

## THE WRITINGS OF JUDGE GEORGE G. WRIGHT.

## IV.

[Heretofore we have presented some unconnected sketches by the late Hon. George G. Wright. Herewith begins a series arranged by Judge Wright at the instance of Hon. Charles Aldrich, Curator and founder of the Historical Department of Iowa.—EDITOR.]

HON. CHARLES ALDRICH,

Dear Sir: You have more than once expressed a wish that I would as time allowed note down some of my recollections of the men and times in Iowa's early history. The fact you state, not to be denied, in explanation of the wish, is that those who were active in those scenes are fast passing away, and you are kind enough to suggest that some "jottings" by me might assist in the good work in which you are engaged for and under the direction of the State, and aid in some future history of Iowa. I comply with your request, promising you herein nothing more than such notes and memories (some, not all) as can be recalled and noted in the midst of many business cares.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

I settled in Keosauqua, Van Buren county, November 14, 1840. Graduated at Indiana State University, 1839—read law with my brother, Gov. Joseph A. Wright, at Rockville in that State. Was born in Bloomington, Indiana, March 24, 1820, and admitted to the bar before I was of age. Was prosecuting attorney for Van Buren county in 1845.

[I was] elected to the State Senate in 1848—my competitor being Hon. Thomas Dibble (my father-in-law), who was a Democrat, and nominated by his party without his wish the week before [I was.] I was nominated against my protest, but the same afternoon went with Mrs. Wright to his home twelve miles in the country. I told him the circum-

stances and submitted to his wish if I should run. Old pioneer as he was, he said, "Yes, yourself a Whig—I, a Democrat—neither want the place, but we owe it to our parties to make the race. It is not I against you but Democracy against Whiggism." So we made the race with the result stated, and our relations were not in the least disturbed.

[I was] candidate for congress in 1850—defeated by Hon. Bernhart Henn by about 500 (Democratic majority in district over 1,200). Was elected Chief Justice of Iowa, January, 1855—served until January, 1860. Declined re-election—was appointed to succeed Hon. L. D. Stockton, deceased, in June, 1860—served by re-election until September, 1870. Was elected to U. S. Senate in January, 1870, took my seat March 4, 1871—served for six years, declining a re-election.

[I] returned to the practice of the law—continued therein until 1882, when I took the presidency of the Polk County Savings Bank and Security Loan & Trust Company. [I am] still in that work. Was president of the State Agricultural Society for five years, commencing in 1860—also president American Bar Association, 1887-8—organized the Iowa School of Law at Des Moines in connection with Judge C. C. Cole in 1865 (afterwards W. G. Hammond was connected with us) and continued it for three years, when, on request of the regents of the State University we united with that institution—saved the Law Department, and save the six years when in the Senate, have for each year, almost, been a lecturer or teacher therein.

Was married in 1843 (October 19th) to Mary H. Dibble, who, born in New York, settled in Van Buren county in 1839. Her father, Hon. Thomas Dibble, had been a member of the New York legislature and was a member of the second Constitutional Convention in Iowa, 1846.

(And of him, I should not be pardoned if I did not say a word more. He was a pioneer, and of the very highest, influential and useful type. Of good education—a constant reader, as his farm duties permitted—far more than the average farmer—one of the best thinkers I ever knew—clear, logical

mind—never tied to old things because they were old, and yet not rejecting because they were old—he was a leader in thought and in investigation whether on political, religious or economic questions. He was not esteemed orthodox in his views, as the world goes, and yet no purer, [more] honest, thoroughly religious man in word or deed ever lived in the State. His word was gold, his advice always inspired by the best motives and his conduct such as friends and family could always refer to with admiration and pride. Was an old-time, old-fashioned Democrat, and yet was liberal in his judgment of others, always preferring to attribute good rather than bad motives to his antagonists and all people. Was always helpful to the poor and needy. His home was the resting place and favorite resort of the leading men of our State—to those of all parties and faiths alike. One of those strong, leading (not brilliant, big-talking and pertinacious) minds, found in the early communities which had so much to do in shaping its policies, building up its schools and best interests and who leave their impress years and years after they are gone. He lived to a good old age (87) respected by all, dying mourned by all.)

But to continue. To us have been born seven children, five sons and two daughters; six living, Thomas S., Craig L., Mary D. (Peavey), Carroll C., Lucia H. (Stone), and George G.; one deceased, the youngest, William R., born in 1865 and died in December, 1875. All married but George G.

This of my life, and perhaps too much.

#### VAN BUREN COUNTY FAMOUS MEN.

There has lived or started in Keosauqua and Van Buren county an unusual galaxy of men. I mention:

Abner Kneeland, the great freethinker and writer.

Hon. John F. Dillon, Judge of the U. S. Circuit Court.

Hon. John H. Gear, Governor and Member of Congress.

Hon. G. W. McCrary, Legislator, Congressman, Secretary of War.

Hon. H. C. Caldwell, Legislator, Colonel, U. S. District Judge.

Hon. Joseph C. Knapp, U. S. District Attorney and District Judge.

Hon. Augustus Hall, Member of Congress and U. S. Judge.

