

Wareham G. Clark

Wareham G. Clark was a wholesale and dry-goods merchant in New York City for ten years prior to 1840 when he decided to leave the noise and confusion of the great metropolis and seek his fortune in the new West. Having sold most of his stock of dry goods, he purchased a light wagon and two of New York's finest dock-tailed Morgan horses and, in company with his nephew, John Clark, planned to start for new adventures in the Territory of Iowa.

Loading the wagon with the remaining stock of dry goods, the young men drove their spirited team across the flat lands of New Jersey and into the foothills of the Alleghenies. Thence they went up over the crest and along the winding rocky mountain trails, out into the new Middle West. Exchanging their small stock of dry goods en route for room and board, and for western furs for eastern markets, the young men made their way westward. At length they crossed the Mississippi River at Burlington and passed into the new Territory of Iowa. Between the years 1840 and 1842, young Wareham Clark, in this manner, made three overland journeys between his old

home in New York and the prairies of Iowa where he planned to establish his permanent residence.

During this period he spent some time in the new Territory between the Mississippi and the Des Moines rivers surveying the public lands, helping to establish township and county lines, and platting new towns. Now and again he ventured into the Indian territory west of the Des Moines River. The country was beautiful, new, and promising. Surely it was a good land — a land in which a pioneer of courage and intelligence might wish to dwell.

Wareham Grant Clark was born of sturdy pioneer stock at Middle Haddam, Connecticut, on January 16, 1813, and was named for a famous colonial minister, Rev. John Wareham. His father's people were clarks (clerks) of the old English courts, from which the name was derived. They could trace their lineage directly to King Alfred, and so Wareham Clark had royal blood in his veins. In America his immigrant progenitor was Major John Clark who came to New England in 1634, to become one of the founders of New Haven, Connecticut. His maternal ancestors were likewise distinguished colonial settlers.

While he was in Davis County in the early forties, Clark made frequent visits to the home of Judge William Walter Rankin, an Ohio man who

had recently moved with his family from Lafayette, Indiana, where the eldest daughter had attended an academy for girls. Charming Jane Rankin was quick-witted and attractive and before long the New Englander found himself much in love with the pioneer magistrate's daughter. He not only asked the strict Scotch Presbyterian father for his daughter's hand, but he also persuaded the Judge to accompany him on a trip to select a site for a new home for himself and his bride.

On a lovely late spring morning in 1842 the two men and Mrs. Rankin and daughter Jane set out in Clark's light wagon drawn by his lively Morgan bob-tailed bays. Huge lunch baskets were filled with delicacies for the all-day outing. The sight of the rolling prairies covered with verdant waving prairie grass and fragrant blooming shrubs greeted them on every side as they drove over neighboring acres, and then on into the Indian territory.

Night overtook them just as they came in sight of a deserted log cabin. Wishing to explore the country more thoroughly, they decided to spend the night there and return home the next day.

In the middle of the night, Clark, who was sleeping in the open near his horses, was aroused by their restlessness. Suddenly he heard them dash away and gallop off over the prairie. Think-

ing that they had loosened their halter-straps, he hastened after them before they would have time to run out of sight and hearing. Again and again he came within close range of the horses, but on and on they went. Presently he became aware that the night had passed. The sun was rising above the horizon in the east. He had left the Rankins asleep, not knowing whither he had gone, and even worse than that he had become so confused by the zig-zag trail he had followed that he was completely lost!

Not knowing how far he had traveled in his anxious search, the city-bred man started to find his way back, but the hot sun had dried the dew on the grass and erased his path. The wet grass that had soaked his shoes and clothing was now dry and harsh and cut like knife blades through his clothing and into his flesh. He called to his friends, but no answer came back to him. He tried to retrace his steps and walked on and on seeking some familiar landmark.

Three wretched days passed! He wandered on through a heavy thunderstorm. Three sleepless nights he spent on the open prairie. Howling wolves and hooting owls continually reminded him of the dangers of the wilderness. The loss of his team was almost forgotten in his anxiety. Weakened by the lack of food and sleep, he at

last found his beloved Rankins who of course were in search of him during his absence.

