

# Keosauqua's Famous Men

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"Some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some had the judgment to live in Keosauqua for a while."

This humorous quip by George G. Wright, United States senator and chief justice of Iowa was recalled by the death of George S. Wright of Council Bluffs, who was born in Keosauqua. He was brought to Council Bluffs as a child of two years, by his father, George F. Wright, who was not related to Judge George G. Wright, but had studied law in his office in Keosauqua. George F. Wright came to Council Bluffs in 1868, the year young George was born, and brought his family two years later.

Within a period of fifteen years, from 1850 to 1865, Van Buren county, of which Keosauqua is the county seat, was the home of six men who afterwards became United States senators; a dozen who were destined to be congressmen; three United States judges; half a dozen men who in later years counted their wealth from two to a hundred or more millions; several who attained high honors as military commanders; fully a dozen governors, lieutenant governors and high officials in Iowa and other states; four or five distinguished railroad managers and presidents; scores who later achieved high distinction as lawyers in numerous states west of the Mississippi; cabinet members, ministers in the diplomatic service, orators, statesmen, a candidate for president, leading business men, and men famous in other vocations.

George Franklin Wright, father of the late George S. Wright of Council Bluffs, came to Keosauqua from Vermont in 1855, and commenced the study of law with the firm of Wright, Knapp and Caldwell. He

was Knapp's nephew, and he was a member of a large class of students under the tutelage of George G. Wright, later to become a supreme court justice and United States senator. In 1857, he was admitted to the Van Buren county bar and the same year became a member of the firm of Knapp, Caldwell and Wright, George G. Wright having become a member of the Iowa supreme court. Early in 1861 he enlisted in response to President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers, and helped raise a company in Van Buren county.

In 1863, he was married to Ellen E. Wright of Northfield, Vermont. He moved the family to Council Bluffs when George S. was two years old, having formed a partnership with Judge Caleb Baldwin. During the years that followed he was elected to the state senate from Pottawattamie county and rendered distinguished service in the legislature. The practice of the firm was large and varied. George F. Wright was also active in many important business enterprises including Omaha and Council Bluffs Railway and Bridge company, which built the Douglas street bridge and put into operation the first electric street railway line to connect Iowa and Nebraska. He was one of the many Keosauquans who achieved fame and fortune elsewhere.

#### A COPPER KING INCLUDED

One of the six United States senators who came from Van Buren county was William A. Clark, whose father was a farmer and business man at Bentonsport a few miles from Keosauqua. He became one of the copper kings of Montana, one of the richest men in the United States, was elected to the senate after a bitter fight in which members of the Montana legislature were reportedly bought and sold at high prices. (Senators were elected by the state legislatures in those days.) Clark was also a builder of railroads, a collector of expensive paintings and a builder of a mansion on Fifth avenue in New York, which was re-

cently torn down. At the time he was a member of the senate, it was said that his annual income would buy all of Van Buren county.

Another Montana man of millions who came from Keosauqua was A. J. Davis. While he was a young man in Keosauqua he used to pay attention to a young woman who later married George G. Wright. When Wright was United States senator and his sons, who also became lawyers, were trying to establish themselves in practice, he used to console them by remarking it would have been a lot easier for them if their mother "had married Alex Davis instead of me."

But the boys did very well. The oldest, Thomas Wright, became general counsel of the Rock Island and one of the most noted lawyers in the west. The second son, Craig Wright, of Sioux City, was a leader of the Western Iowa bar. Another son was Carroll Wright of Des Moines, Iowa attorney for the Rock Island.

#### SOURCE OF WEST'S LEADING LAWYERS

From the office of the famous old firm of Wright, Knapp and Caldwell, came many of the West's best lawyers. Joseph R. Knapp, federal attorney for Iowa, was one of Iowa's greatest lawyers. Henry Clay Caldwell, appointed United States district judge in Arkansas by President Lincoln, later went to the U.S. Circuit Court.

Another Keosauquan who became great was Delazon Smith. Under President Tyler he was minister to Colombia. Later he went to the Pacific coast, became rich and was the first United States senator elected from Oregon.

John Henry Gear, governor of Iowa, congressman and twice elected United States senator, was another Keosauquan of the early day.

Then there was William E. (Billy) Mason, a Bentonsport lad like William A. Clark. But he went to school in Keosauqua and later became United States senator from Illinois.

Nearly a generation before the Civil war two young men started a newspaper in Keosauqua. They were J. B. Howell and Samuel M. Clark. Later they moved to Keokuk. Howell became United States senator and Clark represented the First district in the house of representatives until he tired of it and retired.

The roll of famous men who once lived in Keosauqua is long.

There was Augustus C. Hall, a great lawyer and orator, a Democratic congressman from the first district and later appointed chief justice of Nebraska territory by President Buchanan.

George W. McCrary, born and raised in Keosauqua, an Iowa congressman, U.S. circuit judge in Grant's administration and secretary of war under President Hayes.

#### ONE OF KEOSAUQUA'S MILLIONAIRES

John F. Dillon, whose name would go on almost any list of the greatest lawyers America has produced, was reared and educated in Keosauqua. He sat for years on the Iowa supreme bench and made it famous for his decisions. Later he became a lawyer for the Gould interests in New York, a man of great wealth, one of the Keosauqua millionaires.

