

The Penman and Penmanship of the Constitution of 1857

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"The Penman and Penmanship of the Constitution of 1857." *The Annals of Iowa* 14 (1924), 229-231.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.4775>

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ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

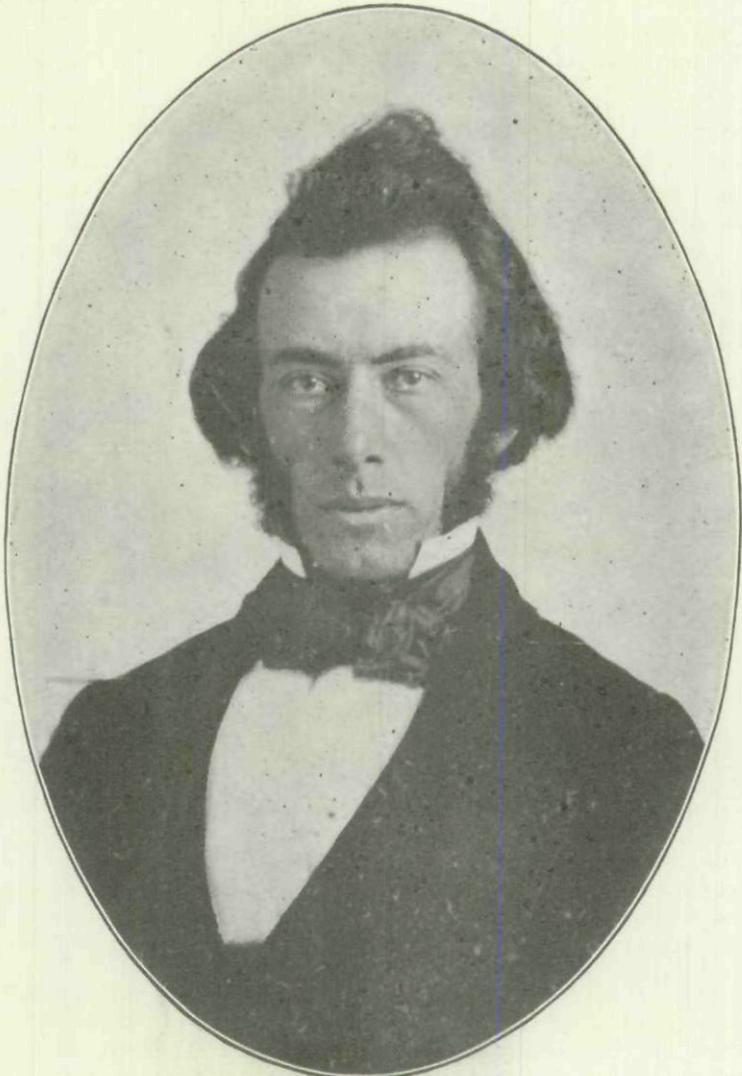
THE PENMAN AND PENMANSHIP OF THE CONSTITUTION OF 1857

In our facsimile reproduction of the present Constitution of Iowa and its amendments, our readers will doubtless be interested in the evolution of the process of engrossing important documents. Up to as late as 1884 the art of penmanship was employed in that work. From that date there was no other amendment adopted until 1904, when the typewriter was used. The observer is impressed with the thought that the art of penmanship was more carefully developed two-thirds of a century ago than now, if these photographed pages of the Constitution are to be taken as an example of even the best type of handwriting of that time. It is doubtful if any one who would now be made assistant secretary of a constitutional convention could produce such beautiful specimens of chirography, almost equal to copperplate engraving, as are the pages of the Constitution.

An examination of the signatures to the Constitution we think plainly reveals the hand that engrossed the instrument. "E. N. Bates, Asst. Secretary," is surely written in the same precise and graceful characters that are in the body of the Constitution. Even "Secretary" after Mr. Saunders' name, and "President" after Mr. Springer's name, were apparently written by the thoughtful and efficient assistant secretary.

Ellsworth N. Bates, a native of Massachusetts, was at the time of this convention twenty-seven years of age. His residence was Cedar Rapids where he had come a few years before fresh from college. He was a lawyer by profession and was at this time city attorney of Cedar Rapids, having been appointed the year before as the first city attorney of that place. He was already known as the "silver tongued orator of the Cedar Valley," and had a "phenomenal command of language."¹ He was elected

¹"History of Linn County, Iowa," by Luther A. Brewer and Barthinius L. Wick, pp. 112, 178.



HON. ELLSWORTH N. BATES, 1857

From a daguerreotype in the collections of the Historical Department of Iowa.

representative from Linn County in 1857 and served in the Seventh General Assembly where he was chairman of the Committee on Incorporations and a member of the Committee on Banks. The Committee on Incorporations was composed of E. N. Bates of Linn, chairman, James F. Wilson of Jefferson, William W. Belknap of Lee, Philip P. Bradley of Jackson, and William H. Seevers of Mahaska. This committee was called on to act on all bills on incorporations, such as of railroad companies, and of cities and towns, and on ferries and toll bridges. The Committee on Banks consisted of T. W. Jackson of Tama, chairman, E. N. Bates of Linn, William Campbell of Wapello, William W. Belknap of Lee, and James F. Wilson of Jefferson. In conjunction with the Senate committee they formulated the bills establishing the old banking system of state banks.²

When the Civil War began Mr. Bates did much to arouse sentiment in support of the government. He raised Company A, Twentieth Iowa Volunteer Infantry, was appointed its captain August 2, 1862, but resigned September 18, 1863,³ returned home because of broken health, and died soon after, thus ending early a useful and brilliant public career.

²Archives Division of the Historical Department of Iowa.

³"Roster of Iowa Soldiers in War of the Rebellion." Vol. III, p. 354.

EXHIBITION

The great National exhibition of the signers of the Declaration of Independence of the United States, is now open from 8 in the morning until 10 in the evening at No. 90 Second street, between Vine and Locust. Admittance 50 cents. Those visiting this exhibition during the day will be admitted free in the evening. This exhibition is not a painting but a representation of 56 distinct and separate figures, done in composition as large and natural as life, arranged as in Congress, when in '76 they signed that immortal paper which has given freedom to our country.

The proprietors of this exhibition would respectfully inform the citizens of St. Louis and the public generally, that they have fitted up this Great Natural Work, which affords one of the grandest moral spectacles ever offered to the contemplation of man. For particulars see small bills.—*Missouri Republican*, St. Louis, June 15, 1839. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

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