

abilities, and gift of persuasion. Many had mixed assessments, ranging from repulsion to admiration. Yet when he died in 1887, Iowa newspapers that had denounced him during the war remarked mostly on his qualities as a leader of men, an intellectual, and a man of great personal warmth and a charitable nature. Numerous Union leaders in Iowa who had known him well published essentially positive reviews of his life's work while noting his many quirks. It was also reported that late in his life Dean privately regretted his harshest rhetoric.

The storms of controversy that Dean had created and survived defined him. One day shortly before his death, as he sat on his front porch with a friend, he commented, "Do you see that large elm down there in the grove, doctor? I've watched it grow from a tiny sprout. It has stood the assault of hailstorms, hurricanes and of lightning, and now it reaches up above all the rest, strong, sturdy, unafraid, like my life has been. That tree, doctor, is to be my headstone." ❖

NOTE ON SOURCES

Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines) holds the papers of Henry Clay Dean, Charles Mason, Laurel Summers, and Gideon Bailey. Pertinent articles appeared in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, *Iowa State Register*, *Davenport Democrat*, *Fairfield Ledger*, *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, *Keokuk Daily Gate City*, [Mount Pleasant] *Home Journal*, and *Tipton Advertiser*. Useful secondary sources include several articles in the *Annals of Iowa*, *Iowa Journal of History*, and the *Palimpsest* (all published by the State Historical Society of Iowa), as well as books on Dean and Iowa Copperheads, particularly Hubert W. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement*. See also Boyd B. Stutler, "Henry Clay Dean—Inconsistent Rebel," *West Virginia Review* 9 (Jan. 1932); and Edgar White, "Henry Clay Dean, 'The Orator of Rebel Cove,'" *Missouri Historical Review* 22 (July 1928).

Complete annotations are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).

David Holmgren volunteers at the State Historical Society of Iowa and writes often for this magazine. His article on Pammel Court received an honorable mention for the Mills/Noun Award from the Board of Trustees of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

James H. Williams

Iowa Legislator, Virginia Confederate

by David Connon

On May 12, 1861, 25-year-old James Harrison Williams wrote in his diary: "Started for Des Moines this morning . . . I go most reluctantly to the legislature. Want to be home, to get ready to go to Va. & espouse her cause."

The son of a well-connected state legislator and slave-owner, James H. Williams grew up in the Shenandoah Valley. A talkative ladies' man, he loved studying, smoking cigars, playing board games, and hunting. In 1857 he graduated near the top of the class at the University of Virginia Law School.

Later that year, James headed to Dubuque, Iowa, where he joined the law firm of native Virginian John T. Lovell, his future brother-in-law. Living in a state quite unlike Virginia, he cherished his "sacred memories of home," as his diary reveals, and on a visit in the spring of 1859 he "saw old Va in all its glory."

As Williams entered Dubuque's political life, he met leading Democrats in and out of the courtroom. He also became acquainted with 11 Dubuque men who later served the Confederacy. This group included a merchant and several men practicing and studying law.

Twice elected state representative as an independent Democrat, James also served as a correspondent for the *Democratic Dubuque Herald*. Under the pen name "Lex," he reportedly wrote in December 1860: "The abolition of slavery [should depend] upon more than the wish of the slave. The best interest of society, of both races, enter[s] into the right to be free. *Their superior condition in slavery [as compared] to freedom in the North must enter into it.*"

As war clouds loomed in March 1861, Williams's father in the Virginia legislature called for his state to secede. The next month, South Carolina troops fired upon Fort Sumter, President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers, and Virginia passed a secession ordinance. In Iowa, Governor Samuel Kirkwood also called for Iowa volunteers and then a special legislative session to legitimize and fund Iowa's war effort. Ap-



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proval appeared to be a foregone conclusion. After all, the Republicans controlled both chambers of the Iowa General Assembly.

But then, young James H. Williams arose to play David against the Republican Goliaths. After a bill came up in the House to "prevent rendering aid to rebels," he took center stage, proposing an amendment in stark contrast. His amendment was Iowa-specific and went further than the 1850 federal Fugitive Slave Act, making it illegal to even "countenance" the escape of fugitive slaves, thus criminalizing a citizen's moral stance.

