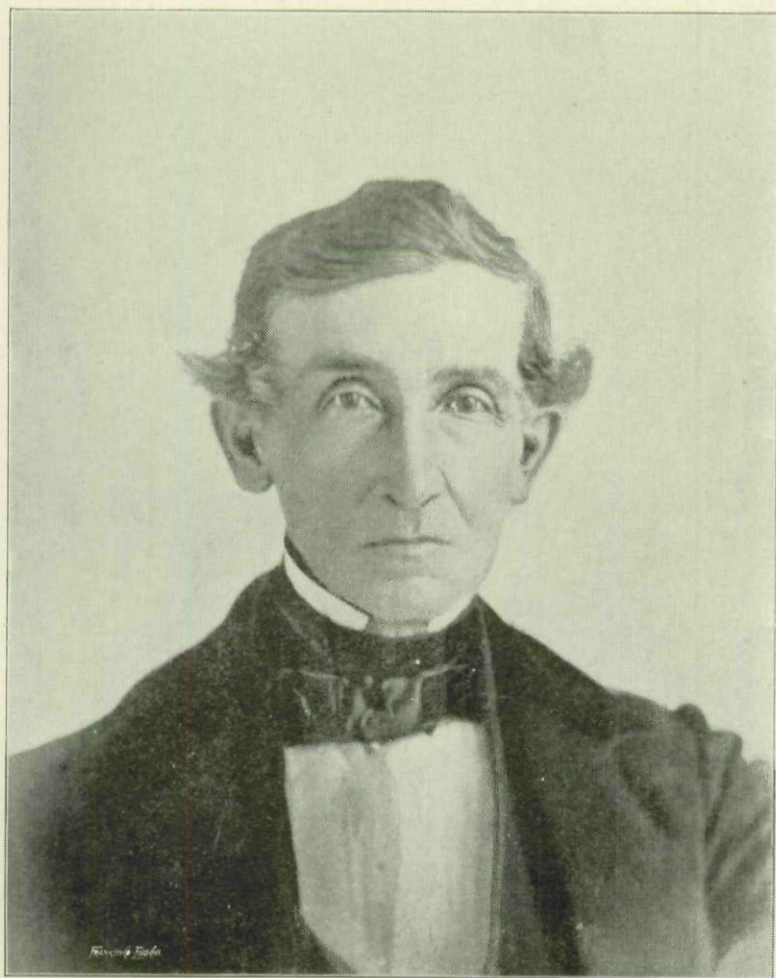


MAJOR WILLIAM WILLIAMS.

BY EX-GOVERNOR CYRUS C. CARPENTER.

The story of the pioneer, prominent in laying the foundation of a community, is always interesting to his successors. Major William Williams, however, possessed qualities which made him an interesting personality apart from the fact that he was a chief actor and factor in the early settlement of Northwestern Iowa. Among the immigrants to Iowa, between the years 1849 and 1856, a large number came from Western Pennsylvania; and especially from the western slope of the Allegheny Mountains. The writer well remembers how, in the early history of Fort Dodge, he, with others, often counted the large percentage of its pioneer population hailing from Western Pennsylvania. Among these was Major Williams. He was born at Huntingdon, December 6th, 1796, and died at Fort Dodge, Iowa, February 26th, 1874. In the seventy-eight years of busy life intervening between these two dates, were crowded scenes and events worthy of perpetuation in the annals of his adopted State. His early education was limited to the acquirements common to the public schools of Pennsylvania. His father had died whilst he was yet a mere boy, and as he was the oldest, the care and direction of the younger children devolved in large measure upon him. This led him to devote himself to business pursuits whilst a mere youth. He was for a time a merchant. Then a manufacturer of salt on the Kiskiminitas river. His later years in Pennsylvania, however, were employed in banking. He was connected with the Exchange Bank of Pittsburg, and was cashier of the branch at Hollidaysburg. He was generous and open



MAJOR WILLIAM WILLIAMS,
Commander of the Spirit Lake Expedition, 1857.

