

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

"ORPHEUS C." KING

In the October issue of the ANNALS we published a letter on pages 429 and 430, written by Captain Orlando C. Howe from Devall's Bluff, Arkansas, dated August 25, 1864, and directed to Mrs. Howe at Newton, Iowa. Captain Howe was in frail health and the rigors of army life in that climate in the heat of summer had weakened him so he expected an early honorable discharge and a return home. His depleted financial resources were causing him worry, so he wrote in this letter to his wife about the propriety of their buying a small farm near Newton, and then said:

How do these suggestions strike you? Do not be in the least troubled if you do not like them, for I merely think of this thing and sometimes think a house and lot would be as well. I must own that another employment is all the time depended some upon by me, that is "Orpheus C." King if you can stand a parody. And the mode I speak of would aid more than exclusive law business. Of course I would not like to say as much openly, but anything to you.

The allusion to "Orpheus C." King was, especially to the reader of today, a profound mystery. But a suggestion that there was in the early 1860's a humorist with a name similar to that caused a search which produced a long forgotten and dusty volume which revealed what few of this generation know, that one, Robert Henry Newell, a prolific newspaper writer and humorist, flourished in popularity somewhat similar to our Will Rogers of today. In 1862, he published a series of articles signing himself "Orpheus C. Kerr," a camouflage for "Office Seeker." In *The Orpheus C. Kerr*, published in New York in 1862, page 29, occurs this language:

Thus, my boy, have I answered your desire for an outline of my personal history; and henceforth let me devote my attention to other and more important inhabitants of our distracted country. I had a certain postmastership in my eye when I first came hither (Washington,

D. C.); but war's alarms indicate that I may do better as an amateur hero. Yours iconoclastically, Orpheus C. Kerr.

Evidently Captain and Mrs. Howe were familiar with Newell's writings, perhaps had enjoyed reading them together. The Captain recalling that his condition was similar to that expressed by the humorist in the above lines, found it easy to parody them by changing "Kerr" to "King," making it Orpheus C. King, or "Office Seeking." In this subtle way he was conveying to Mrs. Howe his secret hope that a public office might come his way, and help them over their financial embarrassment. He evidently did not want anyone else to know he harbored such a thought. Captain Howe was much more diffident and modest about his political ambitions than some others of that period, or even than some of more recent times.

THE STATE BIRD OF IOWA

The Forty-fifth General Assembly in compliance with the wishes of the Iowa Ornithological Union designated the beautiful Eastern Goldfinch as the official bird of Iowa. On March 16, 1933, Representative J. Wilbur Dole of Jefferson County introduced in the House (see House Journal, page 821) the following concurrent resolution:

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION No. 22

Whereas, the Twenty-sixth General Assembly of the state of Iowa, in the year 1897, by concurrent resolution, adopted the Wild Rose as the state flower of Iowa, the record of which is duly recorded in the Senate Journal, pages 1124 and 1164, and in the House Journal, page 1025; and

Whereas, many states have not only adopted certain named flowers as their state flowers, but have also adopted certain named birds as their state birds, and

Whereas, the Iowa Ornithological Union, an association comprising students and lovers of birds, residing within our state, at their annual meeting held in Des Moines, Iowa, in May, 1932, by resolution and vote, designated the Eastern Goldfinch as their choice for a state bird, and recommended that said Eastern Goldfinch be adopted as the official state bird of Iowa, therefore

Be It Resolved in the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring, that the Eastern Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis tristis*, is hereby designated and shall hereafter be officially known as the state bird of Iowa.

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