

Benjamin Billings Richards

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blanks and made the first buttons from the fresh-water clam, in the Mississippi valley. He engaged the attention of William Molis, of Muscatine, to his work and disclosed the possibilities of the industry which appealed to Mr. Molis sufficiently to cause an arrangement of co-partnership between the two gentlemen on January 26, 1891. Out of this arrangement grew one of the greatest industries whose beginning has been in Iowa. Mr. Boepple, like pioneers of many other industries, did not fully reap the benefits of his invention, and the purely commercial manufacture, with its competition against the sea shell product and of local factory against local factory, soon caused his retirement and his employment as a shell expert in the government biological station at Fairport, Iowa, where his service continued until his death. He brought about the practical displacement of the sea shell by the fresh-water shell, and caused the employment of more persons in his industry and allied callings than are employed in all other combined industries in the city of Muscatine. He was an expert in his line, an assistant to Hon. Nelson Dingley in the framing of the Dingley tariff bill, and formed the acquaintance of President McKinley in the discharge of his duties as a government employe.

BENJAMIN BILLINGS RICHARDS was born at Milton, Saratoga county, New York, August 30, 1823; he died at Dubuque, Iowa, March 16, 1912. He was educated at Bennington and at the age of fifteen became a teacher in the district schools of New York. He became the first principal of the Caryville Seminary and professor of mathematics at the age of eighteen. At Caryville he prepared to enter the junior year at Yale but was diverted to Milwaukee, where he began the study of law in 1848 and two years later was admitted to the bar. In 1854 Mr. Richards removed to Dubuque and engaged in the real estate business, associated with others for a part of the time. He was nominated for Congress in opposition to Senator Allison in 1862 and the two conducted their campaign through the joint debate system. Mr. Richards was elected to the General Assembly in 1863, as a member of the House of Representatives, and in 1865 as a member of the Senate. He was again an unsuccessful candidate for Congress, this time against Col. David B. Henderson. He withdrew from the Democratic party in 1896 and was not thereafter a public factor in party sense. Mr. Richards was the first president of the Dubuque National Bank and founded other banks in northern Iowa. He served in other capacities of a public nature including that of a member of the Board of Education of Dubuque. He was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church and was a delegate to the convention which elected Bishop Lee the first bishop in Iowa. He was a broad, deep, strong, eloquent, useful man.

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