

## Charles Aldrich

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## CHARLES ALDRICH.

BY PROF. L. H. PAMMEL.

The following address on Charles Aldrich, by his friend, Prof. L. H. Pammel, was delivered before the Priscilla Club in Ames, Iowa, on the day of Mr. Aldrich's funeral services in Des Moines, March 11, 1908, and in the college chapel of the Iowa State College March 16, 1908:

In accepting the invitation to address you on this occasion I thought it would be very appropriate to give you a brief sketch of the life and services of Mr. Charles Aldrich. It is surely appropriate that we of this institution should pause for a few minutes to talk about the work of those who are instrumental in adding to our educational facilities. It is peculiarly befitting that I should talk of the labors of Mr. Charles Aldrich, whose life work was so unselfish, who gave what little strength he had during his old age for the educational work of our commonwealth. History in large measure must deal with the progress of education, and for this purpose abundant material must be collected and preserved. This was the peculiar work of Mr. Aldrich. More than this, Mr. Aldrich was not only a friend of this institution from its very beginning but he took a keen interest in its progress. He felt that the training given here had a peculiar and an abiding place in the educational system of the State. He knew all about the institution and the various men who had been connected with it in early days. His visits in early days were frequent, and he counted among the early professors many warm friends.

We may well pause and reflect a little over the life of our friend whose life-work was completed on Sunday morning, March 8, and who has left a host of mourners throughout the State and Union. Apprenticed to the printer's trade in 1846, he established a paper of his own in 1850, naming it the *Cattaraugus Sachem*, and later the weekly *Olean Journal*, at Olean, New York. On removing to Iowa he established the *Hamilton Freeman*, at Webster City, and was subsequently connected with the *Marshall County Times*, the *Waterloo Courier* and

the *Dubuque Times*. He was editorial writer on the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, and, most important of all, editor of the *Annals of Iowa*.

Mr. Aldrich was a member of the State Historical Society of Iowa, the American Historical Association, Loyal Legion, Grand Army of the Republic, a charter member of the American Ornithologists' Union, Pioneer Lawmakers' Association, and many other organizations.

When the country was in need of men to put down slavery he enlisted and did splendid service for his country as a brave and loyal soldier.

Many persons in the State feel as I do, that the death of Mr. Aldrich is a personal loss because he was close to his friends. I became acquainted with him some eighteen years ago, shortly after my arrival in the State. During these years my visits with him have been frequent. I have chatted with him about many things and have learned to appreciate the many-sidedness of the man, his keen appreciation of the progress of the intellectual world and in particular what was being done by men who are engaged in the study of plants and animals. He counted among his friends men of science like Gannett, Cope, Brandegee, Chittenden, Holmes, Hayden, Bessey, Coues, Beal, Parry, Leidy, and a host of others.

The loss to the State is certainly a great one, for it is doubtful whether anyone will be obtained who has the instinct of the collector as did Mr. Aldrich, especially along the lines of the materials for a great historical museum.

Mr. Aldrich was a born collector, a genius; few men have equalled him in this respect. Much of the historical matter of Iowa was rapidly disappearing when he took hold of the work; this, through his painstaking effort, has been preserved for future reference. It is for this that Mr. Aldrich has done such splendid service for the State. His wide acquaintance with public men and authors, and his geniality had their effect in getting what he wanted. In this way, he secured letters and manuscripts. Only the other day while in the Historical Department I looked over a large number of autograph albums of notes on European travel by Thomas Wilson, for many years connected with the National Museum.

It is wonderful how Mr. Aldrich succeeded in getting the material together with the limited appropriations made by the State; the numerous files of State papers, manuscripts, letters, etc. The fruition of his work is the splendid historical building and the manuscripts and books it contains on historical matter pertaining to Iowa. For the future historian these will be of inestimable value. He wanted me to write a biographical sketch of Dr. Edwin James, an early American botanist, who died near Burlington. I found much valuable material in the historical collection. I found he had succeeded in getting an old but small oil painting of Dr. James, the only one in existence.

