

Utility of Our Personal Archives Collections

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ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

UTILITY OF OUR PERSONAL ARCHIVES COLLECTIONS

Proof of the utility to historical writers of the first order lies in the language of prefaces and bibliographies of two books reviewed at the head of a list of "Outstanding Biographies" in the November number of *Review of Reviews*, "World of Books" section. We append both reviews for their excellence in the treatment of John Marsh by Dr. George D. Lyman and Nelson W. Aldrich by Dr. Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, respectively, indispensable to understanding of the earliest and of the Allissonian eras of Iowa history.

Doctor Lyman's introduction includes:

This biography of John Marsh is based entirely on source material: on old diaries, journals, faded letters, statements and reminiscences and memoirs found in many quarters: the library of Harvard University; the Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois Historical Society collections; the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa at Des Moines; the Michigan Historical Commission at Lansing; the Jefferson Memorial at St. Louis, Missouri; the files of the Indian Office of the War Department at Washington, D. C.; the Bancroft Library at the University of California; and the California State Library at Sacramento.

The author cites fifteen items from our Street Collection (General Joseph M. Street, Indian agent at Prairie du Chien and at Agency, Iowa); and from our photostats of Indian materials in Washington, three items in a letter from John Marsh to Col. Thomas L. McKenney July 10, 1827, and thanks our institution.

We set out Doctor Stephenson's special acknowledgments by way of showing our readers the care and courage he employed in producing an American biography that will prove to be the most valuable book in its class to Iowa history. His entire manuscript was read by Professors W. B. Munro, F. L. Paxson, C. L. Longley and H. B. Larned. Portions dealing with special phases were read by Professors R. M. Story, G. S. Burgess and Felix Frankfurter, by Hon. Carter Glass, Frank Vanderlip, A. H.

Shelton, Miss Ida M. Tarbell and Professor Allen Nevins. With the rarest candor and lucidity Doctor Stephenson sets forth the disagreement with him of certain eminent authorities on important phases and accounts for his choice of conclusions rather than theirs. Then he continues, or includes:

There is a long list of persons who control manuscript sources, or who have contributed first hand information, whom it is impossible to thank adequately. To no one am I more indebted than to Mrs. Roosevelt, who has permitted extensive search in the rich mine of the Roosevelt papers. Would that it were still possible to thank the late Chief Justice of the United States for opening freely his personal papers, which are of inestimable historical importance. Mr. George B. Cortelyou showed every courtesy in connection with the vast mass of the McKinley papers. The Allison papers, the most voluminous collection of all, were not only opened for research by Mr. Edgar R. Harlan, in whose custody they are, but so far as quoted were carefully checked by him. * * *

(Doctor Stephenson could have included in his statement the use of the private papers of General Grenville M. Dodge.—E. R. H.)

In his bibliography the author thus refers to these two sources:

ALLISON MSS. (Senator William B. Allison). Approximately 200,000 letters, 1864-1908, chiefly to Allison, most valuable for indications of changes in the political viewpoints and usages of the middle west over this long period; custody of Edgar R. Harlan, Curator, Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.

DODGE MSS. (General Grenville M. Dodge). Twenty-three record books, 1853-1915, and 409 volumes of letters, 1851-1915, valuable on railroad expansion west of the Mississippi and on political developments in the middle west; custody same as Allison.

Both books are models of discovery, adaptation and interpretation of private, often confidential, papers of persons no longer living. Doctor Stephenson states that "In accordance with the provisions of our copyright law, letters found among a statesman's papers cannot be printed without permission of the person who wrote the letters, or of his heirs," for which reason he says "I had to cut out of my tentative manuscript, letters of this sort because permission to print was refused."

It gratifies our institution to observe that its tenet of sanctity of private papers¹ is claimed by another custodian and respected by so great an author of so great a book. It is correct and complete compliance with the spirit of good faith with the dead.

¹See "Ethics Involved in the Handling of Personal Papers," by Edgar R. Harlan, *ANNALS OF IOWA*, Vol. XVI, pp. 610-21.

JOHN MARSH, PIONEER: THE LIFE STORY OF A TRAIL-BLAZER ON SIX FRONTIERS. By George D. Lyman. Charles Scribner's Sons. 394 pp. Ill. \$3.50.

