

Edwin T. Meredith

John T. Clarkson

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

Clarkson, John T. "Edwin T. Meredith." *The Annals of Iowa* 16 (1929), 578-584.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.5298>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Nebraska. McKinley appointed James Wilson of Iowa, whom Roosevelt and Taft retained. Wilson first appointed David F. Houston of Missouri, whom Edwin T. Meredith succeeded. Henry C. Wallace of Iowa was the next secretary of agriculture in the Harding and Coolidge administrations. Secretary Jardine of Kansas succeeded Mr. Wallace. So the entire existence of the Department of Agriculture has been presided over by men of Iowa, or one of its neighboring states.

Here faces us the portrait of James Wilson. That of Henry C. Wallace is in existence, though not in our collections. Meredith's is the subject of importance to this assembly this afternoon.

I would speak in cordial satisfaction a welcome then, to you and to your guests, the family and business associates of our late distinguished citizen, Edwin T. Meredith. The address of the occasion will be given by one of your number, the friend of Mr. Meredith, former senator, John T. Clarkson.

EDWIN T. MEREDITH

By JOHN T. CLARKSON

When our forefathers and patriots of '76 proclaimed to the world the sound fundamental doctrine that man has "certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," the sage men of letters and statecraft in the Old World were moved to voice their opposition thereto, as the philosophy thus proclaimed was by them unknown and unthinkable.

It was said by one, regarded as an authority, that a government founded upon the basis of such philosophy could not long survive, nor could it develop men of character or quality. Let the record of over a century and a half be submitted as evidence in support of the soundness of the philosophy thus proclaimed. We find the names of Webster, Lincoln, Blaine, Cleveland, Roosevelt, Bryan, Wilson; and in our own state, Harlan, Allison, Kirkwood, Weaver, Cummins, Dolliver, Dodge, Young, the Wallaces, and the man whose portrait we present today, to be placed with a host of other valiant, patriotic, liberty-loving men, representative of a truly great people. These men stand out among their fellows, yet typify a standard made possible by popular government, where the best in man has an opportunity for development and expression.

In this environment and as a result thereof men have achieved fame and name in oratory, letters, statecraft, and business, but few if any stand out more conspicuously than E. T. Meredith.

Mr. Meredith was endowed with a wonderfully pleasing personality, a commanding presence, a keen intellect, and his ability to vigorously present and ably defend his convictions made him one of Iowa's outstanding figures in the many affairs of life, always the champion of what he believed to be the right in public and private affairs.

The people of Iowa learned to admire and love Meredith for his many qualities. He was a native of our beloved state, born and reared in the healthful environment of agriculture, to which he gave his best that it might advance and keep pace with other lines of endeavor. While thus engaged on a large scale he at the same time became a master mind in other lines of business and statecraft.

Having received the benefit of a common school education he sought to better prepare himself for his life's work at Highland Park College, in the city of Des Moines. Little could his fellows at Highland Park College have foreseen the useful life in the making.

While young Meredith was in school in Des Moines his grandfather, whom we knew as Uncle Thomas Meredith, owned and published a small newspaper devoted to the principles of government espoused by the Greenbackers, afterward known as the Populist party. The zeal, energy, active mind, and organizing ability of the young man was pressed into service by the owner, first as the handy man about the premises, then as bookkeeper, advertising manager, and finally in addition to his school work he was placed in management of the publication.

When he was married at nineteen years of age, Uncle Thomas Meredith gave to him, as a wedding present, the plant known as the *Farmer's Tribune*, which he sold within a few years, and the publication that became so large a part of his life was launched upon an uncharted sea. Here his genius for organization found expression, and his ability to handle the larger affairs of business, en masse, grew and grew, until *Successful Farming* became known throughout the nation, in every walk of life, and especially among those who endeavor to develop and keep agriculture on a high standard, and those engaged therein on the front rank of forward thinking, moral living, useful men and women of the world.

