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The Wedding of James Harlan

A man's marriage is without doubt a most important incident in his career. Yet the biographer of James Harlan, for sixteen years United States Senator from Iowa, notes the event in this brief statement:

Early in November he drove to Greencastle; and there, on Sunday, November 9, 1845, James Harlan and Ann Eliza Peck were united in marriage, President Simpson officiating at the ceremony.¹

It should be stated, in explanation of this brevity, that the first draft of the biography was prepared in anticipation of a two-volume work; but for the sake of uniformity the editor of the series reluctantly concluded to publish the work in a single volume; thus compelling the elimination of many interesting bits of description. The simplicity of the Harlan-Peck wedding, in contrast with the elaborate wed-

¹ Johnson Brigham's *James Harlan* in the *Iowa Biographical Series* published by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

ding festivities and ceremonies of our time, deserves to be made a matter of record. The following account, hitherto unpublished, is taken from the first draft of the biographical manuscript.

Among the young ladies mentioned in James Harlan's diary for the college year 1844-5, we find most frequent mention of "Ann Eliza Peck"—destined to be the devoted wife and helpmate of the future statesman and the loving mother of his children.

In this connection the following entry in Harlan's autobiographical manuscript is interesting, not only as showing the success of the young lover's suit, but also as revealing the simple, honest directness of the man's nature.

Visited Miss Peck in the evening; and had a long confidential talk with her, propounding numerous questions about herself and her views and purposes and preferences, intended by me to elicit information as to her sentiments towards me, and freedom from committals to any one else. Her answers were frank, and as I desired and hoped; and left no doubt on my mind as to her respect for my character and cordial friendship for me personally. At the close of this conversation, although no offer of myself was made or intended on my part, or apprehended by her, yet somehow I felt that our relations had changed to more than cordial friendship.

Soon following this interview is recorded the im-

portant fact that then and there he "came to a definite understanding with" Miss Peck as to what their "relations should become at sometime in the future."

Either the instinct of the educator was strong in him or the desire to measure up to his attainments was strong in her, for an entry of June 16th records his engagement to hear Miss Peck recite two or three times a week in mental science and other advanced studies not included in the course pursued in Mrs. Larabee's school for young ladies. He says: "I gave her an examination on her preceding lessons in Upham's mental philosophy; and formed a very flattering opinion of her capacity."

In the evening, following the Commencement exercises, President Simpson gave a reception to the graduating class, but Harlan, weary and yearning for rest, started for home immediately after dinner. Finding his saddle-horse had been loaned for the day, he returned to Greencastle and in due time appeared at the reception, much to the surprise of his friends. Mrs. Simpson, knowing of his engagement, rallied him on the impropriety of coming alone and ordered him to produce Miss Peck. The order was promptly obeyed.

Following his graduation, Harlan returned home and was soon at work in the fields assisting his father, plowing fallow land and putting in a wheat crop.

Early in September, young Harlan returned to

Greencastle, by agreement, to plan with his prospective wife for the immediate future. His frank and manly report of the interview is noteworthy. He explained to her his slender resources, having no trade, no capital, no profession. He about decided to become a farmer, a vocation which he "fully understood and liked." The question presented itself; Was she willing to share with him such a life in an obscure country neighborhood? She responded with equal frankness that she liked the country; that when she engaged herself to him she expected that he would make his own choice of a calling, and would cheerfully abide by his judgment. When he asked her to fix a date for her marriage, she replied she thought she could "get ready" in a year. He insisted that a week or ten days should be ample, arguing that "long engagements were proverbially unlucky." The lovers compromised on the 9th of the next November as the wedding day.

He then returned to his work on the farm and later engaged to teach a three-months school on Little Raccoon Creek, near the home of his brother-in-law, David Reeder, with whom he made his home.

On the evening of November 7, he drove to his father's; and the next morning, with his two sisters, Lydia and Jane, and his prospective brother-in-law Snow, drove to the home of Dr. Knight, his future wife's guardian, in Pleasant Garden, where the party dined. Mr. Snow on his behalf interviewed the clerk of the court, making the necessary preliminary

arrangements for the marriage ceremony the next day. The party was generously entertained at Dr. Knight's, and on the following morning all drove to Hammond's Hotel, in Greencastle. Here, they were honored by a call from President Matthew Simpson.

At eleven o'clock Sunday morning, November 9, 1845, the party walked to the Methodist church where Dr. Simpson delivered "an excellent sermon" and at its close announced that he had been requested to pronounce a marriage ceremony, asking the parties to come forward to the altar. The two were pronounced husband and wife, and after the benediction and the congratulations of their friends, the party walked back to the hotel. After dinner the newly wedded pair drove to Father Harlan's home in the woods, and entered upon their life career together.

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