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Henry Dodge

Governor Henry Dodge, declared the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser* at the end of the legislative session in January, 1838, is the "very best executive officer this Territory could possibly get". The "old Soldier" had "won golden opinions from all sorts of people". His "practical sense, firmness, courage, knowledge of the frontier character, and of the Indian character" were deemed indispensable for that office, and those qualities he possessed "in an eminent degree."

At Mineral Point soon after the Governor had returned home from Burlington, a public dinner was given in his honor. This was an occasion for acclaiming his achievements as Governor, soldier, and citizen. The secret of his executive success was revealed in the toast: "In having learned to govern himself, he furnishes the strongest evidence of his capacity to govern others."

Henry Dodge was born at Post Vincennes on

October 12, 1782. His father, Israel Dodge, a veteran of the American Revolution, had moved west and married Nancy Ann Hunter, a girl of the Kentucky frontier. As a lad of fourteen, Henry had rescued a woman from the scalping knife of a brawny savage. Fearing revenge from the other Indians, the Dodges fled to Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, where Henry grew to manhood. Fond of hunting and dangerous exploits, he nevertheless worked hard as a youth, assisting his father in the various frontier occupations of lead mining, farming, brewing, and distilling.

In 1800, at the age of eighteen, Henry Dodge married Christina McDonald, a girl of fifteen who lived a few miles west of Saint Louis. She was destined to bear him thirteen children. Five years later he succeeded his father as sheriff of the Ste. Genevieve district and held the office until 1821. Meanwhile he became active in military affairs. He rose to the rank of major-general in the Missouri militia. During the War of 1812 he won renown by leading troops to the relief of the Boone Lick settlement. Lured by reports of fabulous wealth, he left the lead mines of Missouri and migrated to the Upper Mississippi lead region in 1827. In that same year he commanded a force of mounted volunteers in the Winnebago War.

In the Black Hawk War campaign, Henry

Dodge played such a dramatic rôle that he won the approving notice of President Andrew Jackson, who appointed him major of a battalion of mounted rangers, recruited to patrol the frontier of the Upper Mississippi Valley. When this force was replaced by the first regiment of United States dragoons, President Jackson selected him as its colonel. The exploits of these dragoons were unique in American military history. In 1834 Dodge led his men on a gruelling march to the Pawnee Pict villages on the Red River and the following year he campaigned to the Rocky Mountains in Colorado.

George Catlin, who accompanied the expedition to the Pawnee country, declared that only the indefatigable efforts and indomitable courage of Colonel Dodge saved the command in "this most disastrous campaign". The Colonel himself wrote to his friend George Wallace Jones: "Perhaps their never has been in America a campaign that operated More Severely on Men & Horses. The Excessive Heat of the Sun exceeded any thing I ever experienced I marched from Fort Gibson with 500 Men and when I reached the Pawnee Pick Village I had not more than 190 Men fit for duty they were all left behind sick or were attending on the Sick the Heat of the Weather operated Severely on the Dragoon Horses there

was at least 100 Horses that was Killed or Broke down by the excessive Heat of the Weather the Men were taken with fever and I was obliged to Carry Some of my Men in Litters for Several Hundred Miles".

On April 30, 1836, President Andrew Jackson appointed Henry Dodge to the office of Governor of the newly-created Territory of Wisconsin. The position was not entirely unsolicited, for Dodge had written to Territorial Delegate George Wallace Jones in 1835 that the "best energies" of his life had been spent in the mineral region and if his friends and the President wished it he would retire from the army and "Honestly Serve them" to the best of his "Humble Abilities". Loyal friends in Congress and his own high merit were major factors in securing this appointment. The new post gave him an annual income of \$1500 for the Governorship and \$1000 additional salary for serving as Superintendent of Indian Affairs.

That Henry Dodge was a popular Governor was amply attested by the toasts in his honor at the boisterous Fourth of July celebration at Mineral Point in 1836. The same sentiments were echoed at similar occasions throughout the Territory. With his usual energy, Dodge quickly demonstrated that he merited this confidence. He ordered a census to be taken in July and called for

an election of the Legislative Assembly in October. Indian affairs commanded immediate attention. He secured the cession of four million acres of pine land from the Menominee, extinguished the claims of the Sauk and Fox tribes to what is known as the Platte Purchase in western Missouri, and acquired the Keokuk Reserve by a treaty negotiated on the present site of Davenport. When the legislature convened at Belmont in October, 1836, he delivered in person a "brief, clear, and sensible message". Forty-two laws were enacted on a variety of subjects: three banks were incorporated, many provisions for local government were made, construction of roads and bridges was authorized, and new counties were created on both sides of the river.

