

Your affectionate father
Geo. Wilson

FIRST LIEUTENANT GEORGE WILSON.

Graduated from West Point July 1, 1830. Served in the Black Hawk War, and participated in the battle of Bad Axe River, Aug. 2, 1862. Resigned Dec. 31, 1837. Member Wisconsin House Reps., 1838-9, and later held many civil offices in Iowa.

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3D SERIES.

GEORGE WILSON:

FIRST TERRITORIAL ADJUTANT OF THE MILITIA OF IOWA.

BY HIS SON GEORGE WILSON.

Among the many good citizens of early Iowa were three brothers, Judge Thos. Stokely Wilson* of Dubuque, Col. David Stokely Wilson† of the 6th Iowa Cavalry, and their oldest brother, Captain George Wilson, the first Adjutant of the Militia of the Territory of Iowa. The latter was eighteen when his father died at Steubenville, Ohio, their home. The family owed much to the determined spirit of the mother, who, left a young widow with eight children, and little help from the estate of a wealthy father, brought up her children creditably.

George Wilson was born January 20, 1809; he was the son of Peter Miller Wilson of Philadelphia, and Frances Pope Stokely of Delaware. Peter M. Wilson was the son of George Wilson who was born on a ship coming to Philadelphia; both parents died on the voyage and were buried at sea. This George, the immigrant, married Elizabeth Richardson, a great-granddaughter of Sir John Richardson and the Lady Elizabeth Aubrey, who was the daughter of Sir John Aubrey and the Lady Marie, his wife. Both sides, Richardson and Aubrey, belonged to the nobility of Wales. The family name, Miller, was an inheritance from an immigrant ancestor, Gottfried Mueller, a German, who came from Nassau and joined Penn's colony. One of his sons was with

*See ANNALS OF IOWA, Vol. I, 3d Series, p. 503.

†ANNALS OF IOWA, No. 5, 1st Series, pp. 198-9.

Wolf at Quebec, and both were in the American army in the Revolution.

The subject of this sketch, Capt. George Wilson, was named George Stokely Craig Wilson by his mother, but for a man of his plain tastes this was too much, and he never wrote or used the two middle names. His home in Steubenville was near the Stantons, and Edwin M. Stanton and the Wilson boys were playmates. George Wilson's father, Peter Miller Wilson, was appointed Receiver of Public Moneys at Steubenville by President Jackson, who was his personal friend. Mr. Wilson did not live out his term, but was stricken with apoplexy and fell dead at his desk while still a young man.

George Wilson was appointed a cadet at West Point Military Academy as a compliment to his mother's father, Thomas Stokely, a native of Edenton, N. C., and a captain of Pennsylvania troops in the Revolution. Mr. Wilson's father was living at the time and carried his fifteen-year old son on horseback behind himself, from Steubenville to Philadelphia, where they took shipping for New York. Though small of his age at that time, he grew to be six feet high, and his West Point training never failed him. He was to the day of his death as straight as an arrow, scrupulously neat, methodical and orderly. His favorite roommate was Merriwether Lewis Clark; both were athletes and were chosen for their fine figures and soldierly bearing to be sergeants of the color guard. He said that Alexander was never prouder than they, when first promoted and marching with a corporal behind them. One night when Wilson was officer of the guard, a cadet named Dargan, from South Carolina or Georgia, made a murderous assault on a young officer among the instructors, having fancied receiving an insult or slight from him. Wilson was the first to reach the spot and to find the nearly murdered officer, who was a favorite with the cadets generally. Wilson was a fine swordsman all his life, and he was so outraged at the cowardly and brutal manner of the attempted assassination that he drew his sword and afterwards

said that it was with the greatest effort at self-restraint that he kept from running Dargan through. The man was expelled.

