



CONRAD D. REINKING

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A pioneer of good repute, and influential, was Conrad D. Reinking. Born in Westphalia, Prussia, May Second, 1820, where he lived with his parents, who were poor, acquiring such limited education as he could get in the common schools, until he was sixteen years old, when, in 1836, he came to America, landing in Philadelphia, where he remained until 1842, in the meantime learning the cabinet maker trade.

In 1842, he came to Iowa, stopping at Fort Madison, where he started a furniture shop, which soon after was destroyed by fire. He started again, and again his shop went up in flames. Added to his misfortune, he was prostrated with severe and dangerous illness, but the good people of the town, with the proverbial kindness and good-fellowship of the pioneer, appreciating his energy and sterling qualities, generously cared for him during his confinement, and offered assistance to rehabilitate his business, for all of which he was exceedingly grateful, but his independent spirit was too strong to accept charity.

He then went to New Orleans, where he remained a short time, when a longing for his old home led him back to Philadelphia, where he disembarked from a sea vessel with one dollar in his pocket. He started in business again, but it was a losing game, and early in 1848, he turned his face westward, stopping at Saint Louis, where he got a contract job. While there, he learend (sic) of "the future Capital of Iowa," and came to see it. So well was he pleased he made a claim for one-half section of land in the southwestern part of what is now Delaware Township, on the east branch of Four Mile Creek. He also purchased, for thirty dollars, two lots on Walnut Street, now occupied by the Harris-Emery Company's store. He went back to Saint Louis, finished his contract job, purchased some material for cabinet work, returned to Fort Des Moines, October First, and opened a small shop on the west side

of the Court House Square, and there he made the first furniture made in Des Moines. But it was too far out—the center of business and trade was all on Second Street, toward 'Coon River, and soon after, he purchased a lot on Third Street, where the Harbach Building is, built a log cabin, and started the first furniture store and cabinet maker's shop in the town. His push and energy secured him a good patronage, and his sales extended over a large area. In homes at Iowa City to-day can be found some furniture of his making. He used to say that he made all the coffins used within twenty-five miles of his shop.

The times were hard, but such was his faith in the future, he took advantage of the low price of real estate, and invested every surplus dollar he could get in it, for he had the sagacity to see ahead. October Thirtieth, 1848, he entered the claim he had made with two land warrants. Subsequently, he added two hundred and forty acres more, which became his home farm. The county records are frequently paged with entries of his purchases. He relieved "Tom" McMullin, "Jim" Campbell, and others who had overloaded themselves with more town lots than they could carry or pay for. In later years, telling of some of his purchases, he said that, early in 1849, Campbell came to his shop one day and wanted to buy a bedstead—must have one. He had no money, but he could put up some town lots. He selected a bedstead the price of which was eight dollars, costing less than five dollars, for which he offered two lots at the corner of Eighth and Walnut. Conrad didn't want them at any price; they were too far out. It ran along several days, when Mrs. Campbell came and urged him to make the trade, as she had no bed to sleep on.

"But," said Conrad, "I declined. I told her the lots were too far off; they were of no use for business, but she said, 'O, the town may grow sometime, and you can fence them in and use them for a cowyard.' I shook my head. Finally, she went to my wife with a hard tale about having to sleep on the floor, so, between them, I gave it up, and told Mrs. Campbell to come and get the bedstead. I charged profit and loss with five dollars, and let it go at that."

Several versions of that trade have been given from time to time, but this

is the only authentic one. Reinking built a small brick house on the lots, which he lived in for a time, and subsequently built the structure now known as Reinking Block.

In 1849, he became a victim of the California gold fever. The continuous cavalcade, day after day, of gold-seekers, east and west as far as the eye could reach, and the fabulous tales of gold finds, overpowered him. He turned his shop over to J. E. Jewett, a lawyer, and, with Isaac Cooper, a wagon and four yoke of oxen, joined the procession, landing four months later, toil-worn and weary, in that Eldorado, where he remained until the Spring of 1851, when he returned with nearly one thousand dollars as the net result of his venture, but with health greatly impaired. He at once returned to his shop and resumed a business which gave evidence that Jewett was a much better lawyer than cabinet maker, where he continued until 1855, when, with shattered health, he sold to the Harbachs and went to his farm, having, in 1851, taken a helpmate.

At the April election, in 1852, he was elected a member of the first Council of the Town of Fort Des Moines, a body of men of good sense and sound judgment, who, without precedents or experience—there were no junketings to other cities to get pointers, they had no money—laid the foundation of the civic government of what has come to be a city noted for its refinement, good government, schools and churches. They had to devise and formulate measures for a Treasurer, Recorder, Marshal, and make police regulations. Their meetings were held in the old first Court House, lighted with a tallow "dip" stuck in the neck of a bottle. They received no pay for their services. The Council consisted of the Reverend Father Bird, President; Jesse Dicks, stove dealer; C. D. Reinking, cabinet maker; P. M. Casady, lawyer—he had not got to be a Judge; William T. Marvin, proprietor of the Marvin House; Hoyt Sherman, Postmaster, and R. W. Sypher, merchant. J. K. Dollar was elected Recorder, but not liking the job, resigned, and W. A. Galbraith, a grain merchant, was put in his place. "Sammy" Gray, the first plasterer in the town, was made Treasurer, and Alex. Bowers, Marshal. He subsequently became United States Marshal. Of them all, Judge Casady is the only one living.*

*Judge Casady died August 31, 1908.

The Council served one year, the people evidencing a very singular appreciation of their gratuitous, philanthropic labor, by not electing one of them to the next Council.

Reinking was always active in promoting the interest of farmers. He set apart and furnished a room in his block for the free use of the Farmers' Exchange, an organization formed to promote the sale and exchange of farm products—a kind of market, where farmers could have recorded with the Secretary what they had to sell, which was at once listed on a bulletin board so that purchasers could make a selection. Subsequently, a Farmers' Club was organized, with headquarters and monthly meetings at that Exchange. The whole arrangement was of great benefit to the farmers of Polk County.

In 1883, he built a fine brick residence on East Grand Avenue, and there made his home during his life.

Socially, he was a kind neighbor, and a good citizen; charitable toward worthy objects; of positive temperament, and firm in his convictions. There was never any ambiguity in his expressed thought or action. He was not a hero-worshiper. Honesty and sterling integrity were marked characteristic traits, which won the most implicit confidence and trust in business circles. He was a stockholder in the old First Savings Bank, a Director in the Citizens' National Bank, a Director in the People's Bank, and for many years Vice-President and Director of the Polk County Savings Bank, and, on the decease of Judge Wright, was tendered the presidency, but declined. He was one of the oldest and most active members of the Masonic fraternity, donating largely to its funds. He was also one of the oldest members of the Order of Odd Fellows in the city.

Politically, he was a Whig, but, under all conditions and circumstances, an Anti-Monopolist. His antagonism to monopolies was the dominant trait in his character. The destruction of the Standard Oil Company, and its burial beyond the possibility of resurrection, would have given him extreme satisfaction. He was active in political affairs, and many times tendered a nomination for important offices, but he would have none of them.

Religiously, he was not a member of any sectarian denomination. His creed was, "The Fatherhood of God, and Brotherhood of Man."

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