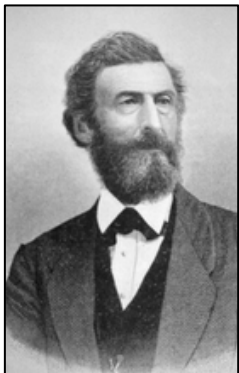


Pieces of Iowa's Past, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of State government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

Examining the Zeros: Annie Wittenmyer

This year begins the 90th Iowa General Assembly. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, 50th, 60th, 70th, and 80th General Assemblies, or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

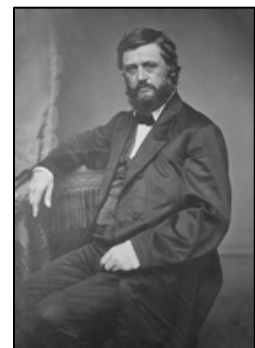
The 10th General Assembly convened January 11 and adjourned March 29, 1864, a 79-day session. The 10th General Assembly had a total of 138 members.



Lieutenant Governor
[Enoch W. Eastman](#)

Among the Senate members were 4 Democrats and 42 Republicans. Lieutenant Governor Enoch W. Eastman presided over the Senate. Eastman's memorial resolution in the [Senate Journal](#) reads: "He was born in the town of Deerfield, New Hampshire, April 15, 1810. . . . Commenced the study of law when about twenty-nine years of age; studied five years, and was admitted to the bar in 1844. Married soon after, and moved to Burlington, Iowa, in which place he lived until 1847, when he moved to Oskaloosa, where he lived and practiced his profession. Moved to Hardin county (Eldora) in 1857."

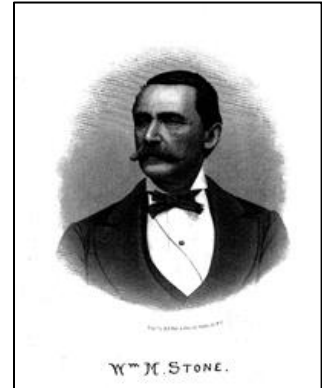
The House of Representatives had 87 Republican members and 5 Democrat members. Speaker Jacob Butler presided over the House of Representatives. The legislative website reads: "A native of Franklin County, Ohio, born August



Speaker of the House
[Jacob Butler](#)

14, 1817, Mr. Butler came to Muscatine in 1841 forming a law partnership with Judge Ralph P. Lowe."

Governor William Stone won the 1863 Republican gubernatorial nomination and was sworn into office on January 14, 1864. The federal census in 1880 put Iowa's population at 1,624,615. In 1884 the General Assembly met in the Brick Capitol.



Governor
[William Milo Stone](#)

Annie Wittenmyer



[Annie Wittenmyer](#)

As the U.S. was in the midst of a Civil War in 1864, Iowa was committed to the Union cause. 76,534 Iowa men served in the Union Army. While their husbands and fathers were in the army, Iowa women stepped up to help where they could. Annie Wittenmyer of Keokuk was very effective in helping to improve the hospitals for injured Union soldiers. She organized shipments of supplies and demanded better medical treatment from army doctors.

Wittenmyer made efforts to systematize and unite the work of improving conditions of Union soldiers for the whole state. In 1861, Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood created the new Army Sanitary Commission for the State of Iowa, usually referred to as the Iowa Sanitary Commission, and in 1862 during the extra session of the Iowa Legislature, an [Act](#) was passed that named Wittenmyer as Sanitary Agent for the State of Iowa.

CHAPTER 36.

SANITARY AGENTS.

AN ACT to provide for the appointment of Sanitary Agents, and to define their duties.

SECTION 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa, That the Governor be and he is hereby authorized and required to appoint two or more agents, (one of whom shall be Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer) as Sanitary Agents for the State of Iowa.*

Wittenmyer was the first and only woman ever named to a commission created by the Legislature, and it was the first time a woman was specifically named in an Iowa legislative document. In October 1863, she was elected president of the Iowa State Sanitary Commission, a group organized to resist an attempt by the all-male Army Sanitary Commission to take over the work of the Iowa women.