Cadet Wilson was but fifteen when he received the appointment and before he could enter the Military Academy had to wait until he was sixteen. He was thus immature in mind and could not keep up with such older men as Charles Mason, afterwards of Burlington, Iowa, and Robert E. Lee, members of the same class. In the last letter he ever received from his father the latter said to him, "for God's sake try to get through in four years and do not be turned back another year." But the struggle to keep up with the older men was vain, and he, with about a third of the class, failed to meet requirements and was obliged to remain through another year. His father had died previously and never knew of this circumstance. The last letter from his father is a long one, beautifully written and finely composed, full of good advice covering almost the whole conduct of life. The strict rules of the Academy forbade him to go home at the time of his father's death as he wished to do. When graduated, his class standing was not high, except in drawing, where he ranked fourth. His right-line drawings in India ink are beautiful for their correctness and precision, and the ink on them is as fresh today as in 1830, the year he was graduated.

After graduating, he was put on duty as second lieutenant in the First Infantry, of which Zachary Taylor was Colonel; the regiment being at Fort Crawford, near the town of Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. Many men whose names became famous were at this fort. Jefferson Davis was a lieutenant in the same company with Wilson and together they were sent to drive the miners from the Dubuque lead mines where they were intruding. I have given the State of Iowa the official history of this matter, from copies of all the orders and correspondence, for some of which I am indebted to Gen. Shafter, who was at the time I got them, Colonel of the First Infantry and courteously furnished them on my request.

There has been some controversy about the part taken in this case by Mr. Davis, which the official history settles.

Lieutenant Wilson met at Fort Crawford the daughter of Gen. Joseph Montfort Street, agent for the Winnebago Indians, but the father opposed his attentions because he did not wish his daughter to marry any young lieutenant, knowing as he did the hardships of an under-officer's life. Mr. Jefferson Davis was at that time paying his addresses to the colonel's daughter, Miss Sarah Knox Taylor. Miss Street and Miss Taylor were devoted friends and when Mr. Davis called at Gen. Street's Miss Taylor was sure to be found spending the evening there; and when Mr. Wilson called at Colonel Taylor's Miss Street always happened to be there.

About this time the Black Hawk War began Mr. Wilson was through all the severe campaigning and fighting in the terrible cold of a Wisconsin winter. Sleeping out of doors with no tents was so severe an experience that often when he tried to get up in the morning in camp he would be so stiff from cold that he would fall down three or four times before he could finally stand on his feet. He froze one side of his face badly, and in later life lost the sight of an eye as a result from the injury then received. In the battle of Bad Axe, he had command of a company and getting his men in a piece of bottom where they were well under cover, he bore an active part in the battle. Towards the last, Albert Sidney Johnston, the adjutant of the regiment, rode down to him and asked if he knew how long he had been there. He answered, "About half an hour, I suppose." "You have been here two hours and a half," answered Johnston, taking out a fine gold watch, something less common in those days than now.

In some respects Mr. Wilson was not fitted for a soldier. He took no pleasure in war and in this case he felt that the Indians were wronged. They were in a starving condition, making a vain effort to stay hunger with the soft inner bark of saplings, and the soldiers following them were often freez-

ing. After this battle Mr. Wilson saw the surgeon cut off the arm of a papoose, which had been broken by the same bullet that killed its mother. He gave it a biscuit which it ate ravenously while the surgeon was at work. At another time he saw the squaws jump into the Mississippi and with their paposes on their backs try to swim its wintry waters, while the Illinois militia shot mothers and children from the banks. This, Mr. Wilson said was "a sickening sight." Black Hawk relates this same incident in the story of his own life.

After Black Hawk gave himself up he was taken to St. Louis on a steamboat by Gen. Street, Lieut. Jefferson Davis being in command of the escort. Miss Street was taken to St. Louis by her father on this trip and sent to school at Jacksonville, Illinois. On the way down Mr. Davis managed to have a note from Lieutenant Wilson carried to her by the mulatto chambermaid. Later on Gen. Street gave his consent to their marriage and their attendants were Ethan Allen Hitchcock, major of the regiment and a grand-nephew of Ethan Allen of Ticonderoga, and Miss Sarah Knox Taylor. They were married by the Rev. David Lowry, a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher, and a notice of their marriage appeared in the Army and Navy Journal at the time, of date March 26, 1835. Their first child, a daughter, was born in Fort Crawford. From there Lieut. Wilson was ordered to Florida for the Seminole War, but was sent back from New Orleans. He kept a journal of the trip from Fort Crawford to St. Louis by stage. In St. Louis he met Dr. Emerson, the army surgeon who owned the slave Dred Scott, afterwards famous in the Supreme Court decision, but who all unconscious of his coming celebrity was nicknamed "Old Dreadful" by one of the officers. On going to one of the two taverns in St. Louis, Lieut. Wilson and the Doctor found so much glass out of the windows and so much plastering off the walls that it was uncomfortably cold, so they went to the other, carrying their portmanteaus and Mr. Wilson's trunk. This

