



*John H. Gear*

THE LATE UNITED STATES SENATOR JOHN H. GEAR, 1825-1900.

## NOTABLE DEATHS.

JOHN HENRY GEAR was born at Ithaca, New York, April 7, 1825; he died at Washington, D. C., July 14, 1900. Such is the brief notice that spans the seventy-five years of a most useful life, a record of whose deeds can be but briefly summarized in these pages. His father, E. G. Gear, a clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal church, was a native of New London, Connecticut; his mother's maiden name was Marinda E. Cook; she was born in Middlebury, Vermont. Rev. Mr. Cook occupied pulpits in various places in Western New York until 1836, when he removed with his family, consisting of his wife and only son to Galena, Illinois. After remaining two years in this location, he received the government appointment of post chaplain of the United States army, at Fort Snelling, Minnesota. He died in 1874. We have little record of the early days of John Henry Gear's life, but from the age of eighteen his association with Iowa and his connection with Iowa history begins. In 1843 he commenced his business career in Burlington, Iowa, engaging as a clerk with the mercantile firm of Bridgeman and Partridge; he later accepted a similar position with W. F. Coolbaugh, wholesale grocer, at that time one of the leading merchants of Eastern Iowa. Five years of faithful service brought recognition to the young man, and he was made a member of the firm; five years later he became sole proprietor, and remained at the head of the establishment until 1880, when he retired from the business. In 1852 Mr. Gear was elected a member of the Burlington city council; in 1863 he was a candidate for mayor, and was the first Republican to be elected to that office on a party issue. In 1867, when the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota (now the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern) Railway was organized, Mr. Gear was chosen its first president, he being actively interested in the building of this line for the benefit of his home city. He also labored zealously for the construction of the Burlington & Southwestern (now the Chicago, Burlington & Kansas City) Railway, as well as the Burlington & Northwestern and the Burlington & Western Railways. He was also associated with many other enterprises, as an officer or stockholder, looking to the upbuilding of the business interests of his city and State. Mr. Gear's political career began in 1871, when he was elected a member of the House of the Fourteenth General Assembly. He was re-elected in 1873, and made speaker of the House, receiving the unanimous nomination of the Republicans. His courteous treatment and impartial rulings met with such general recognition that at the close of the session he was presented with an elaborately engrossed vote of thanks, signed by every member of the House. In 1875 he was again nominated and elected to his seat, and again chosen speaker,—an honor never before similarly conferred, and at the close of the session was made the recipient of a unanimous testimonial. His services for the State had by this time won for him marked attention, and his political career was watched with interest. His reputation as a parliamentarian had become more than state-wide, and this, together with fine executive ability, a pleasing personality, and thorough business training, rendered him a most desirable official, and in 1877 he was nominated for governor, elected by a large majority, and took his seat January 17, 1878, serving four years—being re-elected in October, 1879. During his two terms of office as governor the finances of the State were brought from a condition verging on insolvency to one of marked prosperity, Iowa at the time ranking with states practically without indebtedness. In recognition of his able administration of office and the thrift which characterized his methods, the people gave to their chief executive the title of "Old Business"—a title which has clung to him through all the after years of his eventful life. In 1881 Mr. Gear met his first political rebuff, as candidate

for United States senator. He was defeated by the late Senator Wilson. In 1886 he was elected to the Fiftieth Congress, and was re-elected in 1888. He was defeated in 1890, but reelected in 1892, serving in the interim as assistant secretary of the treasury, by appointment of President Harrison. In January, 1894, Mr. Gear was elected to the United States Senate. His term of office would have expired in 1901. In the winter of 1900, after one of the most spirited contests on record, in which a number of prominent Iowa men were candidates for the office, Senator Gear was elected to succeed himself. Though advanced in years and physically far from robust, it was hoped he might be spared to complete the term of service to which he had been elected, and the news of his death, after an illness of but a few hours, carried with it sincerest sorrow and regret. For nearly forty years Senator Gear was actively interested in the politics of his State and Nation. He was loyal to his friends and faithful to his trusts—his attention to details in his business career characterizing his management of the affairs of his constituents. He was not an orator, strictly speaking, but was a good and effective campaigner. In committee he was eminently successful, rarely failing to secure the passage of any measure he championed. He was noted for his remembrance of faces, and was seldom at a loss to recall a name, though the list of his acquaintances was probably the largest of any man in the State. It is safe to assume that the experiences of his own youth made him especially interested in the young men with whom he came in contact, for certain it is that such a bond of sympathy as existed between them is rarely witnessed, and they were ever his steadfast and valiant supporters. In Congress he distinguished himself, as a member of the Committee on Ways and Means, by his connection with the "McKinley Bill," some of the most important schedules of which owe their authorship to him. He was chairman of the Senate Committee on Pacific Railways during the last Congress, and through his efforts the government was enriched by many millions of dollars. Senator Gear was married in 1852 to Miss Harriett S. Foote, who survives him, and who has been to him champion and helpmeet in his public career as well as in home and social life. Of the four children born to them, the two now living are Margaret, wife of James W. Blythe, and Ruth, Mrs. Horace S. Rand. The home was one of generous hospitality. Senator Gear was most affable, and was approached with perfect freedom by those in the humblest walks of life, and was never too much occupied to give willing ear to matters of personal, as well as public, interest; while his generous spirit and kindness of heart have endeared him to the people as could no honors of State or Nation. His life-long friend, the Rev. Dr. William Salter, of Burlington, Iowa, spoke of him in a letter to a friend as "a unique and charming character."

---

SAM M. CLARK was born in Van Buren county, Iowa, October 4, 1842; he died at Keokuk, August 11, 1900. He was the son of the Rev. Samuel Clark, the most distinguished Methodist Episcopal clergyman of Southeastern Iowa during our pioneer days. The father resided upon a farm a few miles from Keosauqua, where the subject of this notice spent his early years. In 1894 there appeared in the pages of THE ANNALS (Vol. 1, 3d series, pp. 454-466) an appreciative sketch of the life of the Rev. Samuel Clark, from the pen of his gifted son who has now followed him to the grave. Young Clark was educated in the public schools near his home and in the old Des Moines Valley College at West Point, Lee county. He was an all around product of this State. It is recorded that he sought to enlist in the Union Army during the Civil War, but was rejected owing to his lack of health and strength. At the age of eighteen he entered the office of George G. Wright, who then resided at Keosauqua, and began the study of the law. He completed his law studies in the office of Rankin &

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.