

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

---

## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

---

### A STATESMAN AND PHILANTHROPIST.

In the death of Ex-Senator James F. Wilson, which occurred at his home in Fairfield, April 25, 1895, Iowa lost one of the greatest statesmen and one of the most estimable personalities that has ever borne a conspicuous part in her history. His life was one of the highest usefulness—his character the purest and noblest. From his earliest youth to the close of his career conscientious devotion to duty governed his every action. When the final summing up takes place—when the works of his useful life are set down fairly and impartially to his credit—the annals of Iowa will not contain a more truly enviable record. This is high praise, but we believe the estimate is simple truth. When his life comes to be written, as we trust it may be ere long, it will be found not only rich in good works as a private citizen and public man, but containing “points of history”—seldom falling within the limits of one man’s career—which will make his memory imperishable. His example throughout his whole life—from the harness-maker’s apprentice to the Senator—is one that young men may well study and emulate. His motives were pure, his aims the highest. In the pursuit of the ends he sought to accomplish his paths were always straight, and his zeal and energy knew no abatement. His abilities were of a high order, such as gave him a commanding place, both in the public deliberative bodies of the State and the Nation. One whose counsels were sought by Lincoln and Grant in troublous times—

in the great crises which beset the Nation—could have been no common man. It matters not in what theater of action he was placed—whether in our Iowa Constitutional Convention—in either branch of the State Legislature—in the National House of Representatives or in the Senate of the United States—he was always a leader. In each of these deliberative bodies he occupied a foremost place. His name is and always will be connected with the history



HON. JAMES F. WILSON.

of the important State and National questions of his day. In the settlement of many of the great issues his was the brain that conceived and his the hand that penned the conceptions which were crystalized into the laws of the State and Nation. But while thus prominent in the high places of public usefulness and duty, a leader of leaders, no man was ever more an every day laborer for the greatest good of the greatest number, or more revered or honored in his own town and county. Fairfield is distin-

guished beyond any other town in Iowa by the possession of a Public Library which is the result of a growth of more than forty years. It has been conducted upon a broad and liberal basis from the start. Senator Wilson was ever its most generous supporter—the most untiring worker in its behalf. Not only did he give it his great influence, but he contributed liberally to its rich and varied collections. As the result of his efforts it is now housed in the finest library edifice in Iowa. As a useful working library it is only surpassed by those in Des Moines and Iowa City which have been built up and supported by the State. In American History, Politics and Political Economy, it doubtless leads them all.

But aside from his career as lawyer and statesman, in which his acts were known to the public, his domestic and home life was in every respect beautiful and enviable. His little farm of 55 acres adjoining the town had become under his management a place of marvelous beauty. His fields through high cultivation yielded handsome returns. He had built a modest but comfortable home, to which books, pictures and precious autograph treasures seemed to come naturally as by the law of gravitation. It is now almost hidden by tall trees which were long ago planted by his own hand. He had widened and deepened the bed of a creek, converting it into a deep pond, upon the bank of which he built a little summer-house. Fishes swam in the water and the surrounding timber was musical with the songs of his feathered friends. Here it was his custom to seclude himself for the purpose of studying and writing during the summers he was at home. It was an ideal quiet nook, and at his own door. He protected the birds and was a friend of the dumb animals. His means, to an extent which only those in close relationship with him knew or could appreciate, were devoted to charity. In the clear and forcible language of Judge H. E. Deemer, in the Supreme Court Chamber, on the 22d of May last—

“Through all the trials and temptations of life he was faithful to his friends, to his home, to his family, to his country, and to his God. He was more than a learned lawyer or sagacious statesman—he was a good man.”

Materials for his biography are most abundant. They exist, and are easily accessible—in the Debates of the Iowa Constitutional Convention of 1857, in the journals of our State Legislatures of 1858–60, in the proceedings of Congress during his service of twenty years, in a large correspondence which has been carefully preserved, in the files of Iowa newspapers from the time he entered the State, in his printed speeches on many public occasions, and in the recollections of troops of friends. It is to be hoped that these may be utilized by some competent hand in the production of a Life of James F. Wilson worthy of the man and the State and Nation he served so long and so well.

---

#### GENERAL J. M. STREET.

---

Our sketch of the life of this distinguished friend of the Iowa and Wisconsin Indians is from the pen of his son, William B. Street, who is still living at the advanced age of seventy-five years. Though General Street was stationed but a short time in what is now the State of Iowa, his relations with the Indians living west of the Mississippi were intimate and close for many years. No adequate sketch of his life has yet appeared, though he is incidentally mentioned in many works of Indian and Western history, and many papers and official documents from his pen must be filed away in the Indian Bureau at Washington. There is abundant evidence that he was a man of large ability and judicial fairness, honest in his dealings, a genuine philanthropist, devoid of pretense, possessed of the highest moral and physical courage, a chivalrous

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.