

## COLONEL GEORGE C. TICHENOR

I do not think old-timers, especially those who had anything to do with politics, have forgotten George C. Tichenor. He was born in Shelbyville, Kentucky, October Eighth, 1838. During his minority, he attended the common school and learned the trade of house painting. At the age of twenty, he decided to strike out for the West, and early in March, 1858, taking the usual route of Kentuckians, by rail and stage coach, he went to Saint Louis, thence by steamboat to Keokuk, where he tarried for a time hunting for a job, his money getting short, but there was nothing doing. Strolling along the river one day, he discovered a steamboat which he was told was bound for Fort Des Moines. Bantering the Captain very urgently to take him on and "work his passage," without success, he planked down ten dollars and became a passenger, entitled to all the rights and privileges thereof. His further progress is best related in his own words, as printed in the *Annals of Iowa*:

"There were five passengers beside myself. We were eight days and nights making the trip from Keokuk to Des Moines, and we had to run very slowly, particularly nights, not only to avoid snags, but also overhanging limbs of trees when we had to hug the current along the banks, which was frequently the case. We anchored time and again to cut away the limbs of trees to keep them from carrying away the little smokestack, the pilot house and the cabin.

"We landed at 'Campbell's Point,' just at sunset, April Nineteenth, 1858. Runners for the 'Demoin House,' 'Collins House,' and the 'Morris House' rushed aboard the boat as soon as she landed, and loudly solicited the patronage of the passengers for their several hostelries, each declaring that his was the principal hotel in the city. After some haggling with the representative of the Collins House, he agreed to take my trunk to his hotel for 'two bits,' and to board and lodge me for two dollars and a quarter a

week, if I would remain a week or longer, or at the rate of seventy-five cents a day if I only stayed a day or two. The Collins House was a long, narrow, low, two-story, white frame house, with adjoining office and parlor, dining-room and kitchen on the lower floor, and about a dozen sleeping-rooms, about 6 x 8 feet square, on either side of a narrow hallway on the second floor, and was situated between Third and Fourth streets, near 'Coon River. After eating supper that evening, I took an account of my purse, and found that after paying the 'two bits' for carrying my trunk to the hotel, I had exactly an old-fashioned two-cent piece left, which I invested in a 'Principe' cigar I found in a little showcase about two feet square on the counter in the hotel 'office.'

"Thus I found myself, a youth in my twentieth year, with not a cent in my purse, with two very fair suits of clothing, in a strange place, 'a thousand miles from home.' Des Moines was then in the midst of a depression resulting from the panic of 1857, and was about as dead a town as one could imagine. It had been made the Capital of the state a year or so before, and the principal employment of the people on either side of Des Moines River was to abuse each other, according as to whether they resided on the East Side or the West Side. The river was spanned near the foot of Locust Street with a primitive and quite unsuitable sort of pontoon bridge, which was the only means of passage, except by a small skiff or canoe. During a part of that Spring, and in the early Spring and flood season of 1859, the river readily extended from the western shore, or Front Street, in West Des Moines, to the bluffs or Capitol Hill, on the East Side. I remember having made the passage time and again in a skiff from the landing at the Demoin House in West Dest (sic) Moines to the Walker House in East Des Moines."

After his arrival at The Fort, Tichenor engaged in clerking. Being wide-awake and a good mixer socially, he soon became quite popular. When the Civil War came, in September, 1862, though a Southerner and a Democrat, he joined the Thirty-ninth Infantry, the second regiment, organized at Des Moines, and was commissioned Adjutant of the regiment. The regiment rendezvoused at Davenport to receive equipments. Soon after, an epidemic of Measles prostrated the regiment until December Thirteenth, when, not

fully convalescent, it was ordered to report to General J. M. Tuttle at Cairo. It disembarked at Columbus, spending its first night in mud and rain. Thence, after a few days, it moved to Jackson, and from there marched to Trenton, where it joined the forces to move against General Forrest. On the Thirty-first, they suddenly came upon Forrest's army, at Parker's Crossroads, with his six thousand men, while the Union forces numbered but sixteen hundred. A battle was at once begun, and waged for six hours. The Thirty-ninth, only raw recruits, was in the thickest of the fight. It was engaged in driving back a flanking party of the enemy, and succeeded in repulsing them, winning great praise for its bravery. It was its first engagement. Tichenor received high commendation for his gallantry.

The regiment fought to the close of the war; was at the general review at Washington, and there mustered out, June Fifth, 1865.

Tichenor, by his soldierly qualities, activities, and good judgment, so won the favor of General Dodge that he was promoted to Major and Aide-de-Camp to the General, and subsequently he was given the star of a Colonel by brevet.

At the close of the war, Tichenor came back to Des Moines, and went into the lumber business with "Charley" Getchell, on Seventh Street, between Locust and Walnut. The firm was popular, and did a successful business.

In April, 1867, the military service of Tichenor was recognized by his appointment, as Postmaster. The office was then in the Sherman Block, on Court Avenue, but soon after his appointment was removed to a two-story frame building in the rear of the Sherman Block, on Third Street. In 1870, when the present Postoffice building was ready for occupancy, Tichenor dedicated it to the service. In 1871, he was reappointed, but soon after resigned, and was succeeded by J. S. ("Ret") Clarkson.

In 1868, John A. Kasson was a candidate for a third term in Congress. The military spirit of the country had not subsided, and General G. M. Dodge was named by friends as his opponent. Frank Palmer, editor of the *Daily Register*, "Tom" Withrow, attorney for the Rock Island Railroad, and several leading Republicans, were opposed to Kasson. The contest grew hotter as it progressed, until it became one of the most acrimonious ever known in the

state. "Lafe" Young says politics is a great game. It was played to the limit then. Personal animosities were engendered between long-time friends, even kindred and families. Social personal correspondence between individuals at that time would now be interesting reading. I have some of it laid away, gathered together as a newspaper reporter.

Tichenor, who was a shrewd politician, and took a hand in the game whenever it was played in Polk County, naturally, for personal reasons, gave his preference to his old war friend, General Dodge, who finally won out, but after serving one term so disliked the place he refused a renomination, and Palmer was elected.

In 1871, Tichenor was elected Alderman for the Second Ward in the City Council, and re-elected in 1872. The city was then agitated by a movement to secure bridges over Des Moines and 'Coon rivers. It involved the expenditure of a large sum of money, which entered largely into the controversy, but Tichenor, as chairman of the Bridge Committee of the Council, with his energy and business ability, engineered the project to success, and the first iron bridge across the Des Moines was erected at Walnut Street, and a wooden truss bridge over the 'Coon at Seventh Street.

In 1873, Tichenor went to Chicago and engaged in business. In 1878, the failure of a bank left him penniless, and he returned to his first love, politics. President Hayes appointed him a special agent in the Treasury Department at Washington, and he served in some official capacity in that department until his death, in 1902. At one time, he was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. He proved an active and efficient official.

When a resident of Des Moines, Tichenor was an active booster in every public-spirited movement, and being a good mixer socially, he helped materially in the progress of the town. In 1867, when the voters of the city rejected a proposition to purchase a fire engine, and protection was greatly needed, Tichenor, with a few other public-spirited fellows, organized the Rescue Hook and Ladder Company, and they did good service in saving property from destruction.

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