Here is a case of the biography being so engulfed in the history of the times in which its subject lived that his name had almost passed from recollection. Yet John Marsh, if not a frontier hero, was at any rate associated with important episodes in frontier history. In his own person he embodied phrases of the westward expansion movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. Dr. Lyman's account of his life is virtually based on manuscript materials, found in the archives of historical societies and states. It is a story new to the general public, as exciting as any novel of pioneer life, and in several passages well bearing out the familiar adage that truth is stranger than fiction.

Marsh was Massachusetts-born, a graduate of Harvard College, a school-teacher at Fort Snelling, the army post on the site of St. Paul, Minn., Indian agent at Prairie du Chien, Wis., and after fomenting hostilities between whites and Indians on the border, had a rather important part in the Black Hawk War of 1832. At New Salem, Ill., then Lincoln's home town, Marsh fell in with settlers to whom he entrusted the rearing of his son (by a half-breed mother), while he himself pushed on to Missouri and thence, after a failure at storekeeping, by the Santa Fe trail to California, then a Mexican province. At the tiny pueblo of Los Angeles in 1836 he began the practice of medicine, although he had nothing more than his Harvard A. B. diploma, couched in sonorous Latin, to prove his qualifications. Trekking northward, he bought an enormous rancho at the foot of Mount Diablo and became a cattle king, inducing some of his old Missouri neighbors to make the hazardous covered-wagon journey across the plains and mountains to the coast. Thus he had a hand in bringing American settlers to California years before the gold discovery. When the rush began in the late '40's Marsh himself was among the successful placer miners. In the meantime he had been active in stimulating the American revolt from Mexican rule. He was killed for his money by Mexican bandits, but the great treasure that he was supposed to have hidden on his ranch was never accounted for. Avarice seems to have been a besetting sin with Marsh, if his contemporaries told the truth about him! His biographer makes no effort to explain away the mean and petty conduct imputed to him at different times throughout his life. The new version of an old maxim—*Nil nisi hokum*—is not obeyed by Dr. Lyman.

NELSON W. ALDRICH: A LEADER IN AMERICAN POLITICS, by Nathaniel Wright Stephenson. Charles Scribner's Sons. 496 pp. Ill. \$5.

The political history of America might be told effectively in a series of biographies, provided the subjects were wisely chosen and the writing based on a thorough study of correspondence and other original sources. If such a project were ever carried through, the result would

be something quite different from what now passes as our political history. We could not have a better example of the intelligent combination and co-operation of scientific history and biography than is offered in Dr. Nathaniel Wright Stephenson's *Nelson W. Aldrich, a Leader in American Politics*. Here the skillful and sagacious use of unpublished materials reveals long-hidden secrets and makes plain many a hitherto obscure chapter in the politics of the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth.

Mr. Aldrich, who represented Rhode Island in the United States Senate from 1883 to 1913, was a statesman of recognized abilities whose fate it was to be distrusted by a large element of his own party. If that did not greatly disturb him in the days of his power, it was not, as was commonly thought, because he held a public-be-damned attitude, but rather because he honestly believed that the great public was an overgrown child truly unable to take care of itself without a guardian's watchful aid. Those who knew Theodore Roosevelt only after he had left the White House may be more or less surprised by Dr. Stephenson's revelations of the long-continued intimacy between Roosevelt and Aldrich. Then, too, "the Four" in the Senate—Aldrich, Allison, Platt of Connecticut, and Spooner—formed a sort of bodyguard for Roosevelt in the early years of his administration, as this book shows. That wise old Connecticut Yankee, Orville H. Platt, was an impressive figure in those days, although the general public never knew him well. Allison of Iowa and Spooner of Wisconsin saw the clouds gathering in the West long before the storms of insurgency broke in the Republican party. All is clearly told in this admirable biography, which closes with an excellent account of Aldrich's part in laying the foundations of the Federal Reserve System in American banking.

Another good instance of history-making biography, occurring in a wholly different field, is *John Marsh, Pioneer*, by George D. Lyman.

THE TESSON CLAIM IN LEE COUNTY AND THE EARLIEST ORCHARD IN IOWA

Tradition and fact have agreed on the earliest plantation of cultivated fruit trees in Iowa being near the present town of Montrose in Lee County. The confirmation by the United States government of the award by the Spanish lieutenant governor of the Tesson claim to the heirs of Thomas F. Riddick is of record in the litigation over the subject, but those details are not easily

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