Hon. Samuel D. Elbert, afterwards Governor of Colorado and Chief Justice of their Supreme Court.

Hon. James B. Howell, my predecessor in the U. S. Senate, member Southern Claims Commission, and leading editor (*Gate City*).

Sam M. Clark, for years at head of the *Gate City* and leading editor of the State.

Gideon S. Bailey, U. S. Marshal.

Gen. J. M. Tuttle, distinguished in volunteer service during the late war, and then as State legislator.

Hon. John D. Elbert, President of the Territorial Council.

Hon. Timothy Day, first importer and breeder of short-horns in our State and for his time the biggest farmer. [Member of] Iowa Constitutional Convention of 1857.

Henry G. Stewart, also an importer; settled afterwards in Lee county and for years with Mr. Day member of the Board of State Agricultural Society, and very influential and active in building it up.

Hon. Hugh W. Sample, President Des Moines River Improvement Board.

Hon. Paul Brattain, Treasurer Des Moines River Improvement Board.

Hon. C. C. Nourse, Attorney General of State and District Judge.

W. M. McFarland, Member of General Assembly and Secretary of State.

Hon. Samuel Parker, President Territorial Council of Oregon.

J. H. Bonney, Secretary of State and Commissioner of Des Moines River Improvement.

Elisha Cutler, first Secretary of State.

Israel Kister, Treasurer of State.

V. P. Twombly, Treasurer of State.

P. M. Casady, now of Des Moines, member of State Senate, U. S. land officer and prominent banker.

S. W. Summers, colonel in volunteer service.

John B. Miller, Auditor and County Judge of Polk county, and U. S. land officer in Idaho.

T. S. Wright, general solicitor C. R. I. & P. R. R. Co.

E. O. Stanard, in Congress from Missouri and Lieutenant Governor of that State.

Edwin Manning, Commissioner of Des Moines River Improvement.

James H. Cowles, one of the proprietors of the *Gate City* and leading lawyer.

R. T. Dibble, member of Missouri Legislature.

I. N. Lewis, member of Territorial Legislature, and member of Missouri Legislature.

John J. Selman, afterwards in the Senate from Davis county, and member of the Second Constitutional Convention.

J. A. T. Hull, afterwards Secretary of State, Lieutenant Governor and member of Congress.

J. B. Weaver, officer U. S. Army, member of Congress, candidate for President, of the Greenback party.

It may be doubted or perhaps, rather, it is true, that no other county in this or any western State (agricultural) ever produced so many prominent men—nor any town of 1,000 people (and it never had more) so many as Keosauqua. In 1843 there were twenty-three lawyers in that place, and after the opening of the New Purchase and west, they and others named scattered, Summers to Ottumwa, Casady to Des Moines, Weaver and Selman to Bloomfield, Cowles to Bloomfield and afterwards to Keokuk, Elbert to Colorado, Stanard to Missouri.

The attorneys practicing there from 1841 and for years thereafter, other than those mentioned were J. C. Hall, David Rorer, Hugh T. Ried, ————, Alfred Rich, M. D. Browning, James W. Grimes, H. W. and W. H. Starr, Thomas Gray, Frederick Mills, Philip Viele, Henry Eno, D. F. Miller, Samuel Shuffleton, all leading attorneys, but perhaps the more prominent were Hall, Ried, Rich, Grimes, Rorer and the Starrs. Of these, all are dead but Miller (he, however, was seldom at the courts in the early age).

Our first court in Van Buren county was held in the upper room of the jail, a room, I should say, about 20 feet square. After that, [it was held] in a large room of a hotel or over a store until the present brick structure was completed, say, 1845.

The first term in Davis [county] was in 1845, the forenoon (of the only day of the term) in a room say 15 to 20 feet square (with two beds therein), and the afternoon in a new log house, roofed that morning, without floor, windows or doors,—Judge Mason in a rocking chair, back of a board stretched on two barrels,—attorneys on shingle or clapboard blocks,—jurors in the only case tried, seated on boards stretched on blocks,—clerk at the end of the board forming the judge's desk,—and the grand jury on one side of the town (Bloomfield) in the open prairie,—and the petit jury on the other, during the deliberations, with watchful officers to keep off the curious or interested crowd.

First term in Monroe (then Kishkekosh) county, was held at Clark's Point, a few miles west of Albia, in a cabin. It is said that J. C. Hall and Ed Johnstone (since living in Keokuk and president of Old Law Makers' Association) were disturbed during the night by being deprived of a part of their straw bedding by some horses nibbling it through the cracks of the unchinked and undaubed walls! The consequence was that both were quite near the cabin wall in the morning.

But for the present I leave these court houses. Of them possibly more hereafter.

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A steam boat, one hundred feet long, is in process of construction on the island almost immediately under the Court Avenue bridge. We understand that the proprietor is Mr. Tisdale of East DeMoine. In case of a flood, how could this inchoate steamer be saved before its timbers are adjusted to their places?—*Demoiné Citizen*.

Sigourney, Iowa, *Life in the West*, Feb. 17, 1859.

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