



GENERAL M. M. CROCKER

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Resplendent with military fame, and conspicuous in the civic pride of Des Moines, stands the name of Marcellus M. Crocker. To detail his military record, brilliant with great achievements, would fill all the columns of the *Sunday Register and Leader*. I can only make desultory reference to it now.

Born in Johnson County, Indiana, in 1831, he lived there until 1844, when he came to Iowa, with his father, who stopped at Fairfield, and soon after made a claim on Government land two miles northwest of Lancaster, in Keokuk County, when Marcellus transferred his activities from school to assisting his father in breaking up the wild prairie and improving the farm, with all the trials and experiences usual with the pioneers. In the meantime, Shepherd Leffler, a prominent Democrat and Representative in Congress from the Second District, which comprised the south half of the state, became attracted to the young man, and, having the right to select a cadet to West Point Military Academy (sic), in 1847, gave it to Marcellus, who, anxious to acquire an education, at once went to West Point, where he remained until the Fall of 1849, when the death of his father necessitated his return to the farm to care for his mother and sisters, and settle the affairs of the estate.

In 1850, the venerable Judge Olney, well known to every old settler in Van Buren County, suggested to Crocker that he read law, and offered to give him instructions and the use of his library free, which was most thankfully accepted, and at stated periods the Judge went to Lancaster and gave instructions to his student.

In 1851, Crocker was admitted to the Bar, began practice and acquired a successful business. He remained at Lancaster until 1854, when he came to Des Moines, and formed a partnership with "Dan" Finch, one of the best lawyers in the state, and at once took rank with the best of them. Soon after,

Judge Casady joined the partnership, and not long after, Jeff. Polk, making a law firm without a peer in the state.

A well-known character in the very early days was Ben. Bryant. He came here when The Fort was established, served two terms as County Treasurer, and then was elected Justice of the Peace. He was rather illiterate, but prided himself on seeing a "law p'int" with the best of them, and made a very creditable showing. He was a Democrat of the "blue-bellied" variety, and, having served one term, started in for a second. The Whigs started a story that he was not a proper person for the office, that he was completely under the control of Crocker. Ben. denied it in robust language. "Just give me a chance," said he, "and I will show you that Crocker don't own me." Among other things, Ben. was lax respecting his creditors. Soon after his campaign opened, Crocker had a case before him, and during the hearing made several objections to his opponent's method of procedure. Ben. overruled them straight, declaring, "Your p'int ain't good," until after several knockouts, Crocker turned upon His Honor, saying, "I can't understand the action of the Court in this case. I believe somebody has been tampering with it." "I fine you ten dollars for contempt of court," replied Ben. "Very well," said Crocker, "I'll just indorse it on this promissory note of yours," drawing the paper from his pocket. That was a "p'int" in equity Ben. hadn't considered.

In 1856, when the contest was on between the East and West Sides over the location of the State House, Crocker was a West Sider, but he didn't have any money to invest in the "war fund," and thus escaped the "grab" which went to the pockets of certain of the locating Commissioners.

In 1858, McFarland's term as District Judge expired, and Crocker, who was a Democrat, decided to make a run for the place. He was very popular, a fine lawyer, and his friends relied upon those attributes to carry him through. The Democratic Judicial Convention cordially indorsed him with its nomination. The Republicans had become quite strong in the district, and though prominent men of that party desired to support Crocker, they could not abjure fealty to their party, and John H. Gray was elected by a small majority, the first Republican elected to that office in the district.

The two years spent by Crocker at West Point had stimulated the military fervor in him, and in 1857, I think it was, he began to agitate the organization of a State Militia. There was no militia law. Dubuque had two military companies, the Governor's Guards and Washington Greys. Davenport, I think, had a company, but they were organized principally for dress parade and Fourth of July celebrations. General G. M. Dodge had, in 1856, organized the Council Bluffs Guards, for the purpose of protecting the frontier, then exposed to depredation by Indians, having secured, with the special aid of Governor Grimes, the necessary arms and equipment, it being understood the company was to be deemed a special frontier guard.

