



JAMES C. SAVERY

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MR. SAVERY was born in Wareham, Massachusetts, November Thirtieth, 1826. His forefathers were Puritans, of the Pilgrim Fathers, who emigrated to America in 1620. In early life, his family resided at Saratoga, New York. He came to Des Moines early in the Spring of 1853, and soon after purchased the Marvin House, on Third Street, south of the present Court House. He paid three thousand dollars for the lot, 132x132, and the buildings thereon, and changed the name to Everett House. It was the headquarters for the Stage Company, and the influx of land buyers and speculators kept it crowded. It was torn down in 1876.

One day, a young man who was seeking a job as school teacher came to the house. After searching the town several days, with little prospect of success, and hearing of an opening at Fort Dodge—his funds getting short—he shouldered his carpet-sack and started on foot to make the eighty-mile trip. In 1872, he came back as Governor of the State of Iowa; and his name was Cyrus C. Carpenter, a man honored and beloved by everybody to a degree seldom equaled.

In 1856, the Marvin House was leased to Absalom Morris, the name changed to City Hotel, and Savery engaged in real estate business.

In 1855, "Billy" Moore, R. W. Sypher, and a few others, having moved up from Second Street to Fourth Street, got together and inaugurated a movement to get a big hotel in that vicinity, to "draw trade uptown." They got subscriptions to a fund for a bonus. It was slow work, for money was scarce; but finally, in 1856, a company was formed and an agreement made with Savery to erect a hotel on the corner now occupied by the Kirkwood, to cost sixty-five thousand dollars, and to be named the Savery House.

To illustrate the changes in value of property, the block on which the hotel stands, 132x132, was sold to Thomas Gilpin for thirty dollars. It was subsequently sold to Granville Holland, a well-known old-timer, land buyer, and speculator, for an old horse and wagon. He built a small house on it, enclosed the block with a board fence, made a garden of part of it, and occupied it for a home. In May, 1856, Savery purchased the property, the records showing the consideration was three thousand dollars for the land and fifteen hundred dollars for improvements. The property was assessed last year for taxation purposes at one hundred" and eighty-five thousand dollars.

The hotel subscription reached about thirty thousand dollars, when it dragged, and, as one of them put it: "Money was scarce, we got discouraged, and dumped the whole thing over to 'Jim' [as Savery was familiarly called], and quit."

In June, 1856, Savery made a contract with S. A. Robertson to build the hotel, and the foundation was put in that year. The next year came the financial panic. Everybody was land poor. They could not sell lots enough to pay the taxes on their holdings. Work on the hotel was temporarily suspended, but after a time resumed and carried on with procrastination until 1862, when, partially completed, it was opened for business, and finally finished in 1865. In 1879, the name was changed to "Kirkwood," in honor of Governor Kirkwood.

In 1855, A. J. Stevens, a banker, who was floating a large amount of "wild-cat," "agricultural" money, grown in an obscure place in Tennessee, became ambitious to get into an office, and, notwithstanding Barlow Granger, Lamp. Sherman, and Pete Myers had laid away wrecks of newspapers, he induced Savery to join him and start a Republican paper, with the understanding that Stevens was to purchase the outfit and Savery pay the running expenses. In June, 1856, was issued the first number of the *Iowa Citizen*, the first Republican paper in the town. The next year Stevens' bank went overboard in the great financial crash.

An investigation of the affairs of the newspaper showed that the outfit was purchased on credit, which had to be paid; but Savery, with his proverbial pertinacity, continued the paper for two years

at a total loss of seven thousand dollars, and sold it to John Teesdale for half its cost, retired from the field satisfied with newspaper glory, and went on with his hotel and real estate projects.

A search for the bound volume of the *Citizen* disclosed the fact that it was burned with the residence of Savery, which stood where is now the elegant residence of J. S. Polk, on Grand Avenue, a regrettable loss to the history of those early days.

Reminiscences of this panic period would be incomplete which omitted Judge McFarland, *sequelae* of which often reached his court, wherein he became famous as well as notorious from his eccentricities, bibulous habit, and profanity.

The District Court at that time included, with Polk, nearly all the counties in the northwest portion of the state.

Lawyers were scarce, outside of Des Moines, so that when the time for courts to be held in the various counties came, the Judge, the lawyers, and other attaches of the court would pool their transportation expenses, and charter an outfit to make the circuit. "Dan" Finch, one of the most prominent lawyers in the state, was generally one of the crowd. He was a personal friend of the Judge, and often the target of his most vigorous expletives. The tales that were told of the Judge by jurymen would fill a book.

One very hot day in July, the Judge had been out to dine with an old-time friend. On coming into court, "half seas over," he upset his chair and sat down on the side of it. Gathering himself together and getting on his feet, turned to the Bailiff with: "Take this d__d three legged thing away so soon as court adjourns, and get a new one, and don't you forget it."

