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May 27, 2015

THIS WEEK:

Parvin: The Surname of Two of Iowa History's Crucial Figures

BACKGROUND:

John A. Parvin was born at Fairfield, New Jersey, November 10, 1807. He was notable for his work in the Legislature and the 1857 Constitutional Convention.

Theodore Parvin was born in Cumberland County, New Jersey, January 15, 1817. He also played a crucial role in creating what has become our State Library. Congress had given the Iowa Territory \$5,000 to start the collection. Parvin brought the volumes that had been purchased (about 300) down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi River to Burlington, Iowa's Territorial Capitol. Parvin and Governor Lucas arrived in Burlington on August 15, 1838, with the volumes that would be the Iowa Territorial Library. While on that journey and during his early days in Iowa Parvin kept a journal. Included in this publication are the first and last pages of that journal beginning July 27, 1838, and ending January 25, 1839.

A portion of this original purchase made by Theodore Parvin in 1838 is currently on display in the Law Library located on the second floor of the Iowa Capitol.

John A. Parvin

John Parvin was reared on a farm. After acquiring an education, he was a teacher for several years.

In April 1839, Parvin moved to Iowa, locating at Bloomington. He served four years as a clerk of the district court, and in 1850 was elected to the House of the Third General Assembly. Parvin secured the passage of a bill changing the name of Bloomington to Muscatine. He

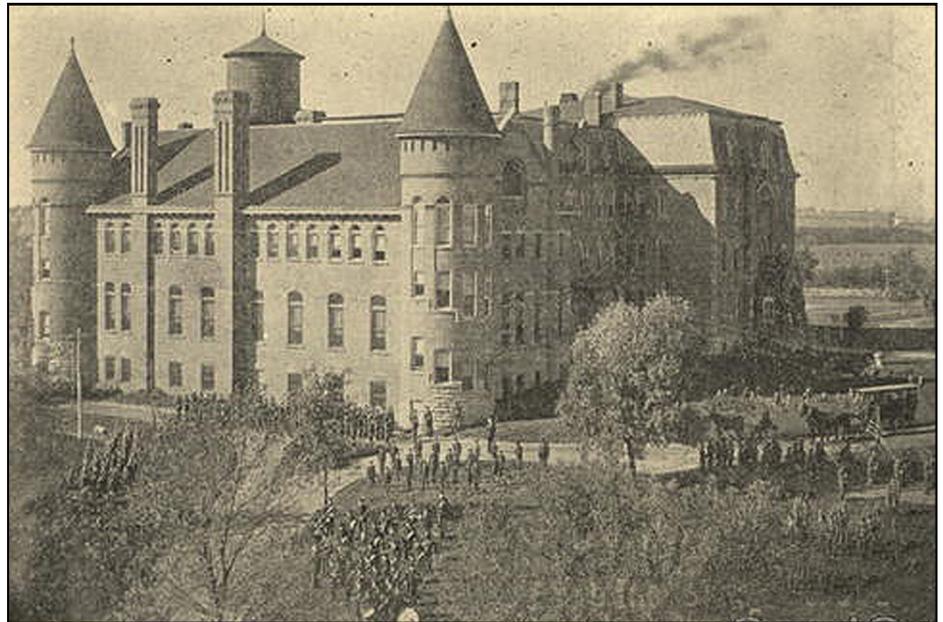


John A. Parvin
1807—1887

was also an active supporter of the act to prohibit the sale of intoxicating liquors.

In 1854, Parvin was elected mayor of Muscatine. In 1856, he was a delegate to the convention that organized the Republican Party of Iowa. In 1857, he was a member of the convention which framed the Constitution of the state and was an active and influential worker in that notable body. In 1863, he was elected to the State Senate where he served six years. He was one of the authors of the bill providing for the establishment of the State Reform and Industrial School and was a trustee and president of the board for 16 years.

Parvin was the first superintendent of the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home.



State Reform and Industrial School



Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home

Newspaper Obituary of John A. Parvin

DEATH OF HON. JOHN A. PARVIN.

End of a Long and Useful Life.

From Thursday's Daily 17.

Just as the sun was setting on the evening of March 16, 1887, the spirit of John A. Parvin, for nearly half a century a resident of this city and vicinity, took its flight, in the 80th year of his age. This event was not unexpected, as Mr. Parvin had been for some weeks failing from the infirmities of age, attended with some trouble of the heart and disease of the lungs.

The JOURNAL having recently (in September) published a biography with portrait of Mr. Parvin, it would be needless now to repeat all the interesting and instructive incidents then narrated of his long and useful life in this county. Suffice it to say that he was a native of New Jersey, born Nov. 10th, 1807, and when thirty years of age moved west, settling in Cincinnati, in 1837, and coming two years later to this place, landing here April 18, 1839. He lived in this city till 1855, when he removed to his suburban home four miles northeast of the city, where he died.

