

Annals of Iowa
Volume 1, No. 7 July, 1864

**AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE HAWKEYE PIONEER ASSOCIATION OF
DES MOINES COUNTY, IOWA, JUNE 2D, 1858.**
BY HON. CHARLES MASON.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On the first day of June, 1833, the White man first set foot on the ground whereon we now stand—claiming it as his own. The former occupants, who, for centuries, had been slowly retiring before the steady progress of their more powerful neighbors, had again yielded to their destiny, and reluctantly left behind them this Great River, with the prairies and forests for which it was skirted, to follow still further the setting sun—fit symbol of the approaching extinguishment of their devoted race—and the civilized American thus obtained a foothold upon this shore, to lay the foundation of new cities, and plant the germ of another empire. We are now holding the first annual meeting of a Society organized to commemorate that event, so interesting, not only to ourselves, but to our country and to the whole world of mankind.

To you, Sir, and to most of those who now hear me, I can hardly offer any statement of facts which will be either novel or interesting. The event we celebrate is so recent in its date, that it seems to belong to the present rather than the past. The mists of forgetfulness have not yet obscured any of the attending circumstances. So far from giving hope to the embellishments of fable, or the exaggerations of fancy, they have not yet subsided into sober, settled history. A quarter of a century seems but a short time in the recollection of an individual—still less in the history of a community. Many of those whom I now address witnessed the retiring steps of the reluctant savage, as he still lingered around the pleasant hunting grounds he was abandoning forever. Within seven years from that event every member of this Society had taken up his abode within the limits of the newly acquired Territory, where the Aboriginal foot prints had not then become erased. Men on whom the winter of age has not yet settled, who still feel the full glow of active, useful manhood, participated as adults in the event we are now commemorating. The Romulus of our city is still among us, with a fair promise of as many more years as have now clasped since he modestly gave to the city, he and his associates were founding, not his own name, but that which then so freshly dwelt in his emigrant heart, associated with tearful recollections of the past, and of the scenes and friends of his early home.

Under these circumstances, I shall not attempt any general recapitulation of events as a matter of information. Still it will not be deemed improper to bring to your recollection some of the circumstances connected with the early settlement of this city and county, and to add such reflections as the present occasion may seem to render appropriate.

When in February, 1837, I first set foot within this city, then in the fourth year of its infancy, it was a village of some three hundred inhabitants. They occupied houses mostly of a single story and even of a single room, constructed of logs or slightly built frames. Not more than two of the whole number were composed of more substantial materials, and even these have long since vanished before the advance of superior improvement. A small opening had been made extending a few squares up and down the river, and a still less distance

perpendicularly from the shore; but the hills around, now crowned with comfortable and tasteful residences, were then covered with the unbroken primeval forest. Not a church or a schoolhouse had as yet made its appearance among us, and although the streets had received their geographical position, yet the plastic substratum of clay, which had perhaps laid dormant for hundreds of generations, had not evinced its capacity for tormenting its disturbers, and for imposing the ruling fashion which prevailed for so many years of the frequent change of sides between the leg of the boot and that of the pantaloon. Such was the unpretending condition of the town which was at that time the Seat of Government of a Territory which included what now constitutes three States and the materials of a fourth.

The condition of the rural district was in harmonious correspondence with that of the metropolis. Skirting the timber land in most parts of the county might be seen a continuous series of incipient farms, each adorned with a settler's cabin. Occasionally, some one more adventurous than the rest had launched boldly out from the shore, where the others had nestled, into the open ocean of prairie, and had fixed his home where the storms of summer and the wintry winds might approach him on all sides, and in defiance, also, of the distance whence the materials for fire and shelter and fences were to be procured.

Public highways were then in an entirely embryotic condition. Between certain points tracks had become defined and established, but the traveler generally regulated his course across the prairies by the same rule that would have guided him over the lake or the desert. The cultivated fruits were wholly an expectancy. Like most of the other comforts and conveniences of life, they were visible only to the eye of Faith—they existed only in the regions of Hope.

The whole population of what now constitutes the entire State of Iowa, taken in the summer and early autumn of 1836, was a little upwards of *ten thousand*. In February following it was probably two or three thousand greater. The usual time requisite to send by mail to New York or Washington and obtain a reply, was ninety days, though the traveler, under favorable circumstance, might hope to make that journey in about one third of that time. I have seen a letter which had been one year and twelve days on its pilgrimage from the city of New York to our Burlington post office.

