

Annals of Iowa

July, 1866

COL. JOHN Q. WILDS.

John Q. Wilds was born at Fort Littleton, Pennsylvania, October 24th, 1792. His ancestors, who were among the earliest settlers in the Keystone State, belonged to the old line whig school of politics. When seven years of age, death deprived him of the counsel and advice of a kind and indulgent father. This threw him, comparatively, upon his own resources, and he was tossed like a foot-ball upon the world's great highway, to battle with the stern realities of life. Although unable to obtain a classic education, he secured for himself by perseverance and hard study, a general knowledgeable of the common English branches, which, combined with sound Judgment and good business tact, v. as the talisman of his success in after life. His earlier years were spent as a tiller of the soil—one of the most honorable and independent avocations in which man can embark. From 1850 to 1854, he was engaged successfully in mercantile pursuits at his native town. But he soon became restless. "No pent-up Utica" like the crowded cities of the east afforded charms for him longer, and bidding farewell to home, friends, and the scenes of his childhood, he turned his gaze westward. Iowa was his choice among all the north-western states, and he soon found himself within her borders, without the remotest thought that future events would at one day lead him to add lustre to her reputation, and defend her honor and integrity with his heart's blood. Settling in the thriving and pleasant village of Mount Vernon in Linn county, he engaged in selling goods and speculation in lands, and as every honest man will do, he met with almost unbounded success. It was at Mount Vernon where the writer of this sketch became acquainted with John Q. Wilds. When a small boy I was employed in his store, and it was then I learned to love and respect him for his kind manner and gentle disposition, the recollection of which can never be eradicated from my memory. During the Kansas troubles, I well remember the interest he manifested in behalf of the cause of freedom and humanity, and it was with the greatest difficulty that his friends dissuaded him from rushing to the arena of combat. For a time he was engaged in merchandising with Messrs. Waln and Griffin—two estimable gentlemen at Mount Vernon; after which, if I remember rightly, he was alone in business again. In 1857, he was united in marriage to Miss Rowena Camp, a young lady of excellent qualities of head and heart, who, with their two pledges of married life, passed away to the land of shadows in the fall of 1864. The war came and John Q. Wilds' patriotic impulses would not permit him to stand aloof when the liberties of His country were in peril. Sometime during the summer of 1861, he was elected captain of company " A," 13th Iowa Infantry—the regiment being commanded by the lamented Crocker. Serving with this regiment a short time, he resigned to accept the Lieut. Colonelcy of the 24th Iowa Infantry, which was raised under the President's proclamation of July 2d, 1862, calling for three hundred thousand volunteers. This regiment was sometimes called " The Iowa Temperance Regiment" or "Methodist Regiment," because of the strict piety of so many of its members, and their supreme contempt for the god Bacchus. The regiment rendezvoused near Muscatine with the 35th at Camp Strong. When medical inspection took place it was ascertained that the regiment was more than full, and the excess was transferred to the 35th. On the 20th of October; Lieut. Col. Wilds proceeded with the regiment to Helena, Arkansas, where they remained during the winter, going out occasionally on expeditions in search of the enemy. On the morning of January 11th, 1863, the regiment embarked with Gen. Gorman's White River Expedition, enduring great trials and

hardships. After the return to Helena a general re-organization took place preparatory to active spring operations, and the 24th was attached to the 13th corps. Having been subjected to the skillful instructions of Lieut. Col. Wilds, it added materially to the efficiency and discipline of the corps. Lieut. Col. Wilds took part in the campaign against Vicksburg, and was engaged in the battle of Port Hudson; after which, himself and command did much "marching, skirmishing and foraging." In the battle of Champion Hills, which was fought on the 16th of May, and undoubtedly one of the hardest fought battles of the war, the officers and men composing the 24th, displayed a bravery and gallantry unexcelled—losing one hundred and ninety-five killed, wounded and captured, out of the four hundred and seventeen who entered the contest. In the siege of Vicksburg—no less famous than was that of Antwerp—the regiment acquitted itself nobly. About this time the Colonel of the regiment—E. C. Byam—an excellent gentleman and fine officer, "was compelled to leave the service by reason of ill health." Lieut. Col. Wilds then took faithful conscientious charge," and led his command through the Red River Expedition and battle of Sabine Cross Roads.

