

## Walter C. Willson

ISSN 0003-4827



Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

This work has been identified with a [Creative Commons Public Domain Mark 1.0](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

"Walter C. Willson." *The Annals of Iowa* 4 (1900), 557-558.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.2639>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

McCrary, of Keokuk, and was admitted to the bar in 1864. Immediately afterwards he was invited by J. B. Howell, who had published a paper several years earlier at Keosauqua, to join the staff of *The Gate City*, as associate editor. This invitation was accepted. Journalism and not the law was his proper field of effort, and it was not long until he had won an enviable reputation throughout the State. He was a keen-eyed observer, an omnivorous reader and a clear-headed, philosophic thinker. He became one of the ablest and most versatile editorial writers in Iowa. His early life on the farm, his habits of close observation, his appreciation and love of nature, and his wide acquaintance with the pioneers of our State, had given him a fund of out of the way knowledge possessed by no other Iowa journalist. And above and beyond all this, he was a man of the purest morals and the kindest heart. There are hundreds of men throughout the State who will say today: "The kindest words ever written about me were from the pen of Sam Clark." We once heard him reproached by a great Iowa jurist for so constantly "saying and doing things for other men and seldom anything for Sam Clark!" But he enjoyed the opportunities which fell in his way to act generously toward friends—and who was not his friend? If a friend called upon him at a busy moment in Washington, while he was serving in Congress, he was certain to be invited to a longer visit before he left the city. Nothing so pleased him as a long evening's visit with a valued friend. In 1894 he was elected to a seat in the national House of Representatives and re-elected two years later. He was always an important factor in his party's State conventions and councils, and very frequently the author of its platform of principles. When fit names were mentioned for governor or U. S. senator his would come first or close to the head of the list. He was a delegate in the Republican National conventions of 1872, '76 and '80. The president appointed him commissioner of education to the Paris Exposition of 1889, which gave him a long-coveted opportunity of travel in Europe. He was four years postmaster of the city of Keokuk. That he served twenty-one years as a member of the public school board of Keokuk, fourteen of which he was its president, shows the high confidence of those who knew him best and his own absorbing interest in the cause of education. It also shows that he shrank from no public duty, however laborious and unremunerative. In all the characteristics of a grand manhood he was admirably equipped. For fully thirty years he was recognized as one of the foremost Iowa editors, in many respects without an equal. He was possessed of that sublime patience which always enabled him to bide his time—and the fruition of his hopes doubtless came to him as far as was possible to one who was racked with acute pain during most of the years of his manhood. He was one who could "suffer and be strong."

---

WALTER C. WILLSON was born at Arkwright, Chautauqua county, New York, December 28, 1824; he died at Webster City, Iowa, August 16, 1900. Mr. Willson came west some time in the early fifties with his brother, the late Sumler Willson, and remained for a while in Wisconsin. But in 1854 they removed to Iowa, with some money, but with a much larger capital in the way of perseverance, energy and enthusiastic ambition to achieve business success. They had started with the intention of pushing on still farther west or northwest, but upon reaching the beautiful plain upon which Webster City afterward arose, they determined to stop and build a town. A small tract of land had been laid out in town lots and called Newcastle. They acquired a controlling interest in this new town and changed the name to Webster City. At that time the present county of Hamilton was a part of Webster county, as the reader may see by reference to the old maps. The Willsons rapidly made many improvements in their little town—erecting houses, keeping a hotel, building a mill, bridging the river,

improving the roads, securing better mail facilities, promoting immigration, encouraging the establishment of a newspaper, etc., etc. Probably the greatest service Mr. Walter Willson ever rendered to Webster City came through the division of Webster county. He was elected to the house of representatives of the State legislature of 1856—the last which assembled in Iowa City. He secured the passage of a law which divided Webster county, and created the new county of Hamilton, with Webster City and Fort Dodge named as the new county seats. Hon. W. W. Hamilton, a senator from Dubuque, who had been chosen president of the senate (lieutenant governors were only provided for in the constitution of 1857), favored Mr. Willson's bill. He was complimented by Mr. Willson by naming the new county Hamilton. Judge W. W. Hamilton was long a leading business man of Dubuque county—prominent in politics—and especially active in railroad extension to the westward. That Hamilton county bears his name was wholly due to the happy and kindly thought and appreciative disposition of Mr. Willson. Walter C. Willson, after some nine years of earnest work at Webster City, removed to Chicago, where he became a member of a prominent business house. But he returned to Webster City where he and his brother still retained large interests in real estate, and in 1868 they once more began their earnest work in promoting the growth of the town and county. Our space will not admit of an enumeration of the various business interests which they undertook alone or in a general way fostered and secured. In 1878 Mr. Walter Willson conceived the idea of building a railroad to the coal mines at Lehigh, Webster county, some 18 or 20 miles distant. (About this time his brother withdrew from the firm and henceforth their interests were separate, though they continued in the same brotherly friendship to the end of their days. Mr. Sumler Willson was thrown from a horse in 1882 and so severely injured that he died.) Several capitalists of Chicago and Wisconsin became interested with Mr. Willson in the construction of his railroad, which was successfully built. It proved a most excellent business enterprise, giving an outlet to vast amounts of coal and employment to a large number of men. Mr. Willson had been the active manager of the road since it was opened, and almost daily went out to Lehigh, keeping the closest watch of everything that transpired along the line. It was while thus engaged, on Thursday, August 16, that a car tipped over and pinned him to the ground. His injuries were so severe that he expired three hours afterwards. He was a man of rare business ability. No obstacle nor any amount of opposition could dampen his ardor. He had thus given forty-six years of earnest and faithful work to the development and growth of the business interests of his town and the surrounding country, all of which was crowned with a large degree of success. He was ever a friend to the laboring men whose respect was manifested by the great number who attended his funeral, especially from the coal regions, where he had been many years their employer. His funeral was the largest ever held in Hamilton county. He will be long remembered for his earnest labors as a successful pioneer legislator and far-seeing business man.

MRS. SARAH CANDAOG (PEARSE) PARKER, a descendant of the Welsh Pearses, the Scotch McLellans, the English Wilders, and the American Pecks and Monroes, the wife of Prof. L. F. Parker, of Grinnell, was born seventy-two years ago in Vermont and died at her home in Grinnell, June 5, 1900. In a model Puritan family she early acquired a love of knowledge, an optimistic character and an ambition to be useful. She graduated at Oberlin in 1851 under such teachers as Presidents Asa Mahan, Charles G. Finney and James H. Fairchild, and as Professors John Morgan, Timothy Hudson and James Monroe, a relative, and with such college friends as the widely known Lucy Stone, Antoinette L. Brown, Ferdinand

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.