



ROBERT L. TIDRICK

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OF the pioneers of the city, none were more thoroughly identified with its history, or a part of it during the first thirty years, than R. L. Tidrick. He arrived here in May, 1847, fresh from a law school, and at once opened a private school in one of the log barrack buildings on 'Coon Row. That the school was popular is evidenced by the large attendance of scholars from all parts of the county. In the Fall, he joined Major William McKay, who subsequently became Judge of the District Court, in the practice of law.

In the Spring of 1848, he was appointed Postmaster, to succeed Doctor Brooks, and removed the office to the law office of P. M. Casady, on Second Street, near Vine. He held the office one year, when he formed a partnership with Casady in the law and real estate business, the land business having increased to large proportions by the influx of settlers.

In April, 1848, at a meeting of citizens of the county, the Settlers' Claim Club was organized, consisting of one hundred members, for the purpose of protecting settlers from speculators and claim jumpers. For some time before lands were surveyed or open to homestead entry, settlers had come, staked out claims and commenced the cultivation of farms and building of houses, awaiting the time when they could be formally entered and secured through the Government Land Office. Meanwhile, speculators from the East, with ample funds, went all over the country, selected the most desirable spots, and made a record thereof, with the intent to over-bid the settler and real claimant when the lands were offered for sale at the Land Office. Claim jumpers also abounded, who would take advantage of a settler's temporary absence or sickness, so as not to be present at the land sale. In other parts of the state there had been very many of these claim troubles. Actual and *bona fide* settlers were despoiled and robbed of their homes, even murders

were committed, and in some counties mob law reigned. It was to provide better protection and prevent mob violence that the club was formed here. Rules were adopted and committees elected to enforce the rules, the first of which was:—

“We will protect all persons who do or may hold claims, against the interference of any person who shall attempt to deprive such claim holders of their claims and improvements, by preemption or otherwise.”

It was also declared that every person who attempted to interfere with the rights of a claim holder should be deemed a nuisance, and abated; and they be notified by the proper committee to leave the vicinity and county, with pledged authority to enforce the order to travel.

Strict vigilance was kept by members of the club. Strangers going through the county found it eminently proper to keep their hands off from land claims. If they became suspicious of any scheme against a settler, they were emphatically and convincingly shown that their personal safety was in their absence from the community.

A short time prior to the land sale at Iowa City, an immense meeting of the club and settlers was held, and Tidrick was elected bidder to attend the sale at Iowa City, and a platoon of stalwart men were selected as his body-guard, to go thoroughly equipped to meet what might come. Their presence was sufficient to secure the adjustment of nearly every claim presented from this county, at the minimum price of one dollar and a quarter per acre. Not a speculator dared to raise a bid when made by Tidrick. By this unity of action and the cool-headedness of Tidrick, the county was saved the turmoil and disturbances which prevailed elsewhere. Subsequent to this, whenever dispute arose respecting a claim, the Club Committee settled it. There was no appeal from it. If one of the contestants was suspected to be a speculator, he was informed that the roads were in good condition for traveling, and fence rails, tar and feathers accessible.

A single incident will illustrate the methods. It was after the Land Office had been removed to Des Moines. A man came here named Bates, who disported himself with considerable pomposity

about the taverns. The land sales were brisk. The town was full of settlers entering their claims and making purchases. He made it known that he was here to buy land; that he had money, plenty to buy all he wanted and pay the price according to law. He didn't care a continental about Claim Clubs. He would buy a claim if he got a chance. One morning when the sale opened, a settler's claim in Walnut Township was put up and he made a bid on it. Instantly he was surrounded by a group of stalwart, determined men, and two rails planted vertically in front of him, with several old shotguns and pistols outlying. He was politely invited to take a walk. He was escorted to the river bank. He sat down. A strong guard was left with him. The water in the river was cold. What might happen after night came on was uncertain. The doings of the Club Committee in such cases were never made public, as a rule. He pondered over the subject until darkness came, when he collapsed, and made a pledge that he would offer no more interference with settlers' claims, and he was permitted to travel.

