

Molly Clemens's Note Book

When Molly Clemens died in 1904, having outlived her husband about seven years, there was found among her effects an old note book which she began in 1862 while she was in Keokuk waiting for Orion to send for her. Orion, it will be seen, had the year before been appointed Secretary of Nevada Territory. That his sudden rise from the position of an obscure country-town lawyer to that of a man prominently engaged in State-building should have prompted her to jot down a bit of family history is entirely excusable. The note book is interesting not only for the sketch of Orion's career, with the steps leading up to his appointment, but also for its references to Sam Clemens who accompanied Orion and for whom the western trip proved the threshold for a literary career. Except for minor changes to insure clearness the entries are rendered as found.

Married, Orion Clemens, to Miss Mary E. Stotts, Dec. 19th 1854. By Rev. J. T. Umsted, Pastor of the Westminster Church.

Orion Clemens, lived in Muscatine, Iowa, when we were married. The river being closed we had to take our trip, or rather return to his home from Keokuk, in the stage. We left K Dec 20 arrived at M Dec 21st. I returned to Keokuk on my first visit March 18, I was taken sick about the last of April and was sick a long time. My Mother was

sent for. She came and staid 10 days. In June Mr. Clemens bought the "Ben Franklin" book and job office, of Ogden & Delaplain. We moved to Keokuk on the 9th of June 1855. Our little Jennie was born Sept 14, 1855. On the 19th of Dec following, we went to board at Pa's. Remained there until February 2nd 1857. In June of 1857, Mr. Clemens sold the printing office to H. H. Belding. On the 25 of September 1857, we started to Tennessee to spend the winter and to see a large amount of mountain land. We spent 10 days in St. Louis, with Mr. Wm. A. Moffett. Belle Stotts went with us. We all attended the "Great Fair of the West." We spent 10 days in Adair Co. Ky. visiting relatives, and friends of our parents. We then proceeded to Tenn. by private conveyance.

I left Tennessee on the 24 of March 1858. We went to Wayne Co. Ky — the present position of a large army. I staid until the 12 of April then went to Columbia Ky. There I remained 8 days, received a letter urging my speedy return to Iowa on account of my mothers illness. I arrived in Keokuk on the 27 of April. Found my mother better. Spent one day in St. Louis on my return.

Mr. Clemens returned to Keokuk on the 7 of July. He came by Memphis Tenn, to see and perhaps wait on & relieve his poor and unfortunate brother Henry Clemens who was second clerk on the steamboat Pennsylvania, which exploded her boilers, on the Mississippi river 60 miles below Memphis, Tenn on the 13, 1858.

Henry died on the 20 of June, one week from the time he was injured. No one of his friends reached him excepting Sam Clemens, his brother who was steersman at that time; but from a difficulty which took place between Sam C and the other pilot named Brown, on Henry's account

Sam had left the Penn and was to go on her again as soon as they arrived at Saint Louis, where Brown was to be discharged. Brown was killed by the explosion.

We staid at Wm Stotts'es from July 7 'til the following July, when we went to housekeeping. On Feb 1st 1860, we moved to town. In May Orion concluded to go to Memphis Missouri, to practice law. (I will say he was admitted to the bar in Jamestown Tenn. examined by Judge Goodall) He moved his family over in August, 1860. In Jan. 1861, he went to St. Louis to see Judge Edward Bates who had accepted an appointment in Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet as Atty General.

Mr. Clemens was successful, he received the appointment of Secretary of Nevada Territory, a new Territory organized in the session of 1860 & 61.

Mr. Clemens received notice of his appointment on the 27 of March, received his papers on the 20 of April. We then left Memphis on the 26, reached Keokuk again on the 27. Mr. C started to St. Louis that night. He left Keokuk on the 4 of July to visit his sister P. A. Moffett in St. Louis. There he met and prevailed on his brother Sam to go to his new home with him. They left Saint Louis on the 18 of July on the Sioux City, for St. Joe. There they took passage in the overland coach a mail conveyance which began to run daily between St Joe Missouri and Sacramento California.

They left St. Joe, on the 26 of July, arrived in Carson City, Nevada Territory on the 14 of Au. 1700 miles from St. Joe, and 580 miles west of Great Salt Lake City.