However, in the conflict only a portion of the regiment was engaged. After this battle, which occurred on the 8th of April 1864, the regiment went by sea to Fortress Monroe, thence by steamer to Washington City, thence to the Shenandoah Valley where it joined Gen. Sheridan and fought the battle of Winchester. In this contest, Col. Wilds, Major Wright, and in fact, all the officers and men fought with the most undaunted courage. Among many others who were wounded was Adj. Daniel W. Camp of Mount Vernon, brother-in-law to Col. Wilds. The next engagement in which the regiment participated, was Fisher's Hill. The loss of the regiment was slight, although it was in the thickest of the fight, with Col. Wilds cheering lustily at its head. On the 19th of October the battle of Cedar Creek was fought, and in which the subject of this sketch was mortally wounded. He was removed immediately to Winchester, where after much suffering, death closed his earthly career. On the 18th of November 1861. Speaking of the part taken by the 28th Iowa in the battle of Cedar Creek, Mr. Ingersoll in his well written "IOWA AND THE REBELLION", says: In this engagement there were two regiments besides the 28th from Iowa,—the 22nd, Col. Harvey Graham, and the 24th Col. John Q. Wilds. These were prominent in the action and lost many officers and men hors du combat. Col. Wilds on this field received this wound from which he soon afterwards died. It is a melancholy fact that soon afterwards died. It is a melancholy fact that soon after his death, his wife and children died of disease, so that his name can only live in the grateful recollection of his countrymen, who can never forget his long career of usefulness and gallantry." His regiment, by which he was almost idolized, held a meeting at Camp Russell, Va., on the 22nd of Nov. 1864, to take action concerning his death. Lieut. Col. Wright having been called upon to preside, T. L. Smith was elected Secretary. Brief and appropriate remarks were made by several persons, while many shed bitter tears of anguish over the loss of their fallen chief. The following resolutions were presented and unanimously adopted:

Resolved, that the death of Col. Wilds has filled our hearts with grief; has torn assunder associations of respect and affection, which, extending back through the period of our organization has only deepened and strengthened as time passed. In Col. Wilds, we remember an officer who was always at his post, and ever filled his position with true soldierly dignity. During the existence of the regiment he has had but few days of relief from duty, and in the severest of its campaigns, and in the bloodiest of its engagements, his skill and courage have inspired its action. In addition to these qualities of the soldier, we remember especially those kindly

feelings, that warm personal interest and sympathy which he extended to every member of his command. Truly unselfish, and delicately- sensible to the trials and hardships of the soldier, he has left in the hearts of us all, indelible impressions which will ever cluster gently around the memory of our commander and friend.

Resolved, That we accord to the relatives and friends of the deceased our deepest sympathy in their loss, and the sorrow it must cause; while at the same time we would remind them that the death of our' mutual friend was one of honor that he gave his life, as he had his service, to his country for the preservation of those institutions and that government through whose instrumentality our freedom and happiness can alone be secured.

John Q. Wilds was considerably above the medium height—tall and wiry in form—very much after the Lincoln style of man. Possessing a keen scrutinizing eye, he never failed to observe all that was transpiring around him, and being an excellent judge of human nature he was enabled to form accurate opinions of those with whom he was thrown in contact. Frank and free in his manner, yet reserved on all proper occasions when discretion demanded reticence. He was one of those men who would never knowingly wrong his fellow man, and his generosity led him to sympathize with all those in misfortune. In truth, he was beloved and respected by all who were fortunate enough to make his acquaintance. No man was more thoroughly imbued with the spirit of patriotism than he. But he has gone! A brave and noble spirit has passed away to the land of the Hereafter. A record has been left behind pure and spotless, untarnished by any dishonorable act during his eventful career. In order to aid in the preservation of the fairest and noblest fabric of constitutional freedom ever erected by man, he has lain down his life with that same sublime heroism which renders man almost immortal in every age and clime where human liberty is revered:

"As the bird to its sheltering rest,
When the storm on the hills is abroad,
So His spirit has flown from this world of unreal, To repose on the bosom of GOD."

JAMES P. C. POULTON.