

Harvey J. Skiff

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.



This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/publicdomain/1.0/).

Recommended Citation

"Harvey J. Skiff." *The Annals of Iowa* 6 (1905), 636-637.

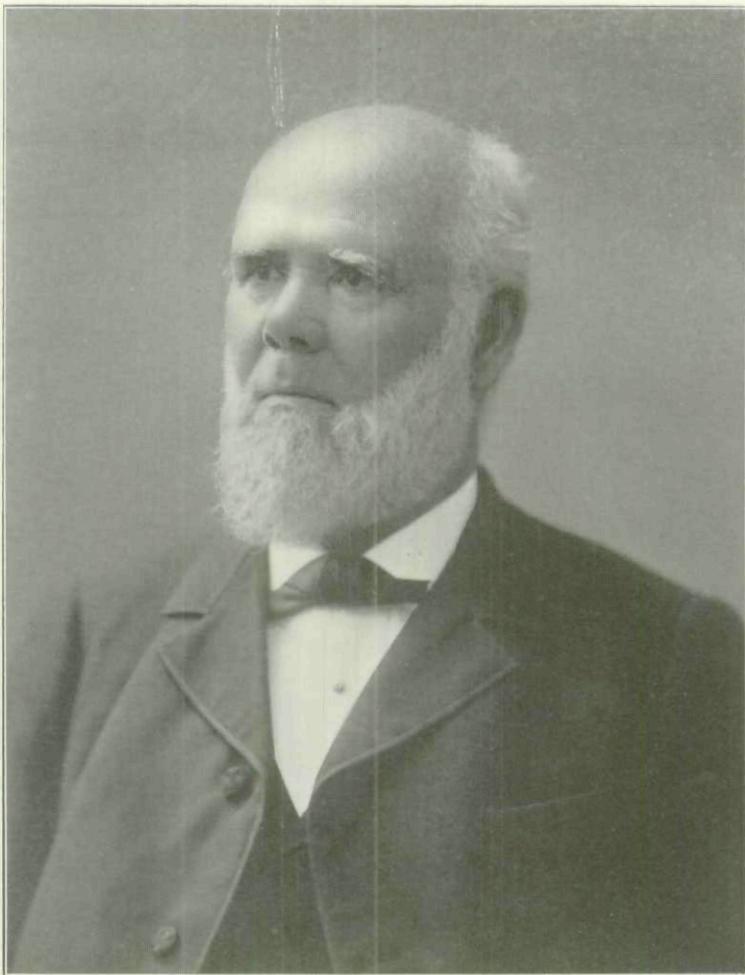
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.3114>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

generous of friends wherever his friendship was bestowed. He was the first executive officer who signed an official paper relating to the founding of the Historical Department, though he was not the first to commend it to the fostering care of the legislature.

JOHN H. CHARLES was born in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, January 19, 1826; he died in Sioux City, Iowa, December 1, 1904. During his infancy his parents removed to Mifflin township, Ashland county, Ohio, where they settled on a farm and where he grew up to manhood. At the age of 15 he began to learn the trade of a carpenter, at which he worked during the next nine years. In 1850 he left his home to seek his fortune in California. The route to the far west in those days was via the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Mr. Charles embarked on one of the river steamboats for St. Louis, where he stopped a few days before starting upon the long overland journey. The party which he joined outfitted at Independence, Missouri, where they procured twenty-one wagons and teams of four yokes of oxen to each wagon. Each wagon carried four men, their provisions and baggage. After some days together this cavalcade divided into several parties, each taking such route as pleased them best. This course was deemed prudent in order to be certain to find grass for the animals, and perhaps there were other reasons. After a stay of six months in California, where the young man by prospecting for gold and by hard labor accumulated \$1,000, he returned to the east. His next venture was the purchase of 100 cows for the California market. Two other men joined him with the same number of animals, and together they made the overland journey, living in a covered wagon. The cows cost \$17 and were sold at \$80 per head, netting the enterprising men handsomely. Mr. Charles gave some time to various business enterprises, but settled in Sioux City in December, 1856, where he remained to the end of his days. He was engaged in merchandizing and steamboating on the upper Missouri until the year 1900. While he became widely known from his large business interests, his claims to a permanent place in the annals of Sioux City and the State of Iowa rest upon his useful and patriotic labors in other directions. Every public interest of Sioux City found in Mr. Charles a most active and intelligent supporter. He was a pioneer in the founding and development of its Scientific Association, its growing public library and its various schools. But the crowning work of this grand old man was the organization of the movement to erect the famous monument, on a bluff overlooking the river and the city, to the memory of Sergeant Charles Floyd, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, who died there August 20, 1804. That he had the aid of many earnest and distinguished workers, is true, but without his energetic and patriotic efforts from the first step to the last, the monument would not have been built. He secured the aid of Congress, and of the State Legislature, as well as most important assistance in Sioux City. In the inception and development of the wide-spread interest in the Lewis and Clark Expedition the erection of that monument, and the discussions to which it gave rise, in the opinion of the writer, were no inconsiderable factor. And now that he has passed away in the fulness of years and usefulness, a tribute in enduring bronze to the man and his labors should be placed upon this imposing and beautiful monument. Said *The Sioux City Journal* of December 3, 1904: "The home life of John H. Charles has been extremely pleasant, and the Charles home has always been a hospitable one. Kind and gentle as a husband, loving and considerate as a father, true and constant as a friend, and patriotic and energetic as a citizen, John H. Charles was an exceptional man, admired and loved by all. He always loved Sioux City, and Sioux City always loved him."

