



EDWIN R. CLAPP

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IF you search his old family records, you will probably find it written, Edwin Ruthven Clapp, but for the last fifty years he has been familiarly known as Ed.

He came to Henry County with his parents in the year 1837, a young boy, and has eaten the ashen crust of poverty in common with many other pioneer lads, who, with willing hands and determined purpose, have assisted their parents in opening up farms and doing the drudgery which usually fell to the lot of the pioneer boys of sixty years ago.

He started out in the world with merely a hint of education. Two Winter terms of three months each, in a log schoolhouse near Mount Pleasant, Iowa, was all that was vouchsafed to him. There was no time nor place, after that, for even a partial education. Penury and untoward circumstances chained him to such manual labor as could be found, and his own busy hands and resistless energy carved out a career and fortune of which any citizen of Iowa might well be proud.

His entire time, after the death of his father, which occurred very soon after arriving in Iowa, was employed, together with an older brother, in supplying, very scantily, food and raiment for the widowed mother and young sister. Later, he found employment at the Tiffany House, Mount Pleasant, at the sum of four dollars per month. His duties were various—from stable boy to table waiter.

In 1845, his brother Wallace came to Fort Des Moines to engage in the grocery business. Ed. followed him a year later, in February, walking the entire distance, his trunk coming on a wagon-load of groceries from Mount Pleasant, the driver kindly giving him that much of a lift, his purse being lighter than his trunk. He was a young man of eighteen years, with pluck, ambition and great expectations. For one of such temperament, the town presented

little encouragement. It was composed of the log cabins deserted by the soldiers, and about a hundred people. He did whatever he could find to do. His first job was running a ferry-boat for the season at ten dollars a month, and it was not an easy one, for the rush of people into the new territory was great. He worked a year as clerk for his brother, who had a general store in the log building used by the soldiers for commissary storage, down at The Point, just east of 'Coon bridge.

As the community increased, so did its needs. Transportation facilities were meager. There were no railroads. The river was passable for steam-boats only at flood times in the Spring. Flour mills were a hundred miles away. St. Louis was the nearest point for merchants to get supplies, which were sent by boats to Keokuk, and from there hauled by wagons to The Fort. At Fairfield and Oskaloosa were the nearest flour mills. That was an opportunity for Ed. He went into the business of hauling freight from Keokuk and flour and meal from the mills. He often made trips from Des Moines to Keokuk and back. He was a good handler of stock. He drove oxen well. Alone, he would drive a yoke of oxen the one hundred and eighty miles to Keokuk, and return, laden with supplies. The old flint-lock musket was his only protection; and that meant only the one shot. Trouble he may have had on these journeys, but he always managed to come through it smoothly, for he was a man of cool nerve.

In 1849, he engaged in farming, but two years later returned to town, and, being of genial, jolly, good nature, he was popular, and found business abundant, as the town was growing.

In 1850, Judge Casady bought two lots at the southwest corner of Fifth and Walnut streets, for which he paid sixty dollars. Being low in part, ice covered it in Winter, and the boys made it a skating rink. The Judge built a three-room, one-story house on the lots, in which he made his residence.

In 1853, Ed. concluded there was money in real estate, and in June, bought the lots of Casady for five hundred and fifty dollars, and in July, sold them to Israel Spencer for five hundred dollars, reserving the rental and use of the buildings for five years. Thereon, Ed. had a wool yard for a time.

In the Spring of 1851, came what is known in history as the "big flood." The whole East Side was under water. On the West Side, Jesse Dicks rafted logs along Second Street, of which he built his house. Bottom lands for miles in width along the Des Moines River were overflowed. The previous Winter had been very severe and the Spring rainfall had made the roads impassable for teams, merchants' stocks of goods had become depleted, and family larders bare of supplies. Nevertheless, inspired with patriotic fervor, the people had a public dinner on the Fourth of July, which was attended with genuine Western enthusiasm and enjoyment. The table spread was elaborate, but the good housewives were put to their wits to supply the absolute want of flour in their cooking, for there was none to be had. On the next day, the steamboat, Caleb Cope, came into port heavy laden with merchandise, flour, etc., on which there was great rejoicing. Captain Price caught the infection, and invited the town to take an excursion up the river on his steamer. About fifty leading citizens responded, taking with them refreshments, solid and liquid (the Captain having given notice that the bar and steward's quarters would be locked). It was a jolly, hilarious crowd of men and women, among whom was Ed. The newspapers said nothing about it, but Ed. will probably say, if you ask him, "It was rather noisy."

In 1855, the community having increased to some importance, Ed. began to mix in public affairs. He was elected Street Commissioner. The subject of bridges was an important one at that time; but how to get them, and what kind, was the problem. John H. Miller, the Civil Engineer, who made the first map of Des Moines, a copy of which hangs in the rooms of the Commercial Club, recommended to the Town Council a floating bridge. The suggestion was adopted, but the town had no money. The increase of travel, and the slow, cumbersome, inadequate ferries, made bridges a necessity. It was therefore decided to raise a fund by subscription, the subscribers thereto to be allowed to cross without toll. Ed. Was given the custody of the subscription list, and nearly three thousand dollars was raised, when dollars were scarce. The bridge was built at Court Avenue, that being the principal east and west street, and was the first bridge across the Des Moines.

