

MADISON YOUNG

Prominent early settler, and useful man, was Madison Young, or "Esquire," as everybody in the county knew him. Entering Union College, New York, at the age of twenty-three, he worked his way through, paying his expenses by manual labor, and graduated from the law department at the head of his class. He came here in December, 1849, opened a law office on Second Street, near Market, and at once identified himself with public affairs, especially those respecting schools, in the little hamlet at Raccoon Forks. He was admitted to the Bar the following Spring Term of court, and appointed Special Prosecutor for the counties of Dallas, Warren, Madison, Jasper, Boone, and Marshall, the Fifth Judicial District then embracing those counties.

Early in 1850, a movement was made for the formation of a School District, and at a meeting of the Directors, in May, he was elected Secretary. His record says:

"On motion, the electors present proceeded to vote by ballot whether they would levy a tax or not upon the taxable property in School District Number Five, Des Moines Township. One vote was given for a tax, and seventeen votes for no tax. Whereupon, it was declared that there should be no tax raised for the purpose of renting, hiring, building, or buying a schoolhouse at this time, in School District Number Five, Des Moines Township, Polk County, Iowa.

"The meeting then adjourned *sine die*."

The particularity of this record indicates clearly the methodical manner in which the Esquire did his business.

The community was small, the people were poor, and felt unable to build schoolhouses, and the school was continued in the Court House.

In November, a meeting was held of the Directors to examine Charles L. Alexander respecting his qualifications to teach the school. (See page One Hundred and Twenty, Volume One.)

It was at this meeting of the Directors a decision was made to purchase a lot and build a schoolhouse, and in 1851, one hundred dollars was paid for one-half acre at the northwest corner of Ninth and Locust, and by slow progress a two-story building was completed in 1855, costing about eleven thousand dollars, and occupied during the Winter term of 1856 by a corps of four teachers, with J. A. Stickney, Principal, and thus was begun the Public School System, with less than three hundred pupils.

In 1851, Young was elected Justice of the Peace and Coroner. During his term occurred the cow case, notable among the early settlers, the details of which are given in the sketch of Judge Curtis Bates. (See page Four Hundred and Twenty-two, Volume One.)

In May, 1855, at a State Conference of the Lutheran Church, it was decided to establish an institution for higher education at some point within forty miles of the Capital, which manifested the most liberality toward it, and to be known as Iowa Central College. Judge Casady, Doctor F. C. Grimmel, Esquire Young, and Captain F. R. West at once took the matter up to secure its location at Des Moines, a characteristic of the pioneers to work unitedly in promoting the welfare of the town, regardless of their individual church associations. A subscription was raised, a site purchased for sixteen hundred dollars, at Fifteenth Street and Woodland Avenue. The proffer was accepted, and during the Summer of 1850, the corner stone was laid and the walls erected, but, because of the hard times and scarcity of building material, work was suspended for want of funds. At this juncture, Judge Casady, Father Bird, Esquire Young, Captain West, R. W. Sypher, and Doctor Grimmel gave their individual notes, at thirty per cent interest, for a loan of five thousand dollars, to go on with the work, and in 1857, the roof was put on and construction suspended, the bare walls being left exposed to the elements as a deserted building until 1865, when the property was sold to the Baptist denomination. A subscription fund of twelve thousand dollars was then raised in Des Moines, the building completed, and in 1886 was inaugurated the University of Des Moines, by Elder Nash. Later, the property was sold and the University became what is now Des Moines College.

In 1856, Young purchased a tract of several acres on Ninth street, adjoining the present Des Moines College grounds. It was his custom to invest every dollar he could in real estate, most of which was subsequently platted and added to the city. He cleared the tract of its forest and planted a fruit orchard and vineyard. While waiting for the trees to grow, he spent two years in Heidelberg, Germany, attending university lectures, and in the grape and wine districts on the Rhine, to gain practical knowledge of grape-growing and wine-making. Returning, he built a shanty on his tract, and in Summer, living alone, cultivated his trees. In the Winter, he lived in a grout house he had built just south of 'Coon River, while experimenting with Reverend Doctor Peet, the first Episcopal minister, and Henry Scribner, to find a substitute for brick for building purposes. For several years, he cultivated his fruit farm, produced several varieties of luscious apples, and became an expert in making fine wine. Meanwhile, he built a fine two-story house of brick on the tract. His health failing, he very reluctantly sold the farm to Conrad Youngerman. It has since yielded to the encroachment of improvements, is covered with fine residences, the orchard has gone to decay, but the brick house still remains, as the home of Mrs. Anna Ross Clark, near the corner of Fifteenth and North streets.

In 1873, he went to Colorado to regain his health, but before going, made a will bequeathing all his wealth to his brothers, sisters, and their children, about thirty-five thousand dollars, except one thousand dollars to his alma mater, Union Colege (sic), and one lot in South Des Moines, which he gave to a colored man named Murray. Failing to get relief in the West, he returned, and in September, accompanied by Taylor Pierce, City Clerk, he went to Cincinnati Hospital, but the ravages of Consumption had done their work, and October Twenty-third, he ceased to be. In accordance with his expressed desire, his remains were brought here, interred in Woodland Cemetery, and a fine monument designates the spot.

He was public-spirited, charitable, and during his life gave liberally to worthy objects, especially in the early days, when help was needed to promote and foster that which tended to the betterment of society.

Socially, he was reserved, taciturn, abjured society affairs and functions, preferring the single life of a bachelor. In 1850, when Pioneer Lodge, Number Twenty-two, A. F. and A. M., was organized, he was the first person admitted to membership. When, in the same year, Fort Des Moines Lodge, I. O. O. F., was organized, he was one of the charter members, and elected its first Noble Grand.

There being no other place available, its first meetings were held in the Clerk's office at the Court House. Soon after, a second story was added to Granville Holland's store on Second Street, near Vine. In both lodges, Young was an active and efficient member, their exclusiveness being congenial to his temperament.

Religiously, he was an Episcopalian. In 1855, when Saint Paul's Church was organized, Young became one of the first Board of Vestry. Meetings were held at the residences of church members, and wherever a place could be obtained, until, in 1856, Edwin Hall donated a lot on Seventh Street, where now is the annex to the Younker store, and a small chapel was erected. Doctor Peet, the first Rector, was a missionary—a noble, worthy man—who, with Father Bird and Elder Nash, formed a triumvirate of goodness and virtue which laid the foundation of that public sentiment which has made this a widely notable community of schools and churches.

Politically, Young was a radical Whig, but not a politician. The only public office he held was given him when there were not Whigs enough in the township to form a Corporal's guard.

He was a man of many idiosyncrasies and eccentricities, one of which was talking to himself during his later years. He would visit places of business and quietly sit for an hour muttering to himself, or he could be seen walking the street talking to himself, and emphasizing his conversation with gestures of the hand. It was absent-mindedness, not from mental aberration.

April Eighth, 1906.

Transcribed from:

PIONEERS OF POLK COUNTY, IOWA AND REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS

by L. F. Andrews

Volume II

Des Moines

Baker-Trisler Company

1908