He was very much interested in the work Coues was doing on the reprint of the Lewis and Clark expedition and afforded much assistance to him in the preparation of this reprint, in recognition of which most grateful acknowledgment was expressed in the preface.

His tenacity of purpose always stood him in good stead. He never forgot to remind the person that he would like the paper or the article. He reminded me every time I saw him that I had promised him an article on Dr. James.

Many years ago while a student in the University of Wisconsin I remember the pleasant pilgrimages made to the Historical Collections of Wisconsin. Here were gathered together the tattered flags of the Civil War, shot, shells, manuscripts and all conceivable things that bore upon the history of our country and that State in particular. The curator of that collection was Mr. Draper, who had brought together not only a library of one hundred thousand volumes, but an immense amount of historical material bearing upon many important American topics. The student had simply consulted the library and museum and without any thought of using the material for historical monographs. The history of Wisconsin antedates that of Iowa by a long period and the material gathered by Mr. Draper was unique in its character, and yet Mr. Draper never received the full credit of bringing together this great collection which has enabled Mr. Reuben Thwaites and others to profit by his work. The State tardily recognized the ability of Mr. Draper. Mr. Aldrich was a man very

much like Mr. Draper; spare in form but kind and appreciative.

Mr. Aldrich had an idea that the historical library should contain not only documents pertaining to the history of the State, political and civil, but matters pertaining to science, art and literature. He once said, "I wish the Academy of Science would meet in the Historical Building and make this its home." It was his idea in short that the Historical Department should be a great center of intellectual activity for the State.

Mr. Aldrich never considered himself a scientist, but he was a keen observer of things pertaining to natural history. His interest is shown in a series of letters written to the *Chicago Inter Ocean* from Colorado, while attached in an unofficial manner to the Hayden Geological Survey which in that season explored parts of Colorado. In their party were men who have become distinguished in the geological investigations of our country.

Exploring in those days was far different from what it is to-day. The railroad took the parties to Canon City in the Arkansas Valley only, the remainder of the survey was made with pack animals and in the saddle. He ascended to the timber line and above in southwestern Colorado. Some of the peaks in the Uncompahgre range are over 1,400 feet in height, so that Mr. Aldrich must have been a good mountain climber and entitled to membership in the Alpine Club. In his letters he gives accounts of the topographical and geological features and mentions some of the common plants, especially trees. He seems to have been attracted by our common reed grass (*Phragmites communis*), it is the only scientific name used in the letters. Mention is also made of *Bigelovia*, to which he was attracted because of its gorgeous display of yellow flowers, the sage bush, and cacti.

The prehistoric remains in the southwest seem to have been of especial interest to him. These are described in detail with size of rooms and material found therein.

Mr. Aldrich was also a contributor to some of the scientific journals, several articles appearing in the *American Natural-*

ist on such subjects as Variation in the Growth of the Virginia Creeper and Hickory, Anecdotes on the Cat, and Survival of Wild Habits of Domestic Cattle. The great museum of London, the British and South Kensington museums with their large array of birds and other natural history specimens, the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and especially the museum presided over by Professor Cope in Philadelphia, were all graphically described in the *Hamilton County Freeman*.

Mr. Aldrich seems to have had an interest in birds similar to that of Thoreau. He says:

"But there is a wonderful dearth of birds; in the old times, say fifteen or twenty years ago, out on such bright, beautiful days, we would see a large number of our winter species, late chickadees, creepers, pewees, nuthatches, the lively winter sparrows, and occasionally a shrike, and numerous other common species. Sometimes the bluebird remained several days in December and in some instances the robins were seen in winter. But to-day the woods and fields are well nigh tenantless so far as the birds are concerned."

