

Judge Cave J. McFarland

During the summers of 1856 and 1857, John Duncombe traveled frequently on behalf of Democratic Party candidates. His journal suggests that he had the ability, or at least the willingness, to talk with almost anyone about nearly any subject. Yet nothing could have prepared him for Judge C. J. McFarland, with whom Duncombe campaigned on several occasions. The diary says little about the content of their conversations or about McFarland himself, other than to note his "powerful build" and "voice like a bulldog." But other historical accounts offer additional details about this unusual pioneer jurist.

A large man by the standards of the day — he was six feet tall and weighed about 200 pounds — with a shiny black beard extending ten inches from his chin, Cave J. McFarland would have to be considered one of the oddest characters to appear on the Iowa frontier. A native of Ohio, McFarland came to Iowa as a young adult and opened a law office in Lee County in the 1840s. In 1851 he was elected to the state legislature, served one term, and in 1853 moved to Boonesboro, where he resumed his private practice. During his stint in the legislature, McFarland had strongly opposed creation of a 5th Judicial District in Iowa insisting that it would cover mostly uninhabited territory. He dismissed the idea as nothing more than "a scheme to give some poor lawyer up at Des Moines a salary of a thousand dollars a year as Judge." Ironically, McFarland himself was appointed to this very position by Democratic governor Stephen Hempstead in 1854.

As a judge, McFarland was known for his integrity, his wit, and his fine clothes. He was also known as a hopeless drunk; a political accident foisted upon the people of central Iowa; and an embarrassment to all self-respecting people in the frontier settlements where he held court. Seeing the judge in action at the 1856 Democratic convention, an observer remarked that McFarland was "a man with a flourishing crop of whiskers, whose luxurious growth doubtless exhausted such a large proportion of nutriment as to greatly affect the nerve center of the brain."

Perhaps it was the beard but more likely the booze that often turned McFarland's courtrooms into circuses. McFarland "was a good judge of whiskey," noted Polk County historian L. F. Andrews, and could never pass it by. The judge's fondness for liquor "developed that keen sense of humor which inspired the many incidents related of him." The liquor was probably also responsible for his premature death in 1863.

"What he lacked in legal acquirement, was compensated by intellectual capacity [and] stalwart common sense," Andrews wrote in his 1908 Polk County history. "His decisions were rarely reversed. Exact justice was his dominant desire, regardless of technicalities, lawyers, and often the law itself. The lawyers of the district were loaded with proof of that."

According to Andrews, "probably no one knew the Judge better than 'Dan' Finch, one of the foremost lawyers of the state. They were strong personal friends, traversed the circuit in a buggy, stopped at the same hotel, ate at the same table, and

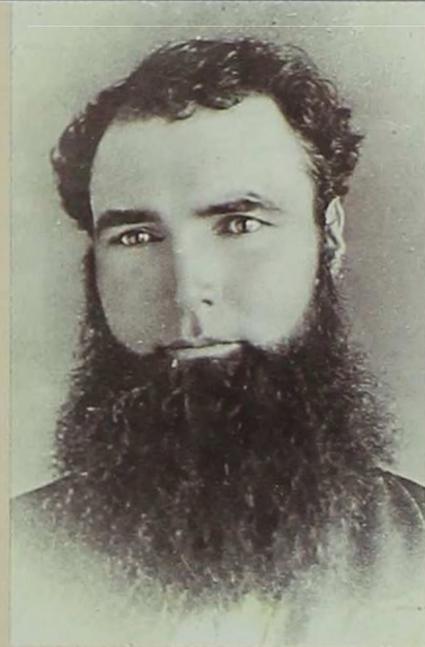
slept in the same bed, which, supposedly, would give 'Dan' an advantage in court, but when on the bench, personal friendships had no weight, and 'Dan' often declared that the Judge took especial delight in ruling against him."

Andrews recounted a Webster County story that shows the judge's heavy hand at work on the law. "A fellow had been captured at Fort Dodge with a horse in his possession he had stolen. The Judge happened to

be at Homer, the County Seat, and was told of the arrest. It was not court time, but he directed that the prisoner be brought to Homer at once, with the witnesses, which was done. He then directed the Sheriff to call in a Grand Jury. An indictment was found, when the Judge called him up and said to him: 'Now, young man, if you plead guilty, I will send you to the penitentiary for only one year, but if you don't, and put the county to the expense of trying you, I will send you to the "pen" until your hair turns white.' The fellow pleaded guilty, received the sentence, and served the time."

McFarland "was rigidly opposed to unnecessary and useless court expenses, and cut them off wherever possible," Andrews related. "In Marion County, a petition was filed by a man for a divorce. When the time came for the hearing, the man, his lawyer and a score of witnesses were present. The Judge, looking over the aggregation, asked the lawyer what he wanted of so many witnesses. 'To prove the allegations in our petition,' was the reply. 'Take your decree; I know the defendant,' said the Judge."

Of course, C. J. McFarland was not a typical frontier judge. Most judges, even in the rustic pioneer communities of the 1850s, were presumably sober and not inclined to share their personal views with the court, which was a McFarland specialty. Still, McFarland got the job done, in a manner of speaking. Working without much administrative support, in makeshift courtrooms — Duncombe's journal mentions one session of court held in a Fort Dodge stable! — frontier circuit judges had to be fairly knowledgeable about many areas of the law, able to think quickly and make firm decisions in sometimes hostile surroundings, and strong enough to travel for weeks on end during sessions of the district court. Soon enough, the court system would catch up with Iowa's rapid westward expansion. Until then, however, eccentrics like McFarland occasionally found themselves in positions of authority in frontier society.



Judge C. J. McFarland

— by Bill Silag

20th Warm day. Threatens rain

21 Rains. I am in my office.

22 Rains. I am in my office I take a little Brandy and Champaign to commemorate my 25th birth day

23 Rains. I am in my office. Spend the evening at Mrs Olcotts Sewing Society. regular kissing bee Nothing else in truth and in fact.

24 I am in my office Rains hard. Severe wind. Grows cold

25 Rains hard. In my office. Spend the evening at Mr Morrisons very pleasantly. Not on account of Miss Pauline particularly but it is a pleasant place to visit

Sunday 26 Pleasant day again The sun shines brightly Went to Church. heard the new minister in Hodges building Went to Webster City with Mr Wood.

27 Came back to Fort Dodge. Very cold wind. One of our horses [tires?] out and the other draws us in.

28 Cool day. A surprise party at Mr Whites. The time passed away quite pleasantly.

29 Cold day but very pleasant. Spend my time in the office Maj Williams returned from the river town last evening. Spend the evening at N B Morrisons

30 Cold morning. Froze quite hard. The sun shines very prettily. The Weather is rather fine after all

31 Rains a very little. I go down to Yell precinct to distribute tickets Leave them at John Beams, Thos Landreths & Frank McGuires. Cross the Des Moines to go to Homer Shoot a duck on the Des Moines McGuires boys go after it. I get to Homer just at dusk. Stay at old Gray Beard [Storming?] Smiths.