trunk, of stout harness leather, his children still have. In a letter from New Orleans to his wife in Wisconsin, he says that he unexpectedly "met Mr. Davis of our regiment" there. This painful separation from his wife and child, with other reasons, caused him to resign after getting back to Fort Crawford. He was afterwards nominated for the council of the Wisconsin legislature and elected over a professional politician who only knew that "some lieutenant" was running against him. Many of the voters were loggers and saw-mill hands who had been soldiers, and knew and liked Mr. Wilson for his good treatment of them. Many stories are related of his kindness. He was once sent on a winter expedition to a lake at the head of the Mississippi, but the weather was severe and believing that the safety of his men was more important than to get the dimensions of the lake just at that time, he brought them back. For this he was censured. He once had to drum a drunken soldier out of the service; he had the man's head shaved in a small spot and a little dab of tar and a few feathers put on, enough to comply with the law but easy to remove. He afterwards saw that man, who had taken up a claim, breaking prairie with a spade; and he lived to see him a well-to-do farmer, who never touched liquor.

Another instance of his humanity was at the time he was ordered by the Secretary of War to burn the cabins of the intruding miners at the Dubuque lead mines. He found them living with their wives and children, in many cases a family in a single-room cabin, in February with a deep snow on the ground. He said that he did not believe that any human authority had the right to order him to burn the cabins and turn the women and children out in the snow in the dead of winter, and he flatly refused to obey the orders. The Secretary of War could not afford to let his own inhumanity become public, so he passed the matter over by giving Lieut. Wilson a leave of absence, a mild rebuke.

From Wisconsin he went to Dubuque, where he was clerk of the court under his brother, Judge Thomas S. Wilson.

Afterwards he farmed in the neighborhood of Dubuque and later he removed to the Sac and Fox Agency on the Des Moines, where Gen. Street, his father-in-law, was agent. Here he was put in charge, by the department, of the Indian Pattern Farm to teach the Indians farming. In that agency house the writer of this sketch was born. When the Sacs and Foxes sold their lands and went to Kansas, Mr. Wilson bought part of the farm and spent several years on it. During this time he secured contracts for surveying government lands. He was the first surveyor to use a solar compass west of the Mississippi. He bought an instrument from Mr. Burt, who invented it. He surveyed most of Mahaska county.

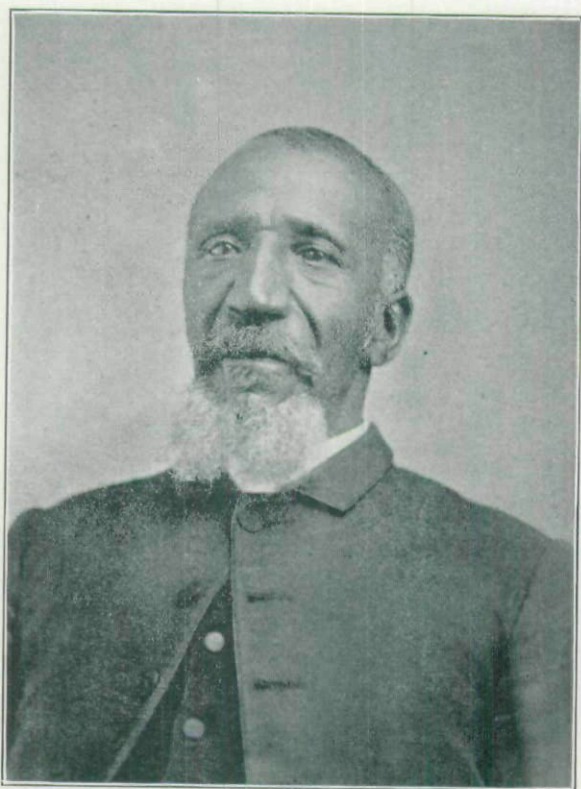
At this time he took great pleasure in hunting, as game was abundant. He was a fine rifle shot and always had a lot of dogs. One day as he saw a partridge walking slowly down the road away from him he shot its head off with his rifle; an Englishman who had just come over saw it, and concluded that if all Americans were such shots it would be well to keep peace with them. One day his dogs bayed a deer in the fence corner, and he went out to them with only a bowie knife. As the deer broke through and ran by him he struck it in the back, severing its spine at a blow. He was very active, and had a powerful grip of the hand.