He seems to have been deeply touched by Thoreau's interest in birds. He says: "I refer to Henry David Thoreau, the poet-naturalist, whose ever enduring fame is permeating every land in which our language is written or spoken, his biographers tell us that he never used a gun, never killed a bird."

He was a sincere advocate of bird protection and the first genuine law passed on the subject was due to his efforts while he was a member of the legislature and he has had much to do with subsequent legislation.

In the old days Mr. Aldrich was a frequent visitor at the college where he formed a warm friendship with Dr. Beal, Prof. Osborn and others of the faculty, especially for Dr. Beal because he was a great lover of birds. With Dr. Beal he used to take long walks and study our birds. He was interested in them and in other pets, up to the close of his life.

Mr. Aldrich was a prolific writer, his style was lucid. His descriptions were vivid. His letters written to the *Hamilton County Freeman* on his European trip show a fine literary

style giving vivid descriptions of the old public buildings, churches and cathedrals. It is unfortunate that they did not find a larger circle of readers. The letters are well worth re-publishing.

The *Annals of Iowa* in which the best efforts of his life were put, contain many important historical articles. The productions are not confined to history and biographical sketches alone, but include the political history of the State and other subjects of interest dealing with the development of Iowa.

Mr. Aldrich had many advanced views on legislative matters. In the legislature he did splendid service as chief clerk of the Iowa House of Representatives during four sessions of the legislature. He did much for constructive legislation in 1882 when he was a member of the House of Representatives. It is true that he did not succeed in seeing certain matters advocated by him enacted into law while he was a member, but since then some of these laws, as the Board of Pardons and the Anti-pass Bill, have been placed on our statute books.

This useful life was brought to a close on a beautiful Sunday morning, and on another beautiful day the body was laid at rest in the cemetery by some of his old comrades who had seen duty with him on the field of battle in the dark days of our republic, the services being under the auspices of the military companies. Loving tributes from his comrades and old friends can only remind us of his unselfish deeds. Goodness and kindness illumined his face and marked every feature of the man. His was a Christian life, truly catholic; clergymen of many denominations were his true and fast friends. He accepted the Christian religion without going into the philosophy of the same. In all my conversations with him I never heard him speak ill of anyone. Though there were some things which he could not tolerate among men, he did not sneer or scoff at them.

In a review of one of Prof. Coues' books he reflects a little on religion and the hereafter, and makes one think that after all he was a man of deep religious conviction, otherwise he would not have asked, but a short time before his death, for the rite of baptism.

With the demise of Mr. Aldrich one of the great men of pioneer Iowa times has passed away. He has left a record of usefulness not accorded to any one else in the State. He was not as rich as some others in scholarship, but he was active and untiring in gathering the material for scholars.

#### TRIBUTES FROM ABSENT FRIENDS.

Extracts from a few of the many letters and telegrams received from Mr. Aldrich's friends at the time of his death:

*Gen. G. M. Dodge, New York:*

I have just received your dispatch announcing the death and funeral of my old friend, Charles Aldrich. I go back to my early days when I first made his acquaintance which grew into a friendship which has lasted all our lives. I think there is none who appreciates better than myself the great work he has done not only for your Department but for the whole State of Iowa. If he had to go it was fitting it should be while he was in the institution that he founded and has done so much to build up. \* \* \*

*Senator Wm. B. Allison, Washington, D. C.:*

Regret to hear of the death of Mr. Aldrich, a good citizen, lover of Iowa, devoting his life and strength to the service of the State. His death will be greatly and universally mourned. \* \* \*

*Alonzo Abernethy, Tampa, Florida:*

Have known and loved Mr. Aldrich for nearly half a century and wish to add my tribute to the life and work of this marvelous man. Iowa has produced many noble patriots but none of rarer usefulness or worth. The Historical Department, the *Annals* and the Historical Building will perpetuate his memory.

*Robert F. Palmer, Chicago, Ill.:*

The death of Mr. Aldrich is a personal loss. My services at your disposal if I can be of assistance.

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