M. E. Clemens

It is unfortunate that the note book consists so largely of mere chronology. Of Orion's experiences

in Muscatine there is practically no mention, nor of the reason for the removal to Keokuk. The reader may surmise that Molly's long illness in the spring of 1855 made her anxious to be near her parents again, and so, when a business opportunity in the form of a printing shop appeared in Keokuk, Orion at once accepted.

But there was probably another reason why Clemens was glad to move to Keokuk. That very summer the Gate City saw the beginning of the biggest boom in its history. Property suddenly rose to fabulous prices, and the town went wild in an orgy of buying and selling lots. Within a year the population almost doubled. Strangers from abroad came in hordes. Speculators in real estate crowded the hotels and street corners. So permanent did the era of prosperity seem to be that by the summer of 1856 the newspapers of Keokuk were extending condolences to the neighboring towns for their sad lack of progress. Even St. Louis stood in danger of an eclipse.

Something of the exultation and vast pride in the city's growth is shown in the item that announced Orion Clemens's purchase of the printing office. "We are informed that Messrs. Ogden and Delaplain have sold out their job office to Mr. O. Clemens of Muscatine. Mr. Clemens is not blind to the advantages and prospects of Keokuk. Wonder if there 'ain't' a number of such persons of that place, and also at Burlington, who would come here if they

could. 'One horse towns' won't win in this age of railroads and steam. Men who would thrive must be in a thriving place.'

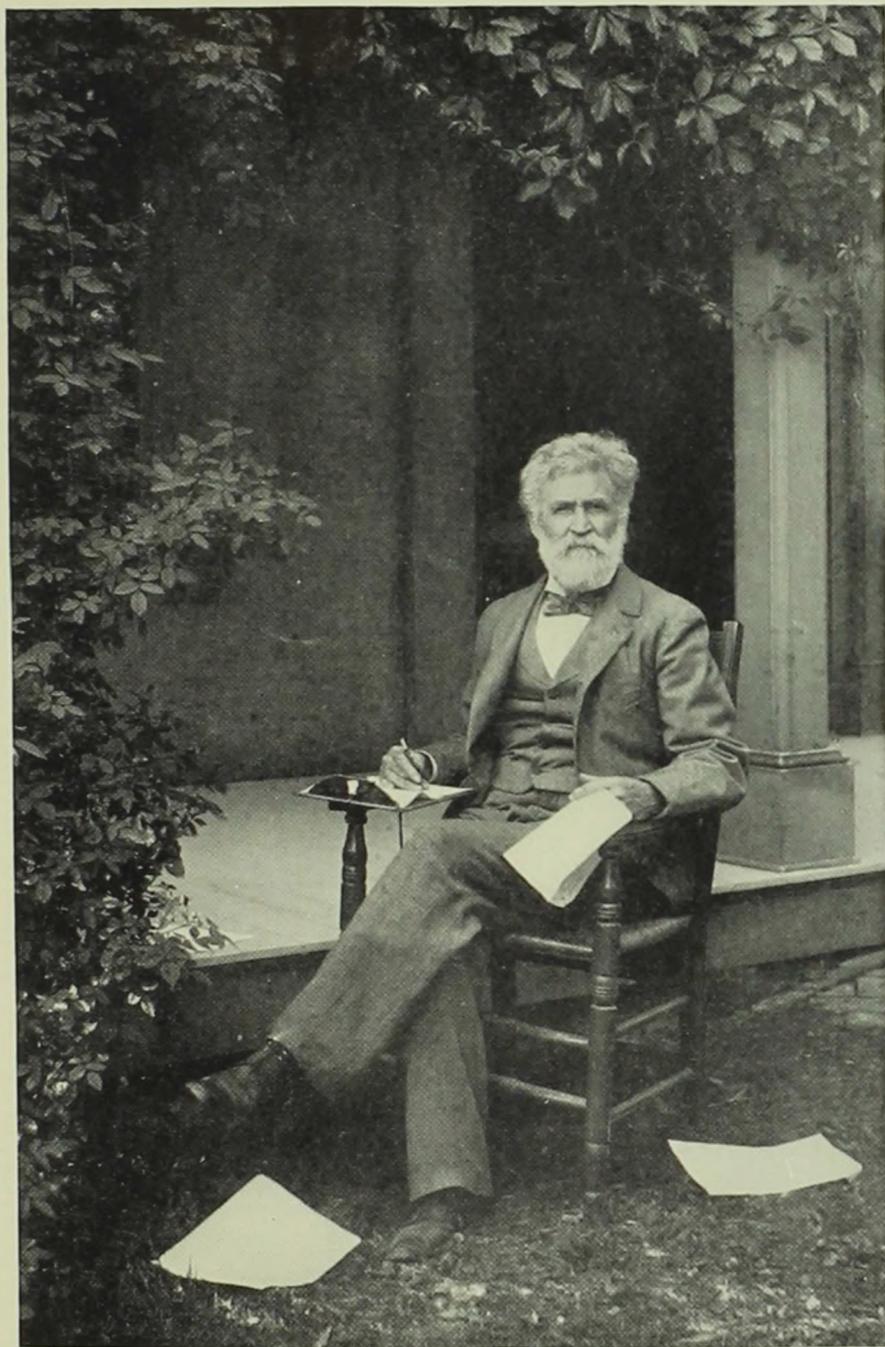
Mark Twain, who worked with Orion at the Ben Franklin Print Shop during these boom years, reports that Orion did not thrive, however, on account of his lack of business sense which resulted in the failure that overtook him in 1857. Molly merely records the event. It would be unfair to accept Twain's indictment at face value, however, for his own lamentable lack of business acumen is a matter of common knowledge, and he fails to add the significant fact that Orion's failure came during the great slump of 1857 when the boom utterly collapsed and left Keokuk gasping at the suddenness and extent of the catastrophe.

