



EVAN MORGAN BOLTON

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An early settler who was quite prominent in the early Fifties was Evan Morton Bolton. He was born on the Third day of August, 1813, of English ancestry, his father being a farmer, born in the town of Bolton, England.

When Evan was two years old, his father emigrated to America and settled in Connersville, Indiana, where he engaged in farming and dealing in livestock. There Evan passed his boyhood days, doing the multifarious tasks which are the usual lot of a boy on a new farm.

His opportunities for attending school were very meager. Not more than six months' schooling was he able to get, and that in the Winter, in a log schoolhouse. During his minority, there lived nearby Phoebe Hannah, a comely country lass, whose father, in 1833, came to Iowa with his family and settled in Burlington.

When Evan attained his majority, he went to farming for himself, and one day, three years later, in 1837, he saddled a horse, filled well a pair of saddlebags, and started on a journey of nearly a thousand miles, through an uninhabited wilderness, to find Phoebe Hannah. As all things are possible to him who wills, he succeeded. They were married, and he returned to his home in Connersville, his bride accompanying him, also on horseback, an unusual, but truly a "bridle" tour.

In 1849, he had an attack of Gold Fever, which induced him to sell his farm and start for California, which he did in 1851, but after shipping his goods to New York for the water route around "The Horn," he switched off and landed in Cincinnati, where he went into the hotel business, first in Camp Washington House, and later the Eight-Mile House, on the Coleraine Turnpike. He soon tired of that, sold out, went to Indianapolis, and bought a farm.

In 1856, the new Capital of the State of Iowa was attracting the attention

of the people in Eastern states as presenting good opportunities for the farmer and mechanic, Bolton, therefore, decided to join the procession thitherward. He again sold his farm and, with his family in a light two-horse spring wagon, by easy drives each day, arrived at the Mississippi opposite Burlington, in May. The river was high and covered the bottom land over a space nearly ten miles wide. His early training, however, had taught him to fear nothing, and he plunged forward, fording the rushing current until he reached the ferry-boat landing, from which he was taken safely to the Iowa shore. Leaving his wife and children with her relatives in Burlington, he came on to Des Moines, arriving in May, and stopped at the Walker House—named after Colonel "Tom" Walker, a "Kentucky Colonel" by brevet, and Registrar of the United States Land Office by favor of President Buchanan—which stood alone on the north side of Locust Street, occupying all the ground from East Fifth to the present Northwestern Railroad tracks, and north to the alley. In July, he purchased the hotel and became its manager.

When the river was high, and the floating bridge at the foot of Sycamore Street became too short at both ends and swung around to the east bank, the Walker House was perforce the headquarters of the Western Stage Company, and did a land office business.

In 1857, Bolton took the mail route from Nevada, in Story County, to Des Moines and return, three times a week, and kept the route until 1862. It was during the famous Skunk River bottoms era. With the river several miles wide, sometimes he was ten days getting ten miles of the distance. Governor Kirkwood, C. F. Clarkson, father of "Ret" and "Dick," and many other notable men were "cooled" on those twenty-mile prairies in Winter, or stuck in the mud of sloughs and Skunk River bottoms. I have a very distinct remembrance of a ride over that route the last night of a bitter cold December, when I made my advent to Des Moines.

In 1857, Bolton started the first lumber yard on the East Side, on the south side of Walnut Street, where the Gilcrest yard now is. The lumber was brought from Keokuk on the steamboat *Clara Hine*, Captain Hill. As steamboats came only when the river was high, he was obliged to haul considerable lumber by teams from Keokuk.

In 1862, during the Civil War, a large number of soldiers were detailed for garrison and post duty when they were greatly needed for active service in the field. To relieve them, the War Department called for a regiment of able-bodied men, forty-five to sixty years old, to relieve the younger men. Iowa quickly responded and raised what was rostered as the Thirty-seventh Infantry, but was known all through the army as the Gray Beard Regiment. Mr. Bolton made strenuous effort to enlist therein, but the doctors refused to accept him as an able-bodied man, to his great disappointment. Every congressional district in the state was represented in it. It became one of the most notable features of the service, yet, singularly, very little was ever said of it in army reports. It rendezvoused at Muscatine, was mustered in in December, and in January, 1863, was sent to Saint Louis, where it served to guard railroad trains and military posts until January, 1864, when it was sent to Rock Island, thence, in June, to Memphis, where it had its only engagement with the "Rebs." A detail was sent to guard a train on the Memphis and Charleston Road, and when about thirty-six miles out, the train was fired on by a lot of bushwhackers concealed behind brush and fences. The guard being on top of the ears were fully exposed, and two men were killed. The fire was quickly returned, and it was reported with good effect. From Memphis, the regiment went to Indianapolis, where it was divided, five companies going to Cincinnati and three companies to Gallopolis, Ohio. May Fifteenth, 1865, it was reunited at Cincinnati, and on the Twentieth, started for Davenport, where it was mustered out on the Twenty-fourth. During its service, it lost by disease, one hundred and thirty-four; battle, two; wounded, three. Most of the men were broken down from hardship and exposures, and did not long survive.

Mr. Bolton was one of the first Justices of the Peace in Lee Township. The prohibitory law was in force then, and no one was allowed to sell spiritous liquor except the authorized agent of the county, who was Doctor D. V. Cole, but there were numerous "holes in the wall" where it could be purchased "on the sly." Numerous seizures were made of the contraband stuff, which helped the lawyers, and some of the best, Jefferson Polk, Judge M. D.

McHenry, W. H. McHenry ("Old Bill"), "Dan" Finch, Judge Cole, John A. Kasson, and others, twisted the statutes, circumstances and facts before his Bar. His decisions were rarely reversed.

Politically, he was a Whig, a strong Abolitionist, a personal friend of old John Brown, and, with Isaac Brandt, was one of the Directors of the "Underground Railroad" from Missouri to Canada. During the Know-Nothing craze, he was suspected of knowing what, to say when asked, "What time is it?" by a man with the second digit of his right hand thrust between the buttons of his waistcoat, or where to go when the sidewalks were strewn with small diamond-shaped pieces of white or red paper.

Socially, he was of positive temperament, inclined to taciturnity, a kind neighbor, a zealous friend of the poor, and a popular citizen. He was not a member of any societies or clubs.

Religiously, he affiliated with the Methodists. Though not a church member, he contributed liberally to churches and for educational purposes.

He died in 1874.

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