



COLONEL J. M. GRIFFITH

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COLONEL J. M. GRIFFITH, who was an important factor in developing the East Side, came from the East in the Fall of 1850, and, after looking over the field, concluded to invest. He rented a store on Second Street, paid one hundred dollars for rent in advance, to secure what he wanted, went away, returned the next Spring, took possession of the store, and began a general merchandise business. He evinced his characteristic public spirit by laying a sidewalk in front of the store lot, the first laid in the city. The town was rapidly becoming a trading-point. Settlers from Boone and surrounding counties came here to get supplies and dispose of their products. To the merchant, transportation was an important matter. It was then both difficult and uncertain. The Colonel, with an eye to business, and to secure regularity and permanency, chartered a steamboat in 1851 for regular service between The Fort and points down the river. At Bonaparte, where the alleged River Improvement Company had obstructed navigation with abandoned, half-completed dams and debris, freight would be transferred around the break. When the river was high, the boat could go through to St. Louis without transfer. It was an enterprise of great benefit to the entire country. It also enabled the merchant to widen the scope of his traffic, to put him more in contact with the farmer, to get his produce in exchange for store goods—in fact, barter was the principal method of trading, for money was scarce. It therefore required some time for the merchant to convert his goods into cash, because of the want of convenient and adequate transportation facilities. Sometimes he could hasten the exchange by investing in hogs and sending them to market on foot, as they were always in demand down the river. An incident of that kind is related where a merchant, with trade dull, a store full of goods, thought he would stir things up a bit by taking a whirl with hogs. He bought every hog in the country

that could travel, giving his note on short time for them. He hired a lot of men and boys to drive them to Keokuk, going himself, leaving his store in charge of clerks.

Arriving at Keokuk, the market was flat. He chartered a steam-boat for St. Louis, put the hogs on it, dismissed some of the drivers, and started down the river. When the drivers returned, there was inquiry as to the merchant and the hogs. All they could say was that the last they saw of them they were headed down-stream. The second lot of drivers could give no better satisfaction. The note-holders got uneasy and suspicious that the man had "skipped." They soon began to turn the notes in at the store in exchange for goods. This quickly increased to a panic. They took everything that was wanted, and some that was not, until the entire store was cleaned out. A large portion of the goods were out of style and unsaleable. Just at that juncture, the merchant turned up, with a big, new stock of goods, and pockets bulging with dollars. He was astounded by the situation of his affairs, threatened to sue everybody in the community for libel and defamation of character, while he quietly laughed "up his sleeve." He went right on with his business, buying hogs and selling "rags." It was not long before the farmers declared, with a wink, that it was "just a trick of trade," but they made no more "runs" on his store.

Soon after his arrival, the Colonel began to invest in real estate, purchasing a tract on the East Side and platting it into lots. In 1855, he, with his brother, Harry, built a three-story brick store and office building at the corner of Locust and Fourth Streets. Subsequently, it was remodeled to the Jones Hotel, and is now the Lakota.

W. A. Scott, the two Lyons, John H. Deakin, and others also purchased tracts and platted them, and proceeded vigorously to build up a rival to The Fort. They were hustlers, and boomed the project, with great surprise to the West Siders. They named the aggregation "East Demoin," Deakin being sponsor for the orthography. He declared he didn't care what the "literary fellers" over at The Fort said, he would have it as he wanted, and so it stands yet on the records.

Later on, Judge Napier, to help them along, by virtue of authority vested in a County Judge, set off the whole of Des

Moines Township east of the river, "to be known and hailed as Lee Township."

In 1856, when the question of location of a site for a State House came on, the East Siders were ready for the fray. The Commissioners sent by the Legislature to fix the place were authorized to accept land, or anything else, to aid in building a Capitol, or get a place to put it. The East Siders formed the "Capitol Stock Association," got Eastern men who were making real estate investments here interested in it; Grimes, who was a candidate for Governor, was said to be in it, gave it his influence (not improbable, as the site must be approved by the Governor) a fact the West Siders afterward declared necessitated the proffer of extraordinary inducements to the gubernatorial candidate. Two hundred and fifty lots were put into the pool, and what else was never made known. The West Siders subscribed a fund of \$159,250 and ten or twenty acres of land, if the site was fixed on the West Side.

As the site must be within two miles of the fork of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, there were others. Doctor T. K. Brooks and "Uncle Jerry" Church had a magnificent City of Brooklyn—on paper—on the beautiful plateau down where the packing-houses are, which they put into the contest.

The Commissioners came, in all the glory of dignified importance, and "put up" at the "Demoine House," corner of First and Walnut streets, kept by Colonel Spofford. They investigated several days with great taciturnity and solemnity. They tramped over the West Side, East Side, and Brooklyn. The air was full of plots and schemes. There were wheels within wheels. Neither side could find out what the other was doing. Excitement was intense. The East Siders declared the West Siders' subscription was not worth the paper it was written on; the West Siders retaliated with equal invectives. It was a bitter contest. Finally, the Commissioners fixed a day when they would meet all parties. The West Siders put in an appearance. Brooklyn had withdrawn and joined the East Siders. The West Siders were quietly informed that the question had been settled the night previous. The East Side had offered forty acres, and agreed to build a State House, and the offer had been accepted. The West Siders were wild with rage. They

condemned the Commissioners, and charged the East Siders with all manner of fraud.