The inhabitants within the present limits of our State were almost exclusively of the class so widely known under the denomination of squatters. Destitute of titles to their lands, they expected and received little protection from statutory enactments. But being without the law in this respect they became a law unto themselves, and I think I can safely state that I have never known justice to be meted out with more strict impartiality, or to be tempered with more genuine equity.

Such is a hasty glimpse which personal observation enables me to present; and though the recollections of many who now hear me may reach back a few years farther, still, to those who have been eye witnesses of all these events, this reminiscence will serve to call up the past in all its vividness.

Contrast for a moment this picture of the past with that afforded by a glance at the present, and tell me whether this earth has often witnessed instances of more rapid progress? Within the last twenty-one years, while the infant has been growing to the man, the population of our city and that of our State have respectively increased about fifty fold; their wealth and importance in a much greater degree. The practical distance to the seaboard cities, measured through the mails, is less than one-tenth of what it was, and not more than one-fifth to the traveler; while the telegraph has, for some purposes, effectually annihilated

time and distance. The open prairie throughout our country has been transformed into a series of almost continual enclosures. The ploughshare has developed the latent fertility of the soil, intrinsically more valuable than the mines of California. Comfortable homes are scattered over its entire surface. Orchards and gardens and fields, bright with the promise of abundant harvests, are blooming in every direction. The necessaries, the comforts, and even the luxuries of life, are enjoyed by us in a degree scarcely inferior to those which the people of any of the older States can boast. Such are some of the changes which a brief retrospect of what we ourselves have witnessed enables us to realize.

Much of this improvement may be regarded as peculiar to this and some of the other new States. But very much is also due to the general progress which the whole human race has made within the last twenty-five years. Probably never since the creation has the world made so great a general advance within the same limit of time. That wonderful instrument, the Telegraph, has sprung into existence during that period, and given to man a faculty he never before possessed. It is not only spreading its net work of nervous sensations all over the land, but is now aiming to produce a like result over the ocean also.

Within the same time, DAGUERRE has unlocked another of the secret chambers of Nature, and drawn from thence the elements of a new art, which promises in the end to be as useful as it was astonishing. Did it not seem like enchantment when we first saw the varying lineaments of the human face transferred in an instant to the imperishable tablet, there to remain unchanged forever, and be capable of endless reproduction? And when for a thousand other purposes it has taken its place among the useful arts, who shall attempt to fix a limit to its wonderful utility?

Railroads, though invented just previously, can hardly be said to have been practically known to the world prior to 1833. They were confined to a very few localities; they have now become a common convenience, an almost daily necessity in all civilized and populous countries, giving to humanity an almost ubiquitous power, never before conceived of. Especially in the United States have they been constantly and rapidly extending themselves westward, checkering every State from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Onward still is their note of progress, and with a bold ambition they are manifesting an unmistakable intention of overleaping the intervening rocky barriers and formidable deserts, and of connecting the two oceans by their ligaments of iron.

Within the same space of time has steam been successfully applied to Ocean navigation. The broad Atlantic is now traversed in this manner with as much regularity as the steam ferry boats ply across the Mississippi, and other seas and oceans are fast becoming witnesses of like results. That mute, submissive power which has learnt to urge there floating leviathans for thousand of miles without food or rest, against winds and currents, has, in numberless other new modes since the epoch we are considering, been made implicitly subservient to the will of man. The inventive genius of our race has, in fact received a new general impulse. It has explored every portion of the wide field of human efforts, substituting the labor of machinery for the far less perfect still of human hands, and contributing in a thousand other methods to enlarge the faculties, minister to the comfort, and advance the progress of the human race.

Even Science has not furnished an exception to the general impulse with which the great mind of Humanity has been moved since the formation of our city. Such has been the case especially with those branches which are peculiarly utilitarian in their character. Geology, for example, the most wonderful and instructive of them all, has assumed its present development within that period, opening entirely new scenes of wonder and

delight, and enabling us to translate from the handwriting of the Almighty, graven on tablets of imperishable rock, the history of a thousand centuries anterior to the advent of the first human being upon this planet.