To *Successful Farming* he later added the publication known as *The Dairy Farmer*. Then came one of the proudest achievements of his life—the publication of *Better Homes and Gardens*. In this publication he gave expression to his very soul in his endeavor to inspire, aid, and assist in building and developing better homes; expressive of his realization that a people cannot become great, nor long endure as such, without a strong, energetic, and constructive love of home and home life, not merely in the ownership of the house alone, but all that goes with it to make the ideal "home" such as finds lodgment in the hearts and souls of the best men and women, expressing the love of the beautiful ideal, though it be but a humble cottage.

His active life was not devoted entirely to the happiness of the adult. He created a fund to be loaned to the young people upon the farms with which to buy a pig, a calf, a lamb, or a colt, in order to develop and encourage a love for animal life, and the spirit of thrift and usefulness in the business world. This act upon his part attracted the attention of men interested in the training of youth and became the

nucleus of a national organization for like purpose, which organization he served as an honored president.

He was identified with and was an official of some of the strongest and leading banking institutions of the city of Des Moines, and was a director of the Reserve Bank. He was an active member and an official of the Chamber of Commerce, both city and national, but withal he kept in close contact with and in active control of his large publishing house, where the Meredith publications were issued under his guidance, with the aid of over five hundred assistants, all of whom became inspired with the spirit of co-operation drawn from the genius and the love and affection of their leader. So firmly and well has the institution's foundation and structure been laid and built that the work goes on, guided and influenced by the hope and good will established; a house where beauty abounds, adorned by the best in literature, art, and sculpture, where the most humble workman finds pleasure in the doing of his part, and wherein he is wont to take pride in saying "I am a part of the institution known as the 'Meredith Publications'."

Though he never held an elective public office, he took a lively, active, and leading part in public affairs. Once he was the nominee of his party for governor of this great state, but the Republican majority, for which Iowa is noted, even Meredith could not overcome.

When we became engaged in the World War our President availed himself of the services of Mr. Meredith, and he was sent abroad to study conditions that we might the better organize our industrial forces to aid and assist in doing our part. Upon his return his active, energetic, organizing ability was felt nationally, as we had known and felt it in our state. Then came the opportunity for our War President to give to the people the services of a genius for public service and he selected Mr. Meredith to become a member of his Cabinet as secretary of agriculture. Promptly he began the work with that same energetic, inspiring force displayed at home, so that when his successor took office he found a revolutionized department, one that became and has held its place among the other strong departments of our national government, where it is said today that the organizing influence of E. T. Meredith is felt and known.

Meredith's voice and influence were given without reserve in behalf of the plans, hopes and aspirations of our War President to establish a system by which wars between nations could be avoided, wherein it was said that we were morally bound to take the step to make good the favorably accepted proclamation that we were engaged in a war to abolish wars. In short, that if our Christian civilization hoped to survive we must become identified with other nations in establishing a World Congress, if you please, to pronounce international law for the guidance of nations in international affairs, and a Court of Justice in which disputes could be adjusted without armed conflict, but nationalism was too firmly imbedded in the minds of men, and we were not permitted to take a part, though we had given to the world a concrete ex-

ample in establishing a national Congress with a Federal Court for all of our states.

Meredith passed to the great beyond firmly believing that our people erred and that in a time not far distant we would reverse our present policy for the more advanced one, in accord with the spirit in which we live and teach.

As we measure the age of men, Meredith passed on when a comparatively young man, but during the thirty years of his business life, beginning in the days when he used a pushcart to transport his publications to the post office, and ending in 1928 with a world-wide experience and as a national figure among men and affairs, he lived a full, active life, far beyond the average of men of affairs. Though short in years, his was long in achievements, and the satisfying thought comes to us that it was not a selfish life, but one devoted actively to the betterment of all mankind.

It is well that the portraits of such men are placed where the eye of the on-coming generations can see and know the kind and character of men who have grown and developed as world figures under our philosophy of life and government and made secure to our successors in a written constitution, and that if we would have men and women noble in character, strong in the virtues that go to make a great people, ever working to improve the standard, we must religiously guard the portals of constitutional government where human rights are recognized as inherent, and where government is organized among men to guard and protect such rights as an aid in our pursuit of happiness. Let us again and again draw from the fountain of faith that we have in our fathers, who made it possible that we and our successors might enjoy the blessings of liberty as we know them under our form of government.