"Jim" Miller, over here in the post office, remembers one night when he was living over east of Capitol Hill. He was awakened from sleep by some disturbance outside. He hustled out to learn the cause. A few rods from the house was a deep well, near which could be dimly discerned a posse of men. "Jim" advanced to see who they were, when he was told to stay where he was, and "in the morning go to Moody's store and get a well rope." He obeyed orders. The next morning the well rope was gone, and, at Moody's a new well rope sixty feet long was waiting for him, charges all paid, but by whom he never knew. He asked no questions. There were occasions in those days when inquisitiveness was folly.

In November, 1850, Tidrick was appointed Prosecuting Attorney, to fill a vacancy, and served until the next election, in April, when J. M. Perry, a loquacious and somewhat consequential lawyer, was elected, who gained some notoriety on one occasion by running up against Judge Byron Rice, an incident more properly to be noted in sketches of the Judge later on.

In 1852, the rush for land by home-seekers throughout the central part of the state began to increase rapidly. For them to traverse the country to make their selection, often fifty to a hundred

miles, then go to Iowa City to make a formal entry and pay for it was an enormous expense, for those, in most cases, unable to bear it. After repeated petitions of the Iowa Legislature for relief from the Government, in September, a Land Office was established here, and the following April Tidrick was appointed Register, held the place one year, and resigned because of bad health. The office was in the Exchange Block, corner of Third and Walnut streets. The tide of land-seekers at once set in here; the town was crowded day and night. With it floated in the speculators. Everybody was on the rush. The man who had selected a tract a hundred miles away was in a hurry to get it entered lest it be done by another who had been there before him. The jurisdiction of the Polk County Claims Club didn't extend to this traffic, which covered all the state north and west of Polk County, and west of Grundy County. For two or three years this was a lively town.

In 1855, having been out of business for two years by bad health, Tidrick became a partner with Hoyt Sherman and Judge Casady in the banking and real estate business at Third and Walnut streets.

When the State House contest between the East Side and West Side came on, Tidrick put up one thousand dollars to have the Capitol placed on Grimmel's Hill, and was very active to beat the East Siders.

In 1856, the Sherman Block, at Third Street and Court Avenue, was built, and occupied by the banking firm of Sherman, Casady & Tidrick, the post office, general business offices, then for county and city offices. It was for several years the trade center.

In 1857, when the prefix "Fort" was dropped and the city simply became Des Moines, at the election in April, Tidrick was elected Alderman from the Fourth Ward, and in 1879 was elected Mayor.

In 1860, he organized the Des Moines Iron Works, which, with several mutations and expansions, is still doing business at East First Street and Court Avenue, as the Des Moines Manufacturing and Supply Company.

In 1876, he joined the Association which built the Exposition Building, at a cost of seventy-five thousand dollars, at Eighth and Walnut streets (now the Iliad), for the permanent exhibition of

Art and Industry of the state. With persistent boosting and energy of the promoters, it was a success for a couple of years, but, being ahead of time, it failed for want of support, and was transformed to a printing house by Frank Mills, who occupied it until he quit business, when it was changed to its present form. The original promoters sunk several thousand dollars in the enterprise, which was intended not so much for profit as a benefit and help to the city.

In May, 1888, Tidrick was again appointed Register of the Land Office, and held the office one year, when he retired from all active business.

He was an efficient, active member of the Brotherhood of Early Settlers, and for many years its Recording Secretary. It was what is now known as the Old Settlers' Association.

He was a quiet, unostentatious man, not a politician or a place-seeker, yet often selected for places of trust. He was a man of few words, without forensic ability, quite unlike his long-time business partner, Judge Casady, yet in his own way, beginning with an educational effort, he helped materially to mould and build the city, and became quite wealthy. He died October Twenty-fourth, 1894.

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