

Iowa People and Events . . .

Duncombe Praised Associates

No more vividly personal picture of the Eighth General Assembly of Iowa has been handed down to us than that which Sen. John F. Duncombe, of Fort Dodge, drew off-hand, on being called to the presidency of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association in Des Moines on the 25th of February, 1886. As illustrating Mr. Duncombe's free and happy colloquial style, his camaraderie and the generous tone in which he was wont to refer to his contemporaries of other days—with not a few of whom he had many a contest in debate—we quote, somewhat freely, from this extempore address:

. . . When, on the 8th of January, 1860, I was sworn in as a senator, representing or misrepresenting the entire northwest quarter of the State of Iowa, I met there the elegant and able lawyer, John W. Rankin—long since passed over the dark river; and the eloquent and brave Cyrus Bussey, a general of the late war; the bold, rough, big-hearted Harvey W. English, a soldier of the Mexican war; the polished, handsome, scholarly Wm. F. Coolbaugh, whose sad death we all remember so well; the shrewd, calculator, Alvin Saunders, late United States senator from Nebraska; the able United States senator, James F. Wilson, who now represents our state in congress; the brilliant wit, A. O. Patterson, who we all hoped would be here and speak for himself; the analytic, sterling ex-congressman, L. L. Ainsworth, whose sharp sarcasms always caused the procession to move on where the way was blocked; the sound and cautious ex-Congressman Pusey, whose advice was always taken; the dashing Tom Drummond, peace to his ashes; the wideawake Col. John Scott, who now again honors the senate with his presence.

And there was honest Dan Anderson and Jarius E. Neal, and Udell and Bailey, and Taylor and Thompson and Davis and Angle and Judge Wilson of Dubuque, and Trumbull and Hammer and McPherson and Brown and Gray and Powers, and many more whose names I cannot now mention, but whose memories I shall ever cherish; and over all presided the good-hearted German, Nicholas J. Rusch, whose voice from

across the river I still in memory hear calling, the "Chintlemen fram Vebster has the floor," in that pleasant, good-natured manner, as I heard it twenty-six years ago; and then there was "Lin Kinsale," the newspaper correspondent, who from time to time, with his sharp pen, tormented and flayed Democrat senators and made giants of small men on the other side.

At the next session there was McCrary, since secretary of war, United States circuit judge, and now attorney of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company; and there was our own Benj. F. Gue and the polished Jennings and many that I have not now time to mention; but among them all I shall never forget the noble, brave man, Col. James Redfield, whose life's blood poured out on the altar of his country—than whom Julius Caesar was never braver. I shall never forget how, when the lightning flashed over the wire from Donelson, the word "victory," when the house and senate gave out one shout of triumph, he was almost overwhelmed with enthusiasm.

In the house I will only mention one man. Among the noble men there was Gen. Nathaniel B. Baker. At that time he had the most remarkable executive ability I ever saw. His quickness, his courage, his readiness, his wit, his sarcasm—his powers of argument were all in full activity, and he was an exceedingly dangerous foe on any field. His great big heart has long since ceased to beat, but Iowa can never forget its debt to General Baker, and his memory should never fade away. When the roll of these assemblies is now called, there is no response for Redfield, Robb, Rankin, Coolbaugh, Thompson, Judge Wilson, McPherson, Drummond and many others who answered the roll call at the sessions of the Eighth and Ninth General Assemblies and the two special sessions between 1860 and 1864. They have gone—conquerors in the battle of life. Their names are not forgotten; their acts aided very much to mold our laws and institutions, and bring beautiful Iowa into the proud position in the great sisterhood of states which she now holds.

General Baker's Advice to Aldrich

Perhaps Iowa never had a more popular or able public man than Gen. Nathaniel B. Baker. Chapters could be written upon his performance in both civil and military circles. Already, at 32 years of age, when he came to Iowa and settled in Clinton county in 1856, he had served a term as governor of New Hampshire, as its

last Democrat governor until later; then having espoused the cause of the Know Nothing party, suffered something of a political eclipse.

His first official service in Iowa was in the house of representatives from Clinton county in the Eighth General Assembly. Quickly his ability was recognized. A discerning newspaper man connected in official capacity with that assembly, left with Governor Gue two revealing pictures of this stalwart Yankee duly westernized:

Honest John Edwards, speaker, while a good presiding officer when everything went well, was only too glad, when storms arose, to call the gentleman from Clinton to the chair. As soon as Baker took up the gavel, order came out of chaos and the business was pushed along rapidly. . . . As a presiding officer he had many of the characteristics of James G. Blaine. He was, no doubt, somewhat arbitrary, as every good speaker must be; but he had an instinctive horror of seeing time wasted.

The autobiographical touch given the second picture adds to its interest, for the clerk referred to was none other than Charles Aldrich, founder of the Historical Department of Iowa, and author of this sketch:

The house had elected for chief clerk a young man who had never seen a legislative body in session two days in his life. . . . When the session was about four days old, Baker came to the desk . . . saying rather sternly: "See here, young man, I've got something to say to you . . . I sit right down there . . . where I can see you from head to foot,, and I notice when you are reading or calling the roll, that your knees tremble. I want to say to you that that is all _____ nonsense, and I don't want to see any more of it. You needn't stand in awe of anybody in this house! You are going to make a good clerk, and we all like you. Brace right up, my boy, and you are all right!"