Crocker, however, wanted some provision by law for arming, equipping and uniforming an active State Militia, with independent companies. He and Dodge got together and prepared a bill, similar to the militia laws of the older Eastern states, but adapted to the financial conditions and population of Iowa, which was presented to the House of the Seventh General Assembly. It was known as House File Number Forty-seven, and when it came up it was made the butt of jests and gibes; all kinds of farcical and ridiculous amendments were piled on it; its head was cut off, and so otherwise emasculated as to lose its identity. Crocker and Dodge were taunted with lunacy in presuming to ask the Legislature to create a standing army in Iowa. Several members boarded at the Savery House (now the Kirkwood), and Crocker laid in wait for them one evening. He was mad, and those who knew him can readily understand what he gave them. He was an expert in the use of invectives, and could swear like a Flanders trooper. He denounced them in the most caustic terms, and they promised to give the subject due consideration. Dodge got disgusted and went home. The House then went on and passed a bill authorizing the Governor to organize companies of "Minute Men" among the settlers for the protection of frontier localities against depredation by Indians, the companies to be limited to twelve men, and their pay to be seventy-five cents per day when actually in service, and furnish their own guns. It went to the Senate, where a substitute was put up against it, and that was the last heard of it in that session. It went over

to the Eighth General Assembly, in 1860, when an Act was passed authorizing the Governor to select not exceeding twelve companies, among the settlers, to which he was to furnish such arms and ammunition as he deemed necessary; they to hold themselves in readiness at all times to meet hostile Indians; that of the said Minute Men, not exceeding four should be employed as active police, and to be paid only for the time actually employed. The sum of five hundred dollars was appropriated for the purpose of the law. That was as near as Iowa ever came to having a State Militia until the National Guards came into existence.

Crocker, however, though disgruntled, was not discouraged. The military spirit was in him, and late in 1860, I think, he organized a company which took the name of the Capital Guards, and he was elected Captain. Plans were made to procure arms and uniforms. In April, 1861, while attending court at Adel, came the report that Fort Sumter had been fired upon by the Rebels. Three days later came the call of the President for volunteers. Crocker turned over his cases in court to other lawyers, came home and tendered the services of himself and his company to the Government, but so inadequate were the facilities for communicating with the Governor that Eastern cities in more direct communication with him quickly filled the one regiment which had been allotted to Iowa, and which was to serve only three months. Soon after came the call for three-years enlistments, and the Capital Guards were assigned as Company D in the Second Regiment. Crocker was promoted to Major of the regiment, May Thirty-first; Lieutenant-Colonel, September Sixth; to Colonel of the Thirteenth Regiment, October Thirtieth. Immediately after the Battle of Shiloh, the Iowa Brigade, composed of the Eleventh, Thirteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth regiments was organized, and Crocker was placed in command as Brigadier General, November Twenty-ninth, 1862. It became one of the most distinguished brigades in the Army of the Tennessee, and was known throughout the army and at the War Department as the "Crocker Greyhounds." With that brigade, at Shiloh and Corinth, he made one of the most brilliant pages of history. He continued with it until April, 1863, when he was placed in temporary command of the Seventeenth Army Corps, during the temporary absence of General Quimby.

Being of frail physique, his health failed under the hardships and exposure of his vigorous campaigns, and on the return of Quimby to his command, Crocker was placed temporarily on the staff of General Grant, their tents being near each other. Grant's attention was attracted by the constant and severe coughing of Crocker, and, meeting him one morning, said to him: "Was it you I heard coughing so last night?" "Yes," replied Crocker. "Well, then, my dear fellow, you must go straight home, for you will die here."

In June, 1863, he was given a sick leave and came home in bad physical condition. The seed of the "White Plague" had been sown in his system. Soon after his arrival, the State Convention of the Union party was held in Des Moines, and during the session he visited the hall. He was greeted with a perfect salvo of cheers. There was a bitter contest in the convention over the nomination for Governor, and Crocker's friends tried to induce him to consent to the use of his name, but he objected, saying, "If a soldier is worth anything, he cannot be spared from the field; if he is worthless, he will not make a good Governor. If I was Governor, I would die in a short time with dry rot. I am a soldier, and a soldier I will remain until the war is ended, or I am knocked out," and, despite the fact that he would have been nominated by acclamation, his name had to be dropped. He made a short, brilliant, patriotic speech to the convention, in which he flayed the Knights of the Golden Circle, the "Copperheads," and Democrats, who, he declared, "want the Union as it was and the Constitution as it is. I want the Union as it is and the Constitution as it ought to be."

