

## THE WRITINGS OF JUDGE GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

[During his later years the Honorable George G. Wright wrote much that was never published on Iowa biographical and historical subjects. He was singularly apt in the interpretation and delineation of character. His memoranda are therefore valuable contributions. A muscular difficulty combined with a rapidity of mental operation produced a handwriting as noted in its way as that of Horace Greeley. William W. Baldwin, of Burlington, his nephew, a close associate, and Mr. Simon Casady, of Des Moines, likewise long associated with him, have assisted in the reading and have verified the most difficult passages.—EDITOR.]

## GENERAL BAKER.

Among the most eccentric and yet in his line ablest and most efficient officials ever in Iowa was Gen. Nathaniel B. Baker.

With good education—a graduate of the best New England university—having read in the office of Franklin Pierce, a lawyer—member of the New Hampshire legislature—Speaker thereof for two terms—his only service,—Governor of the state in 1854—editor of the *Patriot*, leading paper of his party (Democratic)—coming to Iowa in 1856—settled in Clinton Co.—elected to the Iowa House in 1860—and was in what is known as the War Session, 1861—in July, 1861, was made Adjutant General and reappointed in 1864,—it will thus be seen that his official relations with the two states were almost continuous and in all respects leading. A Democrat in New Hampshire and when coming to Iowa—at the very moment of the War of the Rebellion, outspoken and most active for the cause of the Union,—standing with the gallant Major Kellogg and others of his party for the most aggressive warfare and liberal appropriation for the flag and suppression of the Rebellion, ever strong as a Republican, he was at once recognized as a man of great value and strength—one whose services were not to be either overlooked nor under-estimated.



General Baker was *sui generis*. Not by any means a teetotaler—taking more interest in a policy or growing party than the work of Speaker of the New Hampshire legislature or the duties of Governor—text books, whether in Latin or mathematics, engrossed his attention much less than a good cigar or a free enjoying time with his classmates,—not a plodder—never a bookworm, he yet had a mind so active that he grasped readily leading principles and clove to his lessons and conclusions with a constancy which gave him a good standing in his classes and high position in any place to which he was elected.

I have said he was eccentric. By this I mean that he preferred rest to work—a good time to close attention to his official duties—talked about everything in a rambling, apparently incoherent way—was on the street more than in his office—never seemed to know what was going on or to influence his subordinates—and yet whether as Speaker, legislator, Governor or Adjutant General was among the most efficient, painstaking and correct officials ever in Iowa or elsewhere. His records in all the multifarious work of the war and following, are models of neatness, completeness and correctness. It may be doubted whether in another like office in any state a record can be found in all respects so satisfactory and readily comprehended and understood. He was prompt, energetic and systematic, and to such an extent as to elicit the most flattering compliments from the press and others in almost every state in the Union. Of few other things are the people of this State more justly proud.

General Baker was a man of commanding presence—always plain-spoken and earnest—but little if any of the courtier—none of “that creeping, cat-like quiet that stamps all sinister, two-sided men.”

His nature was phenomenally generous and the warmest in its attachments and friendships. The needy or those in poverty he never passed without a kindly word or help. Such a man never made money—never accumulated—he spent as he earned, either for actual needs or to gratify his tastes or charitable disposition.

Was he studious? I answer, no, if by that is meant application to tasks or the many details of business. How then did he so well succeed and so well acquit himself in public life and especially in the office of all others—the last he held—requiring watchfulness and constant attention to men, companies, regiments and statistics? I answer, by reason of his natural ability to grasp things as if by inspiration—to marshal his forces—his many clerks—to select the best men—and so condense and arrange as to give evidence of the extremest personal care and attention. Then he was so large-hearted and genial that he commanded the best service and inspired unlimited confidence in his work. Had his habits been better—such as to rally around him a different and higher moral element,— such was his nobility of nature, quick, active intellect and generosity of spirit—he might have ranked in state and nation among the most able and influential. But he was Nat. Baker and could not be another.

JONATHAN W. CATTELL.

I wish to leave a word of testimony to the high official character and great personal worth of Jonathan W. Cattell.

Was a member of the Senate from Cedar county for two terms (1856-58)—State Auditor three terms (1859-65)—again a member of the Senate from Polk, 1866—and at the time of the trouble with Auditor Brown (1885-86) was appointed to the office by the Governor (Sherman) and acted for several months and until the impeachment proceedings were ended. He was also prominently connected with important insurance companies and recognized by all as among the best and most faithful business men of the State. He died within the last three years on his farm near Des Moines, where he had lived for years in the quiet enjoyment of a happy home.