November 1st I am at Mr Smiths over night. Go to see Mr. Berkley, at his house Leave some American tickets or Know Nothing tickets for him, to give to such men as will vote for Fremont if they dont vote for Buchanan. (The 31st ought to have been written for today)

Nov. 2 Sunday. I go from Homer to Fort Dodge There is a cold raw wind blowing from the North. I am closely wrapped with a coat and shall and still it is very cold. I spend my time in my office after my

return. I hear from my sister It seems very pleasant.

3 Cool windy weather. Maj Williams preemption case with Karr comes off. Witnesses are heard until after midnight. Richards & Strow are attys for Karr I am for Williams. A very bitter contest, great deal of feeling in the case

November 4, 1856 Election day for President Great time in "Ameriky"! I am for James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. A Union party are the Democratic. Old Buck is the best man by all difference on the race.

Fremont is a young inexperienced man a Speculator, a bastard Democrat — and without any legislative experience of any kind except 21 days in the Senate of the United States He was nominated by a party of men from the North alone, 15 of the state in the South having only 8 delegates out of 500. Filmore is a good man but a Know nothing

I hope we shall be victorious as the only issue in the election between the Democrats and the Black Republicans is whether the people of Kansas shall have the right (and other territories) to make their own laws with reference to slavery and all other laws, or whether Congress shall do it for them.

The weather is quite cold. The wind blows severly. I spend the day trying Maj Williams case with Karr and am kept until about midnight again tonight We get through except a little matter of evidence of A [Eaton?].

5. Cold day. Spend my time in my office The Des Moines river froze over last night the wind blows quite hard.

We get Rooms at Old Timber . . . by noon he & the Judge are both very drunk

6th Cold day. Wind blows terribly. Froze hard last night. The ice over the Des Moines river is from 1¹/₂ to 2 inches in thickness.

7 Cold day. Awful wind blows constantly. Spend my time in my office

8 Cold day. Blows & there are a few flakes of snow on the ground.

9 Sunday. Sixteen of the Fort Dodge boys start out of the Fort to go to Eldora Hardin County for the purpose of seeing that W Williams, John F. Duncombe W.O. Ruggles and E. E. Colburn who are indicted for pulling down a house of John H Busey & tarring & feathering him and one Myron W Smith.

These men were tarred & feathered on the 21st of April 1856

10 Stayed all night at Skunk Grove. Cheyney keeps the house Our company consists of John Garaghty, N. B. Morrison, Thos Sargent, Byer, Solon Mason J S Cheyney, C. H. Vincent Danl Okeson, W M Koons, E A Albee J D Burkholder J. B. Williams, besides we who are indicted. We go to Eldora. Stop at Fullers. Judge McFarland and Old Jim W Woods alias Old Timber or Old Basswood is the rascal who gets 100\$ to prosecute the suit

11 To day H L Huff Pros Atty of Hardin County consents to allow a trial for the purpose of disposing of our cause and he waives any imprisonment. We get Rooms at Old Timber and by noon he & the Judge are both very drunk To drunk for our own special benefit. We try the case. Colburn & I stand at the side of Old Timber for the purpose of knocking him down if he uses any low vulgar language towards us.

He does not. We go home to the hotel & the Judge gets awful drunk, beastly drunk.

12th The jury stayed out all night on our case but finally as imprisonment had been waived and the Judge had told them of it our friends give in and we are found guilty. We are sentenced to pay a fine of 20\$ dollars each with nearly 40 Dollars costs, which we do with some little pleasure and start for home by way of Steam Boat rock. Take our dinner at Buck Eye Grove. Go on to Skunk and stay at Old Wheelers or Cheyneys I mean.

13 We had one awful high time last night. But no one of our number got real drunk although a great deal of liquor was wasted. Went home to Fort Dodge.

14 We had beautiful weather all the time we were away and an awful jolly time I never was on quite so big a spree.

Nov 15. Stayed at Fort Dodge, in my office. Nothing of importance The weather is rather cool.

16 Cool weather, quite frosty No news

17 Cool weather — frosty

18 Cool clear & frosty. Col Williams & Lemp here

19 Wind blows & it begins to snow a little, nothing of importance except Col Williams & Lemp have closed their trade

Williams give Lemp \$18500. for all his interest in Fort Dodge property of every kind

Nov. 20, 1856 🐾 start for home & the East generally.

*Take dinner at Delhi.
Very good Town but the
Rail Road misses it and
it must go down.*

Go in a two horse hack owned by the Western Stage Company

A severe snow storm has commenced & is blowing directly in my face: This is the first snow of the season, but it is rather hard for the storms of Iowa are really severe

21. Stayed all night at Iowa Falls at the old shanty kept by Larkins Iowa Falls just begins to develop itself There [are about] 10 or 12 stone buildings going up this season. They are building a stone tavern. I think this will be a fine town. The R R is located here & the stone water power &c must make it of importance & Estes one of the proprietors is a real driving man. He goes on with me to Dubuque. Travel along the Beaver valley to Cedar Falls today. The Beaver valley will be one of the finest farming districts in the State after a while

22 Stayed all night in Cedar Falls at a house kept by S[?]. The town has grown finely for the last year. They are just building a large stone mill here, the finest building so far inland in the State of the kind. I think this will be a fine inland city

I judge the present population must be from 1000 to 1500.

Waterloo is also a very fine growing town. It has improved very much since I was here a little less than a year since. It is the county seat of Blackhawk Co. They have just erected a fine court house, for the new county Waterloo is about the size of Cedar falls.

I go on to Independence The Roads are frozen

and the travelling has been very good until now it begins to be rather poor. The mud begins to thaw.

I dont like the soil as well East of Cedar Falls as I do West of there.

R.P. [Speer?] is about to marry. He is an old college mate of mine

Sunday 23 Stayed all night at a very fine Town (Independence) with about 1800 inhabitants. This Town is growing very rapidly The mud is deep and troublesome here. We lie over at Independence today. I spend the day rather pleasantly with Knickerbocker the R R engineer. It rains nearly all day and it is very muddy.

