

Civil War Governors

Running through the warp and woof of Iowa politics, for more than a quarter of a century, are threads of influence which clearly reveal their connection with the Civil War. Samuel J. Kirkwood is widely known as the Civil War Governor, but there were other Governors who quite properly belong to that period of history. Six veterans of the Civil War served as Governor, and it was not until 1898 that the last of these "Boys of 1861" retired from the office of chief executive of the Commonwealth. Among these soldier-governors were two captains, three colonels, and a brigadier general.

Kirkwood, the first Governor of that era, entered Iowa politics at the convention which convened at the Old Stone Capitol in Iowa City in 1856 for the purpose of organizing a Republican party in Iowa. Although an accredited delegate at the convention, he was a comparative stranger and few present knew of his training or ability. On the floor of the convention, however, his good sense, convincing logic, and forceful oratory enabled him to hold the audience spellbound through the deliverance of a great speech. From that day

the name of Kirkwood was a familiar one throughout the State of Iowa.

Kirkwood was a native of Maryland and lived for a time in Washington, D. C., where not infrequently as a boy he sat in the gallery of the United States Senate and listened to the debates of distinguished statesmen. Later he practiced law in Ohio where he won for himself the name of "Honest Sam". He served in two constitutional conventions in Ohio, and in 1855 came to Iowa and entered the milling business at Coralville near Iowa City.

It was in the garb of a miller that he appeared at the Republican convention in 1856, but his dusty apparel did not conceal his innate ability. Soon after making his initial appearance he was elected State Senator, and in 1859 he won the election to the office of chief executive of the State against his versatile opponent, Augustus Caesar Dodge, who had lately been United States Minister to Spain.

During his second term in the office of Governor, the pro-slavery element, known as "Copperheads", gained strength and threatened insurrection. On one occasion he assured the insurgents that if their opposition were continued he would make an example of those engaged in these disturbances, which would forever deter others

from engaging in like proceedings, and concluded with the declaration: "*I say what I mean and mean what I say.*"

After serving in the office of Governor for two terms, Kirkwood was named United States Senator to fill the unexpired term of James Harlan, who was advanced to a position in Lincoln's cabinet. In 1875 Kirkwood was elected Governor for a third time. Before the end of his term, however, he resigned to go again to the United States Senate. This latter position he likewise resigned to become Secretary of the Interior in the cabinet of James A. Garfield. As legislator and Governor of Iowa and a close associate of Lincoln during the Civil War, as United States Senator, and member of a President's cabinet during the days of reconstruction, few men in Iowa have reflected greater honor upon the State of their adoption than did Samuel J. Kirkwood.

Near the end of Kirkwood's second term in office the Republican State convention met to nominate his successor. Who would be selected as party leader was a matter of much doubt. It was only by chance that Colonel William M. Stone of Knoxville, a man who had been wounded at the battle of Blue Mills, taken prisoner at Shiloh and wounded again at Vicksburg, attended the convention, with one arm in a sling. By a patriotic

appeal to members of the convention he won sufficient support to secure the nomination. And at the ensuing election he was named Governor.

Stone was a native of New York. At the age of fifteen he was a farm hand in Ohio. At seventeen he was employed, as was James A. Garfield at the same age, in driving a canal boat team on the tow-path of the Ohio canal. Later he was a chair maker and at the same time a student of law. Upon admission to the bar in Ohio, he entered upon two important partnership engagements — one with Attorney James Matthews in the practice of his profession and another with Matthews's daughter in a matrimonial adventure.

In 1854 Stone came to Iowa, locating at Knoxville, where he relinquished the practice of law to become editor of the *Knoxville Journal*. He was among the leaders in organizing the Republican party in Iowa, was among the first to enlist in the Civil War, rose to the rank of colonel, was once captured and twice wounded in service, and was quick to turn personal and military defeats into political victories. The shot which ended his military career sent him forth upon a new adventure which resulted in making him twice the chief executive of the State.

A biography of Samuel Merrill, the next chief executive of Iowa, might be written under the title

"A Man from Maine", for he was a resident of that State until he was twenty-seven. He then moved with his family to New Hampshire, served in the legislature, and continued to reside there until 1856 when at the age of thirty-four he moved to Iowa, locating at McGregor. There he entered the mercantile business, became a member of the General Assembly of Iowa, and enlisted in the Civil War, where he was advanced to the rank of colonel of the Twenty-first Iowa Infantry. When he returned home at the close of the war he was chosen President of the First National Bank of McGregor.

In the fall of 1867, Merrill was elected Governor of the State and two years later he was re-elected by a substantial majority. The time during which he directed the affairs of the State was one of prosperity and growth. Mineral wealth was being developed, railroads were being built, and financial interests were reaching out for further expansion. In all of these activities and interests Governor Merrill assumed a leading rôle. "Worthy industries are to be encouraged", he declared, "and internal improvements of every kind zealously promoted". His liberality and breadth of vision are best expressed in his own words when he declared: "Let it be our boast and pride that we fear nothing so much as ignorance and

artificial distinction between man and man. Let us establish our power firmly upon the foundation of intelligence and liberal ideas, making manhood our only title of nobility, and believing in nothing so hopefully as an educated public opinion".

In the decade of the forties, or perhaps the early fifties, it is recorded that a boy in Pennsylvania studying geography noted the symmetry and proportions of the State of Iowa and decided to make this State his future home, because, as he said, he "liked the looks of it on the map". Later this youth became a surveyor, teacher, legislator, Governor, and Congressman. His name is prominent in Iowa history — Cyrus C. Carpenter, twice Governor and for many years a loyal and efficient servant of the State.