In the Fall of 1863, he rejoined his old corps (the Seventeenth) in the famous march of Sherman to the sea, but his frail body failed to respond to his indomitable spirit, and he was relieved from duty, but early in the Summer, he was tendered a command in the Department of New Mexico, at Santa Fe. Believing the change would be beneficial, he accepted. He remained there until the Spring of 1865, when, not regaining his health as expected, he asked to be transferred again to his old field, which was granted, and the following order was issued:

"DEPARTMENT OF NEW MEXICO,
"ASSISTANT ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
"SANTA Fe, NEW MEXICO, MARCH ELEVENTH, 1865.
"SPECIAL ORDERS NUMBER EIGHT.

"IX. In compliance with Special Order Number Four Hundred and Seventy-seven, series for 1864, from the Headquarters of the Army, Brigadier General Marcellus M. Crocker, United States Volunteers, is relieved from further duty in the Department of New Mexico, and will proceed without delay and report in person to the General commanding the Army of the Cumberland for assignment of duty.

"The General commanding the Department of New Mexico takes this occasion to express his warmest thanks for the efficient and judicious manner in which General Crocker has conducted the affairs pertaining to the important post of Fort Sumner, and to the reservation at the Bosque Redondo, with its nine thousand captive Indians; a duty which required an exercise of great judgment, moderation, firmness and forecast; and a duty which has been performed in such a manner as not only to give the utmost satisfaction to those connected professionally with the military affairs of that post and of the department, but to win the affectionate regard of the Indians themselves, who are receiving their first impression of civilization, and their first lessons in the art, literally, of earning their bread by the sweat of their brows.

"General Crocker carries with him to the new field of duty to which he has been called, the earnest wishes on the part of the comrades he leaves behind, not only that he will soon be restored to health, but have an opportunity to add renewed lustre to his already brilliant reputation as a soldier.

"BEN C. Cutler,
"Assistant Adjutant General.
"By command of Brigadier General Carleton."

Crocker reached Washington in June, where he was prostrated, and lingered until August Twenty-sixth, when he passed to his eternal rest. His remains were then brought to Des Moines, and, attended by one of the largest and most impressive civic and military corteges ever seen in the city,

were deposited in Woodland Cemetery. A plain, white marble monument marks his resting-place. It has been disintegrated by the elements, and is slowly going to destruction. Something more durable and more generously expressive of public appreciation of such a man is due from the city, if not from the state, and it would doubtless be forthcoming if an organized effort was made.

As a military man, he was chivalrous, brave, bold, an able leader, and preeminently successful. As a Division Commander he had no equal in the state, as evidenced by his rapid promotions, measured by the rigid rides of military science. General Grant said of him in his autobiography: "He was fit to command an independent army."

As a lawyer, he was accomplished, brilliant, and was highly esteemed by the courts and Bar. As a son, husband and father, he was, in every relation, devoted and true.

As a citizen, he was honorable, exemplary, and public-spirited. He had a remarkably strong hold on the affections of the people of Des Moines and the state. In the city, a principal street, one of the best public schools, a park, and one of the finest business blocks bear his name. On the southwest corner of the pedestal of the magnificent State Soldiers' Monument, near the Capitol, a splendid equestrian statue of him is one of the group of four. The County Supervisors named a township in his honor. In 1870, the Legislature carved a county from Kossuth County, and gave it his name, but local dissensions caused the matter to get into the courts, and the Supreme Court held the law was invalid because the county did not have an area of four hundred and thirty-two square miles—it wasn't big enough. There is also Crocker Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, and Crocker Brigade, composed of veterans of his old brigade, which holds a reunion every two years.

Several years after his monument was erected, Judge Casady, Jeff. S. Polk, Judge Wright, Barlow Granger, George Whittaker, Jesse W. Cheek, Captain Ed. L. Marsh, Robert S. Finkbine, Hoyt Sherman, B. F. Gue, and "Charley" Aldrich had cut on it the following words:

*"General Crocker was fit to command an independent army."
"U. S. Grant."*

August Twenty-sixth, 1906.

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