The rivalry between the two commissions continued into 1864, when opponents falsely accused Wittenmyer of mismanagement and corruption. During the 10th General Assembly, Representative [Samuel Alexander Russell](#) of Washington in the House of Representatives introduced a bill for a sanitary law. The House passed HF 123, an Act to provide for the appointment of Sanitary Agents, define their duties, and provide for their compensation, thus repealing the Act of the 9th General Assembly.

There were several petitions asking that the Act of the 9th General Assembly appointing Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer State Sanitary Agent not be repealed.

Excerpt from the Muscatine Weekly Journal, March 4, 1864

MRS. WITTENMYER.—A petition to the Legislature praying that body to retain Mrs. Wittenmyer—Iowa's brave heroine—in her present capacity of State Sanitary Agent, was in circulation in this city Monday. It received the signatures of over three hundred citizens of both sexes. Only *one* person who was appealed to refused to sign it. Mrs. Wittenmyer has the entire confidence and respect of a large majority of the citizens of the State, all of whom are conversant with her noble self-sacrifices for the relief of suffering soldiers in the early part of the war, when, almost unaided, she devoted herself to her noble task, encountering difficulties which

would have appalled the stoutest heart, neither asking nor receiving any reward, except that which was freely bestowed upon her—the everlasting gratitude of the sick and wounded heroes, who received blessings at her hands. The testimony of the soldiers is unanimous in her praise.

The only opposition she ever met with has been at the hands of a petty, despicable clique, who have private ends to serve, and not the good of the service in view. We trust our Legislature will promptly rebuke any attempt on the part of these *speculators* to injure Mrs. Wittenmyer, or remove her from the place she now so ably fills.

On March 10, 1864, [Senator John Abbott Parvin](#) from the Special Committee on Sanitary Affairs submitted the following report:

The Select Committee, to whom was referred several petitions asking that the Act of the 9th General Assembly appointing Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer State Sanitary Agent, be not repealed, have had the same under consideration, and have instructed me to make the following report :

Your Committee are of the opinion that the indefinite postponement, by the Senate, of House File No. 123, entitled: "A Bill for an Act to provide for the appointment of Sanitary Agents and define their duties, and to provide for their compensation," is an answer to the prayer of the petitioners, and no further legislation is necessary.

Respectfully submitted.

J. A. PARVIN, Chairman.

After refuting the charges and fighting off the threat to her position, Wittenmyer resigned as State Sanitary Agent in May 1864.

To the Soldiers' Aid Societies of Iowa.

Having been called to a more important position, and a broader field of usefulness, by the United States Christian Commission—a position which I believe it my imperative duty to accept, and which will demand all my time and energies,—I feel obliged to resign my position as State Sanitary Agent.

I have been connected with you for *three years*, in your labors of love for our brave Iowa soldiers, and, with but one exception, nothing unpleasant has occurred in all our *business transactions* to disturb the harmony of our relations.

Excerpt from a letter to the Soldiers Aid Society written by Annie Wittenmyer and published in the Muscatine Weekly Journal; June 3, 1864

In the course of her work as Sanitary Agent for the State of Iowa, Wittenmyer saw many men die who spoke of the children they were leaving behind as orphans. This brought forward the project of a Soldiers' Orphans Home.

In June 1864, after Wittenmyer resigned from her position with the State of Iowa, she opened the first orphans' home in Farmington, Iowa. Over the next 10 years, more than 720 children were cared for at the home and at branches in Cedar Falls and Glenwood. Wittenmyer died in 1900 at age 73. The Iowa Legislature in 1949 changed the name of the home from "The Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home" to "The Anna Wittenmyer Home" to honor the heroine of the Civil War whose untiring efforts resulted in the home's founding. Wittenmyer was inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1975.

From the [Acts of the 53rd General Assembly in 1949](#)

A BILL FOR

An Act to amend chapter two hundred forty-four (244), Code 1946, relating to the title of the state institution for children at Davenport, Iowa.

Be It Enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa:

- 1 Section 1. Strike from chapter two hundred forty-four
- 2 (244), Code 1946, wherever they appear, the words "Iowa
- 3 soldiers' orphans home" and insert in lieu thereof the
- 4 following words: "Anna Wittenmeyer Home".
- 1 Sec. 2. Hereafter the Iowa soldiers' orphans home
- 2 shall be entitled "The Anna Wittenmeyer Home".



Postcard of the Orphans' Home in Davenport, Iowa.