24 Start at 1/2 past 3 oclock for Dubuque Go by way of Quasqueton. Take dinner at Delhi. Very good Town but the Rail Road misses it and it must go down. Stayed a time in Rockville. Had a great time with old Jefferson & the stage driver. They are determined to make us stay over night. But we are equally determined that we will go on. We have a loud old time but finally carry the day & go on. Ride in the night to old Drakes 15 miles from Dubuque & there are compelled to stay until day light much to our annoyance

25. We go to Dubuque over & awful muddy road Arrive about noon I stop at the Julien house This is the best house in the city

Dubuque is a fine growing city, now containing about 15000 inhabitants. It is a little the largest city in the State. Keokuk will keep close to it in growth, but I think Dubuque will go ahead of any city in the State. A block of buildings is now being erected on ground [leased] for 20 years that will cost about \$100,000. The builders pay ground rent and leave the building at the end of the time. I go around and make the acquaintance of all the Directors of the RRoad that I can find

26 Visit around Dubuque Meet J.M. Lafferty. Have a pleasant time in Dubuque Start for Erie at Six oclock P M with Mrs Shaw & her two children in my charge

A cold severe wind blows I bought a ticket to Boston which cost me \$29.90 from Dunleith Rode all night in the cars until about 5 oclock arrived at Chicago

27 Started from Chicago 1/2 past seven oclock. Rode all day very pleasant day. Sun shines finely. No snow. Along the RR the forest is torn down through Indiana for a long distance Rode all night until 2 oclock P.M. arrived at Erie. West of Erie a poor son of Dr Vosbergs a drunken rascal that I took pity on and gave him

5.00\$ to help him home to Erie. Of course, Ill never get the money again. Stayed at Browns hotel

28 Got up at ten oclock. Called on my friends — took dinner at Marshalls. Had a very very pleasant time. In the evening called on Mr Otis Had an oyster supper Miss Tinker [s?] a song most beautifly. She is a sweet singer though her voice is rather to high for private singing. Stayed all night at Otises. ~~Fine sleighing.~~ Mud

29 Start to Wattsburg where I arrive about 2 oclock. C David & father in Town Ride home & see all my folks & for the first time saw Cousin [Selina Gleason?] Happy me, me, me!!

30 Sunday. Go to Church at Wattsburg. Hear Anderson preach. Would rather have heard Stevens

Dec 1, 1856 Stay at home Enjoy myself very well. Pleasant time. Very pleasant I am quite happy. It does me good to see my blood relations & friends. It is the greatest pleasure of my life to visit my friends.

I go to singing school. Have a real jolly time. I believe I get the load to imagine I am a steam engine.

2 At home. Pleasant day There is about 2 inches of snow on the ground. Mr Moors & numerous folks visit fathers folks It rains hard all night They stay all night.

3. Cold. Wind blows & it snows quite fast. Go to Lester Perkins horse back. He has become very pious

*he is a prodigious
Abolitionist. He thinks
more of Sumners speach
than he does of his Bible*

since I last saw him. He prays twice a day in his family I dont know whether he will hold out. He tries to preach Stay with him all night

4. Cold morning. Hard wind. Go to Beaver Dam. Stop with Dr Perkins. Dont enjoy my visit. I never have since Carrie died. Seems strange and cold & unpleasant. Dreary. My mind looks back with painful grief on the past.

I go to Mr Crooks Uncle Johns & Cousin & Burrets. Get home at 10 P.M.

5. Am at home until noon Go to Waterford with Wm on horse back in the afternoon Stay all night with Merri- man my old class mate — he is a prodigious Abolitionist. He thinks more of Sumners speach than he does of his Bible I guess. He has it bound in gilt edged paper. A speach that I look on as little short of treason.

6 Start for Erie on the Hack in the morning in company with Dr Spencer. Arrive at 11 A.M.

Go to Mrs Richards. Have a very pleasant visit with Ella. I really love her better than any other girl I know of. I think she would be a very good girl for a wife and if she was not quite so young I should be in favor of looking into the State of the case a little I think quite likely. Stay with Mr. Janes.

Sunday 7 Go to church with Mr Janes family. Stay with pleasure to see the faces of nearly all of my friends. Go to the Pres. Church in the evening. Stay all night here. Have a deal of fun with Miss Cornelia. [L?] is the principal subject.

8 Call around with my friends Call on Miss Sarah Moore. She is a pretty girl and an excellent player on the piano She has a piano that cost \$600. Call on Ella & Mrs Richards. Stay until 11. P.M Stay all night at Mr Otises

9 Visit the West Ward School See all the teachers Call on all the bankers & leave my card. Go to Mr Janes & get my dinner Start for the East about 1 oclock P.M. Reach Rochester at 8. P.M. Go to Uncle Charles house 92. Monroe Street. See my cousins again after an absence of nine years. Good sleighing

10 Beautiful but frosty morning. I ride all over the city with cousin Wilbur, visit the [G?] falls & mills.

The falls are about 70 feet high. Dont know the hight of the lower falls They are very fine

Rochester is a fine city with about 35000 inhabitants. The Courthouse here is a very fine building The Plymouth Church is also a very fine building of stone, with a steeple 250 feet high. There is an observatory here on Mount Hope

11 Stayed with Uncle Charles last night Started for Albany at 8.35." AM

The country along the road is rough and rugged Take it as it is and I rather love the wildness of the sceniry Scrub pines or spruce groves on the rocky peeks

Arrive at Albany just at dark. It has been a real dark dreary day. One of the real old dreary fellows

that makes one feel as if his friends were a great ways off from him. Stayed all night at [Stanwix?] Hall where I pay \$2 for Supper & lodgings

12th A very fine Statehouse. I dont like Albany very

Have a very pleasant visit with Ella. I really love her better than any other girl I know of.

well from what I can see The scenery around the city is beautiful. The Hudson river is rather fine. I start for Boston at 8 A.M. on the Western R.R. It is an awful rough country around Kinderhook near which Expresident Van Buren resides It would look riding from Boston to Albany as if it would be utterly impossible to build a R Road

They are compelled to follow the little ravines & streams. Pittsfield Mass is about as old a looking town as I saw. Springfield on the Connecticut river is a pleasurablely situated & pretty place. The largest Armory in the United States is here. Worcester is a very old looking town. I arrive at Boston at dark. Stop at the City Hotel.

13 Get up early in the morning and start out to look at Boston. I travel out across or nearly across the Bridge leading to Cambridge Get a beautiful view of the city. Go back to the Boston commons. This I call the prettiest place for a public walk of any place in any of the American cities unless it may be the Mall at Washington is superior. I go up through the Statehouse Look all over the city Have a fine view from here of all parts of the city and Charleston & Cambridge Also of the harbor and Bay. The Bunker hill Monument is really the greatest monument to the city. It lies directly north of the public common & Statehouse. The Capitol is a very fine building. The Library is also very fine. I go from here to the Museum. The Boston Museum is a very fine building & it is indeed a fine museum. Not superior to Barnums however and as a curiosity the Patent office at Washington is superior to either

The Bunker Hill Monument is about 220 feet high and cost about \$20,000

Started at [?] 2 P.M. for Portland Maine passed

through old witch killing Salem & Portsmouth N Hampshire, crossed the Saco & Piscataqua Rivers.