As a youth Carpenter divided his time between working on a farm in summer and attending a country school in winter. Then came the period of teaching and of continued study. It was June, 1854, when he reached Des Moines on his way to Fort Dodge, then a military post in the wilderness of the Northwest. At Des Moines he spent the last of his meager savings to pay the hotel bill, and started on foot over the broken prairie to his destination, still more than eighty miles away.

At Fort Dodge he became a surveyor and the first school teacher in that vicinity. In 1857 he

was a member of the expedition that went forth to rescue the settlers after the Spirit Lake massacre. At the outbreak of the Civil War he entered military service as a private, but was soon advanced to captain. He served on the staff of W. S. Rosecrans, of Grenville M. Dodge, and of John A. Logan. He was commissary in Sherman's army in its march to the sea and was mustered out of service with the rank of colonel.

As legislator and Governor he was an indefatigable worker for every public good. Indeed, he expressed the belief that the "blessed gospel of work is a conservator and promoter, not only of the material greatness, but of the morals and decency of the world". In the office of Governor he championed the cause of the Iowa farmer and decried the reckless management of railroads. In this he declared that the "exorbitant railway rate is the skeleton in the Iowa corn crib". After serving in the Governor's office for two terms he was twice elected to Congress and later was appointed postmaster at Fort Dodge.

Governor Carpenter was succeeded in office by Samuel J. Kirkwood. When he resigned in 1877, Lieutenant Governor Joshua G. Newbold succeeded to the Governorship, being the first Governor in Iowa to attain that office by virtue of having been elected Lieutenant Governor.

Newbold, like Carpenter, was a native of Pennsylvania. Like Carpenter, too, he came to Iowa in 1854, and located on a farm a part of which now lies in the city limits of Mount Pleasant. Later he engaged in merchandising and farming in Van Buren County, and at Hillsboro in Henry County. In 1862 he left his business in the hands of a partner and became captain of Company C of the Twenty-fifth Iowa Infantry. He was at the siege of Vicksburg, the battles of Arkansas Post and Lookout Mountain, and marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea. He represented Henry County in three sessions of the General Assembly before he was elected Lieutenant Governor in 1875. A little more than a year after his election to that office he succeeded Samuel J. Kirkwood in the office of Governor.

Governor Newbold served as chief executive for less than twelve months, but during that time he established a reputation of being a just and efficient executive. After retirement from office he served in another session of the General Assembly and was for a time the mayor of Mount Pleasant.

In 1843 John H. Gear, a youth of nineteen years, who had been born in New York and lived for a time in Minnesota, came down the Mississippi River to Burlington, where his uncle, Charles Mason, Chief Justice of the Territory of Iowa, re-

sided. Gear was a self-reliant and ambitious youth. He secured employment on a farm and then became clerk in a wholesale grocery house. Five years later he owned a half interest in the business, and at the end of another five years he was sole proprietor. Nine years after coming to Burlington he was elected alderman, and a little later became mayor of that city.

Gear was a member of the Fourteenth General Assembly. At the following session he was again a member and was a candidate for the office of Speaker of the House. Party strength was equally balanced, however, and there was a deadlock for two weeks. Finally, Gear won the election on the one hundred and thirty-seventh ballot. At the next session he was named Speaker with little opposition. His legislative service made him a leading candidate among the Republicans and he was twice elected Governor of the State.

After the expiration of his Governorship he served in the United States House of Representatives and in the Senate, and was an ardent advocate of the McKinley Tariff Bill. Always and everywhere, in youth and in age, at home, in business, and in politics, Gear evinced untiring industry, strict integrity, and an unusual ability for making and keeping friends.

During the days of the Civil War the name of

William Tecumseh Sherman was closely allied with the names of Lincoln and Grant. When the war was over and reconstruction was well on the way, another Sherman, less renowned perhaps than the first, nevertheless attained distinction in Iowa politics. Buren R. Sherman was a native of New York, a captain in military service, three times State Auditor, and twice Governor of Iowa.

Sherman came to Iowa with his parents in 1855 and located on a farm in Tama County, with his nearest neighbor two miles distant and the nearest post office nearly twenty miles away. During his early years in Iowa he read law. In 1860 he was admitted to the bar and moved to Vinton for the practice of his profession. When the war broke out he enlisted in the Thirteenth Iowa Infantry and became a member of the famous Crocker's Brigade. At the battle of Shiloh he was wounded and left on the field of battle to perish. But he had a mission to perform and would not die. Later he was discovered and taken to a hospital where, six days after the injury was inflicted, his wounds were dressed. Almost a miracle it was that he lived to tell the story. Returning to service he was promoted to the rank of captain. But his disability returned and he was discharged by General Grant "on account of wounds received in battle".

Returning to Vinton, Sherman was successively

elected district judge, clerk of the district court, State Auditor, and Governor. In office he was a fearless executive and an efficient administrator, always responsive to public opinion and zealous for the best interests of the Commonwealth.

A major political issue before the people of Iowa in the early eighties was the amendment of the constitution to prohibit liquor traffic. Governor Sherman favored the amendment and courageously expressed his views upon the subject. When the proposition was submitted to the people, it was approved, but was later declared to be unconstitutional. The loss of the amendment did not, however, detract from the Governor's honor in standing for what he believed to be right.

Thus, for two decades following the close of the Civil War, the office of Governor was, for the most part, in the hands of veterans. Stone and Merrill and Carpenter and Newbold and Sherman had all proved their worth on the field of battle, as had Francis M. Drake, who was Governor at a later date. All honor to these veteran-statesmen who served in times of peace with the same courage and virility that they displayed in times of war!

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