

## GEORGE W. HENDERSON

The committee appointed to prepare a memorial commemorating the life and public service of one of northwest Iowa's venerable pioneer farmers, railroad builders, soldiers, legislators, and public-spirited citizens, the Honorable George W. Henderson of Garfield Township, Pocahontas County, Iowa, begs leave to report that it has turned to the files of the Rolfe Arrow and to an article prepared for that newspaper by its editor, the Honorable Marion Bruce, who now represents Pocahontas County in the House of Representatives, and who for more than fifty years was a neighbor and personal friend of the late Senator from the Fiftieth Senatorial District of Iowa.

Senator George W. Henderson, venerable pioneer, soldier, farmer, and politician, after putting ninety-four and one-half years of real life behind him, peacefully went to sleep at his home, Highland Farm, southeast of Rolfe, Saturday, October 22, 1927. To our mind he was one of the most remarkable old men in Iowa. He saw Iowa almost in its virgin state, watched it develop into one of the greatest producing states of the Union, retained his faculties to the end, and did not quit life until the machinery wore out. His last day on earth, he ate his meals and only a few moments before the call came he was assisted to his bed. A few days before he had been to Rolfe, making his customary rounds. Only during the last two or three years of his life had his step lost his elasticity and his body begun to stoop from the weight of years it carried. He kept himself well posted on current events, and to the last was able to ably discuss them. He was not one who was continually referring to the "good old days" but said, "These are the best days of my life." In other words, he kept up-to-date and enjoyed seeing the world advance.

George W. Henderson was born near Springfield, Sangamon county, Illinois, April 19, 1833. He was the son of John H. Henderson, a Kentucky pioneer, and Elizabeth Powell, the daughter of an old North Carolina family. Shortly after their marriage in 1827, they located in La Salle county, Illinois, and made their home near Ottawa, where the father died. Here amid the privations of pioneer life, young George, eighteen years old, became the main support of his mother and six smaller children.

No schools had been established and George was twelve years old before he ever saw a school house; but he was the son of educated parents and had the advantage of their culture. Three years of schooling was all he actually received, but his extensive reading and active interest in good government and the advance of civilization made him a man of real culture in early life. He learned the "art of doing things" through the multiplied activities of pioneer life, and was always ready with his splendid strength to take the heavy end of every job.

His pioneering interests took him to Iowa at any early age and he settled at Masonic Grove, now Mason City, in 1855, and there engaged in milling operations with Judge E. Randall, who was later his father-in-law, and there operated with Judge Randall the first saw mill, first flour mill,

and first lime kiln in that part of Iowa. Nearly all of the first houses built of lumber in Mason City were built of lumber sawed by these men.

On December 18, 1856, he was married to Martha Ann Randall, eldest daughter of Judge E. Randall of Mason City. In 1861, he enlisted in the 14th Iowa Infantry Volunteers and was transferred to Company M, 7th Iowa Cavalry, and served three years and forty days in the Union Army. Upon his discharge, he took up the duties of citizenship with the same zeal that had marked his service in the army. He was honored by many positions of trust wherever he made his home. In 1875, he moved his family to Sac county, and in 1882 moved to Garfield Township, Pocahontas county, where he established Highland Farm, which has been the family home for more than fifty years. Mr. Henderson served the Fiftieth Senatorial District, consisting of Buena Vista, Pocahontas and Humboldt counties, in the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth General Assemblies of Iowa, also the special session which codified the Code of 1897.

Mr. Henderson was largely influential in securing the first railway to enter Mason City. He was sent from his home town to the meeting of railway officials and presented the advantages of a line to that thriving little town so vigorously that the railway came that way. He was deeply interested in schools and was president of the school board that planned and built the first high school in Mason City. He contributed to the building of every college in his part of Iowa. The Methodist Church received financial support and strong moral backing from him, throughout his long life. All plans for community betterment met with his approval and received his support. He kept himself well informed, and to live with him was equivalent to a liberal education.

He was a believer in representative government and deplored the use of the word "politics" to express contempt. "Politics is the science of good government", he often said. "Why put odium on a good word because some will play dirty politics"? He was a member of the first Republican Convention, which was held at Iowa City, representing a large part of the northern section of the state when the party was organized at Iowa City. He was always a leader in the discussion of party issues, seldom asking any favors for himself. His term in the Senate was the result of his loyalty to the party and to good government at home. He was always a "regular" and had great faith in his party, and could give reasons for such faith.

Mr. and Mrs. Henderson had four children. The eldest, being the only boy, died at Sac City at about the age of 20 years. Kate Henderson, the second child, married but lost her husband by death due to the rigors of pioneer life, and as a widow raised her three children, and in 1907 married Hon. J. A. Crummer, who was a representative in the Thirty-third General Assembly. One daughter, Mrs. George Barnes of Boise, Idaho, is the only child living at this writing, the youngest also having died in 1914.

Few but Mr. Henderson's family knew of his life-long study of nature in woods, prairie, lake, stream and rock quarry. He could name every species of tree in Iowa forests and recognize all the herbs and flowers

of the prairie. He also was a student of the habits of wild fowls and animals. He located his farm near the Des Moines River because of the woods, the water, and the rolling land, which made a beautiful site for a home. But all of his achievements and qualities melt into insignificance beside the strength and beauty of his character and his life. His family may well feel proud of what he did, the service he rendered to home and country, but what he was in his great kindness, patience, cheerfulness, and love should be the real source of their appreciation. His sturdy adherence to honesty was always tempered with mercy. No passing prejudice ruled him, and he often admonished others to take for their rule the great law of kindness. He was a lover of good literature and reading was ever his recreation at home. The best newspapers and magazines were available there. He was an adept at reading old poems, and his quaint humor, always to the point, made him an excellent entertainer.

The people of northern Iowa were much afraid of the Indians, and had just reasons for their fears. After the so-called grindstone war at Clear Lake, the pioneers gathered at Masonic Grove (Mason City) for protection. Mr. Henderson and a scout friend followed the Indian marauders into Minnesota, keeping under cover until they overtook the offenders in a big camp of reputedly friendly Indians. The chief apologized and promised good behavior of his braves in the future. Mr. Henderson did not blame the Indians as much as the Whites for this unhappy incident. Returning from his scouting trip by way of Spirit Lake, he blazed out a claim at what is now Pillsbury Point at West Okoboji, and he and his friend finally arrived at Masonic Grove where they were hailed with joy, as all thought they had fallen victims to the tomahawks of the Indians. Later, Mr. Henderson sold his claim at the Lakes to Gardner and Luce, who moved their families there and became victims of the Spirit Lake Massacre a few years later. Mr. Gardner was the father of Abbie Gardner Sharp, who was carried into captivity by the Indians and is one of the state's best known historical characters.

Mr. Henderson was an expert sawyer and when in the army was detailed to build Ft. Sully and Ft. Randall. His services were invaluable to the government as a scout and in carrying messages during the Civil War. He was a tireless walker and made many trips to unexplored points on foot. When the Iowa Land Office was opened in Des Moines in 1865, he walked to that place from Mason City to file on a claim, carrying the necessary \$200 fee on his person.

In the death of Honorable George W. Henderson the state has lost a venerable pioneer and influential citizen, and the members of the Senate extend to his relatives and friends their sincere sympathy and the committee directs that a copy of this memorial be spread upon the Journal of this Senate and that the secretary be directed to forward an engrossed copy to the family of the deceased.

W. R. RITCHIE,  
G. W. PATTERSON,  
LEO ELTHON,

*Committee.*