During his long residence in Muscatine or its immediate vicinity, covering a period of nearly 48 years, Mr. Parvin has held many positions of trust and honor. He was County Clerk in

1844, was member of the House of Representatives for this county in 1850, was Mayor of Muscatine in 1854, was member of the Constitutional Convention of 1857, and a State Senator from 1863 to 1868. The duties of all these positions he discharged with unvarying fidelity and ability. He was for sixteen years president of the Iowa Reform School, which institution he was instrumental in establishing while a member of the Legislature. In politics, Mr. Parvin was originally a Democrat, but when the crisis came in the controversy over the repeal of the Missouri compromise in 1854, resulting in the organization of the Republican party, he with thousands of others throughout the country left the old party and joined the new.

Mr. Parvin was an earnest and active worker in all educational, Christianizing and benevolent enterprises in the community from the very beginning of his citizenship here, when the conditions surrounding him were in no wise encouraging. He was one of the seven original members of the First M. E. church, organized in 1840, in which he remained a communicant up to the day of his death, and was the last remaining male member of the immortal seven—Mrs. Geo. Bumgardner and Mrs. James Hawley being now the only survivors.

Mr. Parvin followed teaching for a number of years. He was also for

awhile a merchant. Afterwards he did service as a civil engineer. Subsequently he engaged in farming, but for some years past, having rented his farm, he lived in retirement from the more active duties of life.

Theodore Parvin

Theodore Parvin is a name that has been prominently identified with Iowa history since the first year of existence of the Territory.



Theodore Parvin
1817–1901

In 1833, Parvin graduated from Woodworth College, Ohio, and began the study of law, graduating from the Cincinnati Law School in 1837.

In 1838, Robert Lucas, who had been appointed Governor of the new Territory of Iowa, selected Parvin for his private secretary. He accompanied the Governor to Burlington, where he was appointed to take charge of the Territorial Library.

In 1839, Parvin was appointed district attorney of the middle district and moved to Bloomington. He served three terms as probate judge. In 1844, he rendered Iowa an enduring service by cooperating with Enoch W. Eastman and Fredrick D. Mills in defeating the constitution which

proposed to deprive the state of the counties on the Missouri slope. Upon the organization of the United States District Court in 1846, Parvin was appointed clerk, a position he held for 10 years.

In 1857, Parvin was nominated Register of the State Land Office by the Democrats and, notwithstanding, the Republican majority of more than 2,000 in the election for Governor the same year. He was elected and became one of the first trustees of the State University and was for 10 years professor of natural science in that institution. He was one of the organizers of the State Historical Society and served several years as its secretary and as editor of the *Annals of Iowa*, a historical magazine published by the society.

Parvin made large contributions to the library, newspaper files, and general

collections of the State Historical Society.

For more than 30 years, he was one of the most valued writers of historical and biographical articles for the *Annals of Iowa* and the *Historical Record*.

Having been one of the first officials of the Territory and long associated with its public affairs and personally associated with prominent men of all parties for more than 60 years, Parvin was long regarded the highest authority on Iowa history and biography. He was one of the founders of the Masonic Order of Iowa and was Grand Master and Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of the state many years. In his capacity as secretary, he collected at their building in Cedar Rapids the most extensive Masonic library in the world. He also collected and donated to the library a more complete collection of Iowa books and rare documents than is possessed by any other library.

Parvin's contribution of early Iowa newspapers, legislative journals, session laws long out of print, and other rare publications to the State and Historical libraries have been continuous and exceedingly valuable. He was one of the most valued members of the Pioneer Lawmakers Association, and his historical contributions to that organization have been of great value. His writings and addresses on historical subjects relating to Iowa for half a century would fill several volumes. No citizen of Iowa has done so much to collect and preserve its early records and history as Theodore Parvin.



Grand Lodge of Iowa

Selections from Theodore Parvin's Handwritten Journal

1838

- July 27. I have now decided to 'take up my bed and walk' to Iowa Territory. My reasons for doing so, in part are common to emigrants, but a part will for the present remain a mystery to all but one. Engaged
Calls on Lucas but not in.
- July 30. Introduced to Lucas.
- Aug 1st. 28th. I took aboard the Steamer "Temple" Capt. Burt, my baggage consisting of Books, Law, Political & Miscellaneous etc. to near 300 vols.
- Aug 2. 8. AM. Arrived at Louisville
-

Jan. 15. My 22d Birthday.

Jan. 16. Lay to all day. Visited a school in the neighborhood at night attended a "Spelling School", took part and was much pleased. Many young ladies present.

Jan. 22. Reached Burl. broke through ice.

Jan. 23. While absent the Sec. answered the Gov. letter I took occasion to use my name in a manner altogether unwarranted. Took out of business at the Legislature had the Seal of the Territory fitted to the Press.

Jan. 24. Memorial for the removal of the Governor before the Council. Passed 7 to 5, No. of ladies present.

Jan. 25. Legislature adjourned in confusion. All drunk with few exceptions.