MAJOR-GENERAL FREDERICK STEELE.

BY MAJOR JOHN F. LACEY,
Assistant Adjutant General on his staff.

Major-General Frederick Steele is entitled to a conspicuous place in the annals of Iowa. His service as colonel of an Iowa regiment was not long, but his entire service from the beginning to the end of the war was in command of Iowa troops. Though his command was not made up wholly from Iowa regiments, yet it so happened that the "Hawkeye" State always furnished a very considerable portion of the soldiers under his command.

A biography* of Gen. Steele would be out of place in this article. It would take a large volume to give a detailed account of his life and services. It would include the Scott campaign in Mexico, a long term on the frontier, the campaign of the early part of the late war in Missouri and Eastern Arkansas; the battles near and the siege of Vicksburg; the campaigns in Arkansas and against Mobile and finally the movements on the Rio Grande, in Texas. His actions are all recorded in the history of each of these campaigns, and he filled an important part in them all. I will therefore indulge in sketches and reminiscences only.

Frederick Steele was born at Delhi, in New York, and he entered West Point as a cadet June 11, 1839, being then twenty years and five months old. His residence as given in the Academy Records was Delhi, Delaware county, New York. He served at West Point from July 1st, 1839, until July 1st, 1843, when he graduated as thirtieth in a class of thirty-nine.

In a recent visit to the Military Academy, I examined the Adjutant's Records for the four years during which Steele was a cadet.

*Gen. Steele's military history may be found very complete in "Gen. Cullum's Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy."
MAJOR GENERAL FREDERICK STEELE.
First Colonel of the Eighth Iowa Infantry.
The names of many of his associates at the Academy have since been entered upon the immortal pages of history. Among the names of the young men with whom he served, I found the following: William T. Sherman, Stewart Van Vliet, George H. Thomas, Horatio G. Wright, Amiel W. Whipple, T. J. Rodman, A. P. Howe, Nathaniel Lyon, George Stoneman, W. G. Peck, Alfred Pleasanton, William F. Smith, Fitz-John Porter, Henry Coppee, John W. Davidson, Delos B. Sackett, DeLancy Floyd Jones, Gordon Granger, D. A. Russell, John G. Foster, D. N. Couch, Jesse L. Reno, George H. Derby (famous as "John Phoenix"), George B. McClellan, J. P. Garesche, John F. Reynolds, Joseph J. Reynolds, Don Carlos Buell, William S. Rosecrans, John Pope, Abner Doubleday, Rufus Ingalls, Fred T. Dent, I. F. Quinby, W. B. Franklin, John Newton, J. J. Peck, J. A. Hardie, C. C. Augur, W. S. Hancock, C. S. Hamilton, George Sykes and Ulysses Hiram Grant. Some of these men preceded Steele in their entry at the Academy, others entered while he was there and graduated later, but they were all his schoolmates.

The lives of the men whose names are above given, would be practically a history of the war of the rebellion, and no inconsiderable part of the Mexican war. On the rebel side during this same period I found the names of R. J. Ewell, Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson, Dabney H. Maury, Cadmus M. Wilcox, George E. Pickett, Samuel B. Maxey, B. E. Bee, Bushrod Johnson, R. S. Garnett, R. B. Garnett, Earl Van Dorn and James Longstreet, all of confederate fame.

Open Plutarch's Lives and observe what a splendid array of soldiers he has collected and described. But to write these charming and instructive biographies he looked over the field for thirteen hundred years, beginning with Theseus and Romulus in the dim era of remote and fabulous antiquity and ending with Otho in the days of Roman power and greatness, before the empire had begun to fall into decay. But here we have the history of ages compressed into a brief period of four years, and in these four years the schoolmates
of Frederick Steele furnished great names enough to supply another Plutarch with abundant themes.

Grant, Sherman, Pope, Doubleday, Wright, McClellan, Buell, Newton, the two Reynolds, Hancock, Augur, Franklin, Peck, Quinby, Thomas, Dent, Ingalls, Rodman, Rosecrans and Lyons, furnish a galaxy of names that showed that we were not passing through any sterile period of the world's history.

