



GEN. MARCELLUS M. CROCKER

Equestrian Statute—Iowa Soldier's and
Sailors' Monument

THE SWORD OF GENERAL CROCKER

By ORA WILLIAMS

Springtime planting kept farmers in their fields, but the large new court room at the county seat town of Adel was well filled as the lawyers droned out their arguments. The court room was almost the only place of public entertainment, and besides, the case was in the hands of big lawyers from the state capital only twenty miles away. The time was April, 1861. There was a lull in the reading from ponderous law books. The coach on the stage road across the state had just passed the town. The postmaster had thrown the mail. The quiet decorum of the court was broken by a boy who rudely burst in with a shout:

“Fort Sumter has been taken by the rebels.”

The news was an electric shock. The judge dropped his feet from the desk with a thud, ordered the case continued and adjourned court. As if by magic the scattered thoughts of all were channeled into one question: How best can we crush rebellion and save the union? The problem came home to everyone. Brave words were heard. Loyalty to the flag, defense of the union, support of the president, down with secession, out with treason! The doubters were shamed to silence. The frayed Fourth of July flag was run up on the hickory pole at the corner of the court yard.

The out-of-town lawyers hastily gathered up their papers and hurried to the livery barn to mount their horses. There were no railroads and often the stage coaches had hard going in the mud of the state road. Marcellus M. Crocker and Jefferson S. Polk, law partners, were quickly away. What did they talk about as they galloped to their office in Des Moines? Both had voted against the man now president and commander in chief. They did not disagree. Duty to country was

greater than to party. The shot fired at Charleston harbor had shattered all political lines. The crisis some had expected and all feared had come. It would be met with patriotism.

Before nightfall there would be placed on doorsteps of the four or five thousand residents of the capital city printed slips calling for the meeting of good citizens. The next day the flags fluttered and banners carried words of defiance. If it was to be war, very well, Iowa was ready.

"We are here not to talk but to act," said the tall young lawyer called to preside, as he faced a thousand eager patriots. "Step up and sign your name to the roll in the hands of "Hub" Hoxie. Fill up the company and let's go."

The speaker was Crocker. Yes, he had been a Democrat, now—well, he was an American. It so happened that Lawyer Crocker had been for two years in West Point academy. He had begged guns and had drilled a company of Capital Guards, composed of the elite young men of Des Moines. They were popular at picnics and tea parties. Already well organized, this would be a framework around which to build a good company. More paper had to be borrowed for the names of the young men who lined up to sign. Several companies might have been secured off-hand.

The governor promised he would get Crocker's boys into the very first regiment. But, alas, the call for ninety-day men provided for only one Iowa regiment and companies located near the Mississippi river were taken so they could get off to the south by boat without delay. There was disappointment. Why only one Iowa regiment? Why should an organized company from the capital city have to wait? But it was to be only for a day or two.

Captain Crocker and his Capital Guards got away by the first of May as Company D, of the Second Iowa,

first of the three-year enlistments, and it was their delight that they shoved off from the wharf at Keokuk a few hours ahead of the First Regiment. Soon three Iowa regiments were deep in the rebel country. But that is a familiar story. The boys from the farms and shops and offices made good soldiers.

CROCKER AN INDUSTRIOUS YOUTH

The boy Crocker was managing his mother's farm when he pored over borrowed law books. He set up at Lancaster and that phantom town soon disappeared. Then as a member of the law firm of Casady, Crocker & Polk he rose to a high place at the bar of Des Moines. He remembered his primary military lessons on the banks of the Hudson. He believed that men on the frontier ought to be prepared for defense. He took pride in his little company of militia. Soon after the stars and stripes came down at Sumter he and his Des Moines boys were down in Missouri under fire; then to the army marching southward. He moved quickly from captain to the command of the Thirteenth Iowa. He drew that regiment into a group that his boys dubbed Crocker's Greyhounds. On through the entire war they kept together and became known as Crocker's Iowa Brigade. In after years the survivors were to hold many great reunions, attended by the leaders of the western armies.