They had had time to observe small pony tracks near the hoof-prints of the Morgan horses and had concluded at once that someone had stolen the team. The thief was eventually caught, convicted, and sentenced to be whipped.

On May 1, 1843, the first day that claims for homesteads could be made in the newly acquired Indian territory, Wareham G. Clark took some "640 acres of raw prairie land" in what is now the central part of Monroe County. There he established the first settlement in that area. He built a substantial log house on a well-chosen site and arranged the place so that it served as a central meeting place for the earliest pioneers. There he brought his bride, Jane Rankin Clark, after they were married on August 24, 1843, and together they contributed much to the development of that neighborhood.

Their home served as the first post office in the community for a number of years. It also served as the "general store" in the settlement. Labor, cash, and furs were traded by the earliest pioneers to the Clarks for dry goods and other merchandise brought from the New York store or obtained in Iowa Territory. The Clarks took occasional trips to the nearest trading post, then Eddyville on the

Des Moines River, to supplement their stock of goods.

The Clark home served likewise in the capacity of a local library, for when Wareham Clark decided to settle in the "far" west he brought along his private collection of books — "a large library of the choicest works in philosophy, history, science, and general literature, which thereafter, on the wild western frontier became his constant solace and companion". Besides these books the *New York Sun*, and the *Hartford Times* found their way into the Clark home at regular intervals and were shared with the neighbors. This pioneer home was used also as a town hall, and the citizens in the Kishkekosh County precinct cast their votes in the large combination living room, dining room, and fireplace room, where Mrs. Clark arranged dry-goods boxes for tables and covered them with gay calico direct from New York City. The ballot box was a paper box in which stockings were originally packed. W. G. Clark was elected justice of the peace.

The first marriage in Kishkekosh County united charming Mary Searcey and young Nelson Westcoatt. Three months later the bride died of a fever — the first death in the community. There was no lumber at hand with which to make a casket and so a large walnut tree was cut, pun-

cheons were hewn, and from these a coffin was fitted together with wooden pegs. Mrs. Clark used some of the velveteen from her husband's stock of dry goods to line and cover the coffin.

Wareham Clark introduced many new grains and fruits in his part of the State. He brought the first wheat into Kishkekosh County, for example, and in 1844 harvested thirty acres of this grain. He gave grain seed to several of his neighbors, thus providing the means for their start in cultivating new and improved varieties of agricultural products.

By the spring of 1845 the settlement in which Clark had become a leading figure had progressed so far that the people decided to sever political dependency upon Wapello County, to which they had been attached, and organize the government of Kishkekosh County as an independent unit. At the election of the first county officers in August, 1845, at Clark's Point, about two miles north of the present city of Albia, Wareham G. Clark was elected probate judge. A town called Clarks-ville was laid out and there the first district court was held, Charles Mason presiding.

When court time arrived in 1846, Mr. Clark was building a new and larger house for himself and family. When the lawyers came on horse-back with their libraries in their saddle-bags, ready

to begin court, the new home was walled up and roofed but not finished. Nevertheless it was used as a courtroom while the grand jury retired to a nearby slough for deliberation on the first cases to come before the court. Mr. Clark placed a chair at one end of the unfinished room for the judge's "bench", and the jury sat about on blocks of wood and such other makeshift seats as they were able to find.

When night came a heavy rain set in and the horses of the lawyers and jurymen needed shelter. To meet this emergency the loose floor boards were shifted to one end of the courtroom and covered with hay for a soft bed for the lawyers while their horses were sheltered in the other end of the same building. During the night some of the horses got loose and it is reported that they soon began eating the beds on which the lawyers were sleeping.

In August, 1845, the voters of the Territory refused for the second time to join the Union under the constitution of 1844. Plans were made, however, for a second constitutional convention to which Kishkekosh County, renamed Monroe County in January, 1846, was entitled to send a delegate. In May, 1846, Wareham G. Clark, "a democrat, but an abolitionist in his views," went to the capital at Iowa City as the delegate repre-

senting both Monroe and Appanoose counties in this important convention.