The East Siders being all Whigs, and the West Siders mostly Democrats, the latter declared it was a political trick to help Grimes. They went to the Legislature and demanded an investigation of the whole transaction, which was granted, but when instituted, the witnesses were affected with remarkable "forgettery," or declined to tell what they knew for fear of defamation of character. One of them, however, when asked why the Commissioners slept at the "Demoine House" and did the eating and drinking on the East Side, replied that the East Siders were more courteous and hospitable than the West Siders. Another one said there was a lot of money and heaps of Ananiasan and Sapphiran appliances used, but he did not know who got the money.

The Commissioners, for themselves, had no personal knowledge of any unlawful or improper methods used to influence their action.

It developed, however, that a man named Baldwin was an intermediary between the Commissioners and East Siders. He financed the whole business, did all the buying, selling and dividing of swag, if there was any. He denied the right of the Legislature to interfere with his real estate business. As it was said he had stated vociferously on his first appearance here that "fifty thousand dollars would locate the Capitol," the West Siders declared somebody got the money.

In the deal, the State got a mighty good thing, but some of the East Siders lost a pile of money.

Knowing the Colonel was an East Side booster at that time, I asked him a few days ago how many lots he put into the State House pool. He laughingly replied: "Not a lot, but I lost a hundred dollars in the deal. One of the Commissioners sent here came to me and said he wanted a hundred dollars. I gave him the money, and that's the last I saw of it. He probably forgot it, and I presume the administrator of his estate never knew anything about it."

In 1855, there were but few houses on the East Side. The frequent submerging of it by floods was not encouraging for residence building, but the Colonel and his coadjutors had faith in the prospective. The building fever broke out that year on both sides of

the river, and great improvement was made. The Colonel built a fine residence at the corner of East Sixth and Walnut streets, where he lived many years. It was a favorite place for dinners, receptions and social gatherings of the Allens, Shermans, Mills, Robertsons, Williamsons, Hulls, and many others long gone to their final rest. I think "Tom" Hatton, "Friday" Eason, Mrs. Bina M. Wyman, and Mrs. Ed. Clapp have not forgotten some of them.

The Colonel, being largely interested in real estate and building, crossed the river and built the first store at the northwest corner of Court Avenue and Second Street. It was a one-story frame.

About that time, he was called to serve as juryman in court before Judge McFarland, who happened to be quite sober. J. E. Jewett was one of the lawyers in the case. He was making his argument, and with great emphasis endeavoring to impress the court with the importance and weight of it, when he discovered the Judge was apparently sound asleep. He stopped speaking and stood looking at the Judge, when he opened his eyes with: "Go on, Jewett; G_d d__n ye, go on!"

On another occasion, when the weather was hot and sultry, "Dan" Finch was one of the lawyers in the case, and, as all old-timers well know, had a voluminous, incisive vocabulary at his command. The case dragged along without material interest, and the Judge fell asleep. "Dan" and his opposing lawyer got into a heated wrangle over a point in the case, and were making fierce and loud charges against each other, which awoke the Judge, when he roared: "Stop that, or I'll lick h__l out of both of you."

In September, 1862, when the Thirty-ninth Iowa Infantry regiment was organized, the Colonel was commissioned its Major. The enlistments were nearly all from Polk County. In October, it was mustered into the United States Army at Davenport. Soon after, nearly half of it was sent to the hospital with measles, and, before complete recovery, was ordered to report at Cairo. It disembarked at Columbus, spending the first night without tents, in mud and rain. October Eighteenth, it moved by rail to Corinth, where it had severe marches and several skirmishes with Forrest's forces.

On the Thirty-first, a bloody fight for six hours was had at Parker's Cross Roads. For two hours those raw soldiers withstood and repulsed the whole of Forrest's army of seven thousand, when,

by a mistaken order, it was thrown into confusion and retired, but soon reformed and rested that night on the field they won. The Colonel was severely wounded.

In January, 1863, it was sent to Corinth, assigned to the Second Brigade until November, when it joined Sherman in his march to the sea. At the battle of Altoona, it stood at the front like a stone wall and won imperishable fame. In October, the Major was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, May Twelfth, 1865, to Colonel, and mustered out at the close of the war as Colonel. Soon after, he was appointed Government Inspector at the Custom House in New Orleans, where he remained four years, and resigned, his physical system having been completely shattered with yellow fever.

Returning to Des Moines, he gradually closed his several business interests, and now, with his estimable wife, in satisfactory consciousness of having done what he could for the city of his adoption, is quietly waiting the final summons which comes to all men.

Recalling the military services of the Colonel brings to mind an incident, somewhat peculiar, occurring here after the war closed.

Very soon after the close of the Rebellion, a man and his wife came to Des Moines, started in business, and became quite prominent and successful. Little was known of his antecedents, of which he said nothing. His rank and social position were apparently satisfactory, and only those most familiar with him noticed his reticence. He was a familiar personage on the streets. A few years ago he died. His widow left the city soon after. Several months later, I received a letter enclosing a photograph, inquiring if a man of a certain name, of whom the photo was a likeness, had lived in the city, and deceased on or about a certain date. I replied that the photo was true to a man who had lived and deceased here, but under another name. Naturally, I desired to get the sequel as to the matter. It was that, soon after the decease of the man, the widow made application for a pension, based on military service during the Civil War. Investigation of the records at Washington disclosed an application on file from another woman, based on the same identical service. Later, another application was filed by a woman holding a marriage certificate antedating those of the other two applicants, and whom the man had deserted, leaving her with

several children, one of whom is now an officer in the United States Army. It was for the benefit of this woman the inquiry I refer to was made, and she has probably received the pension, but not in the name the man who lived and died here was known by.

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