Why bring this up now? There is a reason. The tragedies and romances of real life sometimes stretch over the years. A queer letter came into Iowa, with a California postmark, that finally found its way into the State Historical department, in which the writer in a crude scrawl stated he knew about a sword that probably once had been in Iowa. This was different from the usual run of things that came out of California into Iowa. Correspondence followed and the sword now rests in a case in the state's splendid historical museum at

the state capital. The sword is a slender blade, with highly ornamental handle, and gold plated scabbard, on which are these words:

“Presented to Gen’l. M. M. Crocker, by the Officers and Men of the 13th Regiment Iowa Infantry Volunteers. April 18, 1863. Shiloh. Corinth.”

There must be more to the story. It would be worth while to fill in at least some of the chapters that are missing. Twenty printed reports of the reunions are filled with laudation of Crocker, the hero of Crocker’s Iowa brigade, but no reference to this sword. Newspaper files yielded no results. But in a little book by a school teacher about Polk county in the war, the inscription on the sword is given. The general had won his victories at Shiloh, Corinth, Champion Hills, Vicksburg, and because of ill health had been ordered home. Further search disclosed that in the letter files of the curator’s office a daughter of the general told of the loss of the sword from the family household goods and treasures on the way from Chicago to Los Angeles in 1886.

After sixty years this testimonial to a great soldier is back in the city he loved.

General Crocker lived to witness the closing scenes of the Civil war, but not to take part in them. The southern swamps were for him more deadly than the enemy bullets. He developed tuberculosis and was sent to New Mexico on an important mission, partly in hope of health recovery. He was called to the east where he was to be made a major general, but he went to a hospital. Just as the last clouds of battle smoke were clearing away he came to the end. Thousands of his men of the Crocker Iowa Brigade, many of whom had gone through Atlanta to the sea and on to Washington, paid tribute to their beloved leader in Woodland cemetery in Des Moines in August, 1865. His sword was there.

FIRST FROM IOWA TO WEST POINT

Marcellus Crocker had been almost the first Iowa boy sent to West Point. For that privilege he was indebted to Shepherd Leffler. His love of arms led him not only to the organization of a company at the capital city of the state but in collaboration with Gen. Grenville M. Dodge to make an endeavor to secure a state law for an organized state guard. The bill he wrote was scorned by the politicians. But the seed had been sown and in after years bore fruit.

Many years after, General Dodge, at one of the reunions, paid high tribute to his friend. "Crocker," he said, "stamped himself a natural born soldier the moment he put on his uniform. Every commanding officer mentioned his services and recommended him for promotion. They all had great faith in his ability and judgment. His bravery was unquestioned, and had he retained his health he would have risen to the highest rank and command in the army."

Crocker, the soldier, did not cease to be Crocker, the good citizen. Soon after he had received the fine gift sword he was among friends in Iowa. The day before Sumter he was a Democrat. At home again he presided over a convention that nominated John A. Kasson for congress. Then a state convention was looking for a war hero to head the state ticket pledged to fight the war to victory. The nomination for governor could have been Crocker's had he but given the nod. He declined. "No," he said, "if a soldier is worth anything, he cannot be spared from the field; and, if he is worthless, he will not make a good governor." The convention nominated Col. William M. Stone, of Knoxville, and he was elected.

Gen. U. S. Grant discerned the military ability of Crocker at Shiloh and later in operations around Vicksburg. It was Grant who sent Crocker home to recover his health. It was Grant who sent for him to come to

Virginia and help finish the war job. Later, when Grant was shaking hands with his comrades in Des Moines on the occasion of a great reunion, he uncovered his head as he was shown the humble home of Crocker, and quietly remarked:

“General Crocker was fit to command an independent army.”

That was a rather long speech for the silent man of many victories, but he repeated it in his published memoirs.

The street on which he lived was given the name of Crocker; his name was bestowed on a school, a park honored him, a county was proposed with his name, a town or station bore his name, a business block bears his name, and Crocker Post, G. A. R. led the list.