Was of the best Quaker stock—tall—not especially courtly—having rather the plain manners and habits of the Friend—of the best and most exemplary habits—fairly strong, intellectual face—a good thinker—honest to the State and its every interest—one of the best legislators and officials—true as steel to every trust—he loved Iowa, and Iowa trusted and

relied upon him as upon few others. Was not an orator if noise, big words and rotund sentences so count, and yet was so thoroughly posted in all the affairs of state—a kind of walking encyclopædia of all its departments, that he was always listened to with interest and like profit. Was apparently as artless as a child, and yet not of the enduring, easily-imposed upon class. Of generous, trustful nature, he was admittedly a good judge of men—weighed well, dispassionately and unselfishly all sides of a problem and the claims of all—reaching his conclusions according to what he believed to be the very right of the matter. Was intense in his anti-slavery views, a most ardent partisan—believed in his very heart that his party was right and those opposed wrong, and forever so. Left no family except his widow, who was of like Quaker stock, and was in all respects a most worthy and efficient helpmate.

#### STEWART GOODRELL.

Stewart Goodrell, who lived first in Brighton in Washington county and afterward in Des Moines, where he died some two years or more since, was of good size—florid complexion,—a mechanic,—of moderate education only, and yet in many ways well informed himself on the affairs of the State.

We first find him a member of the Second Constitutional Convention (1846), then of the first and second State General Assemblies, then again of the 8th, 1860, from Polk, one of the commissioners to locate the capitol (1856) and pension agent at Des Moines at the time of his death. Was twice married, the second wife being the sister of Alex Scott, who was one of the earliest settlers of Des Moines and the owner of a large part of the ground covered by the (east) part of the original city.

Not much of a talker, but of the most royal good sense—pleasant and popular manners, he always had good influence and took the front rank as a legislator. It will be seen that his last legislative service was in the well-known War session (1860-61), composed of an exceptionally strong body of men—Judges Hall, Caldwell, Clagett, Riddle, Ruddick—as also

General Baker, Major Kellogg, Geo. W. Bemis, [Lieut.] Gov. Gue, W. H. F. Gurley, Rush Clark, A. H. Bereman, N. G. Hedges, and other well-known legislators being his colleagues. That he held a good position his places on committees as well as the proceedings of those two unusually active sessions (there was an extra session in May, 1861) abundantly attest. He would always have friends and have their help and active assistance if the occasion demanded. A most enthusiastic Republican, he was still so cordial in his relations with all his fellows that, outside of politics, he seldom provoked antagonism.

Was honest—died poor—left a most excellent family,—loved a good joke as well on himself as on others. Among those he enjoyed most was this:

After his services in the House and the distinction of the Constitutional Convention, he was ambitious for the Senate,—very much so. When the committee met he seemed to have things all his own way. He concluded to play the martyr role, and when his name was suggested, took the floor and told the delegates at what great sacrifice he had served the people before,—how he was neglecting his business—was poor,—and proceeded to name several worthy gentlemen of whom they ought to demand the sacrifice. More than one good friend appealed to him—that he had so well cared for their interests, and that this was the time when they needed good and strong men, &c. To these he replied, begging off, and finally with apparent great reluctance said if he must, he must, &c. In the meantime, another name of those referred to by him, had been mentioned—they balloted, and to use his own language “the damned fools took him at his word and nominated the other fellow.” He always wound up by saying that he wanted the place very much indeed, and concluded that he would never again so act the idiot. Always try to tell the truth and ask for what you want—if you do want it—in politics as in everything else. Not that a man should be a place or office seeker, but if he determine to seek tell the truth when the time comes and the occasion demands. Other aspirants as I

know have failed just as the Colonel did, and greatly to their disappointment.

Of the non professional men—those of limited education and few opportunities—without the aid of money or strong family influence, Colonel Goodrell will be long remembered as among the strong, active and worthy.—He was a good type of a pioneer legislator and sound sense in official and business life.

Possibly “to point a moral” if not “adorn a tale”, I note this instance:

As stated, Colonel Goodrell was pension agent at Des Moines at the time of his death. His death occurring late in the night was not announced in the morning papers. I was in the Senate and not unreasonably would have a voice in nominating his successor. Ignorant myself of his decease, soon after breakfast a friend whom I esteemed highly called at my library and said he wanted the agency. I said, “Why, there is no vacancy.” “Yes,” he said, “Colonel Goodrell died last night,” and about four or five hours before he called. I said, “I like you and would be glad to recommend you, but I will not help one who is so anxious that he cannot wait until our mutual friend is buried. You indicate a too active desire for office.” And I did not recommend him and he was not appointed.

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IOWA.—It appears from a paragraph in the Cincinnati Gazette, that “civil government is at an end,” for a time in the territory of Iowa. That paper says:—Strife has arisen between Gov. Lucas and the Iowa Territorial legislature on a question of power. The Governor insists that all laws and resolutions must be approved by him before they are of any force. The Legislative body contest this position. Both parties spunk up—and all public business is delayed in consequence.—Albany, N. Y.—*The Jeffersonian*, January 19, 1839.

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