In a case on trial at one time, the plaintiff's attorney was making his closing argument. After speaking a short time, he suddenly stopped and took his seat.

The Judge aroused himself with: "Well, well, what in h__l are you waiting for?"

"For your honor to wake."

"Look here, young man, I had made up my mind to instruct the jury for you, when the other side closed, but concluded to let you practice your d__d oratory while I took a nap. Now, then, when you are tired of talking as I have been of listening to this case, we will get down to business. Go on, sir, d__n you; go on."

On another occasion, the Judge came into court very wobbly and late. After getting himself fairly seated, he explained to the bar that he was not feeling well, and would hear motions only that morning. An attorney informed him he had an important case set for hearing and had several witnesses present.

"Can't help it, sir; and I will fine you five dollars for contempt," replied the Judge.

"Do you propose to fine a man for contempt when court is not in session?"

"You hush up, young man, and listen to what I have to say. You must understand, sir, that this court, if she understands herself, and she thinks she does, is subject to contempt whether in session or not, and don't you forget it. But, it being your first offense, the fine will be remitted, provided you take the boys down to Jim Campbell's and set up the 'painkiller'."

The court, lawyers and witnesses proceeded at once to liquidate the fine.

At another time, when the court, Sheriff and attaches were journeying around the circuit, one of their teams gave out, with ten miles to go, and the day closing. They were overtaken by a man with fresh horses, he riding one and leading the other. A proposal was made to exchange teams until their destination was reached, which was obstinately rejected, either for goodness or money. The Sheriff was standing by the stranger's horses when the Judge arose and sang out:

"Mr. Sheriff, open court."

Scarcely had the "Hear ye! Hear ye!" echoed over the prairie, when the Judge declared:

"This court is now open, and it is ordered that you, sir, [to the stranger], dismount and make terms with the Sheriff at once, or for him to put you under arrest."

The horseman was completely dazed, but after a little hesitation, and taking a square view of the two hundred and fifty pounds of judge, dismounted and made the exchange.

In 1878, during a period of adversity which swept over the entire West, Savery met with heavy losses, and was compelled to dispose of some of his holdings, among which was his hotel. He

went to Montana, where, in a few years, he recuperated his losses, returned to Des Moines, and, with James Callanan, formed the American Emigrant Company, whose business it was to furnish emigrants with through tickets from European ports to destination, exercise protection over them, purchase land, and sell to emigrants only. The company bought wild land all over the Northwest, and through it over one hundred thousand Scandinavians were settled on good farms and added to the productive industry of the country, of which Iowa received a large proportion.

In 1879, the purchasers of the Savery House, to the surprise and regret of citizens quite generally, changed the name of the house to "Kirkwood," in honor of the old War Governor. For a long time after, "Ret." Clarkson, editor of the *Register*, and W. W. Witmer, editor of the *Leader*, refused to accept the change, despite the universal reverence for Kirkwood, and continued to call it the "Old Savery," thereby indicating that they deemed the change unfair to one who had done so much for Des Moines.

In 1886, the town had grown northward and westward so that property holders and business men deemed another hotel a necessary improvement. Frank Reisley, who was running what is now the Iowa Hotel, a prominent hotel man, was ambitious to secure a hostelry of later and more modern construction. To that end, he, W. W. Witmer, and George H. Maish made a joint agreement to organize a corporation for the purpose of building a hotel. A location was the first question to be settled. After considerable investigation, it was finally decided to take what was known as the Colonel Hooker place, at Fourth and Locust streets. Then came the name, which was widely discussed among business men, when was developed the fact that the old "Savery House" had not been forgotten. Witmer and Maish, who had been vigorous protestants against that change of name, concluded it would be a good stroke of policy to name the new house the "Savery," and that the people would approve it. In deference to that public sentiment, the name was selected before articles of corporation were drawn, money subscribed, or any consultation had with Mr. Savery.

When the subscription list was opened, Witmer, Maish, and Reisley signed for forty thousand dollars each. Adjoining property owners to the site selected subscribed sufficient to make sure the

project, and upon that showing, Mr. Savery contributed five thousand dollars to the bonus fund, which was all the pecuniary interest he had in the house up to the time it was opened to the public. He had no stock in the corporation.

In the Spring of 1887, the contract for construction was let to S. A. Robertson, who built the first Savery House, and July First, 1888, it was opened for the reception of guests, under the management of Mr. Reisley, having cost the sum of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars.

In later years, Mr. Savery acquired considerable interest in it, but he often said that he regarded the selection of its name under the connecting circumstances a greater testimonial of the esteem of his fellow citizens than if he had built the house.

In 1893, I think, he disposed of his interest in the hotel, owing to the demands of other business, and divides his time between New York, Montana, and Des Moines, which he helped to build, and which he says is his home.*

February Twelfth, 1905.

*Deceased, at Cable, Montana, August Twenty-first, 1905

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