The most democratic of all military organizations is that of the academy at West Point. These boys are taught to respect the civil power from the very beginning of their service. Each one is chosen by a member of Congress, and must be a resident of the district from which he is selected. The President has the power of choosing ten cadets, which places are commonly distributed among the sons of army officers, but most of the cadets come directly from the common people and from every locality of the country. The cadet is usually the son of parents whose political views agree with those of the congressman who makes the nomination, and therefore the boy is commonly chosen from the ranks of the dominant political party in his district. No difference which party happens to be in power, there is sure to be first-class material from which to make this selection, and every congressman feels a pride in making the choice of a youth who may do him credit in after years. These boys thus secure their start in military life from the civil power. The Secretary of War is almost invariably a civilian, and the whole course of a regular army officer's life is subservient to instead of in conflict with the civil law.

At the outbreak of the war, the regular army officers divided as the people did, largely upon sectional lines, but the officers of the Union never ceased to look to the civilian President as his Commander-in-Chief. This could all be changed in a single generation, by allowing the General of the Army to appoint the cadets. We would soon have an office-holding class with purely military antecedents, which would be a great danger to a free government. Or the cadet corps could be reduced to a dull dead level of mediocrity by
adopting the system of drawing through a civil service examination.

Mr. Ward, the obliging custodian of the Records at West Point, showed me the class history of the men whose names I have given. Mr. Ward keeps this Record and administers the oath of office to the cadets, from which, the boys irreverently refer to him as "So help me God." He has at his finger ends the daily record of every officer who has ever graduated at that institution.

Grant, whose name got changed in his appointment to Ulysses Simpson Grant, graduated in the class of 1843 as No. 21, while Steele was No. 30, and W. B. Franklin No. 1. But he signed his name near that of Fred. Steele as "Ulysses Hiram Grant." It was interesting to note the schoolboy writing of these names on the register.

The class standing of Cadet Steele may be of interest as illustrating the methods of the institution. At the January examination 1840, he stood No. 17, in a class of 73; in June of the same year he stood No. 16, in a class of 50; in June, 1841, he stood 27 in a class of 54; in June, 1842, he stood 30 in a class of 41, graduating in June, 1843, No. 30 in a class of 39, the missing members of the class having dropped out from time to time for various causes. His report of demerits was for trivial matters only, occupying less than half the space accorded to Cadet Grant. His demerits the first year were 43, the second year 21, third year 12, and fourth year 32—a total of 108; while Grant's demerits were as follows: First year 59, second year 58, third year 74, and fourth year 44, aggregating 235.

There were no vacancies in the regular army when Steele graduated in 1843, and hence he was appointed Brevet-Second-Lieutenant in the 2d Infantry, and did not rise to the dignity of even a full-fledged Second Lieutenant until March 15, 1846. He served in the Mexican War, commanding a company of regular infantry. He was brevetted First Lieutenant for his gallantry at Contreras, and brevetted captain after the storming of Chapultepec, in which he was a volunteer in the assaulting party. He also fought at Ocalaca,
Churubusco and Molina del Rey. After the Mexican War he served on the frontier and in California a part of the time as adjutant on the staff of Gen. Riley. The friendship between Grant and Steele undoubtedly had considerable to do with General Steele's career in the army. Grant was an admirable judge of military men, and was always true to those in whom he had confidence. Adjutant-General George D. Ruggles told me a story recently, illustrating Grant's friendship for Steele. Ruggles went out to Fort Ridgeley and other frontier posts as a young officer soon after Grant had resigned from the army. Grant was commonly nicknamed "Sam Grant" in those days by his messmates. When Ruggles' regiment was ordered to St. Louis, some older officer had said to him: "You must be sure and get acquainted with Sam Grant, he is living on a farm near St. Louis." One day Grant was pointed out to him in the street sitting upon a wagon load of wood which he had brought into the city to sell. Ruggles introduced himself, when Grant immediately began talking about "Alf. Sully and Fred. Steele," and seemed unwilling to talk of anything else as Ruggles had late news from those old friends who were out on the Plains. General Ruggles did not meet Grant again for some time until, going North with his regiment again, the steamer upon which they were being transported landed at Galena, where Grant was then connected with the now famous leather store. The presence of the troops attracted Grant to the landing where Ruggles again met him, and he immediately began to talk about "Alf. Sully and Fred. Steele." The boat did not lie long at the landing, and Ruggles did not meet Grant again until 1865 at City Point, Virginia, when the great General had been placed in command of all the armies of the United States. Ruggles went up to headquarters and found him busily engaged in drafting with his own hand a number of orders for the next day's movements. He waited the pleasure of the General until he had completed his task, when Grant turned around, took his cigar out of his mouth and inquired when Ruggles had last seen "Alf. Sully or Fred. Steele?" This simple story illus-
trates how far-reaching were the impressions acquired upon the drill ground and in the class rooms at West Point. Gov. Kirkwood selected a few distinguished officers from the regular army to appoint as colonels of Iowa regiments. Wilson’s Creek attracted the Governor’s attention to Steele, and on the 24th day of September, 1861, he was appointed Colonel of the 8th Iowa Infantry. At that time he was holding the position of Major in the 11th Regular Infantry. On the 29th of June, 1861, he was appointed Brigadier-General of Volunteers. He was commissioned Major-General of Volunteers March 15, 1863, to rank from November 29, 1862, and was honorably discharged as Major-General of Volunteers May 1st, 1867.