The lowlands along the coast are covered with thousands of Hay Stacks built on stakes to prevent the water troubling it at high tide. The lands are covered with rock and scrub timber

In thirty years the West will have the power to control the East if it chooses so to do. I arrive at Portland $\frac{1}{2}$ past 6 P.M. Stop at the United States Hotel

*The girls of New England
I rather fancy. They
are bright and sprightly
but a little to formal*

The weather has been warm and pleasant thus far No snow on the ground of any account since I left Albany

The girls of New England I rather fancy. They are bright and sprightly but a little to formal Still they are generally smart, quick spoken rather wanting grace on account of their quick motions.

The Western girls are generally more fun and I think more pleasant in their manners.

I am however rather a poor judge of the girls I like them all to well to speak of their faults!

The East seems to old and the West to new. Cant find [Paradise?] any where on earth

Dec. 14, 56, Sunday I am at Portland, Maine Hear Dr Lord Pres Dart. Coll. preach at the Cong. Church

Also hear Dr Dwight. Excellent sermons

It snows and rains together quite hard making it very disagreeable travelling indeed

15 Go all over the city with exmember of Congress Rufus McIntire. The Custom house is a very fine building, built of gray granite. A new hotel now being erected is a very fine building indeed

There are other buildings that look very well.

I visit the English Steam Ship Anglo Saxon — take a glass of brandy with the burser & captain. Go all over the ship.

The wind blows severely & the pavements are covered with ice. I go up to the Observatory where I get a fine view of the city and harbor.

Portland is destined sometime to be a rival to

Boston, or I mistake It has a far better harbor. It and Norfolk have the best harbors in the United States.

They are the only harbor in which the Great [?] ship can enter. Now building in Great Britain.

The R Road from Detroit has not a break of gauge throughout its entire length to Portland and when the rivers are bridged it will be the great road of the East. I leave this beautiful city, pass through Lawrence & arrive at Boston about eight P.M

16 Stopped all night at the City Hotel. Had good sleep. Started for New York passed through Providence Hartford & New Haven These are fine looking cities very fine indeed The Connecticut is a beautiful stream. The only nice looking land that I saw in New England was along the Connecticut Arrived at New York about 8 P.M. Stopped at the Clarendon house.

17. I rambled all over the city of New York visited the Palace the Aqueducts and all the main parts of the town Visited the Museum & Burtons Theater Saw the Serious family performance.

18 Remain New York until the afternoon Go to Philadelphia where I arrive about dark At the Girard house Visit the National Theater See the Forty thieves performed.

19 Visit all parts of the city, Fairmount & all Visit Girard College

This is the most complete building in the United States. The House of Refuge & States prison are places that for the immense strength and solidity of the walls around them do great honor to the city

The United States Mint is a splendid building & a magnificent Cathedral is just being built. Start for Washington in the afternoon

20 Passed through Baltimore just before dark last night and arrived at Washington City about 10. P.M.

Stopped at Willards Hotel where I stayed last night. Today I visit Congress. Dont think the Congress of the US at present is a very extraordinary body

21 Sunday I visit around the city. Go to the Washington Monument the Smithsonian Institute. It is the coldest day I have felt this season. ~~I freeze my~~ Catch a severe cold

22 Look around the city Mr Henn & Senator Jones of Iowa call on me at my room, we conclude Mr. Henn & I that we will start for Cleveland on Tuesday —

tomorrow I with Judge Knapp look all over the City. Visit all the curiosities — look at all the large buildings and big men

23 Very cold.

☞ visited president Pierce today in company with Mr Henn & Gen Jones.

I was highly pleased with him. He thought as he expressed it that there was no way to [prevent?] treason if preachers continued to preach as they had done unless it was to withhold the supplies from them.

Judge Knapp of Iowa Mr. Henn & myself start for Cleveland at four P.M. Get to Harrisburg at daylight

24. Get to Pittsburg before dark. Stop at the St Clair house. This is an awful dirty city. The sidewalks are covered with filth frozen down.

We go to the glass works. This is a great curiosity, very great indeed. The imitation of silver is a very remarkable thing indeed. It is just commencing. It makes a great show and is a fine thing for the codfish

*Today I visit Congress.
Dont think the Congress
of the US at present is a
very extraordinary body*

aristocracy like [?] when they want to look like silver.

Saw a poor fellow slip down on the walk turn round & say "kiss my ___ but before he got the last word fully out he pitched length wise into a cellar close by.

25 *Christmas* Start at 1/2 past 3 for Cleveland. Get to Alliance Are compelled to wait Finally go on. Get to Cleveland about noon. Snow about 8 inches deep. Go through the city Mr Henn looks at at least a half doz pr of gloves at as many different stores before he is suited Start for Erie at 20 m. past 3. Arrive at Erie at dark. Stay all night at Browns Hotel. Visit at Mrs Richards Stay all night with Otis. Call on many of my friends.

26 Stay all day nearly and all night with Mrs Richards family I am very fond of Ella Richards

27 David comes out after Mrs Richards Ella Willie &

myself we have a very pleasant ride in the sleigh home.

How pleasantly the time past. To get at the facts in the case I am really in love with Ella though I would not begin to own it! No sir. She is to young ever to think of such an old hard case as I am no doubt of that. Find all the folks well at home

28 Sunday. I stay at home Mrs Richards and our folks go to church

They have a pleasant time & so do I.

29, 30, 31. The time passes off very pleasantly indeed I never was any hapier since the death of my wife

I have really had a pleasant time.

January 1, 1857 I am resolved to make this year one of profit and pleasure. I hope to do a great deal of good to keep from any more bad habits and buck up all that I have.

Let what will come I intend to keep out of all bad scrapes and bad company.

This is a real fine winter day. I commenced it in company with my cousin Selina & my friend Miss Ella R.

I feel happy and I dont know of any reason that I have to feel otherwise.

2 Fine winter weather I am at my fathers. I am happy. happy! happy!!

Saturday Jany 3 I start with father Mrs Richards, Ella, & Willie to go to Erie. It snows & blows quite hard. Storm increases We get very cold before we get to Erie. Really this is an uncomfortable day. I get to Mrs Richards we have a great time in building a fire Finally we get all things in order. I stay in the house the balance of the day.

Bid father "good by" He goes home through a very severe storm.

Sunday 4 I stay all day at Mrs Richards I have a fine oyster dinner Never spent a day any more pleasantly. In the evening Mrs Richards goes to church and Ella & Willie remain with me. Ella is certainly a worthy girl. She is frank and high minded. I spend the evening very pleasantly indeed — very.

Monday 5 I stay at Mrs Richards until 10 AM. Then go to Mr Janes get dinner return and bid my friends "good by" I "salute" them and say farewell.

Take the cars for the West at half past 2 P.M.

Tuesday, 6. Arive at Chicago It is quite cold. No incidents except that on our way the train ahead of us



Duncombe lodged at the DeMoine House on a January trip to see the legislature.

SHSI (DES MOINES)

ran off the track We were compelled to pass it on a very slippery place on a high embankment.

