



FREDERICK M. HUBBELL

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An early settler, whose name has been prominent in civic affairs of the city and county during the past forty years, is Frederick M. Hubbell, or Fred., as he is universally called. He came to Des Moines like many another lad, poor in purse, but rich in determination and ability, and to-day he ranks as Des Moines' and Iowa's wealthiest citizen. His vast properties are organized in an estate in trust for ninety-nine years, and their value mounts up into the millions.

Born in the town of Huntington, Connecticut, from whence come the proverbial wooden nutmegs, January Seventeenth, 1839, of English ancestry, he lived with his father, who was a stone-mason and farmer, milked the cows, fed the pigs, cut the wood, ransacked haymows for hens' nests, made himself generally useful, and went to the District School until he was thirteen years old, when he took a three-years' course in the Derby High School.

When he was sixteen years old, in 1855, his father concluded that Iowa was a better country, and with him Fred. came to Rock Island by railroad, thence by steamboat to Muscatine, thence by stage coach to Fort Des Moines, arriving May Seventh, and taking quarters at the Everett House, kept by that genial, jolly Falstaffian boniface, Absalom Morris. There was not much of a town, and very little doing except speculating in real estate and land hunting. His pocketbook was sadly collapsed, and bread and butter were the first problems to be solved.

The next day after his arrival, he got his first job, as clerk with P. M. Casady, Receiver of the United States Land Office, at eight dollars and thirty-two cents per month. The job was no sinecure, for the rush of land-buyers was immense, the daily receipts often reaching twenty-five thousand dollars in gold, which was the only money recognized by Uncle Sam.

Judge Casady, on his retirement from the Land Office, formed a partnership with J. S. Polk, and in 1861, Hubbell became a clerk in their office. The year following, he became a partner in the firm, the business of which was law and real estate. In 1864, Casady retired from the firm, and it became Polk & Hubbell, which, for more than a score of years, was closely identified with nearly every public enterprise in the city, as backers and boosters.

Their most important undertaking was in connection with the building of the Iowa and Minneapolis narrow-gauge railroad to Ames.

At a meeting of citizens in the Court House, February Sixth, 1866, the Iowa and Minnesota Railway Company was organized, articles of incorporation adopted, and B. F. Allen, P. M. Casady, J. M. Tuttle, Hoyt Sherman, T. K. Brooks, J. B. Stewart, Wesley Redhead, George G. Wright, B. F. Roberts, S. F. Spofford, C. B. Bridges, John Scott, L. Q. Hoggatt, John Porter, John Cheshire, T. B. Knapp, and M. D. McHenry were elected Directors, who immediately elected P. M. Casady, President; B. F. Roberts, Vice President; B. F. Allen, Treasurer, and Hoyt Sherman, Secretary.

The object of the company was the construction of a narrow-gauge road to the north and south lines of the state. On the Eighteenth of July, the survey and location of the road to Ames and to Indianola was completed. On the Twenty-eighth of July, the contract for bridging and grading was let. The contractors graded a portion of the road to Polk City and some toward Indianola, when their finances got short, and after several delays they gave up the job. The company struggled along, with frequent change of officers, the project getting into disrepute, with everybody trying to let go of it, until November, 1868, when work was stopped. Creditors then bombarded it with law suits and judgments, until there was no hope of resurrection. April Thirtieth, 1869, the road was divided, and that portion from Des Moines to Ames was sold at Sheriff's sale and purchased by Polk & Hubbell. August First, 1870, a new company, the Des Moines and Minneapolis, was organized, with B. F. Allen, J. S. Polk, J. B. Stewart, J. M. Walker, A. S. Welch, as Directors, Allen, President; Walker, Vice-President, and Polk, Secretary,

for the first year. Aid from townships was solicited, and subsidy taxes were voted as follows:

Des Moines Township	\$ 34,000
Madison Township	16,000
Lee Township	16,000
Washington Township	12,000
Polk County, swamp land . . .	40,000
Total	\$118,000

Polk & Hubbell then assumed the financing of the project. The subsidies were offered to the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company to induce them to build the road, and repeatedly, during 1871-1872, but the Northwestern did not seem to have much fancy for Des Moines, and kept dallying with it. Probably it had not forgotten that in 1864, when it was building across the state, and had reached Marshalltown, it offered to build from that city to Des Moines for a bonus of thirty-five thousand dollars and right-of-way through the town; the town tiptoed her nose and scornfully replied that the Capital of the State of Iowa was not buying railroads—a mistaken notion, it is true, but it went, and the Northwestern steered straight for the Missouri River, leaving Polk County several miles to the southward.