Although his father was a Democrat he was a Whig. He had been under anti-Jackson influences at West Point, as is evident from his father's letter to him. His father-in-law was an old Virginia Whig, too. When Taylor was elected Mr. Wilson's mother, then at Steubenville, went to Washington and asked the President to make her son Surveyor General of Iowa; but political reasons outweighed fitness and the place was given to some one who had more political influence, but knew nothing about practical land surveying. Mr. Wilson was given the office of Register of the Land Office at Fairfield. He succeeded Bernhart Henn, and filled the office with credit to himself. None of his decisions in contests

were ever reversed at Washington. In a county south of Jefferson some one was unjustly trying to get away from a widow a claim that she was holding, and in the contest Mr. Wilson took her side. For this he gained great admiration from the settlers of her neighborhood, who all sympathized with her. While here a delegation of Hungarian exiles from Kossuth's rebellion came to Iowa and chose lands for their colony. They had come all the way from Burlington without meeting any one to whom they could talk, but by means of a good knowledge of French, learned at West Point, Mr. Wilson was able to transact business with them.

About this time the Democratic press began to assail Gen. Street's family; though in terms that would be thought mild now, they were taken as a deadly insult in those days. An editorial in a Fairfield newspaper assailing them for "feeding at the public crib," was published and at once, on reading it, Mr. Wilson went to the office and without saying anything by way of introduction, struck the editor a straight blow from the shoulder, right in the mouth. One of my earliest recollections is that of seeing my mother dressing the wound made by the editor's teeth, which had cut through a thick woolen mitten that my father wore. My mother's devotion to her father made her entirely approve the proceeding.

It was stated in the ANNALS OF IOWA, July-October, 1895, that George Wilson entered the Confederate army. This is a mistake; he never bore arms against the government, nor entered the Confederate service, nor that of Missouri under Governor Jackson in opposition to the Federal government. His position was a most trying and difficult one. No man was ever worse needed than he, with his military knowledge and experience, and firm, cool ways, to organize Price's army. But he could never get his own consent to fight against the republic that his forefathers had helped to found; while he was on his mother's side of a Southern stock and many of his kinsfolk on his father's side had gone South



Respectfully

Henry Harrison Triplet.

REV. HENRY TRIPLET.

Born a slave, and given when a child to Mrs. George Wilson, he was raised in the family and made free at the age of twenty-one. He then became a Methodist preacher. He was still living when the accompanying article was written.

from Philadelphia at an early day and intermarried there, he was not in favor of the system of slavery. He had owned a negro woman on his farm near Agency, or in Dubuque county, or in both places, but she was so unruly that he traded her for a pair of mules and never bought another. A black boy given to Mrs. Wilson by her father at her marriage was by the terms of the gift to be taught a trade and given his freedom at the age of twenty-one, all of which my father faithfully carried out. Many old citizens of Iowa will remember the boy, Henry Triplett, who became a partner of a blacksmith named Stephens at Agency; and a good and fair man Stephens was to the black boy. The latter is now a Methodist preacher and reveres the memory of his old master, Wilson, as much as Wilson's children do. Here in Missouri he never owned a slave and grew more and more in opinion against it. He took open ground against the invasion of Kansas territory by Missourians who were trying to make it a slave state, when it took a great deal of courage to do so. Just before the war broke out he raised a company at Lexington and well drilled it, making a fine infantry company. But it was simply for local protection; there being bad blood between the Kansans and Missourians, and bad men on both sides of the border ready to start the flame. This company was never sworn into service, and when the war broke out it disbanded and some of its members went into one army and some into the other. They parted friendly and met on the field of battle. This company gave rise to a curious hallucination in the minds of the Lexington negroes. They were the first soldiers that any of them had seen, unless some very old ones who remembered 1814 in Virginia. When the war was over some negroes were talking about the punishments that would be meted out to Lee, Davis and others, when one loquacious old woman broke in with: "I tell you, dey's gwine to do sumpn *awful* wid Captain George Wilson, cayse he's de man dat stahsted dis here *whole wah!*" Only a few years ago when his son, Joseph,

