

SAMUEL N. DYER

LATE one day in the last week of October, 1851, Samuel N. Dyer sailed into Raccoon Forks in a prairie schooner, with his family, and tied up for the night at the Marvin House, on Third Street. The next morning, he went house hunting, and found a small vacant dwelling on Walnut street, where Vorse's implement warehouse stood for many years afterward, but it was so uninhabitable, he soon after moved to one of the double log barrack cabins in First Street, near Walnut. Conrad Stutsman, a radical East Sider, had built a tavern at the corner, which he named "Pennsylvania House."

In 1855, Colonel S. F. Spofford and J. C. Warner purchased the corner, enlarged and completed the tavern, the south end joining Dyer's cabin—or Sam., as he was better known by everybody—in fact, there was no caste among the pioneer settlers. They knew each other well, and it was Jeff. Polk, Lamp. Sherman, Ed. Clapp, Hub. Hoxie, Pete. Myers, "Billy" Moore, "Jim" Savery, "Dan" Finch, Frank Allen, "Sammy" Gray, "Tom" Mitchell, "Jimmy" Jordan, "Bill" McHenry, Father Bird, Elder Nash, with several Kentucky and Virginia Captains and Colonels. It was simply an impulsive expression of a fraternal good fellowship. Among the "Colonels" was Barlow Granger. The venerable Judge George G. Wright, a man, as we all know, of truth, veracity, and the utmost circumspection, once related to a lot of old-timers how Barlow got his title:

"Captain Allen, the commander of the troops at The Fort, before departing, was given orders to send in the name of some suitable person, to be commissioned Colonel and Commander of the Home Defenses, for safety when the United States troops were withdrawn, for the Indians were still here. The Captain had so many good friends, and all good men, that he determined to make the selection in a very impartial manner. So he sent out word

one day (without mentioning the direct purpose) to Alex. Scott, Doctor Brooks, Isaac Griffith, P. M. Casady, Will. Porter, Barlow Granger, M. M. Crocker, W. W. Moore, James A. Williamson, Harry and J. M. Griffith, to meet him at 'Coon Point quarters this evening.' All were there. Sentinel at the door. The Captain said: 'Friends, I have a great honor to bestow, ordered and commissioned by the Government so to do, and in justice to you and myself, I must do so impartially. So now, gentlemen, I must put you to a test' [then Isaac Griffith gave one of his soft whispers, so as not to disturb the sentinel outside, and Barlow ran his hands into his pockets, and "Billy" Moore winked], but the Captain, not at all disturbed, said, 'Here is the test [lifting an army blanket from a large, good, sod-grown pumpkin, that rested on a puncheon bench]; he who can bite the farthest into the pumpkin will be made a Colonel and Commander of the Home Defenses.' Each man, in about the order named, struggled and did his best, the Captain resetting the peg as each one distanced the other, but none over-reached Barlow, and he got to be Colonel."

Sam. had to vacate the cabin. It was weather-boarded, a new roof put on, and fitted up for a barroom. For many years, it was the trysting place of legislators, lobbyists, and politicians of that day. The political schemes concocted therein would fill a book, while the "corn juice" imbibed to wash them down would be surprising. "Whiskey straight" was the popular thirst quencher in those days, but the quality was evidently better than most of the stuff sold at the present time. The cabin remained a part of the "Demoin House"—so named by Spofford—until the hotel was torn down, to be supplanted by the new Postoffice (sic).

In 1852, the rush to California had become so great the County Commissioners decided to get some benefit from it, and established a ferry over Des Moines River. Sam. was employed to run the ferry. It was not uncommon to see a line of covered wagons from the river to Four Mile Creek, every driver clamoring to be carried over first, some offering him five dollars to break the line, but he refused, and made them take their turn. The county did a good business, for thousands of teams were carried, and the toll was twelve and one-half cents for man and horse, thirty-seven and

one-half cents for a wagon and two horses, fifty cents for a wagon and four horses, and five cents per head for loose animals.

While Sam. lived in that log cabin, his family got out of flour, and for twelve days they had no bread. There was wheat and corn enough, but no mills to grind them. "Uncle Johnny" Dean had a small mill on Dean Street—now First—on the east side of the river, near where the casket factory is, but it was troubled with intermittent inertness, and they, as well as everybody, had to wait until flour could be hauled from Keokuk.

In 1855, Sam. was nominated for the office of County Treasurer and Recorder by the Democrats, and, with Thomas H. Napier, candidate for County Judge, made a house-to-house canvass of the county. Napier was in many ways an original character. Sam. used to relate that one day they stopped at a farm house for dinner, and to grind their political axes, as it were. The good housewife set up a generous supply of "back-bones," a luxury well known to old-timers, together with other good edibles. Napier was hungry, and was making havoc with the "bones," not cleaning them very well, when he happened to see the mistress looking straight at him, with arms akimbo, whereupon he said, with all the suavity of the true Virginian, that he was: "Never mind, madam, I am in a hurry. The children can pick what I leave." The house was full of children, and the incident illustrated what the Judge subsequently proved to be, as boss of all county affairs, eminently practical.

Sam. was elected, for there were not enough Whigs in the county to form a Corporal's Guard. He served one term, and gave such satisfaction he was renominated and elected for a second term.

While he was Treasurer, he had to deliver the state funds to the State Treasurer at Iowa City, the amount sometimes being considerable. At one time, he and "Dan" Finch made the trip in a sleigh. It was extremely cold, the snow was deep, the roads were blocked, and they had to go where they could, much of the way over staked-and-ridered fences.

Although he owned property on the East Side, and resided there when the scrimmage over the location of the State House came on, in 1856, he was a non-combatant, for very prudential reasons. The

West Siders would have made his second term a very uncertain quantity, for they were as mad as March hares over the result of the contest.

He was a cautious, conservative official, notable for integrity, high sense of honor, and was deservedly popular.

Socially, he was genial, big-hearted, ever ready to grant a favor or assist the needy, a generosity which, overburdened him, for, like Alex. Scott, he became responsible for the promises and obligations of others who failed to fulfill them, so that in 1868, when he sold his property and settled his affairs, there was little left. He then removed to Kansas, and deceased in 1888.

He was an active and consistent member of the Presbyterian Church, an ardent friend and supporter of public schools, and all measures tending to promote morality and good government.

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