Another man of energy and ability was Seth Richards, Connecticut Yankee by birth and citizen of Van Buren county for many years. At one time he owned 65,000 acres of Iowa land. In 1880 he went to Oakland, California, and there multiplied a fortune, already large. He probably left \$5,000,000 when he died, in 1895, at the age of 85.

Other notable Keosauquans were Congressman Benton J. Hall who represented the first Iowa district in congress one term, and was named patent commissioner by President Cleveland; Gen. J. B. Weaver, congressman and greenback and Populist candidate for President, once polling over a million votes; Congressman John A. T. Hull who represented the seventh Iowa district in congress for many years and was chairman of

the committee on military affairs; William Webster, congressman from Nevada for years and the leading lawyer of that state; E. K. Valentine, congressman several terms from a Nebraska district; Elisha Cutler, Jr., the first secretary of the state of Iowa after its admission to the Union; Josiah Bonney, who succeeded Cutler as secretary of state and later refused a nomination for governor; Capt. V. P. Twombly, who became treasurer of Iowa; Samuel Elbert, twice supreme judge of Colorado and twice governor of that state.

#### ACHIEVED FAME AS SOLDIERS

But not only as lawyers and politicians were Keosauquans famous. There were some who achieved fame as soldiers, as railroad managers and in other fields of activity.

Keosauquans made a remarkable record in the Civil war. James M. Tuttle, captain of Van Buren county's first company of volunteers, became colonel of the famous 2nd Iowa, was promoted to brigadier general and later to major general.

Another Keosauqua captain in the 2nd Iowa, was Capt. V. P. Twombly, the youth who planted the colors on the works at Ft. Donelson — and kept them there — after four other men had been shot down with the flag in their hands. Capt. Twombly's heroic act is depicted in a magnificent bronze on the Iowa soldiers' and sailors' monument in Des Moines.

Judge Henry Clay Caldwell, too, was a gallant soldier. He rose from the ranks to be major of the 4th Iowa cavalry. One of the most promising careers, that of Capt. Lee Elbert, was cut short by a rebel bullet in the very beginning of the war.

His father, Dr. Samuel Elbert, should not be overlooked for he was president of the territorial council of Iowa and had a large part in saving Iowa to the Union in the present form. He opposed and helped in the rejection of the first constitution, which would have fixed the western boundary of the state about 100 miles east of the Missouri. As a result, congress

tried again and passed an act setting the present boundaries. Except for Dr. Elbert and his associates, Council Bluffs wouldn't be in Iowa.

Major Hugh Brown of the regular army went as a private from Van Buren county at the beginning of the Civil war, and retired from the service in 1888. Col. O. H. P. Scott of the 48th Iowa was from Keosauqua. So was Col. Daniel Kent of the 19th Iowa.

#### RAILROAD MEN AND ATTORNEYS

Railroad building and management claimed some of the best brains of Keosauqua. H. M. Hoxie, general manager of the Missouri Pacific for many years and an individual having wide influence, was a Keosauqua boy. H. L. Morrell, general manager of another great southern system, was born in Keosauqua. W. W. Baldwin, for many years president of the St. Louis, Keokuk and Northern Railroad, and assistant to the president of the great Burlington system, was a Keosauquan. So was T. O. Baker, general passenger agent of the Northern Ohio railroad.

Edwin Manning, who came to Keosauqua in 1827 and lived there until his death in 1892, was one of Iowa's wealthiest citizens when he died. He conducted a great store, invested in railroads, lands and banking and was the town patriarch, in the last decade of his life, the only remaining member of the colony of early residents who had achieved distinguished success.

St. Louis took E. O. Standard from Keosauqua. He became lieutenant governor of Missouri, member of congress, and president of the chamber of commerce of that city.

C. C. Nourse, who became Iowa attorney general, for many years a leader of the Des Moines bar and a district judge, was a Keosauqua boy. So was D. C. Beaman, general solicitor of the Colorado Fuel and Iron company. So was Calvin Manning, of Ottumwa, U.S. commissioner to the Paris exposition and a leader in state politics. He was the son of Edwin Manning.

George B. Redd and George Stidger became promi-

ment attorneys in Denver. They were members of the Keosauqua school of legal instruction that centered in the old Wright, Knapp and Caldwell office. So were W. A. Work and F. M. Hunter of Ottumwa; George F. Wright and W. S. Mayne of Council Bluffs; Circuit Judge Argus Cox of Bolivar, Missouri; Judge Robert Sloan who presided over courts in the second judicial district of Iowa for more than a quarter of a century.

None of the famous men named survive. All were products of the last century, and the only one whose life extended into the second half of the present century was George S. Wright, who lived for more than 80 years in Council Bluffs.

Why the little town of Keosauqua in old Van Buren gave the nation more distinguished men than any other Iowa city, we shall never know. There was something in the atmosphere of that pioneer community that generated greatness. It is a record that ought not be forgotten.

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## More Comfortable Living

"With the investment of more than 150 billion dollars in new plants and equipment since the end of World War II, this nation has the finest and most efficient industrial establishment the world has ever seen," Charles R. Sligh, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, declared in a year-end statement.

He added, "we know better than we ever did before how to keep our economic machine functioning in high gear, and how to cope with the occasional periods of adjustment which are inevitable."

He pictured the American people as having "learned a lot about how to make our country the kind of land in which everyone can live in dignity, comfort and personal contentment."

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