The note book item of the birth of Jennie will remind old friends of the Clemens family in Keokuk of the mute pathos of an empty little rocking chair. Jennie died in Nevada Territory on February 1, 1864. At the time of her death she was only eight years of age. For forty years afterward, up to the time of Molly's death, the little girl's chair was kept in the living room of the Clemens home.

Those familiar with Mark Twain's *Autobiography* will have no difficulty in identifying "the large amount of mountain land" which Orion and Molly went to see in the fall of 1857. This enormous tract of land, comprising seventy-five thousand acres, had been purchased by Orion's father in the hope that

some day it would bring fabulous wealth to his children. It actually became, instead, the worry of three generations. Once, in the early days, when Orion was Territorial Secretary, a development scheme that promised large returns was about to be consummated. It involved the importation of wine-growers and wine-makers from Europe, and settling them on the land. All that was needed was Orion's signature. But Orion, opposed to the liquor interests, refused to become a party to the scheme and so the project was abandoned. Many years later Mark Twain, speaking of the land, said that it had been created under a misapprehension, that his father had loaded himself up with it under a misapprehension, that he had unloaded it upon his children under a misapprehension, and that he himself should be glad to be rid of the accumulated misapprehensions as soon as possible.

Of the death of Henry Clemens, Molly's account agrees in detail with that given by Sam. He was three years younger than Sam and a favorite with all the members of the Clemens family. In 1853 he had gone up to Muscatine with Orion, and while there had worked as a clerk in Burnett's book store. Later he had followed Orion to Keokuk and had become a printer's apprentice in his shop. After Orion's failure in 1857, Henry had gone on the river with Sam. He was a clean, good-looking boy, and so generally beloved that Sam was often jealous of him, though he, too, loved him deeply as his wildly



COURTESY OF JESSE BENJAMIN

ORION CLEMENS

pathetic letter to Molly shows, written when Henry was dying.

Orion's appointment as Secretary of Nevada Territory was a political plum, a doubtful boon when first presented, but a position which might have proved exceedingly desirable had Orion played his cards right. He had received the post for his energetic support of Lincoln's first candidacy in a stumping tour of northern Missouri. Judge Edward Bates of St. Louis, who secured him the appointment, was an old friend.

For five years Orion prospered. Then the Territory became a State. At the first election he announced his candidacy for the office of Secretary of State. But at the last moment, according to Mark Twain, when there was no doubt of his nomination, he suddenly took it into his head not to go near the convention because his presence there might be an unfair and improper influence. This, together with the fact that he just as suddenly changed to an unfriendly attitude toward whisky in a country where whisky was popular, was enough to eliminate him. Having lost his political job he was forced to turn to law for a livelihood. In 1866 he returned to the Mississippi Valley, never to become a candidate for office again.

FRED W. LORCH