Williams's amendment caused an uproar and brought all work to a standstill. Voicing "many objections," Republican legislators assailed Williams's proposed amendment. The House leadership finally used parliamentary tactics to table the issue.

Although a Muscatine paper labeled Williams "a secessionist," and some legislators called him a "rank disunionist," he returned to Dubuque to "many congratulations from friends & those hitherto not friends," as he noted in his diary.

Williams re-entered the fray in the editorial pages of the *Dubuque Herald*. He criticized Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus—a move that resulted in mass arrests and imprisonments without formal charges or trial by a civilian court. (Among those later imprisoned were two Dubuque men: former U.S. senator George Wallace Jones, and prominent Democrat and *Dubuque Herald* editorialist Dennis Mahony.)

Former Dubuque County representative Lincoln Clark argued that Lincoln did indeed have the power to suspend habeas corpus without congressional approval.

Williams countered: "If it be disloyal to cry out against usurpation, wicked to complain of breaches of the Constitution, let us burn that sacred instrument . . . and serenely recline our heads on the footstools of tyranny."

Clark retorted, "It is understood that you sympathize with Virginia . . . [and] have often stated that if Virginia seceded, you would go back and fight for her."

Williams shot back, "I am a citizen of Iowa; I have not gone to Virginia. . . . I have written nothing to favor violations of the Constitution in any quarter. . . . I thought I had the right to call attention to unconstitutional acts at home. . . . It may be that no one has a right to question the acts of this government."

Soon afterwards, on July 12, a crowd threatened to destroy the *Dubuque Herald* offices. Williams reportedly carried horse pistols to defend the Democratic newspaper.

Ten days later he wrote in his diary, "Went to the Dentist early & whilst there heard of the great battle of Manassas. The news quite discouraging. . . . About 3 o'clock, the News [of] the glorious victory was received. Took the biggest drink of brandy."

Although elected to the State Democratic Conven-

tion, he left Iowa for Virginia on July 24, the day of the convention.

Williams began his military service by recruiting troops for Chew's Battery of horse artillery, 7th Virginia Cavalry. He combined recruiting trips with visits to his future wife, Cora DeMovell Pritchett, and Dubuque friend Junius L. Hempstead, 5th Virginia Infantry, whose father had been Iowa's second governor. Williams became a lieutenant in the battery and then sought appointments as judge advocate, writing to Confederate Major General J. E. B. Stuart that "at the breaking out of the war, I was practicing my profession in Iowa with prospects as bright and success as marked as I had a right to expect. . . . I was impelled to sacrifice all that I had acquired. I preferred to take an active part in sustaining our cause and entered the ranks." In recommending him, a Virginia politician noted that in Iowa, Williams had "boldly denounced the proposed coercion of the Southern States, resisting manfully the raising of men or money to prosecute a war against the Confederate States."

Williams received the appointment, yet he sometimes found court-martial proceedings "a very boring business" that would "serve to kill time." Late in the war, a superior officer noted that Williams, as judge advocate and acting assistant quartermaster, "has done very little service with his company [and] displayed a distaste for field service."

After the war ended, Williams lived the rest of his life in Virginia, marrying Cora, practicing law, and serving in the state legislature. He died in 1903. ♦

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NOTE ON SOURCES

Valuable sources included James Harrison Williams Diary, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library; Williams Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; James H. Williams Compiled Confederate Service Record, National Archives, College Park, MD; *Journal of the Iowa House of Representatives*, Special Session, Spring 1861 (Des Moines); and Hubert H. Wubben, *Civil War Iowa and the Copperhead Movement* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980).

Pertinent newspaper articles appeared in the *Dubuque Herald*, 5/22/1861, 5/23/1861, and 6/2/1861; James H. Williams, letters to editor, *Dubuque Herald*, 6/29/1861 and 7/11/1861; and Lincoln Clark, letters to editor, *Dubuque Herald*, 7/10/1861 and 7/12/1861.

Also useful were James A. Dueholm, "Lincoln's Suspension of the Writ of Habeas Corpus: An Historical and Constitutional Analysis," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29 (Summer 2008); William M. Robinson Jr., *Justice in Grey: A History of the Judicial System of the Confederate States of America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1941), 364-65; and Morton M. Rosenberg, *Iowa on the Eve of the Civil War: A Decade of Frontier Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 222.

Complete annotations are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).