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OF the pioneers who came here in 1855, and who have been notably identified with the growth of the city, was George M. Hippee.

Soon after his arrival, he opened a drug store, in a log cabin on the west side of Second Street, down near 'Coon bridge, where he remained several years in a quiet, unpretentious way.

In 1856, when the State House location fight was on, he was a non-combatant and took no part, though his mental reservations were with the West Siders.

In 1859, business on Second Street began to get crowded, and he ventured up to Court Avenue, purchased the southeast corner lot for one thousand dollars—the owner at first demanding twelve hundred dollars—and erected the first brick building for exclusive store use from bottom to top on that street. The Sherman Block, at Third, and the building adjoining the Register and Leader office, built in 1858, were largely office buildings.

In 1864, Hippee organized the Second National Bank, with himself as President and George T. V. Jones, Cashier. It occupied a basement room on Court Avenue. In 1870, its charter was surrendered, and it, with the First National, was merged into the National State Bank.

Early in January, 1865-6, rumors were rife about town that petroleum could be found in Polk County. Soon after, A. C. Tichenor, a well-known, unscrupulous speculator, N. H. Hibbard, and L. H. Gano, of Chicago, turned up here. They had rooms at the Savery House (now Kirkwood), where they expounded the gospel of petroleum. They had samples of the "ile," the real "Simon pure article," right out of the earth in Polk County. Their rooms were thronged with people seeking knowledge. The furore (sic) was equal to that in 1857, when Uncle "Davy" Norris discovered, gold at the mouth of Bird's Run.

One day, when a crowd was present, a man picked up a sample of the petroleum, gave it a nasal sniff, put it down, and simply said, "Humbug." Tichenor quickly drew from his pocket a roll of money, planked one thousand dollars on the table, and said to him:

"Just cover that; we will select a committee to investigate, and if you are not satisfied within twenty-four hours that petroleum does exist in Polk County, the money is yours."

That was a clincher. There could be no doubt of it by anybody. Tichenor leased several thousand acres in the vicinity of Adelphi, and went to Chicago to purchase machinery to bore for oil. Meanwhile, the oil fever became epidemic. There was vigorous poking in pockets for dollars to invest. Imagination was acute. Visions as vivid as Hamlet pictured in the clouds to Polonius were plentiful. There were indications of oil in all directions. "When the wind was right, " the odor of petroleum permeated all the farm-houses along Four Mile Creek—so it was declared.

Dixon, the wag of the *Daily Register*, boosted the business by announcing one day that he had bought a big chunk of the tail of Rattlesnake Bend, with seventeen rattles included; was boring with proper machinery; had struck "ile" in paying quantities, and was ready to sell one rattle only to each customer.

When Tichenor returned, he took Doctor C. H. Rawson, Mayor Cleveland, Seward Smith, John Brown, and Frank Palmer, editor of the *Register*, out to Spring Creek. They first visited Depew's farm, a half mile from Adelphi, where was a well, dry a short time prior, in which was water covered with oil. They then went to the creek spring, clambered down the steep, ragged bluff through the thick, tangled brush, where the oleaginous fluid was seen floating away, its distinctive fluorescence (sic) glinting in the sunlight. They scooped it up in their hands; sniffed it, and declared it was the genuine article. Thenceforth, the *Register* from day to day pictured visions of the millions which the narrow valley of Four Mile held in soak.

The next day, General J. M. Tuttle went out with a large party. They sopped up the oil with woolen cloth, pumped all the farmers thereabout, and came home so saturated with the stuff that Tuttle

organized a Petroleum Company, with a capital of five hundred thousand dollars.

Hippee organized another company, with himself as President; Hoyt Sherman, Cashier; Frank Allen, Treasurer, and five hundred thousand dollars capital.

George Crawford organized another company with five hundred thousand dollars capital.

Tichenor had a big company in Chicago, and advertised, with big type, in the daily papers there. Options were taken on farms all over the county. There was a constant procession of people going to Spring Creek. Meanwhile, Tichenor's boring machine was making a hole in the ground, while he caught "suckers" in Chicago.

It was in August, I think, rumors came that the drill had struck an impenetrable rock, broken and plugged the hole.

Very late in the year, a fellow blew into town with a big bunch of Tichenor's Spring Creek petroleum stock for sale. Tuttle, Hippee, and Crawford had early retired from the field. All the fellow would say was: "The machinery broke, the well caved in, and the company busted."

No petroleum has been seen since on Spring Creek. In 1873, Hippee, with J. J. Towne, purchased the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Court Avenue, where Captain West lived, erected a banking and office building, and established the Valley Bank, with which Hippee was connected until it was changed to the present Valley National Bank.

In 1876, Hippee became a heavy stockholder in the Iowa Loan and Trust Company, and is now one of the Trustees for the bond-holders of \$2,354,580 of debentures of the company. He is also a stockholder in the Hawkeye Insurance Company.

In 1879, he, with Ira Cook and others, organized the Des Moines Syrup and Refining Company, with a capital of fifty thousand dollars, to make syrups and glucose from corn. A large building was erected on Vine Street, and the project started with promising prospects, but during the Summer of 1880, the circumambient atmosphere was so saturated with sulphurous acid gas and vigorous stenches shot out from its chimneys, the Board of Health sat down on it.

In 1881, Hippee started the Des Moines Bank. About the same time, Judge Casady started a Savings Bank. Soon after, they were united and formed what has become the present Des Moines Savings Bank. Hippee is one of the directors, and a heavy stock-holder, but everybody, from habit, calls it "Judge Casady's Bank." Starting off in a dingy, little, old shanty on Third Street, with deposits the Judge could carry in his pocket, it soon began to grow, and the Judge gave it the stone-front building now occupied by the *Staats Anzeiger*; next it went to an asbestine stone building at Third and Walnut streets, and from thence to its present location, where it carries deposits amounting to over five million dollars regularly.

In 1889, when the Des Moines Street Railway Company was organized, and purchased all the rights, title and property of other street railways, and consolidated them into the present system, Hippee became a stockholder, is one of the Board of Directors, and Vice-President of the company.

He is a very quiet, taciturn person, a mighty good thinker, of strong, firm convictions, and when confronted with important business or public questions is "from Missouri"—he must be shown. With no speculative tendency, conservative, cautious, of strict integrity, firmly grounded in public confidence and trust, he has been an important factor in business and financial affairs of the city.

Politically, he was a Democrat to 1896, when he voted for McKinley for President, and has since affiliated with the Republican party. He is not a politician; he simply goes to the polls and casts his ballot—that's all. Though often solicited, he has refused public office, except to serve nine years, from 1872, on the nonpartisan West Des Moines School Board.

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**by L. F. Andrews**

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