterized as like a rose-cut diamond, with many facets answering to the many-sided aspects of the world about it; its influence elevating, its memory sweet. His name outlasts him. We say the sun has set when it but shines in other longitudes.

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#### EMIGRATION WESTWARD

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A friend of ours who has recently taken up his residence at Fairfield, Iowa, writes us that the emigration westward, by way of that place, exceeds a dozen wagons per day. He represents them as of the first class. \* \* \* \* He also writes that Fairfield abounds with sweet potatoes and stone coal. He says this potato grows to a large size and is cultivated almost as generally there as the Irish potato is here. \* \* \* \* The coal he regards as much cheaper than wood, being afforded for from 8 to 10 cents per bushel. It is used almost exclusively at Fairfield and is considered cheaper at ten cents per bushel than hickory wood at one dollar and twenty-five cents per cord.—*Weekly Miner's Express*, Dubuque, Iowa, October 13, 1847. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)



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