While Colonel of the 8th Iowa, he commanded the 5th Division, Department of Missouri, from November, 1861, to January, 1862; as a Brigadier-General from March 11, 1862, to May 21, 1862, he commanded the Southeastern District of Missouri, and then until August 29, 1862, the 1st Division of the Army of the Southwest. Then until November 30th, 1862, he commanded the District of Eastern Arkansas. From December 21, 1862, to January, 1863, he commanded the 4th Division of the right wing of the 13th Army Corps. From January, 1863, to March 13, 1863, he commanded the 1st Division, 15th Army Corps. As Major-General of Volunteers he held the following commands: March 13 to July, 1863, he commanded the 1st Division, 15th Army Corps; August 5, 1863, to January, 1864, he commanded the army of Arkansas; from January 20th, 1864, to December 22, 1864, he commanded the Department of Arkansas, which was also the 7th Army Corps. He was then relieved by General Joseph J. Reynolds, who was also a graduate of the class of 1843, and from January 8, to February, 1865, he commanded the United States forces at Kenner, Louisiana; from February to April, 1865, he commanded the United States forces operating from Pensacola Bay against Mobile.

After the capture of Blakely, he was assigned to the command of the forces on the east side of Mobile Bay, from April 13 to May, 1865, when he commanded the forces
operating in Northern Alabama. June 1st he was in command of the troops embarking from Mobile to Brazos Santiago, Texas, and from June 9 to August, 1865, he had command of the Army of Observation on the Rio Grande. From August, 1865, to October of the same year, he commanded the Western District of Texas. He was then transferred to the Department of the Columbia with headquarters at Portland and Fort Vancouver, which was his last command.

During this time he was promoted in the Regular Army to Major, then to Lieutenant-Colonel of the 3rd Infantry, and Colonel of the 20th Infantry July 28, 1866, and brevetted Major-General. After his discharge as Major-General of Volunteers, he was relieved from duty November 23, 1867, and before joining his regiment died suddenly of apoplexy January 12, 1868, at San Mateo, California.

This is a brief outline of a great career, for which General Steele never received the credit to which he was entitled.

He was not as successful in editing his campaigns as some of his colleagues.

The first severe battle in which General Steele fought in the late war was at Wilson's Creek, where the gallant General Lyon fell too early to give the country his best service, but in time to show our soldiers how to die. Steele, with his little battalion of regulars, was near the Iowa troops. The 1st Iowa Infantry had remained beyond their term of enlistment to join in the battle. Our people were downhearted over the defeat at Bull Run, but Wilson's Creek came to cheer the friends of the Union cause. Iowa troops were always with Steele from this time until his last battle, when he stormed Fort Blakely in what was the last hard battle of the war. With Iowa troops he made the march from Southeastern Missouri to Helena and thence to Chickasaw Bayou; and again in connection with Iowa troops he took part in the capture of Arkansas Post, returning again to Vicksburg where he was one of Grant's most trusted lieutenants in all the movements and battles which resulted
in the capture of Pemberton's Army, when the Mississippi was again permitted to "flow unvexed to the sea."

Again, he marched to Jackson, always with Iowa troops, and back to Vicksburg, then up the river on transports to Helena, there to take command of the Little Rock Expedition where his favorite Iowa troops continued to form a large part of his command.