the ex-Confederate, was drilling a company of blue-coats in the Missouri militia, some negroes were watching him and one old man remarked gloomily and with portentous shakes of the head: "Deys gwine to be anuder wah." When asked why he thought so he answered, "dem Wilsons started dat las' one." And nobody can get them to think differently.

My father had made business engagements and there were large property interests of others in his hands which he stayed at home and cared for at the risk of his life. His wife was in such a condition of health that he felt he could not leave her, and he had then two young children. I was as a boy utterly astounded when, after the battle of Lexington, he told me that the probabilities were all on the side of the Northern States for final victory, for I thought Price was an invincible hero after his capture of Mulligan at Lexington. My father told me that there were two men in the army, both named Johnston, who would make their mark. He seemed to pick them out from and above all others. Some years ago my brother met Gen. Jos. E. Johnston in Washington and asked the old white-headed warrior if he knew Cadet George Wilson at West Point. "I should think I did know him," he answered; "I knew him well enough to borrow his coat to be graduated in," and the old fellow looked musingly at the floor as he added, as if remembering a half-forgotten dream, "it was a better coat than mine."

Had he been either selfish or ambitious he could scarcely have resisted taking up arms on one side or the other during the civil strife, and it would have been with every promise of reward and distinction. For though, perhaps, he might not have developed the high soldierly qualities that Generals Meade and Thomas did, he was very much that type of man. He was a deeply religious man and besides had a strain of Quaker blood in him. His first ancestor of the same surname in America lies buried in the grounds of the Friends' Meeting House in Philadelphia. The commands of religion, as he gathered them from the Bible, were paramount to him,

and when he had maturely reflected on them and made up his mind about them, it mattered not if every one else in the world was against him, he would not act against his own conscience.

His opposition to taking life had grown very strong. He discovered a way to make a gun carriage that would completely protect the gunners behind entrenchments, but he would not publish the information because as he said he doubted the propriety of adding anything to man's power to destroy his fellow men. Yet he was as brave and cool in danger as a man ever was. I once saw a man take dead aim and shoot at him with a rifle, the ball falling in the water near him, and say something threatening about "filling him full of lead." My father had on his waist a pistol with six loads but he did not draw it, but answered the fellow coolly, "well, you haven't all the lead in the world." And the difficulty was afterwards settled in a much better way than if he had done as I expected him to and would have done myself—emptied the whole six shots into the other party.

My father's dislike of slavery grew upon him but the practical question was the difficult one. It was not in the power of any individual to settle the matter, and what to do with the freed slaves, and how to get some one to work in their places seemed questions that had no answer. It was not for the cruelty of slavery that he objected to it, for its dangerous side was that it was so humane; there never had been a place or a time where as many negroes were as humanely treated as the slaves were before the war, nor had the ancestors of these slaves ever been as well off as they. But his objection to it was that it made the slaveholders an overbearing, tyrannical class. He used to say that Kentucky raised the best horses, but Ohio the best men.

The little boy, Henry Triplett, was the son of a Virginia slave who was part Indian; his mother was a nearly white quadroon, whom we all remember as "Aunt Patsy." She was presented to Gen. Street's wife, the oldest daughter of

