

Last Days In Council Bluffs

In 1907, after an active business career in New York, General Dodge gathered up his cherished mementos, his historic papers, his voluminous letter files and returned to the home he had built proudly and happily 37 years before. With him was his daughter, Lettie Montgomery (now separated from her husband) who was to stay with him as his hostess the rest of his life. Mrs. Dodge remained in the luxurious apartment in New York City with her daughter, Anne.

Dodge had made a preliminary trip home the year before for an event close to his heart—the Annual Reunion of the Army of the Tennessee which was scheduled for early November 1906. He had organized the Society himself and in 1892 had succeeded General William Tecumseh Sherman as its president.

Dodge delighted in these reunions with his old battle mates. When the Society had met in Council Bluffs in October of 1894, he is said to have spent \$10,000 entertaining them with a banquet at the Grand Hotel and a reception at his home. His hospitality was almost as lavish for the veterans of southwest Iowa and northwest Missouri when they met in Council Bluffs on September

29, 1882. Forty thousand spectators watched the stirring parade, and the Dodge House was the scene of another great reception.

Now, when he returned in 1907, he left behind him forever the office at No. 11 Broadway, where he had come in contact with some of the most powerful men of his time. There, too, he had played a major role in some of the leading events of his time. It would be difficult to overemphasize his activities in New York City, where, according to Lieutenant Colonel William H. Powell, his counsel was "sought by capitalists and engineers."

Two of the staff assembled by Mrs. Montgomery to prepare the house for the General's return were a young girl who had arrived from Sweden in 1900 — Helga Gustafson — and her sister, Amanda. The latter had worked for the Dodge daughters during intervals when they had occupied the house. Helga, who became Mrs. Martin R. Olson, and two other Swedish employees, Miss Anna Kronquist and her younger sister, Ellen (Mrs. Ed Prasse), are still residents of Council Bluffs in 1966.

In the fall of 1907, according to Mrs. Olson, the General brought all his belongings from New York, including his superb carriage horses. "The family lived very well," Mrs. Olson remembers, keeping a staff of two maids, a cook, a yardman or gardener, a houseman-chauffeur, and a laundress several days a week. "Many is the time

when there would be six people eating in the kitchen and only the General and Mrs. Lettie Montgomery at that big dining table." But usually there were dinner guests, and nearly always friends came in for cards in the evening.

Mrs. Dodge and Anne came for a springtime visit each year in time to see the great hedge of lilacs in bloom at the back of the house as well as the apple orchard at the peak of its splendor. They brought along personal maids to care for their clothing and individual needs.

Each morning of the workday week, General Dodge walked to his office, which was on the top floor of the Council Bluffs Savings Bank building (Baldwin block), the institution he founded. Carrying his simple lunch in a special hamper, he ate at his desk. Promptly at 3 o'clock he descended to the street where his carriage waited to take him back home.

Chronically ill though he was, this "first citizen" of Council Bluffs kept his secretaries busy with letters on the issues of the day that he exchanged with famous politicians, financiers, and railroad magnates down to the most humble foot soldier of his army. Details of management of his vast fortune, now in the millions of dollars, occupied his time.

In addition, Dodge was determined to write his memoirs. No less a personage than President Theodore Roosevelt had written him after a story-

telling session at his home in 1903: "If only you could put down your reminiscences just exactly as you told them the other night, you would have far and away the best book that has been written about the Civil War."

In consequence, Dodge published *How We Built the Union Pacific Railway and Other Railway Papers and Addresses* and *The Battle of Atlanta and Other Campaigns* both in 1910, and *Personal Recollections of Lincoln, Grant and Sherman* in 1914. All three volumes, long out of print, were reissued in 1965 by Sage Books of Denver. Each one adds immeasurably to the lore of those early days, although the reader will search in vain through that matter-of-fact prose for any romanticizing leaven. To the General, facts were facts as he saw them.

A chain of circumstances led to the partial redecoration of the house in 1908. Mrs. Montgomery had suffered a broken wrist, when her carriage overturned in an accident on the Missouri River bridge. During her convalescence she sought diversion in a trip to New York, staying with Mrs. Dodge in the apartment near Grant's Tomb. During her shopping trips, Mrs. Montgomery purchased a new dining room suite with oversized side chairs, an impressive new brass chandelier, and the red "velvet" brocaded wallpaper for the dining room.

