



WILLIAM H. LEHMAN

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Some of the pioneers of Polk County pulled up stakes, deserted their Eastern homes, kindred and friends, and plodded their way to this wild and desolate country for pecuniary reasons. Some came from the force of circumstances; they could not prevent it. Such was the case with W. H. Lehman, or Will., as everybody knows him best.

Born in 1842, in Lancaster, Ohio, from whence came the pioneer Shermans, "Jim," Hoyt and Lamp., also their brothers, John and Tecumseh, James G. Blaine, the pugilist Jeffries, and the air sailor Knabenshue, he came to Fort Des Moines early in 1848, with his father, who was attracted hither by the glorious accounts sent back East by the Shermans of the prospects and possibilities here in the passing of time.

Packing his family and household goods in wagons, the trip, requiring nearly four weeks, was made without mishap. The population of the town consisted of about one hundred persons. Houses were scarce. A log barrack building down on 'Coon Point, left by the departed garrison of The Fort, was the only available place he could get for a domicile—in fact, the entire town was housed in log cabins.

Soon after his arrival, he started a shoemaking business, but in a few months he had an attack of Nostalgia; wanted to see the old Buckeye State again; nothing doing here, he declared, and he decided to go back while he had the means to do so. But while he was here, he made a little investment in corner lots.

In 1846, when the town of Fort Des Moines was surveyed and platted by A. D. Jones and "Wall" Clapp, the question of re-location of the State Capital was being extensively agitated. When the town lots were sold, "Tom" McMullin and several others bought everything in sight, and loaded themselves up with them at "one-third down, the balance on time."

One day, "Tom" was rummaging around some household goods Lehman had stored away, having no place for them in his small cabin, and in a barrel discovered the movements or working parts of an old-fashioned, wooden-wheeled clock. He declared it was just what he wanted. Clocks were mighty scarce at The Fort in 1848. Even four years later, Lamp. Sherman, in his *Gazette*, petitioned the County Commissioners to have the Court House bell rung on Sunday morning so the people might know when it was time to go to church, "so few families have clocks, and there are no church bells." "Tom" bantered Lehman for a trade on a corner lot in "the future Capital of the state"—he was overloaded with corner lots—and finally persuaded Lehman to take the lot on the northwest corner of Third and Vine, 66 x 132 feet, where the Rock Island new passenger depot is now, for the old clock.

In 1857, Lehman returned to Des Moines with his family, and started a grocery store at the corner of Second and Walnut. The Capital had been fixed at Des Moines, and prospects were brighter than in 1848. But the financial panic had struck the state, and was desolating the whole country. Business was demoralized; there was no money in circulation except the notes of "wild-cat" banks. There was no gold nor silver money except what percolated occasionally through the Government Land Office. Real estate speculators could not sell enough to pay their taxes, and scores of lots were sold for delinquent taxes. Skilled mechanics were compelled to take pay for their labor in "store orders," and were, glad to get them.

Under such conditions, Lehman decided to go back again to Ohio while he had money enough to pay expenses, and there were several other Lancaster fellows here who would have followed him, but they couldn't raise the money to go with.

During all those years, Will, was growing and getting what education he could in the public schools. Being of musical temperament, he took a course of study in music with Professor Snyder, a prominent teacher in Lancaster, Ohio. When the Civil War came, at the age of nineteen, he enlisted in the band of the Seventeenth Ohio Infantry, and served thirteen months, when he was mustered out, with his band, under a change in the army regulations,

whereby, instead of a band with each regiment, only one band with a brigade, or four regiments, was allowed.

On leaving the army, more optimistic than his father, he headed straight for Des Moines, going down the Ohio River, up the Mississippi on the steamer *Frank Steele*, to Keokuk, thence on the steamer *Alice* to Des Moines, landing at 'Coon Point. He soon after started the marble business, maintained it successfully for some time, and in Woodland Cemetery can be seen several fine productions from his establishment, notably that in memory of the old-timer, Captain Gustavus Washburne, who for many years kept what is now the Sabin House.