handed, in his nature; so that many years of arduous toil failed to yield him large accumulations. He had married a Miss Judith Lloyd McConnell in 1830, who died in 1842. Of the five children who came to them, two are still living—James B. Williams of Fort Dodge, and Mary, the wife of Hon. John F. Duncombe. He was again married in 1844 to Jeanette J. Quinian, and of their three children but one—Wm. H., is now living. In March, 1849, he came to Iowa, and for a time lived at Muscatine. In his early life he had developed a taste for military drill and study. He had been an officer in the militia of Pennsylvania. He therefore naturally kept himself informed respecting the movements of the United States Army. So, in 1849, when the order was made for the establishment of a Military Post on the borders of the then uninhabited region now known as Northwestern Iowa, he sought and obtained the appointment as sutler for the post. When the battalion marched through the State from Fort Snelling, Minnesota, to the point on the Des Moines river designated by General Mason, commanding the department, as the place at which a Military Post was to be established, he joined and accompanied them from the Iowa river in the southeast corner of Tama county, whither they had first gone to assist in the removal of the lingering remnants of the Sac and Fox tribes of Indians to their reservation in the Indian Territory.

Major Williams says in a narrative of events which he has left among his papers: "We arrived at the point designated on the 23d of August, 1850. The officers and men of the detachment had served through the Mexican war, and many of them in the Seminole and Florida wars, and from what they had heard of the country they were to be stationed in, they expected to find a region similar to Florida, covered with lakes, ponds, swamps, and destitute of timber; but they were agreeably disappointed. All were highly pleased with the location. The

fine groves of timber, above and below, the pure springs of water and rippling streams, together with the appearance of coal, gypsum and other minerals, the building stone, and enchanting scenery, caused all to pronounce it the most beautiful part of Iowa they had ever seen. When the plans for building quarters, and the arrangement of the buildings were under consideration, it was determined to build convenient as possible to the fine springs of water, and where they would be sheltered from the north-west winds by the timber. It was the opinion of all the officers at that time, that owing to the beauty of the location, and the resources of the country, at no distant day a town of some importance would be built on the site."

During the three years that the troops remained at Fort Dodge they were employed in building the houses which were occupied by the officers and soldiers as quarters, and in fencing, breaking and cultivating a large field near the quarters, and also in scouting and exploring the country north, west and east of the post.

Major Williams has left a narrative of the events at the Fort during these years which is full, graphic and interesting. But, as by a treaty with the Sioux Indians made in 1851, the government purchased all the territory in Minnesota from Lake Pepin to the mouth of Rock River on the St. Peters or Minnesota river, also all the lands within the state of Iowa belonging to the Sioux, which embraced the lands lying west of the Des Moines river and north of Fort Dodge in Iowa, it was regarded by the War Department as no longer necessary to maintain a military post at Fort Dodge. So, on the confirmation of this treaty, Captain Dana of the 6th Regiment of United States Infantry, was ordered to select a site for a permanent post on the north line of the new purchase. The site selected was at the junction of the Rock with the St. Peters or Minnesota river. This has since been known as Fort Ridgely.

In July, 1853, Major Woods, commanding the detachment at this place, received orders to abandon Fort Dodge and move to Fort Ridgely, to assist in building quarters for the officers and soldiers at the new post. On the departure of the troops, Major Williams and his son, James B., with two or three discharged soldiers, were all the people left at Fort Dodge. After the removal to Fort Ridgely a discharged soldier named Joseph Sweet was sent back under pay of the officers to take charge of the buildings. This led Major Williams to the conclusion that it was the purpose of the officers to enter the lands on which the improvements were located.

When the fort was located, in accordance with the uniform custom of the War Department, a reservation was made covering all the improvements and adjoining lands. It extended four miles south and four north, and two miles east and west of the river, making a reservation eight miles long and four miles wide. It has always been the policy of the government to make reservations covering the improvements of military posts, and when they are no longer needed for military purposes to sell them to the highest bidders. But an unexpected complication had arisen at Fort Dodge. When the land came to be surveyed it was found that the improvements made by the government were on section nineteen, an odd section, which under the decision of the Secretary of the Interior was river land, and belonged to the State of Iowa. Here were improvements which had cost the government \$80,000 that were about to be abandoned, as they were on land held to be within the Des Moines River Grant. The Major was awake to these legal complications and determined if possible to enter the lands himself. Accordingly, upon the return of Sweet to assume charge of the buildings he went to Ottumwa, where the office of the State for selling river lands was located, and bought all of section nineteen on the east side of the river, and then went to Des Moines

where the government land office was located, and entered several hundred acres of the adjoining lands on even sections.