The Second Legislative Assembly met in Burlington. Governor Dodge outlined work for a busy session in his message: a codification of the laws, settlement of the boundary dispute with Missouri, provision for more jails, establishment of new counties, and many other recommendations. Over one hundred measures were adopted, but the Governor vetoed five bills.

Meanwhile, the movement to divide the Territory of Wisconsin was receiving serious attention in Congress. Governor Dodge was already weary of the rôle of Territorial executive. "I have Had

Offices Enough to Satisfy one man," he wrote George Wallace Jones, "and from my present feelings on that Subject I think I will never be a candidate for Any Public Office after I retire from my present Station". He urged that Jones be made Governor of the new Territory of Iowa.

But Henry Dodge's career was by no means over. He continued as Governor of Wisconsin Territory until 1841, when he was replaced by a Whig. The citizens of the Territory immediately elected him as their Delegate to Congress. There he served until President James K. Polk re-appointed him to the office of Governor of Wisconsin in 1845. Three years later, when Wisconsin was admitted into the Union, he was elected one of the State's first United States Senators. His son, Augustus Caesar Dodge, had served as Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa during the four years his father had represented Wisconsin. In 1848 Augustus was elected one of the first United States Senators from Iowa. Unlike his son, who warmly favored the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, Henry Dodge fought vigorously against this measure. The result was that Henry Dodge was re-elected to the Senate in 1851, while his son went down in bitter defeat.

Henry Dodge was an old man when he retired at the end of his term in 1857. During his long

and active career he had impressed his character upon the frontier. A man of truth, courage, and great personal bravery, he was well qualified for pioneer leadership. While serving as colonel of Missouri militia, he captured a party of Miami. Dodge promised that the Indians would not be injured. But when the gun of a murdered white man was found in the possession of these Indians, Captain Sarshall Cooper threatened in behalf of his company to kill all the Indians unless the murderer was surrendered. The Miami warriors fell upon their knees and prepared for death. Dodge promptly intervened. "At this critical moment, Major Daniel M. Boone came dashing up to Gen. Dodge's side, and said he would stand by him to the last, and he taunted Cooper with the treachery of the act he proposed. Dodge was firm, never taking his eye from Cooper's. Boone presented a determined countenance, as brave men always do when actuated by noble purposes. At length Cooper yielded, and Dodge ordered him to take his place in the line, and march away. He doggedly obeyed, and his men rode by."

Henry Dodge displayed these same qualities in politics. As a chief executive he sometimes supported unpopular measures and vetoed bills fearlessly. As a Senator he adhered to the will of his constituents. When his colleague voted in favor

of slavery in California, Dodge rebuked him by having the clerk read the instructions from the legislature of Wisconsin to her Senators and then firmly voting "Nay".

It was his courage and resourcefulness that won the first decisive victory against Black Hawk's warriors in the Battle of Pecatonica. A small party of Indians, well sheltered by the river bank, were charged upon by Dodge's men. The fight occurred "on a piece of ground not to exceed sixty feet square." Not a single Indian escaped alive. "This little action", wrote Governor Thomas Ford, "will equal any for courage, brilliancy and success, in the whole history of Indian wars."

After enduring the hardships of war and fulfilling the duties of peace for three-quarters of a century, Colonel-Governor-Senator Dodge spent the evening of his life quietly at his old home in Wisconsin and at the home of his son Augustus Caesar in Burlington, Iowa. As an Indian campaigner and Territorial executive he contributed much to the development of the West. It was, however, during the eight years of his Governorship that Henry Dodge reached "the zenith of his career as a public man", in the opinion of Louis Pelzer, his chief biographer. "To this office he brought a record of long and efficient military service, a wide knowledge of frontier civilization, and ideas adapted to

its increasing population and its political progress."

Christina Dodge, his wife and companion for sixty-five years, died at Burlington in 1865. Two years later, on June 19, 1867, Governor Henry Dodge himself answered taps. On his monument overlooking the Mississippi is engraved the simple epitaph: HE SERVED HIS OWN GENERATION BY THE WILL OF GOD. "It is a fitting resting place for the man", writes Professor Pelzer. "The strong and ceaseless flow of the great Mississippi symbolizes his aggressive pioneer spirit. Its turbulent waves from the north reëcho forever the tales of his Indian conflicts and conquests. And in its more peaceful moods it reflects his civil and military career during which he helped to make and to mould two mighty Mississippi Valley Commonwealths."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN