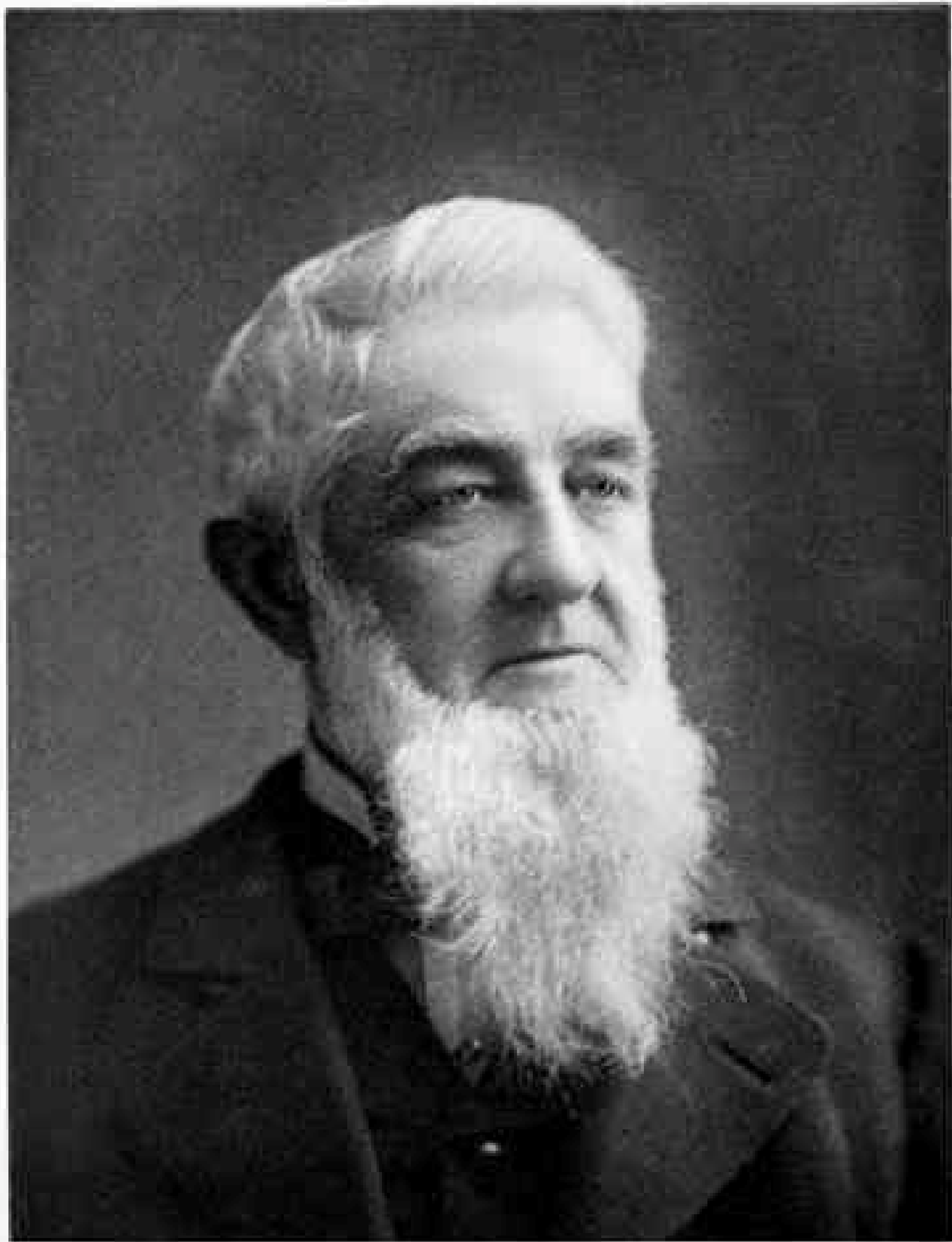

COLONEL E. F. HOOKER

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KNOWN from the Atlantic to the Pacific, along the great western trail of civilization, was Colonel—everybody called him "Colonel"—Edward Foster Mills Hooker, descendant of an English family, entitled by Royal decree to wear the heraldic arms of Thomas Hart Hooker, founder of the city of Hartford, Connecticut, and cousin of the famous fighting General, Joe Hooker. He was a conspicuous figure wherever he was, and for nearly thirty years his time-silvered head, sheltered under a white, soft wool, broad-brimmed hat, was familiar to everybody in Des Moines. He wore such a hat every day in the year, and all his life, which, with his heavy white beard, gave him that venerable bearing which won him his military title.

In 1840, he began freighting by team, but a few years later became connected with the Ohio Stage Company, which operated lines on the national roads to Wheeling, in advance of the iron horse. In 1850, he became General Agent of the company, and moved westward to Columbus, Indianapolis, Chicago, Davenport, in advance of the railroad.

The pioneers of Iowa and Polk County parted company with the railroad at Chicago, and slowly plodded their way in "prairie schooners," or floated on some river boat to Keokuk, and thence, by wagon, to "Raccoon Forks." The tide of immigration increased so rapidly that in 1849, Fink & Walker established a line of stages from Keokuk to the "Forks." Three trips a week were to be made, with elegant coaches, but long before, the heavy wagons of teamsters had cut deep ruts in the soft prairie soil, sloughs and creeks were not bridged, so that, in the wet season, passengers were content with riding in a "jerkey," walking half the distance, and carrying a rail to pry the vehicle out of the mud, and getting through in four days. Skunk River bottoms was a holy terror to drivers and passengers as well.

"How far to Fort Des Moines?" asked a passenger of the driver one day at "Uncle Tommy" Mitchell's tavern, in 1854.

"Sixteen miles."

"How long will it take to get there?"

"We can make it in six hours, I reckon, if the horses hold out, and the bottom don't fall out."

The regular fare was ten dollars for each person, and five dollars for each trunk.

In 1855, the Western Stage Company purchased the Fink & Walker line, and July First, the first coach of the company arrived in Des Moines, the Colonel coming with it as General Manager of all its lines west of the Mississippi. The only available residence for him was a small frame near the corner of Walnut on Third Street, and there was his office. Subsequently, he built a fine brick residence on Locust Street, on the block now occupied by the Savery House. The headquarters of the company was at the Everett House, on the east side of the street, where the temporary Court House now is, and next to the Colonel's office. The rear part of the hotel was one of the soldiers' log barrack buildings, to which William F. Marvin and Benjamin Luse built an addition, named it the Marvin House, sold it, in 1853, to J. C. Savery, who re-named it. It was a lively place, always crowded, two in a bed, the overflow taking chairs. The town was small, the entire population of it could have been seated on the lot where *The Register and Leader* office is. The coming of the stages was a portentious and notable event in the embryo metropolis of the state. On arrival, the small boys, and some larger ones, turned out to greet them, the horses covered with mud in Spring time, foam and lather in Summer, and frost in Winter. I think Simon Casady, the Sherman boys, By. Keffer, and Harry West have not forgotten those days.

The company was a wealthy one, and at once plans were made for the business of the Division Headquarters. A large farm was purchased to provide hay and grain and grazing for the horses, an immense barn and shops were built on Eighth Street, below Vine. There were five departments: Wood Work on Coaches; Iron Work; Painting and Trimming; Horseshoeing; Harness Making. Each department was controlled by an expert superintendent. Routes were at once opened in various directions, one

from Davenport to Council Bluffs; Lyons to Cedar Rapids, Iowa City, Davenport, and Dubuque; Keokuk to Keosauqua; Oskaloosa to Council Bluffs via Indianola, Winterset, and Lewis; Des Moines to Fort Dodge via Boonesboro. Starting out with weekly trips, they were increased to semi-weekly, tri-weekly, and daily, as the country settled up and the demand increased. Its business was immense. During one year, its receipts between Des Moines and Boonesboro were one hundred thousand dollars.

Thousands of men and horses were required, and a system of management devised demanding the highest degree of executive capacity, but the Colonel proved equal to the necessity.

The location of the Division Terminal at Des Moines, with its business, its traffic, and acquisition of employes (sic) and their families, gave the town a new life and impetus, for from every direction of its routes, the potential influence was towards its headquarters.

During the War period, the stages were of great benefit in the transportation of troops. The Thirty-third and Thirty-ninth Iowa regiments were taken to Davenport, with all their equipments, in two days each. Parts of the Second, Sixth, Tenth, and Fifteenth were also taken to their place of rendezvous. On all such occasions, the Colonel directed the movements in person.

Gradually, its routes were made over Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and west to Denver.

In 1868-9, the iron horse had again overtaken the Colonel, and in 1870, the company sold out to the Ben. Halliday Overland Stage Company. Its vast property was disposed of, and July First, 1874, the last coach was shipped to Omaha, A. T. Johnson, who had been the local agent from 1858, riding on the box from the barn to the depot.

The Colonel then went to California, and became manager of the California-Oregon Stage Company, or the Shasta Line, as it was called, from Sacramento to San Francisco and Portland, which position he held five years, when, the iron horse having reached the Pacific Shore, and could push him no farther, he quit, and was soon after appointed General Agent of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad at San Francisco, where he remained about four years, when he was appointed General Live Stock Agent of

the road, and stationed for a time at Salt Lake City, then eastward at other points, until he reached Omaha, and for thirty-one years he was on the payroll of the Rock Island, his services ending with his decease. He was known by every live-stock man from Omaha to San Francisco.