Gen. Thomas Posey of the Revolution, when a child, for her own maid, coming from the Grymes family of Virginia. When we lived on the farm near Agency the boy Henry saved my mother many a step and was a great help, as he was bright, active and intelligent. Gen. Street's sons took up a claim for Patsy and had to lie out with their rifles more than one night to defend it from "jumpers." Gen. Street set all his slaves free by his will. Henry was to be kept by my father until of age, and before his majority was to be taught a trade. When he was a little boy, he says, he had a great admiration for his master, Wilson, and tried especially to hold himself straight and walk like him. He is now a clergyman of the A. M. E. church, a man of high character and of self-respect, spoken of in the most approving terms by those who know him wherever he is stationed, and a faithful and intelligent worker for the moral elevation of his people. On a visit to Mr. Wilson's sons he said, "I used to think your father was too hard on me and you boys when we were little, but I have many a time thanked him in my mind for his rigid discipline and training." On one of his visits as he was waiting for a late evening train he said, "Get out your father's old leather-covered family Bible that he always used in family prayers when we were boys. I would like to have prayers with you all before I go, as I have so many times listened to my faithful friend and master reading from it." He read and prayed fervently and it seemed to do him much good, and was a gratifying circumstance to all present.

Mr. Wilson said in his later years that he thought he had been too severe a disciplinarian in his early married life. His long military training tended to this. But he was a man who tried to be just, and faithful to his obligations. He was not naturally of a quick mind, but was a person of singularly good judgment. His especial pleasure was in the study of mathematics, and the use of firearms of which he always had plenty. During the reign of the bank-raiding robbers in Missouri, he told his sons in the bank with him not to depend

on the peace officers, and he kept the bank like an arsenal for years. There were so many chances to rob banks without a fight that the robbers, who were always well posted by their friends, would not go where they knew the bankers were ready for them.

Mr. Wilson had handsome, regular features, soft dark-brown curly hair, and eyes in which the grey iris bore a few spots of dark brown. He was the perfection of personal neatness; neither he nor any of the Wilsons before him used tobacco. In early life at Fort Crawford he was a member of the Washingtonian temperance society.

He was especially fond of his old friends, Gen. Dodge and Judge Charles Mason, of Burlington; and, indeed, the important friendships of his life were mainly with Iowa people. Undoubtedly the happiest part of his life was spent on his farm near Dubuque and on his farm near Agency City. The country was new, the soil rich, his faithful companion was by his side patiently bearing the share of burdens that fell to the "helpmeet for him;" hope was in their hearts, life was young and their children were blooming around them. My mother said there never was a happier year in her life than one during which they lived in a one-room log house, their dietary spare of luxuries, and the young soldier trying to be a farmer. Though only in his seventy-second year when he died he had shown greatly the loss of his faithful companion who went before him by two years. He was of so sound a constitution that he ought to have lived in comfort for ten more years; but his death was caused by pneumonia resulting from an accidental cold. He loved the scenes about the old Agency neighborhood, and fancied he would like to live there again, but on going there the year before he died he felt oppressed with loneliness as he saw that "all, all are gone, the old familiar faces." And he felt like saying in the words of Beranger:

"Let us be gone, the place is sad and lone;
How far, far off those happy times appear."

Love for all children and interest in their little affairs

seemed to be the most marked trait of his character. He never passed a child in the street without saying something pleasant; he never lost his lively interest in and sympathy for them. He is buried at Lexington, Missouri, by the side of his wife.

CHOLERA.—This dreadful pestilence still continues to spread death and devastation over many parts of the land. Along the Mississippi its ravages are most fearful. No remedy has yet been discovered that may be implicitly relied upon to check the disease. It is truly a wonderful and alarming malady. Wherever it appears the wail of the dying is heard. The rich and the poor—the proud and the humble, alike bow down to its fearful sceptre. No one can consider himself entirely exempt from its blighting attack. But much may be done to guard against it. Our place has thus far been spared its ravages. Let us endeavor to keep it afar off. In order to do this, all putrid and offensive matter should be removed from the corporate limits of the city, and a thorough renovation be had. It might be well for the town authorities to take the matter in hand and put the place in order. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”—*Western (Keosauqua, Iowa) American, July 19, 1851.*

NEGRO AND BLOOD-HOUNDS.—A Southerner, en route for Natchez, passed down the river last week, having in charge forty-two full-grown blood-hounds. Having trained them to negro hunting, he expected to realize a fortune for them on his arrival in Mississippi. A more ferocious, bloodthirsty lot of devils was certainly never created.—*Mound City (Ill.) Emporium, Oct. 15, 1857.*

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