My personal acquaintance with Meredith dates back to the time when he was a boy of eleven years of age, and later became one of close, warm, personal friendship. As members of the same political faith I enjoyed his confidence and joined with him in the many efforts to carry out the principles which he firmly believed to be to the best interests of all concerned. My mind goes back to the days when equal suffrage was a paramount issue, and I cannot forget his sincere, aggressive, interest therein. Temperance to him was a gospel of faith, and no influence, financial or otherwise, could swerve him from a course having for its purpose the advancement of his cause. Better highways was an ever constant subject to which he gave time and money. In truth his devotion to hard surfaced highways in his candidacy for governor lost for him the support of those who believed Iowa's soil was good enough, as it had served those who had gone before. I have oftentimes heard him speak of the need and necessity of readjustment in state governmental affairs to avoid overlapping in administrative matters.

As an employer of labor he gave active support and influence to bring about the enactment of the Workmens' Compensation Law in Iowa.

When it became apparent to his family and friends that his physical strength could not long endure the demands made thereon by his active participation in so many varied and important issues and activities, he was admonished and urged to refrain from taking such an active and energetic part in the many interests so close to his heart, but his was a heart that could not be satisfied in giving less than all that was in him. He could not stand by or be regarded as one among a number of others to be counted as so many men in a movement. Thus until the last, he was engaged to his utmost capacity in the furtherance of every cause which he believed to be right.

The cause in which he believed was the all important matter with him. Men's personal ambitions were secondary, and only regarded as worth while when essential and necessary for the advancement of affairs of state in the direction of and for the public welfare. He was a liberal contributor in time and money to all endeavors having for their object and purpose the improvement of the community interests, and any movement to improve living conditions received from him his best efforts, however modest the beginning.

It was not strange nor unexpected that one of Meredith's active life would meet with opposition, but it can be said in truth that in all of his efforts, actively aggressive as they were, he left no personal wound among his fellows or those he opposed.

Disappointed at times, yet never discouraged, he accorded to others the rights and privileges he claimed for himself. He went on with the work until called upon to "pass on to the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns."

He lived the part of one of Iowa's distinguished citizens, a great American.

Following Senator Clarkson's address the secretary read the following list of names of members of this association who died during the last biennium with their legislative service:

George S. Allyn.....	Mt. Ayr.....	R. 38, 39, S. 26, 27, 28, 29
Irving P. Bowdish.....	Waubeck.....	R. 17, 19
James Joseph Bruce.....	Rolfe.....	R. 21
C. E. Bull.....	Milton.....	R. 27
Edward Boland.....	Williamsburg.....	R. 30, 31
H. W. Byers.....	{ Harlan Des Moines }	R. 25, 26, 28
E. J. C. Bealer.....	Cedar Rapids.....	R. 29, 30, 31
Milton K. Campbell....	{ Harlan Pamona, Calif. }	R. 16
John B. Classen.....	Marshalltown.....	R. 26, 27, S. 28, 29
J. F. Clyde.....	Osage.....	S. 23
Oliver Coomes.....	Atlantic.....	R. 17, 18