Wednesday, 7. Start at 10 last evening for Rock Island & Iowa City. Cross the Mississipi on the bridge. Get to the city about 10 A M Stopped at the Tremont house. Went over to see the Legislature.

Saw Wooden. bot a Vol of Greens reports

Started at $1\frac{1}{2}$ past 2 oclock P.M. for Fort Des Moines. Very cold & frosty. Wind in our face. Rode in an open sleigh. rode all night. About 2 A M. sleigh tipped over and turned us all out on the prairie Real cold. Stopped the horses after they had draged the driver about 30 rods. Fixed up the sleigh. Got to [Grinnell?] about day light.

Thursday 8th Go on to Fort Des Moines. Arive there about 3 P.M.

Look all over for cousin Frank Gleason.

Stayed at the Des Moines house.

Left my fur collar

Friday, 9 Cold stormy day Start in stage for Fort Dodge. No news on the way & no incidents Stay all night at Boonsboro.

Saturday 10 Very cold stormy day. Storm right in my face Take dinner at old Smiths. Good dinner

have my wolf skin coat on — His dog wants to eat me up & I object to it at present. Arive at Fort Dodge at about dark or a little after having being absent from the Fort since the 20th day of November last & having visited the large cities & great men & my friends dear to me by love and the ties of nature and blood. Having had a very very pleasant & interesting time.

Sunday 11. At Fort Dodge. Stay in my office & read my letters.

Cold & quite stormy They tell me here that they have had the awfulest cold stormy bitter time that they have ever known anywhere as in any country.

On the night the 2d of December men absolutely got lost in the town and could not find their way home, but came very near perishing with the cold and awful snow storm which was never surpassed The snow blew through the tightest roofs of the houses and in houses that had been called secure in the morning the snow was [laid?] in huge heaps

Several persons have frozen to death. One coming from Webster City here froze just out of town

Solomon Hand froze so that he has had both his

hands & both his feet taken off — an operation that I would die twice before I would have done, I think. Cant tell though. Three men froze to death on the Iowa river just beyond Alden or Iowa Falls.

The month of December has from all accounts been an unprecedented month in the West & particularly in the State of Iowa.

12 In my office all day writing letters as hard as I could.
Cold day

Tues 13. Start for Webster City with my horses & Shaffners sleigh. Go to Tolmans pay up my interest to School fund coms. Go to Homer then to Webster City, where I arrive just after dark.

It is a very cold day. The horses are as white as snow & frost can make them.

Wednesday 14th Last night was the coldest of the season. The thermometer indicated over 30° below zero.

I had a fine visit with Willson last night his bro is quite sick with the lung fever.

Start for Fort Dodge about 10 A.M.

Roads bad — very bad. finally get home to Fort Dodge

Thursday 15th At home in my office. Cold & quite dreary I am reading papers and writing letters

Friday 16th Very cold. Stay all night in my office

Am quite happy I am boarding at John Garaghty Esq. a Catholic family and very fine family indeed.

Saturday 17th Very cold — 22 degrees below zero, at 9 AM

Stay in the office all day enjoy myself very well.

Sunday 18th ☞ 34. degrees below zero, 8. A.M. Coldest day of the season so far. I looked at the thermometer

Monday Jany 19. 10 degrees below zero and a wind has blown from the south since early yesterday morning I have been very busy reading the newspapers today to catch up with the times past. I have made up my mind to enjoy life and not quite so carelessly pass along. I mean to read some in the Bible after I get up. It cant harm me and I know from experience that it will have a tendency to make me virtuous and honorable

I resolve that I will not endorse for any body.

White is the only one that I feel under any obligations to assist in this respect and I dont think I will help him any longer by doing that.

Tuesday January 20th 57 The mercury indicates about two degrees below zero. The day is rather stormy.

Spend my time in my office. Read a good deal in the news papers. Write a good deal and read some law.

To day when Mr White presents his note to me to sign I hand it back to him I am resolved never to indorse in my own name for any body. unless I have the security in return for so doing. If I have I may. But I will not take doubtful security or endorse without security. I have a long talk with White and I really feel sorry for him. But I declare I dont see how I can help him and I dont mean to embarrass myself to help any one.

I advise him to write to Henn & Col Jesse Williams.

Indeed I feel sorry for him. I hope he will stop playing cards if he wants to succeed.

Alby shot

Wednesday Jany 21st Mercury indicates 21° below zero This is really a very cold climate But few climates that beats it for cold. I hope it may become warmer after a while.

I have spent my time in my office. Read the Evening Post through. Had a long talk with White. Read a good deal of law and wrote three pieces for the Sentinel

My health is very good I am trying to live honestly and honorably. I hope to succeed well. I sometimes feel a little downspirited. But never get the blues. I will be content. I will not murmur. I am prospered as well as I could expect to be.

I gave five dollars to Dodder the Presbyterian preacher.

He is a good little fellow and I wish I could give him more.

I am resolved that Dr Pease shall not be judge of this county. See how it will turn out!

Thursday January 23d Cold sharp day about 20 below zero The cold weather keeps up pretty well. I spend my time in my office. Read law attend to answering my correspondents, and other matters of interest.

I have since my return made a practice of reading a few chapters in the Scriptures immediately after getting up in the morning. This I find is really a great pleasure

I am not merely cursorily reading but studying severely. I have read the book of Ecclesiastics through several times until I now begin to find it very interesting.

I read some law. I am determined to post myself thoroughly in the law.

I close the day by calling on the family of Thos Sargent, inviting him to become County Judge &c

Close the day reading the "Tempest" in Shakespeare

Friday January 23d, 1857 Got up about half past seven o'clock this morning. Put away my bed, built my fire, swept and dusted my office. Washed my face and combed my hair and then read 10 chapters in the Bible. At 9 AM went to Breakfast at John Garaghty's Esq. Had hash, potatoes, wheat bread frozen Plumb Sauce, buckwheat cakes, fried cakes, Cuckey's, and a glass of Good Cold Water with an excellent appetite. Went to my office stirred the fire went to the taylor and get my coat that I had torn in a scuffle, paid the taylor /50 cts, went to my office, Read law two hours, got tired, went to the office of Robbins Safford & Co, played two games of chess with Saml Robbins. He beat me both times, because I was so careless. Went and eat a piece of pie for dinner. Met Saml K Wright who wished to see me, had a note of Six Hundred Dollars against the estate of Johnson I suspect that he is playing the rascal. He thinks that he is doing a heavy business. I finally draw out an affidavit and swear him to it. From his appearance I conclude that he has either forged the name to the note or that it is a

Went to Breakfast at John Garaghty's Esq. Had hash, potatoes, wheat bread frozen Plumb Sauce, buckwheat cakes, fried cakes, Cuckey's, and a glass of Good Cold Water

secret rascality in some way. I go over to the County Judge and get all the amounts but that approved. That the Judge agrees not to approve without citing him to appear on some future day.

