



WILLIAM LOWRY

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A pioneer who tasted the Cup of Misfortune and passed through the Valley of Trouble was the well-known William Lowry.

He was born in the county of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, February Fourteenth, 1835, of Scotch-Irish ancestry. His grandfather came to America from Ireland in 1798, and settled in Lancaster. Later, four brothers came and settled in different parts of the country, but he never saw them after they reached America.

William passed his boyhood days with his father, who was a hatter, and acquired such education as he could in the public school of that day, which was supplemented with a course in Franklin College.

In 1851, when sixteen years old, he was apprenticed for four years to learn the trade of carpenter. At the close of his apprenticeship, he worked one year as a journeyman.

In 1855, he came to Iowa, reaching Davenport July Seventh, registered at the Ohio House, kept by the Howell Brothers, and on Ninth Street secured his first job. There and in Moline he worked at his trade until October, 1856, when, hearing that the new Capital of the state was a good place for a young man with aspirations, he packed his carpet-bag, mounted one of Colonel Hooker's stage coaches, at three o'clock on the morning of the Ninth, deposited his luggage at the Everett House, kept by the jolly Absalom Morris, who, he says, furnished good meals, filled the dinner pails, and made everybody feel as though he had known them all their days, then went to bed. The house was crowded with travelers and land-seekers.

The next morning, after one of Absalom's satisfying breakfasts, he sailed out for business and to make observations. There was not much to attract a new-comer. There was but one bridge, a pontoon, floating, at Keokuk Street

(now Grand Avenue), operated by Father McClelland, as he was called. On the East Side, the only building was a frame about twenty feet square, on the south-east corner of Ninth and Keokuk, used for religious and school purposes. Reverend William Remsburg, a saintly old man, did the preaching, and his wife did the school teaching therein. Many of our prominent men received their early tutelage in that school, among them Congressman J. A. T. Hull.

The State House was then in process of construction on East Walnut. That was Lowry's first objective point. He took the narrow plank walk laid on stilts above high-water mark, through grubs, thereto. The walls of the building were up ready for the rafters and roof. He interviewed John Bryan, the contractor, and John P. Huskins, his foreman, secured a job, and on the Eleventh of that month went to work, and so continued until the building was completed and ready for the Legislature, in January, 1858. The Pine lumber used was hauled by teams from Davenport, and cost one hundred dollars per thousand feet, delivered to the builders. About twenty carpenters were employed, all good fellows, who got the roof on and floors laid ready for the plasterers in the Spring of 1857. On the Fourth of July, "the boys" decided to celebrate, but there was not a flag in the town. Lowry purchased material, and hired John Morris, a one-legged tailor, or "Pegleg Morris," as he was usually called, to sew it together. A tall Hickory pole was cut on the Capitol grounds, and on the morning of the Fourth, Lowry flung to the breeze the first flag to float from the Capitol in Des Moines. A platform was erected on the site of the present Capitol, and orations were made by "Dan" Finch, W. H. McHenry ("Old Bill"), Colonel "Tom" Walker (a "Kentucky Colonel"), J. A. Williamson, and others. A fat ox was roasted, garnished with the necessary fixings, and a grand ovation in genuine pioneer style was had.

When the building was ready for the seating, desks and furniture, a verbal agreement was made between Governor Grimes, other state officers, and Bryan, whereby the latter was to make the necessary furniture. He fulfilled the agreement under many difficulties. The country was new, seasoned Black Walnut lumber was high in price, the roads were bad, and expenses for hauling exorbitant. His bill was presented to the General Assembly, where

it was declared extortionate, but, after a long delay, and emasculating it of fourteen hundred dollars, it was allowed, but never accepted by him during his life. Since his decease, his heirs have made repeated application for a settlement of the claim. Referring to the incident a few days ago, Mr. Lowry said: "The bill was a just one. Bryan had great difficulty in procuring material, and expended all his surplus money to get the building ready for the Legislature on time. It is a just claim, and the State of Iowa owes it to Bryan's estate."

January Fourteenth, 1884, the new Capitol having been completed so as to accommodate the General Assembly, at two fourteen p. m., the members of the Senate and House of Representatives formed in line, marched to the new building, and the old one was abandoned to rats, bats, the elements, and ruin, until September First, 1892, when it went up in a cloud of fire, supposedly started by tramps and hoodlums, who had made it a common resort.

In January, 1858, a branch Postoffice was established in East Des Moines, as the East Side was then called, with Doctor Alex. Shaw as Postmaster. Lowry was appointed Deputy, and served until the following March, when, hearing of what he considered was a better thing, resigned, and recommended George Tichenor as his successor, who was appointed. Hyde & Huskins, who had been contractors for the State House, had made a contract to build a Court House at Webster City, in Hamilton County, and wanted Lowry to go with them, all to be on the ground at a fixed date. Accordingly, Hyde and Lowry left Des Moines early the morning of March Fifteenth, on horseback. The weather was clear and cold, and all went well until about ten o'clock, when a blizzard came upon them. The wind increased, the snow fell heavily and drifted. It soon became impossible to see fifty yards, and they were lost—did not know what direction they were going. The horses floundered through the snow drifts, the storm continuing until far into the night. During the day, they saw no living thing. They kept the horses moving, however, and during a lull in the wind, a dim light was seen in the distance, for which they steered. Reaching a cabin, they found it occupied by a Norwegian alone, and learned they were near Squaw Creek, in Story County. They had eaten nothing since early morning, and were

nearly frozen. The Norwegian put their horses in his shack stable, gave them a good feeding, made a good fire in the cabin, and cooked them a hot meal, consisting of corn bread and Pennyroyal tea, which Lowry says was the best meal he ever ate. A bed of hay was made on the ground floor, and after a refreshing rest and sleep, they resumed their journey through the drifted snow, reaching Webster City late at night. They remained there eighteen months, making earnest effort to complete the Court. House. Through some irregularity in the issuance of the bonds, their time and money were lost. They were "dead broke," and returned to Des Moines.