A Train Robbery Tradition

Town platting and building largely came to an end in Iowa a good many years ago, but not quite so. A hundred Iowa towns have disappeared, but some new ones appear. One such is said to be in Adair county, near where the old stage road crosses the Middle river,

and near the Madison county border, half-way between Greenfield and Winterset.

There is an interesting tradition about this place. It runs this way. There is no documentary evidence in support, but the tradition was long known and passed from person to person. It was in the days when the celebrated and infamous James brothers were changing over from Confederate guerillas to Missouri bandits. The gang set out from their hiding place in Missouri to pick up some gold and they headed for Iowa. They knew the Wells-Fargo stages were transporting vast amounts of California gold to the east. They found out the route that many of these stages followed across Iowa. They would start with a stage robbery.

So, the James boys gang decided that a good place for such a hold-up would be on the old stage road right where it crosses Middle river and at the county line. They rode their horses to that place all ready for the hold-up. But, alas, there had been a miscalculation and the stage had just passed eastward and there wouldn't be another for a day.

What next? They exchanged information, and found that a Rock Island train would be passing through Adair county at a certain hour. So they turned their horses northward, and arranged their first train robbery to be near the town of Adair. They raided the tool house, loosened a rail, ditched the train two miles out of Adair, killed one trainman and got about \$3,000. The gang was followed into Missouri, but not overtaken. This is said to be the first train robbery that Frank and Jesse James pulled off. They found it easy and repeated several times in Missouri.

The town now being built at the place where the stage robbery was to have taken place, is called Stanzel, recently publicized in being able to retain its post office, although having only 33 inhabitants.

There is another well authenticated story about a time when the James brothers and their followers came into Iowa, and actually planned to raid the city of Des Moines. This was partly an act of revenge. Des

Moines had sent many soldiers to the war to preserve the Union. In their early career the James boys never forgot that their father had been murdered by a band purporting to be Union guerillas. They started for Des Moines and got into Iowa. But stragglers had attached themselves and Frank and Jesse became fearful that they would be betrayed and Des Moines would be ready to beat them off. That was not true, but the fear of it scared them away and they turned toward Kansas. The famous raid on Lawrence followed. And so a Kansas town and not the capital of Iowa got the big raid. These facts were stated by Mrs. Dr. Samuels, the mother of the James brothers, in an interview in a Kansas City paper many years later.

Of course Jesse James crossed Iowa on his way back home from the Northfield bank robbery up in Minnesota, in connection with Cole Younger, and was recognized at various points.

A Civil War Muster Roll

An addition to the Civil war records in the Iowa State Department of History & Archives recently received, is the muster roll of volunteers enlisting under Robert M. Semans, recruiting officer. They were enrolled under the call of President Lincoln in July, 1862, at Burlington, Des Moines county, Iowa, for Company D of the 25th Iowa Volunteers. This muster roll contains 95 entries, of which 33 apparently are individual signatures, the remainder being entered in the same handwriting.

The instrument contains in addition to the names of enrollees, their residence, largely from Burlington, Augusta, Benton and Union in Des Moines county, their ages, nativity, occupations, height, personal description, and date of enlistment. Robert M. Seamans, the recruiting officer and Orange S. Seamans, who joined this company, were brothers of Benjamin B. Seamens, of Burlington, and Middletown, Iowa, the grandfather of Harry W. Seamens of Chevy Chase, Maryland, who presents the muster roll to the state.

Benjamin B. Seamans was born July 12, 1835, near Middletown, Iowa, and died in Burlington March 13, 1901. Sometime prior to his death the *Burlington Hawk-eye* conducted a search for the identity of the first white child born in Des Moines county and at that time Benjamin B. Seamans was determined to be that person. His son, Bert B. Seamans was born on a farm near Middletown, Des Moines county, on February 28, 1871. He served on the police force in Burlington from about 1897 to 1906, and now resides in Middletown, New York.

The grandson and donor of the muster roll, Harry W. Seamans, was born in Burlington on March 23, 1898 and resides just outside of Washington, D. C., where he is a liaison officer in the office of Public Affairs in the U. S. Department of State.

Iowa Loss in Population Shift

Iowa again shows a loss in population the last three years, as shown by a survey released by the national census bureau at Washington. A shift to western and southwestern states is evidenced in the figures presented. The states which experienced the greatest population declines were largely in the south, north-east and the Dakotas. Generally, the pattern of shifting population was much like that of the preceding ten years from 1940 to 1950.

Twelve states lost population between 1950 and July 1, 1953. The bureau listed them as North Dakota, 3.5 per cent; South Dakota, 1.2; Iowa, 1.3; West Virginia, 3.9; Kentucky, 0.6; Tennessee, 0.4; Oklahoma, 0.6; Arkansas, 3.4; Mississippi, 1.2; Maine, 2.7; Vermont, 1.4; and New Hampshire, 1.2.

