

REMARKS OF JAMES B. WEAVER IN MEMORY OF THE LATE  
HONORABLE JAMES WILSON OF TAMA COUNTY

On September 3, 1920, the flags at the National Capitol were at half mast. On that day there gathered at Traer, Iowa, the home of Honorable James Wilson, affectionately known as "Tama Jim," a great company of the friends and neighbors of the deceased, with representatives of the Department of Agriculture over which the deceased presided for so many years with such honor to himself and to the State of Iowa. In the Presbyterian church to which he belonged, his favorite hymns were sung and the eventful life of the deceased was reviewed.

James Wilson was born August 16, 1835, in the County of Ayrshire, Scotland. It is the county in which Burns was born, and the great poet had no more enthusiastic follower and admirer than "Tama Jim." Many of Burns' poems he knew at heart and loved to recite, and though a devoted American he had an abiding love for the country of his birth.

His father was a farmer. He brought the family to the United States in 1852 and settled on a half section of Tama County land in 1855. Young Wilson worked in a sawmill the first year of the Tama County residence. He became a practical farmer. He was a great reader and eagerly sought every opportunity to become conversant with the classics, and also to inform himself upon the problems which more directly affected his calling. He was married in 1863. When the Civil War began, he and his brother made an arrangement by which the brother should go to war and James should remain and care for the families and the farm. This arrangement was carried out, and when the war closed the eighty-acre farm had grown to a half section. He took an active interest in all public matters and in September, 1864, was elected a member of the Board of Supervisors. This service led to action in a broader field, for he was elected to represent Tama County in the Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth General assemblies, being a member of the House, and was elected Speaker in the Fourteenth General assembly.

The career of James Wilson in the General assembly was a militant battle for the protection of the agricultural interest of the State. He secured the passage of a law requiring that stock and not land should be fenced, and the granting of county option in this connection. He was a member of the Railroad Committee, and throughout the three sessions was especially interested in the regulation of railroad charges. At that time there arose the question of the acceptance by the railroads of sundry land grants. On every occasion he insisted upon the principle that such acceptance should be conditional upon submission by the railroad to regulation of freight charges by the state. Time and again, as a member of the Railroad Committee, he brought in minority reports to this effect and secured their substitution for the majority report.

In 1873 he was elected to Congress, serving until 1877. He was re-elected in 1883. His career in Congress was marked by the same interest in agricultural legislation that he had shown in the General assembly, and he shared in the movement for the establishment of the Interstate Commerce Commission. He was a member of the Farmers' Protective Association which made the fight against the barbed wire monopoly.

In 1882 Mr. Wilson was elected member of the Iowa Railroad Commission. Returning to Congress in 1883, he was especially active in securing a law for disinfection and quarantining of live stock and for protection against pleuro-pneumonia.

In 1890 Mr. Wilson became professor of Agriculture of the State College, and director of the Experiment Station. Although his technical education had been limited, yet through systematic reading and study, and his experience in public life, he became an expert in agricultural education and brought the Agricultural Department in the State College to the very forefront of the institution. He had a keen appreciation of the value of Science to the farm and developed the experimental work at the State College to a high point of efficiency.

In February, 1897, President McKinley invited James Wilson to become Secretary of Agriculture. He did for the Department of Agriculture what he had done for the College. For sixteen years he served as Secretary of the Department, serving under McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft.

So great has been the influence of James Wilson upon the Department of Agriculture that it may be said to stand as his monument today. He introduced Durum wheat, promoted the beet sugar industry and developed the hog cholera serum treatment. He investigated and promoted the protection of milk supply against tuberculosis. He shared in the enactment of the Food and Drug Act. He promoted packing inspection. He encouraged the growing of rice, alfalfa, fruits and indeed displayed a passion for development in every substantial line of agricultural effort.

When James Wilson retired from the Agricultural Department, March 4, 1913, he had seen the American balance of trade grow from two hundred thirty-four million to four hundred and thirty-five million. He had seen the Department develop until it had twenty-five hundred employes, and he saw it take a place of dignity, importance and recognition which was the direct fruit of his labors.

Upon his return home after his retirement, a great reception was tendered him at Ames, and a little later Governor Clarke appointed Mr. Wilson and the late Henry Wallace on a Commission for the Investigation of agricultural conditions abroad, with a view to recommendations here at home for the preservation of Iowa's agricultural resources. The two old Scotchmen enjoyed the trip abroad very greatly, and came home uniting in a report to the Governor which deals with

the fundamental problem of the preservation of the fertility of the soil.

The obscure Scotch farm boy had so developed in the service of the Nation and the State that in his latter years he was the recipient of many honors. He was the president of the National Agricultural society and received honorary degrees from many institutions, including the State Universities of Wisconsin, Missouri, from Cornell and McGill—in all eighteen American universities.

James Wilson had also the unique honor to receive a degree from the University of Edinburgh. The five Americans who have received that degree are Carnegie, Choate, Mark Twain, Joseph Jefferson and James Wilson.

James Wilson loved deeply his home town and county, and shared in their civic activities to the end of his life. Agriculture was, however, his fundamental passion and he lived to see and to share in the great Farm Bureau Movement of our own time.

James Wilson was a strong, picturesque, vigorous Scotch-American. He kept his feet upon the ground and his life was full of constructive endeavor. He knew and often spoke of the interdependence of modern life, and although his activity had been more intimately connected with one great class he had a broad conception of our interdependence and of the many elements that contribute to American prosperity.

James Wilson's character was elemental, like the soil and the wind and the skies that he loved. He passed out full of honors and with the unqualified approval of his career by his fellow men.

Iowa is proud of James Wilson and his remarkable life. His career is a living illustration of the opportunity that inheres in American life. His name will stand for SERVICE, and that should be a lesson to all who follow him.

As someone has said of him: "He was a Christian gentlemen, and his father and mother were Christians before him. That was his strong anchorage through life."

I would close this sketch with the words with which he closed his final report as Secretary of Agriculture:

"Men grow old in service and in years, and cease their labor, but the results of their labor and the children of their brains will live on."