



*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

**April 22, 2015**

**THIS WEEK:**

## **Describing Judge Hall**

**BACKGROUND:**

From: The 14th Biennial Session of Pioneer Lawmakers. The following is from a paper, *Recollections and Sketches of the Lawyers and Other Public Men of Early Iowa*, written by Edward Stiles and shared at the meeting of Pioneer Lawmakers Association Reunion held in Des Moines on March 19 and 20, 1913.

### **Describing Judge Hall**

*From his paper, Stiles shared his description of Jonathan C. Hall, a former Iowa Legislator and judge:*

It is no easy thing to so sketch an extraordinary personality as to bring saliently out the particular traits that make it so. The first time I saw Jonathan C. Hall was in the old courthouse at Ottumwa fifty years ago. I was introduced to him as a young law student just from Connecticut. He talked with me in that good-natured and kindly manner highly characteristic of him, and the acquaintance thus commenced laid the basis of a lasting friendship. Though he had then attained the highest professional rank, his presence and bearing were perfectly devoid of the least tinge of vanity or self-importance. There was about him, however, an indescribable something that told as plainly as words that nature had fashioned him in no ordinary mold.



**Jonathan C. Hall**  
**1808 - 1874**

Without being apparently sensible of it himself, his presence was commanding, and his "supremacy was written upon his features and person." He was heroic in frame, of Taft-like structure, whose height was apparently diminished by his breadth, and whose embonpoint unmistakably showed the signs of generous living. He had a large head, a full face, a rather florid complexion, and light hair. He was careless in dress, inattentive to the little conventionalities of society, easy of approach, amiable and sympathetic in disposition, generous beyond his means, unrestrained in frankness and independence of speech and manner—save by those gentlemanly and tender instincts which the Almighty had deeply implanted in his being. He liked whole-souled



**Edward H. Stiles**  
**1836 - 1921**

company, good cheer, and was convivial to a high degree. Generally speaking, I may say that the traits last referred to were characteristic of a majority of the lawyers of that day. He was fond of anecdotes, liked a good story, and few could tell better ones than himself. By virtue of these traits coupled with his fame as a lawyer, his presence was much sought and his society courted, whether at home or moving in the circuit of his extensive practice, and especially by the younger members of the bar, who flocked to see and hear one about whom they heard so much.

*Stiles continues his story with the account of then Representative Hall attending a special session of the Legislature called by the Governor in 1861. The special session was held to meet the emergency of the onset of the Civil War. Hall had introduced a bill allowing the soldiers on the battlefield and absent from Iowa the ability to vote in elections\*. This was House File 39 and it was referred to committee. The committee recommended passage of the bill and Representative Hall moved that the House take up the bill for consideration. Strangely, Representative Williams moved to postpone consideration of House File 39 until 2065. The Legislature ended its session the next day, and after it had adjourned, Representative Williams left to fight for the Confederacy.*

*\*The measure giving the soldiers in the field the right to vote did not pass into a law until 1862, but it originated in 1861. Several persons have been given credit for its origin, but it unquestionably belongs to Judge Hall.*

*From his paper (continued):*

Mr. Hall moved that the House take up House File No. 39: "A bill for an act to authorize volunteer officers and soldiers who are absent from the state and in the service of the United States, citizens of this state, to vote at the state elections." Carried. Mr. Williams moved to postpone the further consideration of the bill till the year 2065. Upon this motion, Mr. Hall demanded the yeas and nays, which were ordered and were as follows: (See Journal.)

On the same day the House adjourned sine die.

Mr. Williams, who made the motion to postpone the consideration of the bill till the year 2065, was one of the representatives from Dubuque county, and immediately upon the adjournment of the legislature proceeded to Virginia, his former home, and entered the Confederate service.

---

Paragraphs below are from: *Iowa Official Register*  
Iowa General Assembly website: [www.legis.iowa.gov](http://www.legis.iowa.gov) (Archives)

JAMES H. WILLIAMS He was a prominent member of the Shenandoah county bar, and senior member of the firm of Williams and Brothers. For years, he was one of the most prominent attorneys in the Valley. After his graduation from the University of Virginia in 1857, he located in Dubuque, Iowa, from which place he was elected to the Iowa Legislature serving in the Eighth General Assembly, 1860. He remained in the West until the breaking out of war between the States when he ran the blockade and joined the Confederate army, and served as lieutenant in Chews' Horse Artillery, which was attached to Ashby's regiments, and was afterwards Rossers' Brigade, and just at the close of the war was commissioned captain of the same company. He served as judge advocate general in Stuart's and then Hampton's Cavalry Corps. He located in Winchester for the practice of law in 1868, forming a partnership there with Captain John J. Williams, and in Woodstock with W. T. Williams. He represented the county of Frederick in the Virginia Legislature in 1873, and removed to Woodstock in 1883, where he has since resided. He married Miss Cora D. N. Pritchard, of Alexandria. Source: Newspaper: *The Times Dispatch* Published: Richmond, Virginia Issue Date: 8 December 1903 Citation: Page 2 - Column 4 Obituary Title

JONATHAN C. HALL Born at Batavia, New York, February 27, 1808, and was reared on a farm. He attended district school winters and a few terms at Wyoming Academy. He taught school three winters and helped to survey several new counties. In 1828 he began to study law, removed to Ohio and was admitted to the bar of Columbus. In 1839 he came to Iowa Territory and a year later opened a law office at Mount Pleasant where in a few years he acquired a large practice, attending courts in eleven counties. In 1844 he was chosen a delegate to the First Constitutional Convention and was one of the prominent framers of the Constitution that was rejected. Soon after he removed to Burlington and in 1854 was appointed Supreme Judge to fill a vacancy. In 1855 he was elected president of the Burlington & Missouri Railroad Company and was one of the influential promoters of that line. In 1857 he was again a member of the Constitutional Convention which framed our present Constitution. He was one of the authors of the State Board of Education which was provided for in that instrument. In 1859 he was elected to the Eighth General Assembly and took a prominent part in the enactment of the Code of 1860. In politics Judge Hall was a Democrat; as a lawyer, judge and legislator, he had few equals in the State he served so long and well. He died June 11, 1874. Source: *History of Iowa From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*/Volume 4

*Information regarding both biographies from State Historical Society of Iowa Resources*