This campaign was important in its general results, but the skill of his maneuvers prevented much bloodshed, and the brilliancy of his strategy was overshadowed by other more interesting movements that were full of carnage. His skillful crossing of the Arkansas, and the turning of Price out of Little Rock would delight the military student. The troops that Grant had hurried forward to reinforce him found that he had already accomplished the purpose of his campaign. Thenceforth the line of the Arkansas became a defense to the Union cause in Missouri. Confederates crossed that line often, but their presence was only temporary, and when Price last broke through and invaded Missouri it was fatal to his command. But few of his men returned.

Steele's position in Arkansas, when not engaged in actual campaign, was an unfortunate one for any soldier, and especially for one as kind and humane as he. He was compelled to act the part of a restorer of civil government where the country outside of his pickets was all hostile. He never made war on women and children, and yet the whole population were enemies. He was directed to attempt to restore the civil law and he carried in his train an honored and excellent Unionist, Isaac Murphy, who was (inside of Steele's camp only) the Provisional Governor of Arkansas. This civil Governor had to look to Steele's commissary for the rations for himself and family.

Mr. Lincoln took a profound interest in this premature attempt to inaugurate a loyal civil government in Arkansas, and after the failure of the Red River campaign the President wrote with his own hand the following letter, which Captain Richard P. Strong of Steele's staff, now of the 4th
U. S. Artillery, has sacredly preserved, having found it among General Steele's highly prized relics:

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 29, 1864.

MAJOR GENERAL STEELE:—I understand that Congress declines to admit to seats the persons sent as Senators and Representatives from Arkansas. These persons apprehend that, in consequence, you may not support the new State government there as you otherwise would. My wish is that you give that government and the people there the same support and protection that you would if the members had been admitted; because in no event, nor in any view of the case, can this do any harm, while it will be the best you can do towards suppressing the rebellion.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.

Horace Greeley was brilliant and honest, but sometimes unfair and erratic. He assails Steele in his American Conflict as the enemy of emancipation. But nothing more unjust was ever written. Steele recruited the negroes of Arkansas into regiments and, though he doubted their qualities as soldiers, he first saw them tried at Jenkins' Ferry, and in his final campaign against Mobile a whole division of negro troops under General Hawkins formed a part of his command. Steele treated these troops with confidence and found them faithful and brave. But he found it hard to be severe against those who had no arms in their hands. There was nothing of the Weyler in his disposition. He was urged by many to use more rigor—to be more severe. I remember even when a Union officer appealed to him in verse to

"Strike home unceasing—let the traitors feel
Within the velvet glove the hand of Steel."

In the spring of 1864, it was determined to move the line of the Arkansas to the Red River and attempt to pacify a still larger part of the Trans-Mississippi country. Steele's movements were in accordance with his previous record as a campaigner. But unfortunately he and Gen. Banks were attempting to cooperate upon independent lines, at too great distance from each other, and the defeat of Banks threw all the army of Gen. E. Kirby Smith upon Steele. The loss of General (now Governor) F. M. Drake's brigade at Mark's Mills, rendered necessary a retreat to the line of the Ar-
Executive Mansion,

Washington, June 29, 1864

Major General Steele

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kansas. The movement by which Steele reached the Saline at Jenkins’ Ferry, instead of at Benton, would also be highly interesting to the military student, for though it led to the bloody battle of Jenkins’ Ferry, with a swollen river at his back, and though many brave soldiers died there, yet it saved the army and held firmly the old line of the Arkansas. And here again Iowa troops stood General Steele in good stead, and the gallant General Samuel A. Rice lost his life.

In this brief article whilst I speak so often of Iowa men, I do not wish to disparage the other splendid troops whom he commanded, but rather to show how intimately the service of General Steele was linked with that of Iowa soldiers.

Steele’s return to Little Rock placed him again where he was compelled to take up the premature and aggravating business of political reconstruction. Grant wisely resolved to put his friend again where he was at his best, with troops in the field, and Canby sent Steele’s old classmate, J. J. Reynolds, to relieve him at Little Rock and placed him in an important command of that part of the army operating from Pensacola against Mobile.