This is not the same world it seemed when our city was founded, nor is man the same being he then was. His capacities have become enlarged. He can accomplish now what would then have been entirely chimerical. He has risen one degree in the scale of being. He has commenced a new era in progress of development. If the wonders described in the Arabian tales should become realities, during the next generation hardly will a greater change be effected than that which has taken place since the occurrence of the event we are this day commemorating. All this have we witnessed. In all this have we participated, aside from our experience in relation to the development of our own body politic, in which the world at large has not shared.

Reckoning by events and the power of accomplishing results, the days of antediluvian longevity seem almost again restored. Methuselah could not accomplish in a thousand years what we can now complete in our brief three score and ten. I doubt whether during his whole life he saw more important changes or witnessed a more substantial progress, either physically, morally, socially, or politically, than we have done within the last twenty-five years.

We have within that time looked in upon the cradle where human institutions were in their swaddling clothes, and we have witnessed all their stages of development up to the period of their present maturity. We have practically been back to the days of the early Patriarchs, and many of the charges which, in other instances, it has required three thousand years to produce, have passed successively before our own vision. We have seen society in the process of its first formation. Little by little have we beheld the elements organizing into regular order, crystallizing into forms in accordance with the laws of their being and developing progressively into higher and more perfect organizations as circumstances permitted or required.

Some of us at least have witnessed the entire absence of all the forms of civil government within our limits. More than a year elapsed after the savage had yielded to the white man before the laws of Michigan were extended over the western shore of the Mississippi. Two years later we became a portion of the Territory of Wisconsin, and the winter following, regular Territorial Courts of general jurisdiction were, for the first time, established among us. Even then, the administration of the laws was for some time extremely imperfect. Counties were organized, but their limits no one could ascertain. The course of a stream, and lines indefinitely drawn from grove to headland were all the boundaries which the circumstances of the case permitted.

Annals of Iowa

Volume 1, No. 8 October, 1864

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE HAWKEYE PIONEER ASSOCIATION OF DES MOINES COUNTY, IOWA, JUNE 2D, 1858.

BY HON. CHARLES MASON.

"In July, 1838, we became a separate Territory, and not long afterwards, the surveys of the public lands in this neighborhood having been completed, the boundaries of our counties

were fixed with precision. The public lands were brought into market, and we became possessed of the legal titles to our real estate. Regular government was soon afterwards established in the older counties, and rapidly extended, as civilization made its way into the interior.

As illustrative of the novel uses to which it was necessary to adapt the limited means within our reach in those early days, and of the shifts to which we were driven by the great mother of invention, I need but remind you of some of the scenes which have been witnessed within these very walls. The main body of this edifice has now been standing about twenty years. It was the first and for many years the only church building in the city of Burlington.

Whoever at the present day sits within its hallowed precincts, listening to the fervid prayer, the calm discourse, the swelling anthem or the loud hosanna, would be very erroneous in the conclusion that these were the only sounds that had ever echoed within its consecrated walls. No: other halls have witnessed more important and more tragical scenes, but where will you find those that could give a more variegated history of what had transpired within them?

Here was embodied, for several years, the legislative wisdom of the Territory of Iowa—the "Lower" House paradoxically occupying the hall above, and the "Upper" House, the room below. From these went forth those edicts which for many a year have ruled this goodly land. Here, too, the Supreme Judicial Tribunal of the Territory held its sometime session, and the regular terms of the District Court were here convened for many a successive year. Here the rights of persons and property were adjudicated. Here the felon trembled and hoped at the prospect of an inefficient penitentiary, and here the murderer received his final earthly doom.

Nor is this all. With the eye of vivid recollection I now see before me the assembled patriotism of this young city, in democratic council convened to hear the propositions brought by the bearers of a flag of truce from a hostile camp, to discuss, in high debate, the momentous question of peace or farther war with our more powerful but not more valiant antagonist. A model war was that, and right worthy of our praise, where not one drop of hostile blood was shed; where those who won the glory *paid the bills*, and ever since then their hearts have inclined to peace.