In 1863, I think it was, Ed. Clapp, who was a purchasing agent of the Rock Island Railroad Company, began reconnoitering for a site for a new passenger depot; their depot, a two-story, wooden residence building, owned by Hy. Hatch, at the corner of Third and Vine, was too small. They wanted more room. He selected the wooden clock lot at the corner of Fourth and Vine. Will, thought it a good opportunity to make a little profit on the old clock, but his father was in Ohio, and Ed. was in a hurry to secure a site; so Will, negotiated a sale whereby eighteen hundred dollars was to be paid for the lot, one hundred dollars spot cash. Will, took the one hundred dollars and made a written contract for the remainder. His father objected to the trade; thought there was something wrong about it—some chicanery—it was too much to be expected for an old wooden clock; but after considerable correspondence, in which Will, convinced him the town had grown some and was still growing, he acquiesced. That is how the company got its site for the new passenger depot.

But Will.'s head was full of music. Mills & Company were running a large printing house and book store at Third and Court Avenue, and they added a music department, the first in the town. Will, was selected to manage it. He disposed of his marble business; devoted his entire time to music, and has been in it since then, over forty years.

In the early days, musical entertainments were the chief sources of amusement, and some of the concerts given could not be duplicated to-day, for there were splendid musicians here. The time, labor and enthusiasm

given to preparation for a musical event was prodigious—not for profit, but pure love of it, as the proceeds usually went to some charitable object. One of the best organizations was the Timbuctoos, consisting of some of the leading business and professional men of the town. Its entertainments took a wide range, from sedate to humorous, and were of the highest excellence. There was also considerable dramatic talent here, and exhibitions of that character were frequently given; also operas.

Traveling shows had not reached the town, and the only amusements were such as were improvised by local talent. The only hall in town was in the third story of the Sherman Block, at the corner of Third and Court Avenue. Whatever the exhibit was, the hall was always crowded, for the town was like a large family, everyone knew everybody; they helped each other.

I recall a tableaux entertainment given in that old hall, in which a devil and an angel were personified among other things. "Charley" Spofford, son of Colonel Spofford, represented the devil, and Miss Lucy Love, daughter of the President of the First National Bank, represented the angel. "Charley" Nourse—he hadn't got to be a Judge then—was general manager, and run the show. Spofford was promptly togged out with satanic horns, hoofs and forked tail, but there was a long delay with the angel; they couldn't get the wings on straight. The audience got uneasy, whereupon the general manager began to expostulate, saying: "It seems to take a long time to make an angel out of a woman; the devil has been waiting several minutes." "It don't take very much time to make a devil out of a man," quickly retorted Mrs. Frank Allen.

Will, was for many years a member of the well-known Hartung Orchestra and Collard's Instrumental Brass Band, which kept him busy, for there were parties, receptions, banquets, etc., nearly every night, which so encroached on his sleeping hours he engaged "Charley" Rogg, who clerked in "Ham" Bush's drug store, in the Kirkwood Building, where Wright is now, to hustle him out at half-past six every morning in time to go on duty at Mills & Company's—they didn't have any eight-hours-a-day labor in those days. On Sunday, he played the pipe organ in some church, a service he performed for thirty-six consecutive years, in the different churches of the city.

In 1869, he purchased the music stock of Mills & Company, and opened a store in the one-story frame building which stood next west to the Kirkwood, where Harbach erected his big furniture store, and it became the musical center of the city for many years. He is still in the business. So it is, he is one of the pioneer musicians, helped to lay the foundation, promote and foster the musical element which has culminated in the excellent schools and talent which prevail in the city to-day, and given the town a fine, notable reputation abroad. He was ever ready to assist with his talent for all social and charitable objects.

Politically, he is a Republican, of the Roosevelt persuasion, but takes no part in politics.

Socially, he is genial, courteous, affable, and popular. He is a member of Capital Lodge, A. F. A. M.; a charter member of Myrtle Lodge, Knights of Pythias, the Ancient Order of United Workmen, and the R. E. C. A., a secret organization formed several years ago for good fellowship by Hy. Smith, "Ret" Clarkson, and Ed. Whitcomb. What its real name was, where it met, what its object, was never known, except to its members, and they would tell nobody. They had signs, grips and a ritual similar to the Masons. The membership at one time was about two hundred. Its public appearance was only on New Year's Day, when every dollar in the treasury was taken, and they went silently about the city, depositing at the door of the deserving poor a well-filled basket of family supplies.

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