He now began to lay his plans for the location of a town on the original site of the military post. In March, 1854, he had completed the survey of the original town of Fort Dodge. From this time forward during the remainder of his life he devoted himself almost exclusively to the care of his lands in and about Fort Dodge, and to building up and advertising the town. He early secured the extension of a mail route from Homer—then the county seat of Webster county—to Fort Dodge. With the establishment of a postoffice at Fort Dodge he was himself appointed the first postmaster. In 1855, by act of Congress, the United States Land Department in Iowa was reorganized—two new districts were provided for—and new land offices established at Fort Dodge and Sioux City. Major Williams was active and prominent in securing this legislation.

After the departure of the United States troops from Fort Dodge, parties of Indians frequently came back to their former hunting grounds, and in some instances had committed depredations upon families of the scattered settlers who had begun to make claims and improvements along the Des Moines river. A party of surveyors in charge of a Mr. Marsh, who had the contract for surveying the correction line across the state, were set upon and robbed within three miles of Fort Dodge. A pioneer by the name of Henry Lott, who had originally made a claim near the mouth of the Boone Fork, had been robbed during his absence from home, and one of his children who had fled from his cabin in fright, whilst the Indians were ransacking the premises, had perished from cold and exposure. Afterwards Lott, who had moved further north and made a claim at the mouth of a creek in the present Humboldt county, now known as Lott's creek, in

turn attacked and killed an Indian named Sidominadota and his entire family, who were camping and hunting in the vicinity. These events had so alarmed many of the settlers that they flocked into Fort Dodge for protection. Major Williams represented the facts to Governor Hempstead and was authorized by him to organize a force, if necessary, to protect the frontier. During the winter of 1854-5, parties of Indians frequently visited Fort Dodge, camping in the immediate neighborhood, and hunting and trapping along the Des Moines river and the Lizard Fork. The leader of the principal band of these Indians was Inkpaduta. And whilst their attitude was frequently reported as threatening to settlers remote from neighbors, yet the winter passed away without any depredations in the vicinity of Fort Dodge.

The summer of 1855 witnessed an influx of land-hunters, claim seekers and explorers, which brought Northwestern Iowa into general notice. People began to move up the east and west branches of the Des Moines river and lay the foundation of future homes. Several families settled at the groves along the Lizard Fork. Others crossed the prairie from the head waters of the Lizard to the Little Sioux river and made pre-emptions at and above the present site of Sioux Rapids. The majority, however, made claims upon which they put some little improvements, and left them for the winter, proposing to come and occupy them permanently the following summer.

Whilst the winter of 1854-5 had been mild and open, that of 1855-6 was noted for its severity, its heavy snows and for the intensity of the cold. The spring, however, brought renewed cheer and hope to the scattered settlers in Northwestern Iowa, and the prairies during the summer of 1856 were thronged with adventurous immigrants in search of claims and pre-emptions. Every grove along the Des Moines river and its borders resounded to the axe of the hardy claimant, felling the trees for his cabin. The

little Sioux was explored from its mouth to its source, and the pre-emptor was found at almost every grove which afforded sufficient timber with which to erect a cabin and furnish fuel.

During this summer several families settled at the Oko-boji and Spirit lakes. The most of these settlers reached the lakes in the months of July and August, giving them barely time to erect their cabins and cut the hay for the few cattle they had brought with them, before the winter of 1856-7 set in with a fury, steadiness and severity, which make it a land-mark in the experience of every person who after more than thirty-five years shivers at the mention of it. The prairie between the groves where the scattered pioneers had built their cabins, was a bleak, unbroken desolation. The wild winds swept across the crusted snow-banks with cruel and pitiless ferocity. Day after day were constant repetitions one of the other.

The snows fell and drifted until the prairies were impassable to men or teams, except in comparatively thickly settled neighborhoods, where the roads could be kept open by constant use. The scattered settlers along the Little Sioux river through the counties of Cherokee, Buena Vista and Clay, and those at the lakes in Dickinson county, were almost as thoroughly cut off from intercourse with the outside world as though they had been cast away on an island of the sea. During the month of February, the Indians known as Inkpaduta's band, appeared on the Little Sioux river in the northeast corner of Woodbury county—ostensibly to hunt, but in reality to beg, steal and rob. They passed up the Little Sioux to the lakes, robbing and maltreating the settlers, and in several instances shamefully abusing women, and threatening destruction to entire families along the route. They reached the lakes in the early days of March. And finally on the 8th of March their hostile purposes culminated in the massacre of more than one half the people at this settlement, and

between the 8th and 13th their bloody work continued. Of the more than forty men, women and children not one escaped alive, except a girl of 13 years, Miss Abbie Gardner, and three women, Mrs. Marble, Mrs. Noble and Mrs. Thatcher, who were carried into captivity.

In the fall of 1856 three men, from Newton, Jasper county, Messrs. O. C. Howe, B. F. Parmenter and R. U. Wheelock, had visited the lakes and made claims, with the purpose of returning and improving them the following season. Early in March they had started with oxen and wagon to return to the lakes. After great hardships they arrived within a few miles of their destination, when their team had become so completely exhausted that they left their wagon and pushed on to the lakes, reaching them late in the evening. But instead of finding the settlers, with whom they had become acquainted the fall before, ready to receive them, on arriving at the cabin occupied by the family of Joel Howe, they were horrified to find the ground strewn with dead bodies and the interior of the house a desolation. The next morning they visited the claim of a family named Mattock, about a mile and a half distant, found the cabin burned and the entire family murdered. This convinced them that everybody in the settlement had probably shared the same fate, and they started immediately for Fort Dodge. Upon their arrival at Fort Dodge a meeting was called and responded to by almost every able-bodied man in the town. It was resolved to raise a command and march immediately to the lakes in order to rescue any of the settlers who might have escaped the massacre, and if possible overtake and punish the Indians.

Major Williams had informed Gov. Grimes as early as 1855 of his fears that the wandering bands of Indians which frequently made incursions into the settlements might commit depredations upon the lives and property of the settlers. And the Governor had renewed the commission orig

inally granted by Gov. Hempstead, authorizing him to organize and arm settlers to repel the Indians upon any indication, on their part, of hostile purposes. He was therefore looked upon as the natural leader of the expedition. Two companies, comprising about thirty-five men each, were organized at Fort Dodge. And a third company was organized at Webster City, whither runners had been sent to inform the people of that town of the massacre and of the proposed relief expedition.

The news of the massacre reached Fort Dodge on the 21st of March, and Webster City on the 22d. On the 23d the company from Webster City marched to Fort Dodge. On the 24th the battalion of three companies, under the command of Major Williams, left Fort Dodge for the scene of the massacre.

It is not proposed at this time to go into details respecting the campaign. Suffice it to say, that in all the stories of pioneer hardships and heroism, this campaign has had but few parallels in history. As has been said, the winter had been one of the severest known in Iowa. The snow was unusually deep. On the prairie level it was at least two feet in depth. And in the ravines and depressions was frequently from eight to ten feet deep.

The battalion moved in light marching order. Three wagons drawn by oxen, and three or four horses constituted the transportation of the entire command. Most of the men were without proper clothing for such a campaign, whilst their scanty rations were very limited in variety. Thus equipped, however, the command was to march one hundred miles over a trackless, snow-covered prairie. At times, to get the wagons, cattle and horses through the deep snow-drifts, the entire command would form in two single files, as far apart as the tracks of an ordinary wagon, and march and counter march until they had beaten two tracks over which the teams could be moved. When the snow was so deep and light that it would not

pack by marching and counter-marching across a drift, a long rope would be attached to a wagon and from fifty to one hundred men would haul it through in spite of resisting piles of snow which would accumulate in its front. And not infrequently the cattle would be pulled across a snow-drift by the main strength of the battalion. Each day's experience was but the repetition of its predecessor, except that the second day after leaving Medium Lake, in Palo Alto county, the command met and cared for the refugees from Springfield, Minnesota, whom the Indians attacked after the massacre of the settlers at the lakes.

