

John Powell Irish

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JOHN POWELL IRISH was born in Iowa City, Iowa, January 1, 1843, and died in Oakland, California, October 6, 1923. He obtained his education in his home town and at seventeen years of age taught in the Third Ward school in Iowa City. In 1864 he acquired the *Iowa City Press* which he edited for the following eighteen years, and which under his management at once became one of the leading Democratic papers of the state. In 1867 he was elected representative and was re-elected in 1869 and 1871, serving in the Twelfth, Thirteenth, and Fourteenth general assemblies, taking high rank as a legislator. He was the author of the law which changed the time of electing school officers from general to special elections so as to take school affairs out of party politics. He was an eloquent and efficient helper of John A. Kasson in the struggle for the appropriation to erect the new Capitol, which was carried on through three assemblies and was secured in the Fourteenth. He was an able friend of the State University and was instrumental in securing an addition to the endowment. He served as a member of the Board of Regents of the University from 1868 to 1870 and was largely instrumental in securing the establishment of the Law and Medical departments. He helped create the Iowa Soldiers Orphans Home at Davenport and was one of its trustees up to the time of his removal from the state. In 1868 he was the Democratic candidate for Congress in the then Fourth District against William Loughridge, and in 1872 in the then Fifth District against James Wilson. He was also in 1877 his party's candidate for governor against John H. Gear. In all these contests he failed of election, as his party was much in the minority. He removed to Oakland, California, in 1882 and bought the *Oakland Times*, but in 1886 sold it and took over the *Alta California* of San Francisco. In 1894 President Cleveland appointed him naval officer of customs at San Francisco, which office he continued to hold under the McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft administrations. In California by appointment on the governor's staff he obtained his well known title of "Colonel." He was a commissioner of the Yosemite National Park, and was president of the board of managers of the Home for the Blind in Oakland. For the last twenty years of his life he gave much personal attention to the management of his thousand-acre vegetable farm in the Sacramento Valley. He was an orator of great ability, and a writer of versatility and power. Although a lawyer, his other activities prevented him from devoting himself to that profession. He had strong convictions. Although a Democrat he refused to follow his party in support of "free silver." Although the people of his adopted state generally opposed the Japanese, he was a friend and defender of that race. He opposed the popular movement for woman suffrage. He was an occasional visitor to his native state in the later years of his life and never lost his love for Iowa City, the University, and Iowa.

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