Finally, here our amiable Governor once met in friendly conference, the representatives of some of the dissatisfied red children; to hear their complaints and *to promise* them justice. Here we listened to their native eloquence, and were afterwards treated in this very presence to the song and the war dance. The wild whoop of the savage, which had so often carried dismay and horror into many a stout heart, failed to make any impression upon the walls of "Old Zion," which looked on in staid gravity, and seemed fully prepared not to be surprised at anything strange thereafter.

But all these things have long since passed away. Our institutions, civil, political and religious, strengthened and matured by the very stocks and commotions to which they have been subjected, have at length settled down into order and quiet and propriety. Nearly twelve years since our Territory having passed through the necessary training in incipient self-government, having sufficiently organized and solidified her institutions, and having acquired the necessary amount of population, was admitted into that great sisterhood of States, which, by its moral, more than by its physical power, is now felt throughout the earth, and will at no distant day, in a greater or less degree, give law to the whole race of mankind.

There are some events which seem to increase in magnitude and importance as they recede

in distance. The establishment of a new State—one that is probably destined to exist till "the last syllable of recorded time"—is of that sublime and solemn character. While that State endures its founders will become more and more venerated. To us of the present age and country, such an event is of so common occurrence that, like the glory of the morning sun or the starry vault of midnight, it fails to be adequately appreciated. But when the historian of the thirtieth century shall attempt to trace the rise, progress and destiny of our federal Union and its sovereign constituents, he will rank the empire builders of the present day and country high in the scale of human philanthropists and benefactors. Individually, their names may all have sunk into oblivion, but, like the invisible stars that shed their twilight glory over the milky way, the united acts of those who planted, fostered and protected the infancy of our broad State, shall glow and brighten on the page of history forever. Not that their names were written on the scroll of fame in characters of human blood; not that they had carried havoc and desolation into the peaceful homes of a neighboring people. The triumphs of peace will hereafter be ranked high above those of the most successful acts of violence and bloodshed. Those who, obeying the generous instincts, which prompt the young and ardent to brave danger for the public weal, abandoned the comforts of civilized life, and the homes of their early years, to plant the standard of civilization in the wilderness who contended not in the exciting strife with foes of flesh and blood, but with the debilitating diseases and disheartening privations incident to a frontier life. Who, in mute, uncomplaining agony, saw the friends whom they loved as their own souls, fade and die in their arms or by their sides; who, by their sufferings, their efforts and their sacrifices, have caused to spring forth from the soil of this great State the food and comfort which make glad the hearts of millions in other lands. These are they who, in after times, will receive the need of praise as being the heroes of peace, the genuine benefactors of the world.

And here I close my reflections upon the past; but from my present stand-point I cannot deny myself the pleasure of glancing for a moment in the opposite direction. The interest of this occasion arises not more from the contrast of the Present with the Past, than from that with the future.

In point of importance in the Federal circle, we now rank among the smallest of the States. The next census will show us little if any below the medium. Some of the present members of this Society will see the time when Iowa will be the fifth State in the Union in point of population, and the third, if not the second, in respect to agricultural wealth and resources. And but a few generations will pass away—a short period in the existence of a State—before our prairies shall yield their full amount of annual treasures into the garner of the husbandman, and our descendants shall exceed in number the population of Imperial Rome when she had the world at her feet. Then, with her institutions in full maturity, and her power and influence at their zenith, shall the stalwart tree retain something of the form and character which were communicated by her own hands when it was a nursling shrub. Then, and for ages afterwards, shall the institutions we have assisted in establishing continue to influence the destinies of this mighty State.

But let us give our vision a wider range, and mark the promised progress of that whole country of which we form so fair a portion. It is not in her individual capacity—sovereign though she be—that the brightening destinies of our State exhibit themselves in their grandest and most interesting aspect; but it is as a member of that great social compact of sovereigns, which out of many forms but one, that she excites our highest patriotic pride.

Since the epoch we now celebrate, the population of the United States has fully doubled;

then wealth, power, and importance have augmented in a much greater ratio. Already have we the largest commercial marine of any power on the face of the earth; with only one competitor in all the arts of peace, and with a more active and enterprising people than can be found elsewhere under the sun. At the end of another quarter of a century, our numbers, judging by the past, will have doubled again—exceeding those of France or Great Britain, including all except her Asiatic dependencies; and by, the commencement of another century we shall equal those of even Russia herself. Before that date the financial centre of the civilized world will have crossed the Atlantic. Our limits will include all that is of essential value in the whole of North America; our progress in science, agriculture, the useful arts, the means of locomotion, and all that gives real prosperity shall be unequaled by any other nation, and we shall stand confessedly the leading power upon the face of the whole earth.

