



JUDGE P. M. CASADY

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ONE of the most conspicuous landmarks of the city, as it were, is Phineas M. Casady, or "Judge," as he is familiarly called. He arrived here June Eleventh, 1846. The outlook at that time, to a young man on business bent, was not attractive. Civilization had scarcely begun. A few log cabins were scattered here and there—the heritage left by the military garrison. They stood, principally, along the two rivers; those along the Des Moines were called, "Des Moines Row;" those along the Racoon, "Coon Row." These cabins were rented from Uncle Sam on such terms as could be agreed upon with his agents, until more commodious quarters could be prepared, and with the increase of newcomers, it was often necessary to "double up." This was a little inconvenient, but everybody was neighborly and helped to make life pleasant.

The Judge deposited his belongings at Martin (X) Tucker's tavern—Tucker signed his name with an X because he couldn't do otherwise—the only first-class tavern in town. It was the garrison blacksmith shop, which he had improved, as he announced to the public, "by having run an avenue through it, and having put up a condition to it, he would be able to detain the public in a more hostile manner." It stood near where the old Fort Dodge depot now is.

The Judge put out his sign as a lawyer on one of the cabins on 'Coon Row. Law practice in those days was unlike that of to-day. Courts were few and far between. Lawyers rode the circuit of a hundred miles, had good times, and, despite frequent legal tilts, formed social ties strong and lasting. Perhaps not so well versed in legal technicalities as are the lawyers of to-day, they were well grounded in common sense and exact justice, which is the foundation of good law. They did not get very much pay for their services, either. Money was scarce, and the people were poor. A fee of five dollars cash was uncommon. The Judge says he once had a case

of considerable importance to a man twenty-five miles away. Starting early in the morning on horseback, he went, tried and won the case, and returned home after midnight, for which the man gave him fifteen dollars, the largest fee he got in those days, and which to-day, for like service, would not be less than one hundred dollars.

Plain, conservative, unostentatious and courteous, the Judge quickly won the esteem and confidence of the public, and a large practice. He was the second attorney admitted to the Bar of Polk County.

In January following, Doctor T. K. Brooks resigned the office of Postmaster, to devote his entire time to his profession, and the Judge was appointed his successor. The office, which was down near the Starch Works, was removed to his law office. The postal business was not very extensive, as he often carried the mail in his hat and delivered it to the proper persons as he met them—a sort of rural mail delivery. The salary was not sufficient for very sumptuous living, and in 1848 he resigned the postmastership and formed a partnership with R. L. Tidrick in a land and real estate business, which continued successfully until 1853.

In 1848, Casady was elected Senator, to represent the counties of Polk, Marion, Dallas, Jasper, Marshall, Story, Boone, Warren, and Madison in the Legislature. He served through the second and third sessions, declining a nomination for the fourth.

As Senator, his broad, conservative, practical views on all public questions; his genial, courteous bearing, made him an influential leader and director of the legislative mind. He was not an orator, but a plain commoner, winning success by logical, convincing, "heart-to-heart" talks. He aided very largely in laying the foundation for the civil government of the state, and in forming the state Constitution. He was one of the committee that formed and named nearly all the counties of the state.

He was always true and loyal to his own county and town, and, with a score of localities vigorously pitted against him, he secured the adoption of measures whereby this city became the Capital of the state.

While he was Senator, the rush of immigration, land seekers, homesteaders and speculators became immense, and the

establishment of a government land office was a necessity for the proper transaction of business. So soon as this became apparent, a score of cities and towns were aspirants for its location. At each session of the Legislature the Judge secured the adoption of a memorial to the Government for the establishment of a Land Office, and that it be located at Des Moines.

After retiring from the Senate, he turned his attention to business affairs generally.

In 1851, he assisted in organizing the First Baptist Church, was one of the charter members, and was elected Trustee of the Society. The same year, he, with Father Bird and Lamp Sherman, was elected to form a charter for the town, and under the provisions of that charter he was elected a member of the first council, which laid the foundation for Des Moines' municipal government. Their work was purely patriotic; they got no pay. He was again elected to the third council.

In 1854, he was nominated for Judge of the District Court. The district was large, and as the Whigs and Know Nothings were getting pretty thick, he took the stump. Marshall County was in the throes of a county-seat war, and to checkmate the Know Nothings, he had to resort to a little tactics; so he rode up there. The Court House was a log building, part of which was used for a stable. He was received very cordially, his horse put into a stall and fed, while he dined at the hostelry. During the visit, he and Frank Anson, a good friend and father of the noted baseball player, got their heads together and fixed up the county fences. The Judge came home and was elected by a good majority, but soon after his election he was appointed Receiver of Public Money for the United States Land Office. The compensation being better and more certain, he resigned the judgeship without holding a single hearing of court.

In 1853, with Hoyt Sherman and Tidrick, he erected the Sherman Block, at the corner of Third Street and Court Avenue, for a State Bank and business offices, the third floor being used as a public hall. Subsequently it was used for post office and county offices, while the Court House was being built; then, for several years, as the City Hall.

In 1857, the country was flooded with notes of wild-cat banks, having no reliability and some of them no accessible habitat. Business was demoralized; nobody knew whether a five-dollar note received one day would buy a meal of victuals the next morning. The quickest riddance of them was the aim of those who got them. To give greater stability to the money market, the Legislature authorized corporations with banking privileges, and, in accordance therewith, the State Bank of Iowa was organized, with eight branches, and the Judge was elected one of the directors of the Des Moines branch. The bank at once was favorably received, and rendered good service until Uncle Sam took control of monetary affairs with his national bank system, when the State Bank was merged into the National State Bank, May, 1865.

In 1859, the Judge formed a law partnership with Jefferson S. Polk and General M. M. Crocker, making one of the strongest firms in practice. He was engaged in law and real estate business until 1864, when, having acquired a competency, he retired from active business, though occasionally giving aid to start some new enterprise, as in 1871 he was one of the organizers of the City Water Works Company, and in 1873 the State Printing Company, to furnish "patent insides" for newspapers, and now the Western Newspaper Union.

He was one of the charter members of Ebenezer Encampment, Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

In 1866 was organized the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa. The Judge was elected its first President, and held the place until 1872. It is recognized as one of the most substantial institutions in the state.

In July, 1875, the Des Moines Bank was organized by Simon Casady and Elwood Gatch. In January, 1883, the Union Savings Bank was organized, and in October, the Des Moines Savings Bank was incorporated, and succeeded to the business of the two above named banks. In 1895, Judge Casady was elected President, and still holds the place, and may be found there every day, in peaceful contentment, ready for a social chat, or to swap yarns with an old-timer. "Hank" Anson dropped in on him a few days ago, and their hilarity nearly upset the bank boys.

In all his acts as lawyer, senator or minor public official, the Judge was ever actuated by the consciousness of responsibility and duty to the public, and it may be truly said that no one did more than he to aid the county and town during their formative period, or to secure the heritage we possess as the State Capital and a city of financial, social and educational distinction.

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