

William H. Seevers.

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The death of Judge WILLIAM H. SEEVERS of Oskaloosa, on the 24th of March, removes one of the most eminent of our public men. He was a native of Virginia where he spent his boyhood days. In 1843 his father moved with his family to Mahaska county, Iowa. The next year the son, William H., came to Oskaloosa and entered upon the study of law. He was admitted to the bar in 1846 and began the practice of his profession at home. In 1848 he was chosen Prosecuting Attorney, and in 1852 he was elected District Judge. In 1857 he was elected to the lower house of the Seventh General Assembly as the representative from the district consisting of Iowa, Poweshiek and Mahaska counties. This was not only the first Legislature which met at Des Moines, then the new capital of the State, but it was the first held after the adoption of the constitution of 1857 which radically changed our organic law. •

It became necessary to reorganize our entire system of state government, and provide a new code of civil and criminal practice. The house numbered among its members an unusual array of able and brilliant men, who won high rank in later years as statesmen, jurists and soldiers. Lincoln Clark, a distinguished ex-member of Congress from Dubuque, and the afterwards famous D. A. Mahoney were the acknowledged leaders on the Democratic side. M. V. B. Bennett, of Knoxville, one of the ablest young politicians of the State, Phil Bradley, of Jackson, W. W. Belknap, of Keokuk, G. W. Gray, of Lansing, and Justus Clark, of Burlington, were among the Democratic members. On the Republican side W. H. Seevers was made chairman of the judiciary committee, the post of honor, and of the highest responsibility at that particular time. James F. Wilson, of Fairfield, C. C. Carpenter, of Fort Dodge, George W. McCrary, of Van Buren, John Edwards, of Lucas, Colonel Shelledy, of Jasper, Tom Drummond, of Benton, Ed. Wright, of Cedar, M. M. Trumbull, of Butler, E. E. Cooley, of Winnesheik, were also Republican members of that historic House. William P. Hepburn was its chief clerk.

As chairman of the House Judiciary Committee Judge Seevers at once entered upon the arduous work of giving rigid examination to an unusual number of bills of the highest importance. There was a general understanding among members, that owing to the radical changes made by the new constitution, all important bills should be submitted to the judiciary committee for rigid examination. Judge Seevers gave every bill submitted to his committee the most careful personal consideration, and when a measure proposed had passed that ordeal it was generally conceded that it might be safely enacted into law. As the Seventh General Assembly necessarily had to frame and enact more laws of importance than any of its predecessors or successors, the position held by Judge Seevers was most arduous. His superb legal mind and excellent judgment were here tested, and all must admit that he was equal to the responsibility. Few of the present generation realize the full measure of the important legislation placed upon our statute books by that first General Assembly which convened after the adoption of our present constitution. Its work largely survives on our statute book after the lapse of more than a third of a century. To Judge Seevers and James F. Wilson is due a large measure of credit for the enduring work of that House of 1858. Of the subsequent career of Judge Seevers as Code Commissioner and Judge of the Supreme Court, the press of the State has made appropriate notice. But so far as I have knowledge, no mention has been made of the most important public work of his life, quietly but most ably given in shaping so largely the important legislation of the Seventh General Assembly which has proved so satisfactory and enduring.

B. F. G.

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