Pike's Peak was then the objective point of gold-seekers. Lowry, John and Joe Huskins fited (sic) up a two-horse team, with the necessary outfit, and May Nineteenth, 1860, started for the Peak, reaching Denver five weeks later, in which was but one brick building, the United States Mint. There they changed their plans, and went to California Gulch, one hundred and fifty miles distant, where they worked until October First, and, having panned out but little gold dust, sold out for what they could get, and returned to Des Moines, long on experience, but short on cash. Physically, however, they had gained in adipose tissue, avoirdupois, and appetite.

Lowry then resumed his trade until the Spring of 1861, when he became a clerk in the grocery store of J. M. Moody, where he remained eleven years.

In 1865, he was elected Secretary of East Demoine School District Board. By considerable good financiering, what is now Bryant school building was erected at Penn and Keokuk avenues. It was the boast of the time that it was sufficient, for the next generation, but soon after another building was necessary. Four lots were purchased at Twelfth and Lyon, and what is now the Webster building was erected. In 1870, he declined further election as Secretary.

In 1871, he was elected City Treasurer, and was twice re-elected. During the last quarter of his third term, in November, 1875, he was elected County Treasurer, and December First, resigned the city office to qualify as County Treasurer. So satisfactorily did he fill the office, and so implicit was the trust

and confidence of the people in his integrity, he was reelected and served a second term. Enos B. Hunt was his Deputy. They were often overworked, and had to burn midnight oil in that pestiferous old rookery to keep their records clear, for they did not have a corps of clerks to aid them.

Lowry being a very cautious man, and the Court House having no vaults nor place he deemed suitable or safe in which to keep the large amount of money frequently received, placed it in the bank of F. R. West & Son for safe keeping. During his second term, July Seventeenth, 1877, the bank was crushed, through the failure of B. F. Allen, and the doors were closed against him, with seven thousand, one hundred and seventy-seven dollars and ninety-three cents of county funds therein. The failure was a terrible blow to him, as it was to thousands of others, and created intense excitement in the community. In a reminiscent mood one day, not long ago, he said: "On my way home that night, my thoughts were of the sorrow it would be to my wife and children, and of the parting words of my father when I left home to come West. I never have, and never shall, forget them. Said he: 'William, keep your integrity and you will always have true friends in time of need.' There was no sleep in our house that night. My wife and I sat under the trees and counseled of the loss, and the effect it would have upon the children and ourselves. Our conclusion was to surrender all we had, begin anew, and we did so." Their property was turned over to the assignee of the bank, for the benefit of the county. Subsequently, an effort was made in the courts to exempt, from the attachment of the property of the bank the county funds, on the ground that they were placed in the bank only for safety accommodation, the county not having any proper place therefor, but the courts hold that money when placed in a bank became the property of the bank, subject to all laws relating thereto; that the county was presumed to provide a suitable place to keep its funds; that if the County Treasurer placed them elsewhere or in a bank, he did it at his own risk.

The numerous friends of Lowry then rallied to his aid. A petition was presented to the Twentieth General Assembly for his relief. The matter was

referred to a special committee, who, after a thorough investigation, reported that Lowry had made good to the county by the payment in full of the amount he had deposited in the bank; that it was an entire loss to him except a dividend received from the assignee of the bank of six hundred and forty-one dollars and ninety-one cents, leaving a loss of six thousand, five hundred and thirty-two dollars and two cents. The General Assembly then passed a bill authorizing the Board of Supervisors of Polk County to submit to the voters of the county a proposition to refund his loss. The proposition was submitted at the election in November, 1884, and carried by over four thousand majority.

Soon after the expiration of his term, in 1879, Lowry opened a small grocery store, and remained in that business until October, 1886, when he was elected Superintendent of Union Park, which place he now holds, with eminent satisfaction to the thousands of visitors to that favorite resort.

Politically, he is a Democrat, but in local affairs he always votes for the man he deems best qualified for the office. He cast his first vote in Des Moines for James Buchanan for President. At that election, there was but one voting place in the town, the old Court House, which stood where the Union Depot now is. The total vote of the town at that election was eight hundred and nine.

Socially, he is quiet, unassuming, genial, courteous in manner, and deservedly popular. Domestic in taste and habit, he finds in his home more satisfaction than in the usual society events. He is one of the oldest members of Capital Lodge, of the Order of Odd Fellows, and Capital Lodge, of the Masonic order, and was the second Master Mason passed in that lodge. He is also a member of Lodge Number Ten, Ancient Order of United Workmen.

Religiously, he was reared in the faith of the Presbyterian Church, but in 1884, he united with the Roman Catholic Church, of which his estimable wife had been a member from girlhood to her death, August Ninth, 1905.

November Third, 1907.

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