E. D. Chassell.....	{ LeMars Des Moines }	R. 25, 30, 31
George D. Darnall.....	West Union.....	R. 22
W. P. Dawson.....	Aurelia.....	R. 33, 34, 35
A. H. Davison.....	{ Rock Rapids Des Moines }	R. 25
E. E. Dotson.....	Colfax.....	R. 18, 19
George L. Finn.....	Los Angeles.....	R. 21, S. 22, 23, 24, 25
Shirley Gilliland.....	Glenwood.....	S. 30, 31, 32, 33, 34
John L. Good.....	Boone Co.....	R. 26, 27
William Groneweg.....	Council Bluffs.....	S. 22, 23, 24, 25
George D. Harrison.....	Columbus Jet.....	R. 13
Wm. S. Hart.....	Waukon.....	R. 30, 31
Lyman S. Huntley.....	Chariton.....	R. 26
Geo. W. Henderson.....	Rolfe.....	S. 25, 26
Geo. Hilsinger.....	Sabula.....	R. 28, 29, S. 35, 36
Ernest L. Hogue.....	Blencoe.....	S. 29, 30, 31
J. A. T. Hull.....	{ Clk. of Senate Lieut. Gov. }	
E. J. Hartshorn.....	Emmetsburg.....	R. 15, S. 16, 17, 18, 19
Emmons Johnson.....	Waterloo.....	S. 13
Henry R. Keagy.....	{ Epworth Independence }	R. 29
David L. Lyons.....	{ Mahaska Co. Clarion }	R. 21
Timothy E. McCurdy.....	Hazelton.....	R. 27, 28
Samuel Mayne.....	Bancroft.....	R. 26
S. T. Meservey.....	Ft. Dodge.....	R. 21, 29
John McAllister.....	Cedar Rapids.....	R. 30, 31-32
S. F. Prouty.....	{ Marion Co. Des Moines }	R. 18
John F. Potter.....	Quimby.....	R. 23
L. F. Potter.....	{ Pottawattamic Co. Harlan }	R. 26, 27
David J. Palmer.....	Washington.....	S. 24, 25, 26, 27
J. M. Schleicher.....	Livermore.....	R. 22
J. U. Sammis.....	LeMars.....	S. 33, 34
I. Lewis H. Smith.....	{ Algona Enroll. Clk. in House }	8th G. A.
Wm. D. Sheean.....	Anamosa.....	R. 27, S. 35, 36
John Y. Stone.....	Glenwood.....	R. 12, 13, S. 14, 15, R. 16, 17
J. H. Trewin.....	{ Lansing Cedar Rapids }	R. 25, S. 26, 27, 28, 29
M. L. Temple.....	Osceola.....	R. 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38
George C. White.....	Nevada.....	R. 32, 33

There then followed reminiscences concerning legislative affairs, participated in by George M. Titus, E. C. Roach, and R. G. Clark. Former senator Perry Engle spoke substantially as follows:

SPEECH BY PERRY ENGLE

Gentlemen and comrades, we again have assembled in our biennial meeting. In the last two years death has levied a costly tribute upon our ranks; one by one at the beckoning of the silent messenger our comrades have passed through the gate to the land of the dead. We miss their presence and counsels. They bore the flag triumphant even to the gates of the sunset.

I congratulate you, comrade pioneers of Iowa, that you are here today to talk over and enjoy reminiscences of days that are gone. It must be satisfying to you to contemplate Iowa—the Iowa you have seen develop from a wilderness to the state it is.

We pioneers had battles to fight, great difficulties to overcome, but we passed to our worthy successors a gem of a state, inhabited by the best people on earth. We hope our successors will honor us by excelling us. We can put fear out of our hearts. This nation will survive, this state will prosper. Give the people free speech and free press, then we are saved. Reason never has failed men; only force has made the wrecks in the world.

You tell me that law is above freedom of utterance, and I reply that you can have no wise laws nor free enforcement of wise laws unless there is free expression of the wisdom of the people—and, alas, their folly with it. But, if there is freedom, folly will die of its own poison, and the wisdom will survive. That is the history of the race. It is the proof of man's kinship with God.

President Washington said: "My first wish is to see war banished from the earth, war and pillage have drenched the world in blood."

Hope, love, and fraternity have not deserted the world. We see in peace the morning dawn of a better day.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said:

"Along its front no sabers shine,
No blood-red pennons wave;
Its banner bears the single line,
'Our duty is to save.'"

May around the earth the church bells chime, "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

Were I a Raphael I would paint two pictures. In one I would paint the wails of dying men, the moans of weeping wives and mothers, the cries of suffering children; I would paint the background as black as Egyptian night; I would drape it in blood. I would call this picture "War." In the other I would paint the love, hope, and light in weeping eyes, the dimples and rose on the faded cheek; I would paint all that

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.