In business affairs, he was exact, methodical, the soul of honor, expected of employes faithful service, yet to them he was exceedingly kind. If sick or in trouble, he was their helper and best friend. They knew it, and so it was they served him until the last wheel was turned, or they rested in death. He never expected them to do what he would not do himself, if occasion required, and there were times in the experience of drivers which tested pluck and fortitude. I could name scores of drivers who were loaded with incidents interesting and often thrilling.

As an instance of his readiness to do things, "Pap" Clark, who began driving for him in Ohio, and came with him to Des Moines, and died a few years ago on South Sixth Street, a very old man, once related an incident in 1850, ten miles east of Massillon. Two coaches had stopped for supper and to change horses. There was a terrific storm of rain, thunder and lightning raging. It was dark as pitch. The corduroy road was in horrible condition, broken and full of deep, dangerous holes. The coaches were to go east. Old "Pap" was to take the first coach out. The driver marked up for the second refused to go. "Pap" urged him hard, but he refused to budge. The Colonel, who happened to be present, as he usually was at such times, overheard the refusal, and said to "Pap":

"Have the team brought up. I will drive it. I used to drive team once, and I think I can do it again. If I can't manage it with the reins, I will use the jerk line." The old teamsters used to train their teams of four and six horses to be guided by the "near" leader, to which was attached a long single rein, and to which it had been trained to respond by "jerks."

The team was brought out, and, after requesting "Pap," who knew every foot of the road, to shout to him the dangerous places as they approached them, for they could scarcely see the horses, and chaining the coach body to the axles to prevent being thrown over, the Colonel mounted the box and the run was made safely.

"To make such a trip," said "Pap," "over such a road, with a strange team, required lots of pluck."

It was the custom of the Colonel to ride over the various lines on the box with the driver, and watch the horses. If he found one that did not match its mate in work or gait, he would simply say, as he left the box, "I will send you a good mate horse for that 'off leader,' " or as the case might be, on such a day; when the day came, the horse was there. That pleased the drivers, for they detested a "shirk."

The first question the Colonel put when application was made for a job was, "Is he honest; is he capable?" Not often, but sometimes, his confidence was misplaced. One day, at a station out in the mountains, while he was strolling about, he overheard a driver saying to another, as the coins clinked, "There's one dollar for the company; there's one dollar for me." He counted an equal division of six dollars, and one over, which was "for me." He concluded to find what was turned in as fares. It was three dollars. He thought the company was entitled to a little more than half the receipts, and the driver lost his job.

The most famous of the Colonel's drivers was "Hank" Monk, immortalized by Mark Twain. He was the most expert, fearless driver that ever drew a rein in the Overland Service. In that mountainous country, mules—the Mexican variety—with most vicious heels, were used. A man had to stand at the head of each and hold him fast, while the driver gloved and got ready. When he grasped the reins and gave the word, the six men suddenly sprang aside, the coach quickly shot out of sight, and the pace was kept up for the ten-mile run.

Stories galore were told of "Hank," one of which was that when Horace Greeley was lecturing through that country, he was billed for Placerville on a certain evening. Arriving at Carson City, he was behind time. When he boarded the coach, he said to "Hank," who was on the box, that he had an engagement at Placerville and wanted to get there quick. "Hank" gave his whip a crack and started at a terrific pace. The coach bounded in every direction, pitching Greeley all over it, until he began to get sore, when he asked "Hank" if he could not go a little easier. "You keep your

seat, Horace, and I'll get you there by seven o'clock, " said "Hank," and he did, pounded almost to jelly. The incident prompted the gift to "Hank," by friends, of a fine gold watch, suitably inscribed, and chain. The watch and identical coach were exhibited at the Saint Louis World's Fair.

The Colonel was proud of his drivers, and they were loyal to him, for he took great interest in their welfare. A passenger once stopped for dinner at Wood River Station, in Colorado. The eating-house was kept by "Aunt Lamb." He heard the driver ask her: "Where is the Colonel? He has not been along here for three months." "I would be more glad to see Ben. Halliday, for what the Colonel owes me, I know I will get," was the reply.

Nearly all of the old drivers have gone to their rest. I recall a few yet living: John Whissen, William E. Ray, the veterinary surgeon, John R. Burgess, of Des Moines; J. M. Diefenbecker, of Ames; "Billy" Warren, of Stuart; Fred. Willard and Bent Morrow, of Atlantic, and Charley Coon, of Newton, and White Kimes, of Lynnville.