I go down the river on the ice to where the widow Johnson lives and enquire of her about the matter. She

tells me Wright said to her that he signed Johnsons name to the note! I give her directions to get him to say it before somebody else. Go back to the Fort, 2 miles. In going down I slip & fall on an icy side hill. Dont get hurt any though. Get my supper. Go to my office. Bring in my coal for a fire. Wrote to three [?] & am — this minute writing [him?] & I expect finishing reading the "Tempest" by Shakespeare will finish the day. [Minutely?] cold. About 10 degrees below zero

Saturday Jany 24th 1857 Spent the day in my office. Very pleasant winter day. the mercury indicates about zero. I spend my day very pleasantly in my office reading law. But a part of the day I spent playing chess

Sunday 25th I spent the day in my office. Very pleasant winter day. I read considerable and talk more.

Monday 26th Warm South wind blows in the morning. Read law nearly all the forenoon. In the afternoon played four games of chess, with [Sam?] Robins & Thomas Sargent. Beat twice and got beat twice.

27 Warm pleasant day I spend my time in my office nearly all day

Wednesday Jany 28th 1857 Warm pleasant day. I spend my time in my office. Have a great time snowballing & sliding down hill.

Buy a sled or sleigh.

29th I start today with Judge J D Maxwell for Webster City by way of Homer. I have about \$900 in Gold to pay at Webster City for property there. I endorse a note at Reeses as second endorser for Morrison to help him raise the money which he was to raise for me in consideration that I should give him a half interest in the property at Webster City. I am perfectly safe as the property is all in my name even if I had to pay the note or I would not indorse for him.

I arrive at the City at about 3 o'clock. Stay all night at Willsons. This has been a beautiful day

Friday Jany 30th 1857 Start from Webster City after paying over my money and getting every thing straight for Fort Dodge where I arrive at noon. It snows a little and the wind begins to blow. I spend the balance of the day in my office. It grows quite cold towards night

Saturday Jany 31st 1857 Cold. Mercury 15°s below (0). Quite an unpleasant day to be out. I begin a suit for Michael Caligan vs John C. I have determined to take

a retaining fee in all cases that may arise. I take \$10. of Caligan fill my papers and attend to the matter leaving the notice with Garaghty. I have tried to spend this week as virtuously as I well can reading 6 chapters in my Bible every morning before breakfast.

Good by pleasant week!

Sunday Feb. 1st 1857. Cool morning but not very cold. I get up before day light, and after Breakfast read several chapters, at least a dozen in the Bible. I then write a letter to P [June?] Then go to Church in the School house and hear Elder Dodder preach a very good, but not smart sermon. Then go to dinner. Go to my office and have long talk with Maj Williams. Go to supper talk with Maj long time after supper, then write a funny letter to Ella Richards — political in answer to one she wrote me before Election. Build up a good fire and get warm and prepare to go to bed. I dont think I am much wiser for having lived this day. I have gained no new idea but some of my resolutions for good are strengthened

Monday Feb 2. 1857 Pleasant day. Thaws I spend my time in my office, getting up the papers in the Caligan Replevin suit & writing a host of letters also trying a suit against Wright on his claim against the Johnson Estate

Tuesday Feb. 3. A severe South wind. A chilly morning but not cold I go over to Webster City to try a case for Binkly deft vs. Williams plff. I have a jury. Jury find that both parties shall pay the costs. Finally they cant agree. Parties settle it.

This is really a victory for my client. I stay all with W C Willson who returns from Iowa City to night where he has been a representative for this section during the past winter.

Wednesday Feb 4, 1857 I leave Webster City in the morning. Get home about 1. oclock P.M. Willson gives me a hint of an attempt to remove the Land office. When I get home I find a great excitement up in relation to the removal of the Land office. Mr Henn having written a letter to the effect that Merritt in the office has signed & circulated a petition for the removal to Algona & has with Van Antwerp the register written a letter to Washington urging the removal. We get up petitions & have them printed & prepared to [?] on to have them over thrown in their calculations. Some of the Town is a little excited and some as usual cool.

This world is made up of more fool than wise men or I am mistaken.

Thurs, Feb 5, 1857 I go over to Webster City and get 110 signers to my remonstrance against the removal of the Land office and get back about dark. We get up several letters and with the names already on hand we send off 310 signers to Jones our U S Senator.

Friday Feb 6th The weather has been fine for a long time past until today. It storms & blows very bad indeed.

I go to Tolmans to get signers to my petitions but

*This day I must own,
I feel quite cross.*

it could not be done the weather is so bad

Saturday F. 7. One of the stormiest days of the season. In my office attend Caligans case before the County officers Write 12 letters

Sunday Feb 8, 1857 Spent my time in my office Wrote home & a long letter recommending Thos Sargent for Register. Spent my time very pleasantly.

Monday Feb. 9, 1857  Spent my time trying suits for Caligan. [?] one and one not decided. A very queer case. Stormy day.

Go to Homer to see Mr. Snell & Butterworth at the answer to Mr Snells letter to Maj Williams. The thermometer falls to 14 below zero. This is the stormiest day I ever saw.

Feb 10 Stayed all night at Old Smiths in Homer. Had a long talk with Snell. He feels all right I think or appears so at any rate. Very cold. I ride to Fort Dodge Have 102 names to my remonstrance

Wednesday Feb. 11th 1857 Cold weather. I spend my time in my office. I begin to feel a little dul & bilious. This day I must own, I feel quite cross. Not that I have anything to scold about but it is in my bones and I cant get it out. I think if I had a wife I should be quite likely to scold her if she was not to good natured for me to do it. To day my business I guess will not pay my board. I commence boarding to Schaffners tavern This is one reason for my cross feelings.

Feb 12th It thaws the snow is getting quite soft. I am doing but little to day. I have been troubled with a

sort of [?] disquietude for two or three days. I dont exactly understand it. I had a bad dream last night about my sister. Strange that I should notice it

Friday Feb. 13th 1857 I spent the day in my office. I read a little talked a little, felt rather foolish and dul as if there was about to be a thaw. In the evening I went over to the home of my friend Tom Sargent, and played chess with him. Talked a long time with him about having him run for County Judge. We concluded it would be best to play shy.

Saturday. Feb. 14th Last night ☔! it rained hard and thawed the snow away. In the night it thundered & lightened a good deal.

To day it has thawed all day. The snow is very soft and slopy. Every appearance would indicate a change in the weather for spring. But I dont expect any such good luck.

I hope we may have an early Spring. I spend my time in my office to day. I have accomplished a fair days work to day in my office. This week has been rather lonesome to me

Sunday Feb. 15th 1857 Beautiful day. I attend church. Hear Rev. Dodder preach. Very excellent young man. Preached a very excellent sermon

I spend the balance of the day in my office reading the Bible and Butlers Analogy of Religion The day passes away very pleasantly indeed

Monday Feb. 16th Beautiful day. The thaw has continued until it is getting quite sloppy in the streets. Foggy weather I am very busy. I get Thos Caligans account approved by the County Judge. Have a long trial in Wright vs Johnsons Estate in the County Court.