In 1855, Ed. built a bridge over Bird's Run, on Fourth Street, a terror in those days when heavy rainfalls came. It was the first structural bridge in the town, and he was allowed twenty dollars and ninety-nine cents for the job. In the present days of boodle, grabs and "extras" in public works, the particularity of that ninety-nine cents is significant. It shows that Ed. was honest—would not claim a penny he had not earned. Consciences were not as elastic in those days as they seem to be nowadays.

In 1856, Ed. started the first ice business in the town. His storage plant was on the river just above the dam, and it is of record that Judge Napier, who was then general manager of county affairs, ordered the County Treasurer to pay him eight dollars for ice furnished the District Court during the August Term that year. Old-timers, who are familiar with the inordinate thirst for whiskey of McFarland, the presiding Judge, will not deem Ed.'s bill for congealed protoxide of hydrogen furnished exorbitant, for the Judge was seldom sober. He came into court one day in a very maudlin condition. The lawyers, litigants, jury, and witnesses in the case on trial were all present. He got himself into his chair, looked vacantly around for a moment, nodded to the Sheriff, and mumbled out: "Well! Well! Gentlemen; call this Board to-morrow morning at eight o'clock," and, gathering himself together, meandered away to his hotel.

In 1856, occurred the famous fight between the East and West Side over the location of the State House. Ed. was a loyal West Sider, subscribed five hundred dollars to the war fund, and did valiant service in the scrimmage.

In 1860, he bought a farm in Walnut Township, now the well-known Flynn farm, and engaged in raising cattle and grain on an extensive sale. He was so successful that, in 1867, he was appointed Live Stock Agent for the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, and had control of that department from the Missouri River to the Mississippi. In 1865, he sold the farm, and continued with the railroad company several years thereafter.

In 1860, he was elected Sergeant-at-Arms of the Lower House of the Eighth General Assembly.

In 1869, his penchant for town lots was aroused, and he again bought the two lots at Fifth and Walnut streets, but this time he

had to plank down twenty-seven thousand dollars. On the corner was a hide and leather store, and on the west lot a livery stable. Two years later, he built a three-story brick office building thereon, the Citizens National Bank occupying the corner. In 1882, he added another story. In 1883, it was nearly destroyed by fire, with great loss to the Masonic Lodge, which occupied the upper floor, occupants of business offices, the Citizens' National Bank, and Morris & Humphrey, merchants. The debris was soon cleared away and the building restored. In 1890, he entirely remodeled it, according to modern ideas, added another story, and put in an elevator, the first in an office building in the city, thus constituting him the first bridge builder, ice dealer, and elevator constructor in the city.

It will be seen there is a jog in Walnut Street at Fifth, by which "Clapp's Block," emblazoned on the cornice in gold letters, is made a prominent landmark on the street, to be seen by everybody. When A. D. Jones surveyed the "Original Town," it was done with a rope instead of a chain, and in making the plat, Court Avenue was made one hundred feet wide, as it was expected to be the principal business street of the city. At the head of it was placed the Public Square, on which were to be the Court House and other public buildings. Doctor P. B. Fagen, who owned, or held title to, a portion of the land embraced in the plat west of Fifth Street, raised objection to the survey, claiming irregularities therein. They had some difficulty over the matter, but it was finally settled by letting the survey stand as made as far west as Fifth Street, and to narrow Walnut and Mulberry streets to let in the Public Square as originally platted, and on this agreement the plat was finally made and recorded, and thus came the jog in Walnut Street.

In 1887, Ed. gave an old-fashioned dinner to the early settlers, in honor of his fifty years' residence, which was largely attended. It was a joyous reunion of those who had experienced the trials and vicissitudes of pioneer life, and an occasion for recounting them. Listening newcomers concluded they knew very little about hard times.

In 1903, when the Century Savings Bank was organized, he became a stockholder, one of the Directors, and was also elected

Vice-President. The bank took the corner vacated by the Citizens National Bank.

Religiously, Ed. is a regular church-goer, but I would not vouch for his orthodoxy in any sectarian creed.

Socially, he is affable, jovial, fond of jesting and a good joke, whether the victim be himself or some other fellow. Old-timers can recall Hy. Hatch, better known as "Laughing Hatch," a Government mail contractor, an inveterate jester and story-teller, who punctuated his points with a laugh that could be heard half a mile. He was known to every show company that appeared in "Billy" Moore's old hall, for when he saw anything funny in the performance, and started his cachination (sic), the stage business stopped, the players and audience soon caught the infection, and everybody joined in a hearty laugh. When Ed. and Hy. got together on a street corner, every onlooker knew what was coming—there was hilarity galore. Sometimes, Levi J. Wells—he of the 'bus line—an inveterate jester, would join in, and they would fill the air with Hy.'s laughter.

Ed. was an active and popular member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

The excellent business capacity, pluck, and executive ability manifested in all his undertakings has secured to Ed. a competency, while his loyalty and public spirit have won him a prominent place among those who helped to build up the city from the day of its foundation.\*

April Thirtieth, 1905.

\*Died June Eighth, 1906.

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**by L. F. Andrews**

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