Meanwhile, more than two hundred tax-payers began a crusade against the narrow-gauge company, to get court injunctions and stop the collection of the taxes voted in Des Moines, Madison and Lee townships, thus reducing the expected aid which, with the expense of defending suits in the courts, seriously jeopardized the prospects of the company.

Early in 1873, the company decided to abandon the subsidy plan and get stock subscriptions, to which citizens of Des Moines responded with twenty-two thousand dollars, Ames, ten thousand dollars, and Madison Township, five thousand dollars.

In September, the capital stock was increased to three hundred thousand dollars. Polk & Hubbell, having got tired of it, transferred the right-of-way and roadbed situate in Polk and Story counties to the company. New officers were elected, to-wit: Samuel Merrill, President; J. B. Stewart, Vice-President;

F. M. Hubbell, Secretary; James Callanan, Treasurer; Frank M. Pelton, Civil Engineer.

Track-laying commenced January Twelfth, 1874, Governor Carpenter driving the first spike. July First, it was completed to Ames, and the road equipped for business at a cost of three hundred thousand dollars.

August First, 1879, the road, with all its franchises, was transferred to the Chicago and Northwestern, the gauge changed, and Sunday, July Eleventh, 1880, the first passenger train of the Northwestern entered the city on the broad track.

In 1866, Polk & Hubbell, Doctor M. P. Turner, and U. B. White obtained a charter, and built the first mile of street railway in the city. It started from the Court House on Court Avenue, and extended to the foot of Capitol Hill. The motive power was a pair of horses. Subsequently, the track was extended north to Walnut, west to Fifth, and south to the place of beginning. It was not a very great dividend producer, and in 1868, Polk & Hubbell got tired of paying bills with no income, and sold their interest to Turner.

In January, 1867, at a meeting of citizens to form a life insurance company, P. M. Casady and Hubbell were requested to prepare articles of incorporation, which, at a subsequent meeting, were adopted, and signed by Hubbell, Casady, J. M. Tuttle, Isaac Cooper, Wesley Redhead, J. S. Polk, Lampson P. Sherman, B. F. Allen, R. L. Tidrick, W. W. Williamson, J. B. Stewart, Peter Myers, F. R. West, J. C. Jordan, H. L. Whitman, and Hoyt Sherman. The first officers were: Casady, President; Redhead, Vice President; Hubbell, Secretary; Allen, Treasurer; Hoyt Sherman, Actuary; Whitman, Medical Examiner. The company was named the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa. The first policy issued was to Hubbell, and is still in force.

In 1868, Hubbell resigned as Secretary, but retained his place with the Board of Trustees. In 1888, he was elected President, and so continued until the January meeting in 1907, when he declined a reelection, having served nineteen years, and leaving the office with a business, as shown by the annual report, January First, 1907, of twenty-two thousand and ninety-four

policies in force, representing thirty million, eight hundred and seventy-four thousand, three hundred and nineteen dollars, and assets of five million, four hundred and forty-seven thousand, one hundred and nineteen dollars and thirty cents. The company has never had but one suit in court respecting a risk, and in that the judgment was for the company. Its growth and prosperity evidence its wise management. Mr. Hubbell, however, remains with the Board of Trustees.

In 1871, the city had grown to proportions requiring better protection from fires than was afforded by the system of large cisterns in the streets, and the voluntary services rendered by two or three hose companies, and April Third, Polk and Hubbell organized the Des Moines Water Works Company, with a capital of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, of which B. F. Allen was President and Treasurer, and J. S. Polk, Secretary. May Second, a charter was granted by the City Council, and the erection of works immediately commenced, where they now are. The system adopted was that known as the "Holly," which is in use to-day, and Des Moines is the largest city in the United States using it. The water is taken from large chambers excavated deep and broad under the bed of the 'Coon River, and being thus sand-filtered, gives the city the purest and best water of any city in the Union. The city is also provided with an adequate and reliable fire service.