Spend the evening at Maj Ws very pleasantly, drinking [?] playing chess & having [?]

Tuesday Feb. 17th 1857 Beautiful morning. Spent my time in my office

18 Beautiful day. Spend my time in my office

19 Beautiful day. Spend my time in my office.

20 Beautiful day. Yesterday I issued the No. of the Sentinel. This is my first act as Editor de facto of the Sentinel.

The boys laugh at me a great deal. Call me Mr Editor.

21st Pleasant weather. In my office. Begin to feel a little of the Spring fever

22 Sunday. I go to McKnights and back on the ice of the river, to let him know that Humbolt [isnt quite restored?]

Monday 23, Feb. 1857 Warm pleasant day. It continues thawing Spend my time in the office.

24 ditto

25 ditto

26 ditto

Spent the evening at Maj Williams with Colburns family Sargent and Boott.

27 Warm pleasant day To day we get off the Second number of our paper for which I had to work considerably myself in correcting the proof sheet &c

Saturday 28 Feb 1857 Beautiful morning, but quite cool. Rise at daylight

March 1 1857 Attended church at 1/2 past ten. heard Dodder preach Did not think he preached a very good sermon. Was not much interested in it

This is a real cold day Wind blows hard from the North. Willson and Funck come over from Webster City

March 2 Monday. ☔ Thermometer 7 degrees below zero at daylight. Bright sun shine. Weather looks beautiful, but feels cold

Tuesday March 3 In my office, close. Cold about 5

Mercury 18 degrees below zero. Rather cold for Spring.

degrees below zero

Wednesday March 4 Cold day In my office James Buchanan President.

5 Cold day. In my office.

Friday March 6th 57 Cold day. I go down to Nettletons to get Bush papers in his law suit. Had a great deal of trouble in this suit.

7 ☞ Mercury 18 degrees below zero. Rather cold for Spring. Spent my time in my office

Sunday 8, 1857 In my office. Snows a little About zero cold Wrote letters nearly all day. Eat dinner at Thos Sargents

Monday 9th Cold morning Mercury 10 degrees below zero.

Spent my time in my office writing & preparing for Court.

Nothing of importance. Read several letters from Pa. Has been warm there. No frost in the ground

Tuesday March 10th 1857 Cold morning. I spend my time in my office. Little excitement about county officers.

Wednesday March 11th 1857. For several mornings past the mercury has sunk below zero but the days have been beautiful

Thursday March 13th 1857 Cold morning. N B Morrison & I go up the Lizard River to get a set of delegates nominated for county officers. The wind blows quite hard and it is unpleasantly cold.

Large meeting at John H Williams.

Friday March 13th 1857. Cold morning. Pleasant day I go around and rally the boys out for our Convention which will be held here tomorrow.

Saturday March 14th 1857 Cool morning and chilly day Great excitement over our town Election. Wm H. Merritt unites with a set of Know Nothings, and in order to carry his ticket places my name at the head, with a few other reliable men as delegates for the convention. The grand move is by my enemies to get me as one of the convention to nominate county Judge, and have enough delegates on the ticket to get W N Messervey nominated County Judge.

We had a bitter fight, and I never felt more interest in so small a matter. But as usual I make every exertion to conquer The Irish are deceived by John Garaghty. And from this day I set him down in my Journal as a treacherous man. He is, or else he is a fool in this matter, for he votes for and assists in nominating a set of Know Nothings on his ticket the worst enemies he has. He could not be mistaken I think. He has deceived the Catholic priest & he has electioneered for this bastard ticket with all his might. I mark John Garaghty Esq Attorney and counselor at law, as

a man that I will not trust in the future politically. He has done a base act, or else he has been very easily duped, either of which disqualifies him for my trust. But I only mark him in my own mind. He shall not know anything about it.

Our fight goes on. But thank my friends and my

We had a bitter fight, and I never felt more interest in so small a matter. But as usual I make every exertion to conquer

own Bull-dogitiveness, I beat and get every delegate of the 13 my own ticket elected. One of them by only 1, majority and the balance by 9 majority thanks also to a few shrewd Irishmen.

I get every vote of the convention as a delegate 113, run by my friends for success & by my enemies placed first on the ticket to make it carry & kill my electioneering.

This little fight, and the very narrow escape, gives me reason to increase my energy every time I go to battle.

Sunday March 15th 1857 Warm pleasant day. The snow is melting very rapidly. I attend church and hear Dodder preach.

March 16th 1857. Warm pleasant day. I go and attend the Democratic County Convention for the nomination of County officers We nominate Samuel Rees for County Judge. Tom White for Treas J Garaghty for Recorder L Davis for county assessor, J H Williams Sh[eriff] A. Mesmore Drainage Coms.

A very good list of officers.

March 17th 1857 Warm days I receive all the British Reviews for the year 1856 and a part for the present year

I mean to attend to my own comfort a little more in the future, and not work so hard for others.

18 Republicans hold their Convention and nominate L. L. Pease for County Judge, John Brady for Sheriff, W E Brooks for Clerk A Carpenter treasurer, Wm Burkholder Recorder F B Drake Surveyor Dont know how

it will turn out but I think that Pease will be defeated.

Thurs 19. I go in my sleigh down to old Judge Johns to get him to serve a writ that I have against Benj [McPhiters?] for a span of horses of Saml Hayden which the Sheriff refuses to serve I feel rather poorly. The snow is nearly all gone in the roads. So that the sleighing is rather poor. The stage comes up tonight on wheels and the wagoning is excellent.

Friday 20 It Rains a little this morning. The weather indicates a break up in our winter. No one would be more anxious to see it than I am.

Saturday 21st Mar. 57 Three men, Messrs Howe, Wheelock and one name forgotten came here from Spirit Lakes, on the North line of the State in Dickinson County, who brought the news that the entire settlement on the Spirit Lakes had been destroyed by the Indians which settlement consisted of 43/ persons in all We call a meeting at the School house for the purpose of seeing who will go to their relief. We appoint another meeting for tomorrow.

Cool chilly weather.

Sunday 22, Mar 57 Cold chilly day Another meeting for the purpose of devising ways and means to relieve the Settlers attacked by the indians on Spirit lakes is held to day and the five men appointed as a committee brought in the report that about 30. had volunteered to go to the lakes and that there would probably be about 75. volunteers with those expected from other points in the County. Also that the probability was that we should be able to raise provisions &c for the trip. The committee consisted of Messrs N B. Morrison, E.E. Colburn, C B Richards, H. Beecher and myself.