When Steele was relieved of the command of the Department of Arkansas in the winter of 1864 Grant at once desired the benefit of his services in the Army of the Potomac, intending to place him in command of the 9th Corps.

Grant wrote Gen. Halleck December 14, 1864: “What has been done with Steele? He is too good a soldier immediately in command of troops to leave idle? . . . I think it will be better to order him here in command of the Ninth Corps and send Parke to Canby.”

But Halleck had already sent Steele to New Orleans and the order was not changed.

Steele’s movements from Pensacola mystified the enemy but were fully understood when his army closed in unexpectedly upon the defenses of Blakely.

Blakely was held by General F. M. Cockrell, now Senator from Missouri. I had learned to fully respect Steele’s talents and capacity as a General in command of troops in the field, and had he been kept with Grant or Sherman in that
capacity his military history, illustrious as it was, would have been much more important. His skill in the conduct of a siege was now tried, and in one week's time his lines of approach had been pushed sufficiently to make an assault practicable.

The siege of Blakely culminating with the storming of the works on April 9, 1865, was one of the closing events of the war, and its importance was not understood by the country, because it was over-shadowed by the greater things that attracted the eyes of the world upon Appomattox.

The same day that Lee laid down his arms, Steele stormed the almost impregnable defenses of Blakely, capturing General Cockrell and his entire command and opened the gates of Mobile to the Union troops. There were a few unimportant skirmishes after this, but the storming of Blakely was the last real battle of the war.

The 34th Iowa, under Gen. G. W. Clark, had been recruited up to nearly its maximum strength of a thousand men, and when it sprung from the trenches and started towards the enemy's lines it looked like a full brigade in comparison with the depleted ranks of most of the other regiments at that period of the war.

General Steele after issuing orders fixing the time of the movement went into the trenches with this regiment, and when the charge commenced he drew his sword and leaped over the protecting earth-works as nimbly as he had once done at Chapultepec, and rushing forward and with his staff entered the enemy's defenses under a heavy fire. The scene was an inspiring one.

"Twere worth ten years of peaceful life,
One glance at their array."

The whole line from Hawkins' Negro troops on the right to Garrard's line on the left swept splendidly forward under the eye of their commanding General.

There were many Iowa troops in these advancing lines, and the men who had captured Spanish Fort the night before were coming forward as reinforcements in time to see the brilliant, though deadly spectacle, and loudly cheered
their comrades. Steele's old regiment, the 8th Iowa, had the night before effected a lodgment in the rebel lines at Spanish Fort which led to the capture of that stronghold, and it so happened that though so long separated, by different routes the regiment and its first Colonel here met again. They had not met since Vicksburg and Jackson. Together they saw the war end at Blakely a few hours after Lee stacked his arms at Appomattox.

When General Andrew Jackson marched against the Indians from Pensacola, his troops were required to wade at high tide along the shore of the bay. Tradition says that they stripped for that part of their march, carrying their clothing, arms and supplies on their shoulders and heads. Steele's march out of Pensacola was over the same route, and as Hawkins' division of negro troops reached that part of their journey, they followed Jackson's example and there was probably no more droll or amusing spectacle during the war than this division of several thousand men with their black skins glistening in the sun, as they marched along the overflowed road. Steele was highly amused, but he appreciated these new allies fully and afterwards watched their gallant conduct while for seven days they were under the hottest fire during the siege—for their part of our line was the special object of attack and was peppered with an incessant hail of shot and shell. These negro troops did not share in Horace Greeley's idea that Steele was hostile to the colored race.

I recall an incident illustrating the desire of the negroes to communicate with him in person. On April 2, 1865, the army of General Steele encountered the troops of the enemy who were watching for him in his approach upon Blakely. The night before at Stockton I remember that two negro refugees were brought to my tent by the pickets. They told me that they must see "de general hisself," and I could not induce them to tell anything to a mere Assistant Adjutant General of the staff. It was two o'clock in the morning but I went to the General's tent and called him out. He came to the tent door and asked the "contrabands" what they
wanted. He did not look like a General as he stood there thinly clad at the foot of his cot, at the tent door. One of them said: "Is you de general?" General Steele assured them that he was indeed General Steele and again asked them what they wanted. "Well," the negro replied, "we done just come to tell you that we was hyah."