Grenville Dodge's last few birthdays were

marked by the outpouring of regard from all over the Nation. Vases filled with roses—one for each year of his life—were sent by the New York Stock Exchange. Other friends and organizations sent floral congratulations until the house bloomed like a garden.

Invitations to a Dodge social dinner were highly prized. His vigorous life had supplied the General with a wealth of anecdotes and he told them vividly. The wine cellar was always well stocked; conviviality ran high.

General Dodge allowed himself the luxury of pampering animal pets after resuming residence in his own house. His constant companion for a time was a dog named "Dick" who accompanied the General often on his walks to the office. "Dick" was not afraid of a fight. If things were going well, the General let him handle his own affairs; if "Dick" was getting the worst of it, the General was ready to join the battle with his cane.

A large gray tomcat was the General's indoor favorite. This pet enjoyed the freedom of his bedroom, perched on top of the dresser. When the master went downstairs, the gray cat rode down regally under the General's arm.

The last few summers, when General Dodge's health was noticeably declining, he and his daughter and various members of the household staff stayed at the large resort hotel at Glenwood Springs, Colorado. One week of each of those

summers was spent in the company of the members of the "Saturday Noon Club" of Council Bluffs, who were invited there en masse as guests of General Dodge. It was a tradition that died with the genial host's death.

Grenville Dodge became ill while at Glenwood Springs in 1915. The Union Pacific sent a private car for him to return to Council Bluffs, holding it on a siding while he rested at home before going on to Rochester, Minnesota, for surgery. His illness was revealed as cancer and a colostomy was performed. From then on a nurse was in constant attendance even though he resumed his routine on a restricted basis when at home again.

An acute seizure of kidney stones a few months later sent him to New York to consult a specialist, with surgery the result. All too soon, his days ran out, and he died in Council Bluffs on January 3, 1916, at the age of 84. The funeral on January 6 was conducted in fitting tribute to the last living army and department commander of the Civil War.

A local news story described the ceremony as follows:

General Grenville M. Dodge was buried at Council Bluffs yesterday as he had desired, with full military honors. The body was carried from the house by six non-commissioned officers of the militia company he sponsored, the Dodge Light Guards, while a military band played "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." The casket was borne to the cemetery upon a gun caisson, drawn by six black

horses in full military harness. His sword and the cocked hat of a major general rested on top of the pall. A horse, fully caparisoned, with the saber at one side of the saddle and reversed boots in the stirrups, followed the gun caisson.

Six hundred members of the U.S. National Guard acted as guard of honor during the procession to Walnut Hill cemetery and at the grave. Three volleys of musketry sounded the requiem salute; trumpeter Joseph Rosenfield blew taps. The body rests in the uniform of a major general. It was lowered into the grave while the guard stood at attention and the band played the Star Spangled Banner.

The funeral was a solemn spectacle said to be the largest ever held in Iowa, not soon to be forgotten by the thousands who watched it. More impressive, however, than all the military honors was the scene in the cemetery when a dozen white and bent veterans, tears dropping from their cheeks, stood about the open grave and sang

*We are going down the valley one by one,
We are going toward the setting of the sun.*

Attending were dozens of distinguished mourners.

Grenville Dodge's will revealed him generous in death as in life and shrewd enough to have engaged the finest New York legal talent to insure that his millions would be disposed exactly as he wished. He established trust funds of \$50,000 each for Norwich University, the Y.M.C.A. in Council Bluffs, and the city itself for relief of Civil War veterans' families and charities. He had already given Norwich a donation which built a residence hall named after him in

1892. His wife and daughters were liberally provided for and the grandchildren in turn.

Twenty-one years after the death of the last grandchild, or in 1984, the estate is to be divided; half will go to the remaining heirs, one-fourth to Norwich and one-fourth to Council Bluffs in trust. The fortune has been carefully handled by the trust department of the Council Bluffs Savings Bank and still amounts to several million dollars.

He authorized publication of his memoirs, setting aside \$5,000 for preparation of the manuscript under direction of the Historical Department of Iowa. The Reverend J. R. Perkins of Council Bluffs became his official biographer in 1929 under the title — *Trails, Rails and War*.