The only states which lost population in the forties were North Dakota, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Mississippi. The census bureau figures include persons in the armed forces stationed in each state, but exclude members of the armed services overseas. The estimate of Iowa's population on July 1, 1953, was 2,587,000. The

April 1, 1950, figure was 2,621,000. West Virginia, with the biggest loss, dropped from 2,005,552 to 1,927,000.

Nevada, which had the biggest gain the last three years, grew from 160,083 to 199,000. Second-place Arizona increased from 749,587 to 905,000.

A block of eight states in the west and southwest had population gains of 7.5 per cent or more between the 1950 census and last July 1. They were Nevada, 24.5 per cent; Arizona, 20.7; California, 14.2; New Mexico, 11.1; Colorado, 9.9; Wyoming, 9.2; Utah, 8.9, and Texas, 8.9.

Six other states had increases of 7.5 per cent or greater: Florida, 17.9 per cent; Connecticut, 9.0; Delaware, 11.1; Maryland, 9.7; Virginia, 7.5, and Michigan, 7.5.

States with gains between 5.0 and 7.5 per cent were: Washington, 5.9 per cent; Oregon, 7.1; Kansas, 5.3; Indiana, 6.4; Ohio, 6.7; New Jersey, 7.3; District of Columbia, 6.4, and Louisiana, 5.0.

Early Iowa Postoffices Abandoned

In the last few months there has been considerable talk about abolishing the postoffices in villages that have very small patronage. It is contended that their continuation helps enlarge the deficit of the postoffice department and it is claimed that their patrons could be given even better services if their mail was delivered by rural carriers.

In Washington county (Iowa) Richmond and Haskins postoffices would be abandoned if this policy is carried out, also Coppock, Cotter, and Pleasant Plain in neighboring counties.

In this connection, says Bruce Cowden, in the *Washington Evening Journal*, it is interesting to know that in the earlier days of the settlement of Washington county there were many such postoffices, with even smaller patronage than those it is now proposed to close. Some were even out in the open country, some-

times in a private home. In those days they were needed, for means of communication were scanty and slow, when people got around on horseback or in buggies, when the roads often were muddy or snow covered.

The ANNALS OF IOWA in 1931 listed the postoffices in Washington county which had been abandoned. They had been located every few miles, scattered over the county. . . Richmond is in a class by itself among the small villages in this county. It was founded in 1840 and presumably had a postoffice in the very early days of the county's settlement. Like the others that have passed out of existence, it didn't get a railroad, but continued to survive and still has its postoffice, although now threatened with losing it. Haskins, which may also lose its postoffice, came into being when the Milwaukee railroad was built across the county in 1902.

Harrison's Independence

The following items concerning President Benjamin Harrison are taken from Henry L. Stoddard's book, *As I Knew Them: Presidents and Politics from Grant to Coolidge*. Political correspondent Stoddard enjoyed for a century an unusual opportunity to form intimate judgments of public men:

In the 1880 national Republican convention Harrison might have made a bargain for the vice-presidency when the Conkling-Cameron forces were trying to break into different state delegations to capture votes for Grant. He was chairman of the Indiana delegation, supporting Blaine. During the balloting he was handed a card that is still in existence reading, "General Logan and Mr. Cameron will call upon General Harrison at his hotel tonight at nine o'clock."

The two chieftains of the Stalwart forces called promptly at the hour stated. They had authority to say that Harrison would be nominated for vice president if he would throw the Indiana delegates to Grant. During the interview they temptingly called attention to Grant's age, his strenuous career in war, and his eight tiring years as president, leaving Harrison to infer that a vice president elected with Grant would find himself president before the term ended.

"Gentlemen," said Harrison, "I am not ambitious to enter the White House following a hearse."

That ended the interview—and Harrison continued to vote for Blaine until the latter released his supporters in favor of Garfield. Eight years later Blaine showed his appreciation by urging Harrison's nomination.

History's Warning Finger

For five years in Europe, freedom was on the siding, and the main line was kept free for the expresses of facism and communism, flying insulting banners. We don't want that to happen again. It was that state of mind that put our freedoms in peril and made the last World War inevitable.

It is because of this lethargy, or this abnormal state of mind bordering on hysteria, that a rereading and reappraisal of American history, making clear the meaning of freedom, and how it came to us, is of primary importance.

Perhaps the old, reared in a day when men had time to read and think, do not require it; and the middle-aged must have understood the meaning of freedom before the twin devils of totalitarianism confused the millions with their clamor, and they may well reread what they once read and recall what they once thought. But the old are passing out, and the middle-aged will soon be old, and the future of our country is with the children of today who will be the citizens of tomorrow. That means that these children must be drilled in school in the meaning of Americanism, and how it came to us after a bitter struggle.

In this day of mortal combat between ideologies it is not enough that the oncoming generation should be against something; to give meaning to its opposition, it must be for something. When and if it has to march against the hammer and the sickle, we want it to have a banner of its own. School histories should stress the creed of the American way of life, or they fail in a primary function; and this creed should be impressed upon the minds of the oncoming generation.

—Claude G. Bowers.

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.