The second Iowa constitutional convention met on May 4, 1846, and Wareham G. Clark rode on horseback from his home to the capital. One of the thirty-two members present, he was named on two of the six standing committees. As a member of the revision committee whose duty it was "to collect, compare and digest various reports of a Constitution preparatory to their third reading", his broad knowledge of parliamentary law was used advantageously. As a member of the engrossment committee whose duty it was to "make clear and legible documents for final action", his fine and speedy penmanship was a great help when typewriters were unknown.

The tasks of these committees were multifold. By day they were among the busiest of the convention, and by night they burned the candle-lights well into the next day "comparing, digesting documents", condensing some, enlarging others preparatory to the next day's action by the delegates. Wareham G. Clark's clear thinking and logical reasoning were of great importance here. "Much of the work of the Second Constitutional Convention was handled by its six Standing Committees". The members of the second constitutional convention were proud that they were so well organized

and industrious that only fifteen days were required to frame the new organic law which was adopted by the people on August 3, 1846. Wareham G. Clark was one of the members of this convention who did not ask for pay or receive any pay for his time and efforts.

On the way home, when Clark was nearing the end of his journey, he stopped at the stagecoach inn at Eddyville, planning to remain there for the night. Much to his surprise he heard his father's voice inquiring the way to Clark's Point. Oliver Clark was on his way from Connecticut to visit his son in the west.

But Wareham Clark's public service was not at an end. The settlers in Lucas County to the west wanted someone with a "fair-minded attitude, logical reasoning, and well-informed mind to settle the question" of just where their permanent county seat should be located. Clark served as one of the commissioners for this purpose. It was a warm August day when a group of men followed the commissioners to "a stake some four feet high, which proved to be a Government landmark at the corner of Sections 19, 20, 29, and 30, Twp. 72, Range 21 West." Presently Commissioner Clark asked someone to help him upon this stake, which was done; and after surveying the country about him for a moment he promptly and

emphatically said, 'Gentlemen, this is the county seat of Lucas County!' " The others at once agreed.

Ever interested in the progress and welfare of his community, Wareham Clark spent much effort to obtain mainline railroad facilities for southern Iowa. Even when a few of his neighbors charged that "the new-fangled idea of having an 'iron-horse' racing across the prairies would come to no good", Clark pressed on, anticipating the time, perhaps, when this railroad would operate as a portion of a coast to coast system.

In his youth and young manhood, Clark studied history, science, and literature. Coming into the new West he was interested in the schools of his community. He served for years as treasurer of the neighborhood school. In 1873 he helped organize a new school adjoining his large farm and served as a member of this school board for many years. The site chosen overlooked a large buffalo wallow for which the school was named. As president of the local school board it was not only his duty to hire the teacher, but to find a place for the teacher to live, and this usually ended by the teacher taking up board and room in the spacious Clark home.

In later life, one of Wareham Clark's chief interests was in the field of horticulture. Accord-

ingly, in 1856, he purchased a large farmstead in Monroe Township and established the Clark Orchards covering over fifty acres of land. It was there that he practiced many new methods and conducted his experiments. New specimens were developed by grafting various kinds of fruit trees. Clark's Prolific Apple was one of the delicious varieties brought into bearing during these years. At one time his exhibit of fruits at the Iowa State Horticultural convention contained 180 varieties, and "took the prize," according to the newspaper. After visiting the Clark homestead, one news editor wrote, "Mr. Clark was the first settler of that region, and looked up to as the 'Father of Monroe County'. His farm contains many hundred acres, had more fruit, better fruit, and a greater number of varieties than anyone else in southern Iowa. No one in that region has done as much for the improvement and cultivation of fruit as Mr. Clark."

Wareham Grant Clark lived until June, 1890. He found time to read much of the world's best literature. He traveled widely, visiting much of the Middle West, besides taking two trips entirely across the continent. He lived abundantly, making valuable contributions to his community, his county, and to the Commonwealth of Iowa. He used his knowledge of history to gain a clear per-

spective of the future and, being a man of much individual enterprise and stability, he helped explore, survey, and develop the raw prairie into farmsteads and growing towns and cities. He lived a full life. It seems fitting that the old homestead of Wareham Grant Clark is now being used by the State Agricultural College as a field laboratory and experimental farm.

FLORA CLARK GARDNER