HARVEY J. SKIFF was born in Allegany county, New York, in 1821; he



Edw. H. Thayer

JUDGE EDWARD H. THAYER,
Pioneer Iowa journalist, founder of *The Clinton Age*.

died at Newton, Iowa, November 12, 1904. He was educated at the Academy in Wyoming, New York, and later attended Amherst College, Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1846. He studied law in the office of Fillmore & Havens in Buffalo. (The senior member of this law firm was Millard Fillmore, afterwards President of the United States.) Mr. Skiff migrated to Iowa, reaching Oskaloosa in 1849. He removed to Newton in 1851, where he engaged in the practice of the law, in which he continued until 1861, when he enlisted in the army, becoming a member of Co. B, 13th Iowa Infantry. This was the regiment organized and commanded by Col. M. M. Crocker. Mr. Skiff was in the service three years, serving most of the time as Captain of the Company. After his return he engaged in mercantile pursuits, his hearing having failed so that it was impossible for him to practice his profession as a lawyer. He was chosen a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1857, and is believed to have been the last survivor of that body, instead of the late Dr. John J. Selman, as heretofore erroneously stated. The proceedings of the Convention show that he was a prominent and useful member of that body. It was related of Mr. Skiff that he had a passage at arms in court with the eccentric Judge C. J. McFarland, who proceeded to fine him because he would not obey an order of the Court to "sit down." Deeming himself in the right at the time the young attorney replied—"Fine and be ——!" Judge McFarland then ordered the sheriff to arrest him and take him to Des Moines for confinement in jail. The Judge soon ascertained that he could not find officers enough in Jasper county to take Harvey Skiff to Des Moines, for the reason that the people would not permit it. The Judge did not insist upon his order, and the matter blew over. He was a student and a man of wide culture and information. It is stated that he led the opposition to keep the word "slave" out of the constitution of the State. His later years were marked by great quiet, due perhaps to the loss of his hearing. To the end of his days he enjoyed the highest respect of the people of Newton and Jasper county. After the foregoing was put in type, it was learned that Hon. Aylett R. Cotton was residing in California during the past year or two. He was chosen to the Constitutional Convention of 1857, but was not present at its close. He signed the Constitution in Des Moines at the quarter-centennial in 1882. If living, he is also the senior surviving ex-speaker of the Iowa House of Representatives.

EDWARD H. THAYER was born at Windham, Maine, November 27, 1832; he died at Clinton, Iowa, November 7, 1904. He attended school at Orono, Maine, and graduated from the East Corinth Academy in 1850. When he reached the age of eighteen he came to Cleveland, Ohio, where he read law and was admitted to the bar. While in Cleveland he also attended medical lectures and did local work on some of the newspapers of that day. He was one of the first shorthand writers in that section of the country. He reported speeches by Stephen A. Douglas, Lewis Cass, Horace Greeley, Sam Houston, Louis Kossuth, Gen. Scott, and other distinguished gentlemen. It is said that he reported Gen. Scott's speeches in which he spoke of "the rich Irish brogue" and "the sweet German accent." Removing to Iowa in 1853 he first settled in Muscatine, where he practiced his profession three years. In 1855 he was elected prosecuting attorney, and two years later county judge. This was under the old law, when the county judges were supreme executive authorities in their counties. Two years later he was reelected. He was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention of 1860, where he supported Stephen A. Douglas for the presidency. He established *The Muscatine Courier* in 1861, and in 1868 founded *The Clinton Age*, with which he was connected to the end of his days. From the establishment of *The Age* he became one of the commanding influences in the city and county of Clinton and throughout eastern Iowa. For many years he was an influential promoter of railroad interests in

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.