The few settlers at Springfield having heard a rumor of the massacre at the lakes, had, with the exception of one or two families, assembled in the largest log house in the settlement where they made a desperate resistance. And although two of the men and one of the women had been wounded, and nearly all those who had not reached the house had been killed, the Indians finally retired from the attack. As soon as satisfied the Indians had left, the people in the house, under cover of darkness, took from a stable, which had been saved from fire and plunder by its nearness to the besieged house, a yoke of good oxen, and hurriedly hitching them to a sled, upon which the wounded and a few provisions had been loaded, fled southward. For four nights and three days they had pushed forward, when nearly exhausted by exposure and want of food, they were met by the expedition. And when the wounded had been cared for, they were furnished food from the scanty supply of the command and sent on their way southward.

The impression now prevailed in the battalion that the Indians would be overtaken, and the next day the men pushed forward with renewed determination, arriving at night at Granger's Point, near the Minnesota line. Here they learned that Captain Bee, in command of a company of regular soldiers from Fort Ridgely, in Minnesota, had

been at the lakes, and having scouted from thence to Springfield, found that the Indians had left with their captives and booty.

As the provisions of the battalion were now nearly exhausted, and as it was conceded that any further attempt to overtake the Indians would be fruitless, Major Williams determined to send a small detachment to the lakes, some fifteen miles west, to bury the dead, supplying this detachment with all the provisions that could be spared, whilst the main command were to return to the source of supply at Fort Dodge.

The return march was even more terrible than the movement toward the lakes. The main body of the command, on the third day after starting upon the return, waded through melting snow and sloughs filled with water and slush, beneath a drenching rain, until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. When thoroughly wet and exhausted they arrived at Cylinder Creek. Here they found the water out of the banks, covering the entire bottom, making a stream nearly half a mile wide. The water was at least three feet deep over the entire bottom and the main channel, some hundred feet in width, was from twelve to twenty feet deep. They spent perhaps an hour in trying various experiments, and looking up and down the stream in the hope of finding a way, or a place to cross. The day had been mild, but the wind now veered into the north, the rain turned to snow, and the mercury fell several degrees below zero. Not a man in the command had a dry thread on his body, but in the face of this pitiless storm they improvised a shelter out of a wagon cover and a single tent, which broke the wind from the north, east and west. The men then huddled together under this shelter, and remained without food from 4 o'clock Saturday afternoon until Monday morning. In the mean time the creek had frozen over so that the whole command with wagons and animals crossed on the ice



young Mr. Bunker

But appalling as was the suffering of the main command it did not equal that of the detachment which had gone to the lakes to bury the dead. The same day that the main body of the battalion arrived at Cylinder creek, this detachment had started across the prairie between the lakes and the Des Moines. They were delayed and wearied during the day in finding crossings over the swollen streams and through the overflowing sloughs. Night found them on the prairie in this terrible blizzard. The stronger and more resolute kept their feet all night, and prevented their comrades from perishing by constantly rallying them and preventing them from giving way to sleep. The next morning after incredible hardships they reached the timber on the Des Moines river. Two of their number, however, had lost their bearings in the blinding storm and perished on the prairie. It was ever after a source of grief to Major Williams that the final results of the expedition had been clouded by the sad death of these two young men. One, Captain J. C. Johnson, was commanding officer of the Webster City company. He was a man of noble bearing and with bright promise of future success and usefulness. The other, Wm. E. Burkholder, was an intelligent and manly young man, just elected treasurer of Webster county, and possessed of qualities of head and heart which gave him a strong hold upon the good will of his comrades. These two lives were sacrificed in the noble endeavor to aid in protecting the helpless settlers upon the frontier. Such is the story of a campaign, made by the young men who composed this volunteer battalion.