The 8th Iowa Infantry was a model regiment. General Steele was succeeded by Col. James L. Geddes, an excellent disciplinarian and one of the finest soldiers and expert drill masters of the war. The regiment unfortunately was surrounded and captured with Prentiss at Shiloh, and served a long and perilous confinement in the prisons of the South. After their exchange they were again recruited and re-organized and became famous for their perfection of drill and the beauty and accuracy of their evolutions.

When Steele was sent to command the forces on the Rio Grande in June, 1865, he had a delicate international question on his hands. Maximilian and Juarez were engaged in the great contest which was to decide between imperialism and republicanism in Mexico, and Steele gave all the moral and material aid to the republican cause that he could without involving this country in an open rupture with France and the Mexican imperialists. His instructions from Sheridan July 13, 1865, said:

Don't come to any actual hostilities, but annoy these people (I mean the Franco-Mexicans). They are not our friends and their present manner and past conduct in their dealings and assistance to the rebels is and has been infamous.

But Grant with a quaint humor, in an earlier autograph letter, May 21, 1865, gave Steele the cue to his purposes in sending him to the Rio Grande with a great army of forty thousand men.

MAY 21, '65.

We will have to observe a strict neutrality toward Mexico in the French and English sense of the word.

Your own good sense and knowledge of international law and experience of the policy pursued toward us in this war teaches you what will be proper.
Steele took the hint and furnished guns and ammunition to the Juarist General Cortina.

General Steele was a man of striking individuality. He was very social and kept in stock a fund of stories in which he rivaled Lincoln himself. He was small, spare built, wiry, withy and enduring. His eyes were grey and had a snappy way about them that puzzled a stranger. His hair and beard were grizzly. His voice was very peculiar and its shrill, sharp notes always attracted the attention of any one who met him for the first time.

He was a confirmed bachelor, and having no immediate family ties lavished a good deal of his affection on his fine horses and dogs throughout his long camp life. He was a superb horseman, and one of his greatest bereavements in the Mobile campaign was when his splendid black Morgan horse "Sigel" broke away from the orderly who was leading him and ran straight into the enemy's lines.

He was best liked by those who knew him best.

Steele was something of a wag in his private relations and was always ready with repartee. His service in Mexico in the inconspicuous position of a brevet Second Lieutenant, did not give him much acquaintance in the army there. Hardee, who was afterwards a confederate General and the author of "Hardee's Tactics," was higher in rank and generally known. But at "Thornton's Field" Hardee was innocent and unfortunate enough to take his company of cavalry into a small field and there go into camp without tearing down the rail fences. A superior body of Mexican cavalry came upon him unexpectedly and "corraled" his company before they could throw down the fences and escape. In a hotel at New Orleans on the return of the army Steele was dining alone, when Hardee and several other officers took seats near by at the table and commenced to talk of Mexico. After the conversation had proceeded for a time Steele joined in and said that he too had been in Mexico.

"What is your name?" said Hardee. Steele modestly gave his name, when Hardee blurted out: "I never heard
of you in Mexico." "I have heard of you, sir," Steele pleasantly replied.

"Indeed, and where was that," said Hardee. "At Thornton's Field," said Steele, and the silence in the dining-room was profound for a few minutes until Hardee got up and went away.

His death from apoplexy at San Mateo, California, was sudden and painless.

He was about forty-nine years of age and had received his final discharge from the volunteer service only about eight months before. Iowa during the war was too young to have many sons born upon her own soil, for her Statehood had only existed fifteen years when the war began, but her sons by adoption took a foremost part in that contest and among them she has especial cause to be proud of the career of Major-General Steele.

A biographer should be a judge, not an attorney for the defence. He should weigh all the evidence for and against his subject, and deliver a verdict which takes into consideration all phases of character. If it be "guilty," the verdict should be couched in such terms that the reader becomes aware of the commendable characteristics of the person condemned as well as the traits which lead to the condemnation. If the verdict be "not guilty," the weakness of character should be presented side by side with the virtues.—The Chap-Book, April 1, 1898.

Attention! Muscatenians!—Bloomington is no more—the name has been obliterated, and the beautiful and unique name of Muscatine, has been ushered in its place; and we think there ought to be some demonstration of our approbation, made on this occasion. Who seconds the motion? Who?—Muscatine Journal, June 9, 1849.