That brief and unrivaled tribute to Crocker caught the fancy of Crocker's old friends, and in *THE ANNALS OF IOWA* it was stated that they had caused it to be cut into the stone that marks the resting place of the general. Incidentally, one of the men close to Crocker was Charles Aldrich, founder of the Historical department, and Crocker had tried to persuade Aldrich to become a member of his staff when he went to the southwest in 1864. It would be worth while to verify about the inscription on the stone. If true it would certainly mark the Crocker monument as one of the most notable in Iowa.

Yes, it was true; but the casual visitor would not easily find the Crocker monument. It is as modest as was the man—a simple shaft of sandstone, on which the names and lettering are almost worn away by eighty years of Iowa storms. The roadway on which the lot faces is grown over with grass. The leaves lie heavily over the grave. No emblem of service is displayed. It is the resting place of a citizen. It is so far hidden behind more pretentious markers that it will not be disturbed.

Crocker of Iowa, the good citizen, was modest; as a lawyer he was a hard hitter, and here he is in company he would have liked. The massive granite stone with the name of his old law partner, Jefferson Polk, is a few feet away. Then there is Dr. Turner who ran his horse car lines to Crocker Woods when it was a playground. The tomb of Byron Rice is near, and Crocker often clashed with the judge at the bar. His great admirer, the peerless editor, James S. Clarkson, rests in a conspicuous vault in plain sight. In the same block lies Lieut. Noah Mills who fell by the side of Crocker when Company D received its baptism of fire.

Then there is Herbert Hoxie whose beautiful monument towers a few feet away. This was the same "Hub" Hoxie who took down the names of enlistees that April morning in 1861. He was sheriff, then U. S. marshal and closed a notable career as general manager of the Missouri Pacific railway, and his funeral at Des Moines was attended by three whole train loads of eminent men from St. Louis, Chicago and New York.

IOWA'S GREAT WAR HERO

Many a hot tear fell from the cheeks of surviving veterans as they heard read by Leonard Brown, Iowa poet, his sonnet in honor of Iowa's great war hero:

How bright a record this brave man had made!
He stood midst flying shot and bursting shell
Unharm'd. When "death reigned king" and thousands fell,
On high he wielded his victorious blade,
But now aside he has the sabre laid,
And gone in everlasting peace to dwell.
Had he not lived and fought; ah, who can tell,
If e'en today would war's red tide be stayed!
His prowess won the field at Champion Hill,
And op'd the way for Vicksburg to be ta'en;
And it was his indomitable will
That saved the day when Lauman's braves were slain,
But now our country saved, and peace is won,
Brave Crocker has come home, his work is done.

An oil portrait of Crocker is among the great of Iowa in the state's unrivaled portrait gallery in the Historical building and another in the state G. A. R. rooms in the capitol. When the senate chamber of the state house was decorated a portrait of General Crocker was included. The Iowa tourist who pauses on the battlefield at Vicksburg comes face to face with a magnificent bust statue of Crocker on a battle marker. Sometimes the flag he loved flutters to the sunny breeze of the Southland.

On the eastern face of the Iowa monument to Iowa soldiers and sailors of the "War of the Rebellion" is inscribed this phrase:

"The bravest of the brave."

That was the tribute of the commander in chief to the Iowa soldiers and especially those of the regiment in which Crocker proved his worth. At the corners of the base of this impressive monument there are four splendidly executed equestrian figures in full size. They represent Gen. John M. Corse, Gen. Grenville M. Dodge, Gen. Samuel R. Curtis and Gen. Marcellus M. Crocker.

There rides Crocker, Crocker of Iowa, who was "fit to command an independent army," facing the city he knew and loved, looking across the valley from which came the members of his Capital Guards, once the haunt of the buffalo and wild turkey. There is defiance in his pose. It matters little if his commander's tribute is fading from the soft sandstone in Woodland cemetery—his place in history is secure.

There is a sword falling from his saddle, but it will not touch the ground. Perhaps it is the sword that after sixty years of hiding has come back to be a perpetual reminder of Iowa patriotism.

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