

Edgar R. Harlan

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EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

EDGAR R. HARLAN

When Edgar R. Harlan at the age of 29 became county attorney of Van Buren County it seemed as if his success as a lawyer had been assured. He had a right to look forward to a satisfactory career in his chosen profession. Environment and circumstances decreed that he should devote his life to a worthy public service.

He had been graduated from the high school in Keosauqua and had secured education in the law at the Drake University law school. The quaint old courthouse in his town was a daily reminder of the historic past of his community and the state. At this bar had appeared many of the notable early Iowa practitioners and judges. From this picturesque bend in Iowa's largest river, reminiscent of steamboat and ox-team days, men had gone forth as statesmen and jurists to carry the name and fame of Iowa far and wide. There were real first settlers still occupying some of the little white cottages and many of their sons and daughters were active. With his native faculty of keen observation Mr. Harlan came to a fine appreciation of his torical values.

About the time Mr. Harlan had completed four years as attorney for the county, Charles Aldrich secured the promise from George C. Duffield of some articles on recollections of pioneer life. Mr. Duffield had come with his father to a home on Chequest creek in territorial days which was, when staked out, the farthest west of any claim in what is now Iowa. Mr. Harlan was Mr. Duffield's son-in-law and in the preparation of the articles for publication assisted as an amanuensis, and also personally took pictures of persons and scenes that were used and published in the ANNALS OF IOWA in 1903-4.

The Iowa Historical Department was taking shape under the guidance of its founder who had twenty years earlier laid the foundation by the gift of his historic collection to the state. Mr. Aldrich desired that the work should be continued and expanded, and to that end he induced Mr. Harlan to turn aside from his profession of the law to assist him; and so when the founder laid down the burden in 1908, Mr. Harlan was already prepared to carry on, and in due time he was elected to be curator of the department.

The span of service of Mr. Aldrich, the founder, and Mr. Harlan, the builder, covered more than fifty years, and both left an indelible impress upon the history preserving and the history writing of Iowa's first century. Mr. Harlan took up the task with a zeal that increased with his years. He more than supplemented the efforts of his predecessor. He was not a mere imitator, but he did faithfully carry out the well thought out plans that had been made not alone by the founder but by a considerable group of eminent men who gave of their thought and their service to preserve a record of the making of Iowa.

As the years are tolled off for Iowa's second century of statehood the general appreciation of the service of Mr. Harlan will be enhanced. Almost every nook and corner of Iowa's historical building bears evidence of Mr. Harlan's devotion to the fidelity with which he applied himself to the great task of collecting and preserving at the seat of state government the infinite variety of materials and records that will be found useful to the historian of Iowa in telling the story of making a great state out of a wilderness. Words of praise now written will seem inadequate to those who will some time appraise his work.

When Edgar R. Harlan came into his unquestioned responsibility as keeper of the records he gave all of his time and his talent, with plodding patience and unstinted sacrifice, directing the search for historic material not only in the public records and private libraries but in the memories of those who had personal knowledge of passing events. He added to the collection of portraits and autographs, to

the gallery of notable portraits, to the natural history and science departments, to the samples of pioneer implements and utensils, to the splendid library with its unrivaled historical and genealogical books and manuscripts, and to the material showing prehistoric Indian life. All this was in perfect accord with the purpose for which the department had been created and sustained. Had the state been more, just in the allocation of funds for the department the results would have been greater, but within the narrow limits set by the law makers, a truly creditable work was done.

In the constant effort to keep *THE ANNALS OF IOWA* on a high plane he was successful. His sense of beauty led him to sponsor the seemingly hopeless job of brushing aside the ugly store buildings and cheap residences surrounding the state capitol—but it was done. He had literally tramped up and down almost every river of Iowa and camped by every lake, so it was inevitable he should throw all his influence into the work of creating Iowa parks and saving Iowa beauty-spots. He encouraged monuments and memorials and the marking of trails and historic scenes. What he did in all these lines will live for long.

Edgar R. Harlan had a fine sense of values in historic material. He applied himself to getting this material together that history writers may have accurate information. He left to others to gain fame as word builders with the facts laid on the record shelves. His fondness for Iowa led him into almost every channel of information, and for many years his footsteps will be followed to good advantage.

ORA WILLIAMS

DEPARTMENT NOTES

To carry out a long desired project of improving the museum displays in natural history, and to assist in installing new exhibits, Maynard F. Reece, an artist especially trained in natural history subjects, joined the staff of the Department in August. As a trained artist, Mr. Reece will

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