Monday March 23, 57. Cold chilly morning Very cold weather for the season of the year. We meet again to devise measures to relieve the Settlers on the lakes. New volunteers are constantly coming in. We fix on tomorrow for a start. A company of 17 men came in this evening from Webster City. Some from Border Plains some from Homer

Tuesday, March 24, 57  A body consisting of about 75. men were organized into three companies, viz Company "A" under command of E.E. Colburn, (who declined going, and afterwards C.B. Richards, Captain) Company "B", who chose me to command them Company "C", who chose Mr Johnson of Webster City to take charge of them as their captain. All under

the command of Maj Wm. Williams of Fort Dodge.

We get one waggon from Webster City drawn by three yoke of oxen. One waggon drawn by Geo McClures mules, one drawn by Dawsons horses, one drawn by Hardmans horses. We start about noon. The snow banks in the ravines are from 4 to 10 feet deep The water is rising. The snow is melting. and the roads are becoming extremely bad. We labor hard and finally succeed in getting out about six Miles to Badger Creek where we encamp for the night. The men get a little hay off from a hay stack and we lie down on the ground for the night. I have been quite unwell for some time past. I have had a severe ear ache for several days past. To night I lie on the ground, and as it is very cold and frosty my ear aches very severely.

Wednesday March 25th, 1857 We get up in the morning and after cooking and eating our breakfast we start on our march. We have a big tin horn to call us to arms! Badger Creek is so high in the channel that we cannot cross it except on a cattle path. We cut willows and bush and lead our horses and cattle over and drive our waggons over by hand. We find a very deep bad slough between Badger and Beaver Creek where the cattle and horses are nearly compelled to swim. We drag the waggons through by means of ropes & chains. Of course we get very wet.

About noon we reach Beaver Creek, where we find it almost an impossibility to drag our waggons over as the snow is drifted about twenty rods. We unyoke our oxen and drag them over the deep places. We are compelled to haul our waggons, heavily loaded up a hill, over ten rods through a snow bank nearly hard enough to hold the waggon, but the wheels cut through to the axeltrees. We have a very willing set of men.

About 4 oclock we reach the East Fork of the Des Moines River, about 1¹/₂ miles South East of Dacotah. Here the snow is drifted in about 10 ft deep on the East Bank. We shovel a path through for a single horse and ox and thus get our horses and cattle over. The ice is about half out of the River and we cut it so as to get our waggons through and drag them over by hand, wading the river wet as ducks. We encamp about forty rods from Dacotah in a grove. I get the use of the house of O W Clark for my men to sleep in My ear aches awfully, but I have it tied up with a handkerchief and I have worked the stiffness out of my neck almost entirely I do not sleep any until about morning. One of my men Michael McCarty, an old sailor gets fighting drunk and disturbs us all for a

time until he falls into the fire and burns his hand badly and this rather seems to quiet him. Towards morning my ear broke on the inside and ran quite freely, which greatly relieved the pain, and I got a very little sleep which greatly refreshed me.

Thursday March 26th 1857 We leave Dacotah early in the morning. It blows and rains, a very dreary looking morning. We have an almost awful hard days work to day. The snow is very deep.

Yesterday Byer and one or two more deserted us. On account of hardships To day we are compelled to drag our cattle horses and heavy waggons through snow banks, almost without number. I go ahead and look out the roads until I find one of these bad places and then wait until the men come up, and assist them

over. I am not with the Co B when they get their dinner and consequently get nothing but a cracker or two. The high points of lands are free from any snow, while the low places are covered with old snow from a foot to 5 and six feet in debth. The snow is hard. So that in some places it will hold a horse In other places, it will hold a man, and in others it would not hold a child. This makes the hardest kind of traveling. Like going up a high flight of stairs where the stairs are very high separated.

About 2. oclock P.M. when we were within about 10 miles from McKnights point and surrounded with deep snows John N Maxwell, Lieutenant of Co. "C." and myself started ahead to put up lights at the point, to direct the Company, as it became quite evident that they would not reach the timber before dark. We

The Spirit Lake Relief Expedition

In March 1857, as unseasonably cold temperatures gripped northern Iowa, a band of Wahpakute Dakota Indians led by Inkpaduta entered the white settlement at Spirit Lake in search of food and shelter from the pounding blasts of Arctic air. Not all of Spirit Lake's settlers were willing to open their larders for the visitors, and by the time the Indians departed a few days later 33 settlers were dead and 4 white women were in captivity.

In the immediate aftermath of the killings, community leaders in central Iowa raised companies of armed citizens to track down the kidnapers and to secure the Spirit Lake settlement from further attack. In Des Moines, for example, young lawyer Jefferson Scott Polk called his neighbors to arms in order to protect life and property in northern Iowa from further depredations. In Boone County, Judge C. J. McFarland joined a group of his neighbors and headed north toward Spirit Lake. Greeted by the "entire populace" on their arrival in Webster City, where the Boone County men stopped to rendezvous with other companies, the always voluble Judge McFarland spoke for his comrades. "The Boone Tigers are here," the judge declared. "Bring on your Indians, and we will lick hell out of them."

In Fort Dodge, William Williams, John Duncombe, and others pulled together about 100 men, including some from Webster City and presumably Boone County as well, and on March 25 set out on a relief expedition to Spirit Lake in deep snow and frigid temperatures. Travel was slow and taxed the strength of most of the men. Many of them collapsed into a deep sleep at the end of each day, often without eating. In her biography of Cyrus Clay Carpenter, who rode with the Fort Dodge men, Mildred Throne wrote, "the hardships that this group of men underwent called for the last ounce of stamina, and had it not been for a good core of tough frontiersmen,

who kept the men together, many of them would never have survived the experience."

An advance party sent out by William Williams to survey the situation in Spirit Lake returned with word that U.S. troops from Fort Ridgely in Minnesota had secured the settlement and were now pursuing Inkpaduta's band. In response to this news, Williams sent a small detachment north again to Spirit Lake with orders to bury the dead before returning to Fort Dodge. With supplies running low and the weather showing no sign of letting up, Williams himself and the other men turned south toward home.

Hardships continued all the way home for Duncombe and the other men who traveled with Williams, according to Mildred Throne. "At one time the men were marooned for thirty-six hours in the midst of a blizzard, with no shelter except a wagon cover and two tents stretched across the wagon bodies to provide some protection from the storm," she wrote. "Many became crazed with the cold and the lack of food; feet and hands were frozen; clothes became tattered rags."

At least the men who traveled with Williams could rely on each other for help, and eventually the group made it home. The burial party did not fare as well. Separated in the stormy weather, many wandered aimlessly for days before finding a route home. Two became lost altogether and presumably died somewhere in the unsettled territory between Fort Dodge and Spirit Lake.

Many years later, in 1894, John Duncombe and Cyrus Clay Carpenter joined Abbie Gardner Sharp — who had been taken captive in March 1857 by Inkpaduta's band and released unharmed a few months later — in dedicating a memorial to the Gardner family, their Spirit Lake neighbors, and the frontiersmen who in 1857 had hurried to their aid. — by Bill Silag