Soon after the company was organized, the works passed into the hands of Polk & Hubbell, the latter was made Secretary, and served until 1880, when the works were sold to a joint stock company.

In 1882, work commenced to build a narrow-gauge road to Waukee, by "Ret" Clarkson, John S. Runnells, and a few other, who had organized the combination known as the Wabash Syndicate, to build the Wabash from Albia to Des Moines. Later, Polk & Hubbell joined, and from Waukee the road was extended to Fonda, and a branch from Clive to Boone. It is now a part of the Chicago and Milwaukee System.

In 1884, Hubbell disposed of a portion of his shekels by purchasing the well-known B. F. Allen property, at Terrace Hill, on Grand Avenue, the most costly residence in the state.

In 1887, Polk & Hubbell dissolved partnership that had existed twenty-five years, and Hubbell turned his attention to real estate, since when that has been his hobby, and he has succeeded in getting possession of an extensive valuable area of the fifty-four square miles of the city. On some of it he has erected fine buildings, among which are the Victoria Hotel, at Sixth and Chestnut; Merchants' Transfer Company, three-story warehouse, at Ninth and Tuttle, and the Hawkeye Transfer Company, at Seventh and Elm. As an earnest, active member of the Booster Committee, he stands ready to erect other buildings for industries seeking a place in a city which does things.

I asked him one day how he had accumulated the three million or more accredited to him. He very frankly and courteously replied that for several years, as a broker, he handled bonds and securities for capitalists; took advantage of opportunities for safe investment in real estate; practiced economy and industry, laying aside each year a surplus over expenses; did not make a dollar in the Water Works deal; made a good investment in Terrace Hill property, and some of his other holdings; that he had accomplished only what was possible to any young man who, for fifty-six years, would pursue a like course of action.

Politically, Hubbell is what has come to be known as a "progressive" Republican. He is not a politician—was not built that way. In local government affairs, he gives his influence to what he deems the best interest of the town, regardless of partisan politics. He has never held but one public office. In 1857, the money panic paralyzed the industries of the state, spreading wreck and ruin in all directions. The year following, the state was flooded with high water, there were no railroads, the country roads were in such horrible condition freight hauling from Keokuk was nearly impossible, farmers could not get into the fields with reapers and mowers at harvest time, and business languished generally. The stagnation extended into 1859, and there was little or nothing doing in Des Moines. Fred. was "on his oars," so to speak, and wanted to be doing something—he was seldom idle. In 1852, Judge Casady, as Senator in the Legislature, had engineered the passage of a bill locating and naming twenty-three new counties, among

which was Sioux. The Judge suggested to Fred. that he go up there and start something. "There is a whole county," said he, "just as Nature made it, waiting for civilization." Fred. took the cue, and with three other wide-awake young fellows, went, got an order from the courts to organize the county and make the necessary preparation for an election to elect county officers, and set the machine going, which was done to their most eminent satisfaction. They fixed the County Seat, and named it Calliope. While their project was incubating, prairie chickens, quail, and rabbits afforded recreation and amusement. At the election in October, they voted for Sam. Kirkwood for Governor for his first term, and elected themselves to the county offices, Fred, taking that of Clerk of the District Court, which he held eighteen months and resigned.

Socially, Hubbell is courteous, affable, reticent, of positive temperament, has the courage of his convictions, which, once fixed, are not easily changed. He takes little or no part in social affairs, as society goes, is not a member of any clubs or fraternal organizations, is always ready to promote the welfare of schools, charitable organizations, and the public. The narrow-gauge roads projected by him and Polk forty years ago were valuable public improvements, the purpose being to connect Des Moines by roads of cheaper and lighter construction than the ordinary steam roads, with towns in a radius of one hundred miles, and bring their trade to the city. It was the same purpose now being more fully developed by electric interurban roads, electricity as a motive power for railroads not then being known.

Hubbell is not a member of any religious denomination, but the records will probably show that he has more or less money accredited to him in all the churches of the city.

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