Not that our military strength and appointments, either on the ocean or on the land, shall exceed those of any of the sovereigns of Europe; not that we are about to enter on a career of conquest, to subjugate by force our neighbors, either on the North or on the South. Such an attempt would be the extreme of folly, not to say of wickedness and would lead us far away from the end at which we should be aiming.

Our mission is, "peace on earth and good will to all men." On that, as a foundation, our government rests. That is the source of all our real power and progress. Unless urged by some great necessity, we should not deviate from that line of policy. We have but to follow the precept of the Golden Rule and the dictates of our own moral sense, to deal justly, kindly, generously, with each other and with all other nations; to practice charity and moderation, but at the same time friendship, both at home and abroad; in order not only to confer on others, but also to secure to ourselves, the greatest possible amount of benefits—including territorial expansion, national growth, and that moral power which as greatly exceeds physical force on the score of efficacy as on that of humanity.

These will secure us eternal peace and domestic tranquillity. Sectional jealousies and bickerings will soon cease to be dangerous. Foreign nations will court our friendship, and avoid wantonly to provoke our displeasure. Neighboring States and provinces will gladly seek to escape from the inconveniences of colonial dependence, or the terrors of domestic anarchy, by mingling their interests and their national existence with ours, and in this manner all we ought to desire will be cheaply obtained without the firing of a hostile gun for a century to come.

But your apprehensions have perhaps already suggested the enquiry, whether this very expansion is not fraught with the danger of dissolution. Such an event may indeed take place, but not in consequence of territorial enlargement. A separation would be much more likely to take place between two States than between fifty. Had the number of the States in this Union never been increased beyond their original thirteen, I very much doubt whether a separation would not have taken place before this day. The power that made us a nation has provided the means of preserving us so. The great interior States, formed since the adoption of the Constitution, are the chief bond upon which the Union relies for its preservation at the present day. Every new acquisition increases the strength and number of those ties which hold us united. Even were there no other feelings involved than those of patriotic pride, I appeal to every heart among you whether each augmentation of territory, while it increases our common property, does not also increase the reluctance with which you would see a dissolution of that government which holds it in trust for us all; whether every advance in national power and importance does not enhance the repugnance with which you would descend

from a pre-eminent to a subordinate position.

"I will venture the opinion, founded on mature reflections, that the whole Mexican Republic might at once be admitted into this Union, if done by mutual consent, the States and Territories placed on a footing of equality with our own, without causing any essential disturbance or danger to our own institutions. I believe that there is sufficient vital power and vigor of constitution in our Federal system to enable it at once to take our weaker neighbors by the hand and steady their footsteps until they shall be able to stand and to act with their own unaided strength. All that would be necessary for that purpose would be that protection against domestic insurrection which the Federal power accords, under the Constitution, to all the States of the Union. Events at no distant day may bring this questions to the test of experiment. But I must return from this digression.

Such, then, is the prospect by the future of our Federal Government. Such the hopes which the circumstances around us justify us in indulging. We may be doomed to disappointment. You and I may live to see that glorious Union, around which so many of our fondest hopes no cluster, rent in twain or scattered in fragments. Instead of being the citizens of a central State in a confederated Republic, which as a great and going power among the nations, we may find ourselves on the very frontier of two or more weakened and warring factions, the sport of those despots who have trembled at the consequences of our united example.

The very magnitude of this danger, while it appalls us, brings with it our surest guarantee of safety. No sane man is in danger of dashing himself by daylight down the precipice which yawns in full view before him. The menaces engendered by causes of occasional irritation, are soon forgotten when the sober realities of dissolution array themselves fully before us,—a truth which has already been illustrated on several memorable occasions.

If there is any class in all our wide domain who, more than all others, can be relied upon as being loyal to our present constitution and government, it is the pioneers of Iowa who have given a State to that very Union. In their name, and in this sacred presence, I here utter the solemn pledge that they will ever be found standing shoulder to shoulder in defense of that great political fabric, which is partly the worn of their own hands, and which they have so essentially aided to strengthen and adorn.