His treasure of Civil War and railroading documents were willed to the Historical Department of Iowa, E. R. Harlan, Curator:

All my army and civil commissions and diplomas and army records, maps, plans, letters, letter-books relating to my profession as a civil engineer and especially those relating to the surveys and explorations of the two overland routes to the Pacific Ocean, the Union Pacific and the Texas Pacific, both of which are of historical interest. Also one copy of the seven typewritten volumes of the compiled and complete records of my life.

His home library collection of books, letters, memoirs, papers, and prints, along with the bookcases housing them, became the property of the Council Bluffs Free Public Library in 1950 when the house was sold.

The final stipulation of the will speaks eloquently for General Dodge's consideration for the dignity of his associates:

As my life has been a busy one and I have engaged in many enterprises and had many military, civil and official positions, and persons in high . . . positions have given me their confidence, there may be in my large correspondence private and other matters that would, if made public, give some person pain; and I therefore direct that not a word or line written to me that would reflect upon any one or give anyone the right to complain, shall ever be published or made public in any way.

Assets of the estate originally included immense tracts of land in various states, Saskatchewan, Canada, and Cuba, and town property in Council Bluffs, Omaha, Washington, D.C., Quanah, Texas, Denver, and Winnipeg. A Cuban railroad and a sugar plantation were included in the estate.

The Texas property included a 13,000-acre ranch sold to John Nance Garner, Vice President under Franklin Roosevelt, in the 1930's. There were almost 17,000 shares of stock in various corporations, 750 bonds, notes, mortgages, and contracts.

A few years ago the bank's trust department was forced to comply with Cuban Premier Castro's Agrarian Reform law which called for breaking up large land holdings. The trustees had to sign over the 1,250-acre sugar cane plantation in the province of Camaguey, in return for "bonds"

which are ostensibly to be paid off at 4-1/2 percent interest in twenty years. The property was reputed to be worth \$60,000 and for years brought an annual income of \$2,000 to the estate.

While General Dodge lay dying of cancer, his wife was ill of the same disease in New York City, where death occurred on September 4, 1916, nine months after her husband's. A beautiful woman of gentleness and spirituality, she had been visited by a recurring dream the few nights before her death. As she described the dream to her daughters, she found herself standing on the edge of a lake, watching as a solemnly impressive angel moved toward her in the prow of a vessel. The angel carried in her arm a pitcher of water which she offered to the spectator. Twice in this dream, Mrs. Dodge related, she refused the Water of Life, but in the third dream she accepted it, drank of it, and felt herself transported by its purity beyond physical life.

To her daughters, Anne and Ella, it seemed only fitting that this vision should be transmuted into a memorial for their mother. The late Daniel Chester French was commissioned to sculpture the angel standing in the boat's prow; he is said to have considered the heroic figure his finest work. Henry Bacon, architect of the Lincoln monument in Washington, D.C., designed the surrounding pool and inscription. Since 1919 the Ruth Anne Dodge memorial fountain, known to many as "The

Black Angel" because the bronze has weathered darkly, is one of Council Bluffs' favorite landmarks. The site at the edge of Fairview Cemetery is now being maintained by the city's park board.

All the members of General Dodge's immediate family except Lettie are buried in a handsome mausoleum on a rise in Walnut Hill Cemetery erected by the daughters.

Accustomed to receiving many honors and high praise during his lifetime, it is safe to say that Dodge would have been highly gratified at his election to the Hall of Great Westerners in 1963 at Oklahoma City "for his contribution to the development of the West." The honor reflected a belated acknowledgment of his sincere belief that the greatest benefit from building railroads lay in the increased value of the land and its resources.

It has been a source of dismay to students of Dodge's achievements that his name has not been accorded the national recognition it would seem to deserve. The truth must be that he stood a little too deeply in the shadow of the great men with whom he associated. Because his function was to assist more meteoric careers in a practical way, he somehow never caught the popular imagination to win a reputation greater than his worth. But he was a practical man who lived by his principles, and he was obviously content to receive credit for his accomplishments and no more.

GENEVIEVE P. MAUCK