

## Benjamin F. Gue

ISSN 0003-4827



Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

"Benjamin F. Gue." *The Annals of Iowa* 6 (1904), 476-477.

Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol6/iss6/24>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

## NOTABLE DEATHS.

BENJAMIN F. GUE was born on a farm near Coxsackie, Green Co., New York, on the 25th of December, 1828. His parents, John and Catherine Gurney Gue were Quakers in religion and in politics were abolitionists. Their home was known as a station of the underground railroad and the boy's sympathies were early enlisted for the slave. His first protest was against the wrong of slavery. The oldest of six children, the burdens of life came upon him at the early age of ten, when his father died, leaving his mother to provide for and educate the family. The boys, under the leadership of the elder brother, managed the farm successfully. In the spring of 1852, at the age of 24, Benjamin with his younger brother came to Iowa and took a claim on Rock Creek, in Scott county, where for a year and a half the brothers lived alone in a log cabin, clearing the farm and preparing a home for their widowed mother and the younger children. The early sympathies of the boy for the slave led the man to take an active interest in the Free Soil movement, and in February, 1856, he was a delegate to the State Convention at Iowa City which formally organized the Republican party in Iowa. In the following year he was elected representative from Scott county to the Seventh General Assembly. He was one of the authors of a bill to found a state agricultural college, and in the House led the movement for its passage which was successful despite an adverse report from the committee on Ways and Means. In 1859 he was re-elected to the House and in 1861 was elected Senator. In the Senate as in the House, he was a recognized leader. Among the measures introduced by him and carried to a successful conclusion were: an act prohibiting the circulation of foreign bank bills in Iowa, which was a measure of protection against "wild-cat" currency; an act requiring jury fees to be taxed with costs in suits in the District Court which resulted in saving to the State more than one hundred thousand dollars annually. But the law to which this pioneer legislator was wont to refer with most satisfaction, was that advocated by him in conjunction with Senator C. F. Clarkson and Samuel J. Kirkwood; a law by which the Agricultural College land grant of 240,000 acres was reserved from sale at the low prices then prevailing and instead was leased for a long term of years at a rental sufficient of itself to maintain the college. By this act the lands were held until good prices were obtained and thus our State College secured an endowment fund far larger than that received by any other similar institution. His journalistic career began at Fort Dodge, in 1864, when Mr. Gue became editor and publisher of the *Iowa North West*, one of the first republican newspapers in that part of the State. When nominated for Lieutenant Governor in 1865 his competitors were General James B. Weaver and Hon. George W. McCrary. In 1866 he was elected president of the board of trustees of the State Agricultural College, which he had done so much to place upon a permanent basis. In the face of strong opposition he advocated and secured the admission of girls as students of that institution, and the success of what was then a new departure is evidence of his far-sighted wisdom. It was on his recommendation that the progressive educator, A. S. Welch, then United States Senator for Florida, was selected as the first president of the State College. In 1872 Governor Gue removed from Fort Dodge to Des Moines and took editorial charge of the *Iowa Homestead*. Under his editorship the *Homestead* gained a wide reputation as a leader of practical thought on public questions. In December of that year General Grant appointed him Pension Agent for Iowa and Nebraska, and in that capacity he served eight years. In 1880 he and his son purchased the *Homestead*, and for years thereafter his editorial page was a powerful factor in the discussion of social, educational and economic

questions. Mr. Gue's pioneer work includes an active part in the founding of the Pioneer Law-Makers Association of Iowa, among the members of which no one was held in higher esteem. In religion he was a Unitarian, at a time when to be a Unitarian was to be almost alone in Iowa. He was one of the founders of the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines and of the Iowa Unitarian Association. The crowning work of Mr. Gue's life is the four-volume History of Iowa on which he labored, at first intermittently and afterward daily, for more than seventeen years. The gathering and preparing of the material for this history was a work calling for rare patience, industry and good judgment and a personal knowledge of the subject such as few have. It is not too much to say, borrowing the thought from Virgil, that he himself was part of the history of Iowa and had himself witnessed nearly all the public events which make up that history. Mr. Gue was very close to Governor Kirkwood during the War period and the John Brown epoch immediately preceding, and his personal participation in the history of the war and the many incidents and events leading to the war, constitute of themselves a most valuable contribution to Iowa history. His story of the part which he and his brother, David J. Gue, took in warning the Secretary of War of the John Brown raid on Harpers' ferry, forms a most interesting chapter in the history of that episode and a remarkable indication of the trend of his Quaker education. As Charles Aldrich well said, in the *Register and Leader* on the morning following the death of his friend: "Governor Gue stood for what he thought was right. This characteristic, this principle is the thing that distinguished him above all things. His influence was always on the side of right, in politics, in business, in morals, in society." On the 12th of November, 1855, Benjamin F. Gue was united in marriage with Elizabeth Parker, and on the 3rd of July, 1888, occurred the death of Mrs. Gue, leaving four children all of whom survive, namely: Horace G., Alice, Gurney C., and Katherine, the last named is the wife of Dr. A. G. Leonard, State Geologist of North Dakota. The death of Benjamin F. Gue occurred on Wednesday, June 1, 1904. Death came to him without premonition. The funeral took place at his residence, 1522 West Ninth street, on Saturday, the 4th inst. Funeral services were conducted by his pastor, Rev. Mary A. Safford and his friend Judge Gifford S. Robinson.

J. B.

JOSIAH D. McVAY was born in Fulton county, Ill., February 3, 1844; he died at Lake City, Iowa, April 10, 1904. He came with his father's family to Keokuk county in his boyhood. In August, 1862, he enlisted in Co. B, 36th Iowa Infantry, of which Gov. Francis M. Drake was the Lieutenant Colonel. The most active campaigning of this command was in the southwest. Drake's Brigade was surrounded by Gen. Fagin's army at Mark's Mills, Ark., and compelled to surrender. The prisoners were taken to Tyler, Texas, where they remained in prison for the next ten months. McVay when exchanged returned to his command at Little Rock, where he was furloughed home, but later returned to his regiment, with which he was mustered out at Davenport. He was yet but twenty-one years of age, and at once set about attending school, afterwards studying medicine. He settled in Lake City, Calhoun county, in May, 1872, where he rapidly rose in his profession, becoming surgeon of the C. & N. W. R. R., which position he held for several years. He was elected to represent Calhoun and Pocahontas counties in the Iowa House of Representatives, in 1883. In 1887 he was elected State Senator from Webster and Calhoun counties. During his service in the legislature he was recognized from the start as one of its leaders, becoming widely and favorably known throughout the State.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.