

Augustus Caesar Dodge

The interesting article on Governor Kirkwood in the *Year Book of the Old Settlers' Association of Johnson County* for 1921, and Mr. Lathrop's book on the *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood*, in which Augustus Caesar Dodge is called an aristocrat with no sympathy for the life and interests of the common people, may make it timely to restate the facts about that estimable pioneer. Israel Dodge, a soldier of the Revolution, left Kentucky in 1788 or 1789 and crossed the Mississippi into the Spanish province of the Upper Louisiana, settling near Ste. Genevieve now in the State of Missouri. After the purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte he witnessed at St. Louis in 1804 the unfurling of the American flag as a signal of our sovereignty over the new domain. At Ste. Genevieve, his grandson Augustus C. Dodge, son of Henry Dodge, was born in 1812. The boy had brief and insufficient schooling, a few months in a log school house with windows of oiled paper, using pencils made of leaden bullets hammered to a point, quill pens, and ink made by boiling butternut bark with gun powder. When he was fifteen years old, the family moved to Wisconsin, travelling on the steamboat "Indiana" as far as the Rapids of the River Des Moines and the balance of the way on a keel boat pulled by some forty oarsmen in small boats. Landing near what is now

called Galena, the settlers were found in a panic from hostile acts of the Winnebago Indians. Henry Dodge was requested to take command and organized the settlers for protection. His son, A. C. Dodge, joined this force, in the company of Captain Wm. S. Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton.

After the Indians were subdued Henry Dodge settled in Iowa County, Wisconsin, where father and son worked in the lead mines. From there the son moved to Burlington, Iowa, in 1838. The father became Governor of Wisconsin. The son was elected Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa, serving from 1840 to 1846, and became one of Iowa's first United States Senators, being the first member of that body who was born west of the Mississippi. From the Senate he went as our Minister to Spain. His erect carriage and much of his personal manner were due to association with the Indians, for he knew Black Hawk, Mahaska, Keokuk, Wapello, and Poweshiek, the great Sac and Fox leaders. Born a frontiersman, such he remained with not a trace of aristocracy about him. He was a Democrat in politics and in his sympathies, the favorite of the Iowa pioneers. In the Senate he urged the Homestead Bill, to give the public domain to the settlers, and took leadership in the measures that laid the foundations of the State.

One incident in his senatorial career completely discloses his statesmanship and his philosophy of life. The Southern Senators had provoked a debate

in which they nagged the Northern members. On their side the debate was closed by Brown of Mississippi in a speech full of contempt and ridicule for the Northern people. He said that no gentleman would do himself or others the personal service and manual labor for which the negro was fitted by nature.

Then Senator Dodge took the floor in reply. The *Philadelphia Press* described the scene. His father, Henry Dodge, was present as the Senator from Wisconsin. The *Press* said:

His straight Indian figure, strong features and defiant air gave effect to his tones which rang out like a trumpet call. He said: "I have never permitted myself to believe that there can ever be civil war between the North and South. But today I have heard with mingled astonishment and regret in the speech of the Senator from Mississippi such views of life and its duties that I differ from him as widely as the poles are asunder. If his views are those of his section, civil war is possible. I say on the floor of this Senate, in the presence of my father, the Senator from Wisconsin, who will attest its truth, that I have performed and do perform, all these services denounced as menial. I saw my own wood, I have worked in the mines, and driven teams of horses, oxen and mules, and consider myself as respectable as any senator on this floor."

When sent as Minister to Spain, he immediately acquired complete use of the Spanish language, and years later told me that he found his command of Indian dialects useful in his study of the new tongue. But while absent from the State Iowa had changed

in its politics and population. The pioneers who fellowshipped him were in a minority, and the newer settlers knew him not. Now Kirkwood was not a frontiersman nor a pioneer. Born in Maryland, he was reared in Washington City. He moved to an old settled community in Mansfield, Ohio, and thence to Iowa, where he settled at the close of our pioneer period.

I knew Dodge intimately from my childhood and Kirkwood as well later on in my life, and they were both my friends. The actors in that time long gone by should not be judged nor disparaged now by importing into this age the spirit, the prejudices, and hasty judgments of the partisan politics of the past.

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