Coon began driving in 1853, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and for eleven years drew the reins all over California, Colorado, and Nevada. He drove into Placerville when "Hank" Monk drove in there, but on another line. I met him one day last week, and he related some of his experiences. "I remember one night in 1854, when going over the mountain, I was suddenly called to halt, kick out the mail sack, and throw up my hands, " said he, "but I gave the team a word they understood, and they went off like a shot, and I got away. That was the only time I was held up.

"Over the ranges, the roads were fearful, steep, with short, reverse curves like the letter S, with the reverse so sharp the leaders could see the coach. We had to chain the coach down to the forward axle to keep it from going over. I had to strap myself down to the seat.

"In 1861, I came East and began driving for Colonel Hooker. My first run was from the end of the railroad, four miles east of Brooklyn, to Newton, with the fast mail. The travel was immense, sometimes five and six coaches were necessary to take all the passengers. It was very nice in Summer, but in Spring and Winter there was trouble—lots of it.

"One Winter night, I left Grinnell at eight o'clock. The snow had been falling all day, and was over a foot deep. I had gone but a few miles when I lost the trail. I drove around for several hours, then took my own tracks and followed them back until I got on some high ground where I could see some distance, and, selecting a certain star which I knew was in the direction of Newton, I followed it until I got to Rock Creek; then I knew where I was. I got into Newton at nine o'clock the next morning, the team was fagged, and the passengers clamoring for breakfast.

"After a time, my run was changed to go west from Newton, and one Spring, Skunk River got on a rampage, as usual, and flooded the whole bottoms. The driver who had preceded me had attempted to go through, but got into deep water, lost the mails, and nearly drowned the passengers, but he finally got out, and left the coach and horses on the other side. I was sent after them. I went a long distance to the south around the flood, got the horses, and swam them back through the flood.

"One Winter night, with the mercury at the bottom of the thermometer, and the wind cutting like a knife—I had put on double extra thick clothing—on reaching a tavern four miles west of Newton, I was nearly frozen. I pulled up and told the passengers that I would turn out there unless I got something to keep the wind out. "Billy" Quick, who was inside, threw out a big robe, and I went on. Arriving at Kendall Station, we met the coaches going east, and drivers being short, after thawing out for thirty minutes, I had to drive back to Grinnell.

"One great source of danger we had was cattle lying in the road in the Summer, frightening the horses and endangering the passengers. One driver declared he would run over them if they got in his way. Soon after, at Rising Sun, one night, a cow was lying in the middle of the road. He told the horses to go; they spread out, went around the cow on both sides, and when the forward axle reached her, she humped herself and tipped over the coach."

Referring to the Colonel, he said: "The Colonel was a father to all the drivers. If we got into trouble with the Road Agent, as we sometimes did, he being our boss, all we had to do was to go to Colonel Hooker, and it was quickly settled. When he left, and the

company sold out to Halliday, "Billy" Quick took several of us old drivers, to serve the United States Express Company as messengers and agents."

Coon drove seventeen years without an accident or injury to a passenger. He is now seventy-nine years old.

The Colonel was a man of the people, and for the people. He was not versed in book lore, but he possessed an extensive knowledge of men and things, of which books are made, and he was one of those who are the builders of civic communities. He was loyal to Des Moines, the home of his adoption, and helped to build it.

Socially, he was frank, companionable, and universally popular. His business life brought him in contact with all classes of people, and whether at some notable social function in Washington, or seated beside a driver on the box of a coach, he was equally cordial and courteous. In that respect, he was thoroughly cosmopolitan. He had a keen sense of humor, and thoroughly enjoyed the ludicrous. He was kind, liberal in the bestowment of favors to the needy and worthy. It was his frankness, high sense of humor, unaffectedness, sincerity, and cheerfulness that won the friendship of all who knew him. Buoyant and light-hearted, he was always young, never grew old, never would give his age. To ask it, displeased him.

His home was an ideal one, always open to friends, who were scattered from ocean to ocean. He was a royal entertainer, and his dinners and receptions were notable functions. He enjoyed, heartily, the society of young people and little ones, of whom he had an attractive brood of his own. For woman, he had the most profound respect and regard. Motherhood, to him, was her crowning glory. In business relations, he was ever watchful for her care and comfort. He was a member of high degree in the Masonic fraternity.

Religiously, he was bound by no denominational creed, though he regularly attended the Episcopal service. He believed that personal character should be measured by action instead of profession. His high sense of morality made him an exemplary citizen.

Politically, he was like most of the pioneers, a Democrat, but when the Civil War came, he affiliated with the Republican party, but took no part in politics. Very few knew his political faith.

He died in 1896, aged eighty-three. His funeral was attended by a large concourse, among whom were many notable persons from abroad. The cortege to the cemetery was headed with one of his old coaches, bearing the pall-bearers, with two old drivers, John R. Burgess and Fred. Kromer, on the box.

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