And when one considers that, from first to last, the command was as orderly, as ready to perform the most trying and dangerous duties as any organized force of regular soldiers could have been, it is not only a tribute to the men, but to the officers who commanded them, and especially to Major Williams, chief in command. He

could not appeal to a court-martial to enforce discipline. He had no guard house to give effect to his orders. His authority was simply the moral supremacy of a manly and energetic character, and throughout the campaign he retained the respect and confidence of the entire battalion. He was over sixty years old. He had a horse, and yet he probably did not ride one half the time. For hours he would pull through the deep snow-drifts on foot while a weary and foot-sore boy would ride his horse. He never lost his good nature, and in the face of the most trying situations bore a hopeful front. He would march all day, uncomplainingly through the snow, and at night accept the same fare as the other members of the command. He would pull on his boots in the morning—shrunken and hardened from the melting snow of the day previous—and start forward on the new day, fresh, smiling, cheerful and resolute. No young man, with any pride, could see all this without catching the inspiration which constitutes the hero.

In all the years of his after life he kept informed of the whereabouts of the men who comprised the battalion, and never tired of repeating incidents of the march, and telling stories illustrating the peculiarities of various members of the expedition. Such was Major Williams as a leader of men.

When Fort Dodge was finally organized as a third class city he was elected the first mayor. His pride in Fort Dodge, and anxiety for its growth and prosperity, were enthusiastic and unceasing, and his efforts in behalf of its improvements were constant and untiring.

The writer has given so far as he has been able to procure them, the principal facts in the life of Major Williams. But this story would be incomplete if he did not record some of his social characteristics. He loved cheerful companionship, being himself a good story teller. He was especially entertaining in relation to men whom

he had known, and events in which he himself had been an actor. And yet he never told a story offensive to good taste.

He was a mimic. His power of impersonation was inimitable. He was fond of the society of young men. He loved to spend an evening in the offices of some of the young men, and with peculiar drollery impersonate the characteristics of some of the young fellows not present. It is not likely that any young man in Fort Dodge escaped, on some occasion, being made the subject of his power of mimicry, not even Duncombe, his prospective son-in-law. And yet there was never any malice in his impersonations. They were simply an overflowing love of fun. The writer can never forget his impersonations of Major Armistead, one of the regular army officers at the post, who was killed at Gettysburg, commanding a division in the rebel army. His alternations in reading prayers in presence of the soldiers, in the absence of a chaplain, and the next minute swearing at some offender until it would fairly startle even an old soldier, afforded a peculiar subject for the Major's power of mimicry.

He and his entire family were musical. In the early days at Fort Dodge, the home of Major Williams was the only house in which there was a piano. It was a pleasant home. There was a sprightly and accomplished young lady in the family (now Mrs. Duncombe) and every member of the family could perform on some musical instrument. The coterie of young men then in Fort Dodge all lived at the hotel, and to occasionally spend an evening in this home, was one of the experiences that kept the boys from relapsing into heathenism. Mrs. Williams would play the piano. The Major, with his violin, would stand by her side and enter into the spirit of the occasion with the zest of a boy. Up to the day of his death he did not "hang up the fiddle and the bow," nor did the hand that drew the bow forget its cunning.

Major Williams was a Democrat, and a partisan. The writer was a Republican, and something of a partisan. In the fierce contentions and antagonisms of the earnest politics which immediately preceded the civil war, it required a philosophic temperament in men who widely and radically differed, to pass through the fiery ordeal without questioning personal motives. But it affords the writer pleasure to record this judgment of Major Williams: He was a man of sincere purposes, of patriotic impulses, of generous intuitions, and he was never happier than when performing the kindly offices of neighbor and friend.

NOTE.—Granville Berkley, pioneer lawyer of Webster City, and also of the older town of Homer, the first county seat of Webster county, secured the skull of Sidominadota, (mentioned in Governor Carpenter's article), and kept it several years in his office. This skull, when I saw it in 1857, showed many fractures, as though the head had been beaten with a heavy club, and portions of the integuments were still adhering to it. Mr. Berkley stated that he kept this ghastly relic because the murdered Indian had been his friend.—EDITOR OF THE ANNALS.

WASHINGTON'S NOTION ABOUT THE SENATE.

Sir John McDonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, was fond of relating this story to illustrate the need of an Upper House:

"Of what use is the Senate?" asked Jefferson as he stood before the fire with a cup of tea in his hand, pouring the tea into a saucer.

"You have answered your own question," replied Washington.

"What do you mean?"

"Why do you pour that tea into the saucer?"

"To cool it."

"Even so," said Washington, "the Senate is the saucer into which we pour legislation to cool."—*Philadelphia Record*.

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