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**February 18, 2009**

**THIS WEEK: Speech by a Pioneer Lawmakers Member**

**BACKGROUND:** The following remarks come from the Senate Journal. Thursday, April 1, 1971

**Joint Convention  
Pioneer Lawmakers  
House Chamber - 2p.m.**

Mr. Dewel addressed the joint convention as follows:

I bring you greetings, understanding and sympathy from those who preceded you—The Pioneer Lawmakers of Iowa.

I am not going to tell you what you should do. You know your problems better than anyone and I am sure you will come up with the answers. You can serve just as well without any pleading by me.

I am going to say a little about those who once sat in these seats and served the state well. We were not wholly content with what we did, but we were satisfied we had done our best as we saw it at the time.

We will welcome you to the Pioneers twenty years after the day of your first service in the legislature when you too can recall with pleasure the friends you have made. There are a few bad memories—only the good ones come to mind.

Our hair has thinned. Our eyeglasses have thickened. Our voices which once roared now have a tendency to quiver and squeak. But our interest in good government is as strong as ever. We have confidence in you.

Who are the Pioneers?

They are legislators and elected state officials who served twenty years or more ago. It is not an organization to do anything. There are no dues. Membership is automatic.

They meet every other year on call of the president and invitation by the legislature. They meet together in the morning for tales of by-gone days when they too were important. They choose officers for the next biennium and in the afternoon meet in joint session with the legislature for a short program.

The Pioneers were organized in 1886. At that meeting there were those who served in the 1850's and 1860's and one who had served in the first Territorial legislature in 1838. His name was Hawkins Taylor.

Annual sessions are not new in Iowa. The eight Territorial legislatures met annually prior to the 1857 constitution when the biennial session was adopted.

It may surprise you to know there were 3,360 individuals who served in the sessions from the First through the Forty-ninth General Assembly.

Their names are preserved in the Redbook of 1941-42 and among the names was that new household word "Agnew".

The sixty-third General Assembly passed a resolution to bring the list up to date and it is hoped by the Pioneers that the State Printer will now include the names since 1942 in the next Redbook.

Members of the early legislatures got \$2 per day for the first fifty days and then only \$1 per day. It made for shorter sessions.

A feature of Pioneer meetings from the start are tales of the old days by members. They were once published in printed book form and are fascinating. There was no bitterness over battles lost and most tales were humorous. I have selected a few which may interest you.

Remember in the old days the men were young. They had to be to fight the wilderness and pioneer problems. They were quick to anger and quick to forgive.

In one heated debate one exasperated member called another a ring-tailed baboon. He was called down by the Chair and apologized by saying he meant to say his opponent was a NICE ring-tailed baboon.

The accused member, not to be outdone by his opponent, said he was sorry he said the fellow had a yellow streak down his back. He now observed it was white down the back and his scent was more powerful than his arguments. The speaker shut both up. They later became fast friends. The second man always regretted the speaker did not let him too observe the other was a NICE polecat.

When the speaker took the floor to argue on a bill an exasperated opponent said: "Our speaker is neglecting the duties of the office to which we elected him, and in coming onto the floor to influence our votes he jumps around like a stump-tailed bull in fly time."

In 1862 the Civil War was going rather badly for the Northern forces. There were four Iowa regiments with General Grant when he captured Fort Donnellson. The news came by telegraph and when announced in the House a resolution was introduced and passed suspending the prohibition law for twenty-four hours. It was discreetly left out of the official journal however.

The next day one of the members who had evidently celebrated was worried about the next election and said he wanted his constituents to know he was intoxicated—with joy.

Several men in the early sessions had served in like positions in other states but came to Iowa for land and opportunity. One, Nathan B. Baker, had twice been speaker of the house and also was governor of New Hampshire, and served in the Iowa Legislature in 1860. He later was adjutant-general under Governor Kirkwood.

Feelings on the Civil War were strong in Iowa and the state was the site of the underground railroad passing slaves to Canada.

And in 1866 the Iowa House of Representatives passed a resolution to hang Jefferson Davis. The vote was 89 to 7 in favor.

They had their problems with the press too. I belong to both worlds being in the weekly newspaper field for some fifty years and serving in the Senate. I can sympathize with both—the reporter who has to condense a day's arguments into a column and the legislator who finds his intent if not his words misquoted. There's a big gulf between the press bench and the members' chairs only a few feet away. Neither can really understand the problems of the other. It might be good if a legislative reporter had to have service in the hot seats where he had to vote yes or not and not maybe. Both are under pressure.

I however hold no brief for a certain columnist. I think his comments on the legislature are ill-founded to say the least.

The first lobby on record was when the Owl family invaded the legislative halls to protest a grant of land to the Iowa Central Railroad. They wanted it given to the Clinton, Cedar Rapids and Missouri Railroad. They lost.

In my day we were not too concerned about lobbyists. We could and did vote against them when they were sitting in the back of the chamber and felt no holding back to advise them to get lost when we were busy.

By the way the constitution says, "The doors of each house shall be open except on such occasions as, in the opinion of the house, may require secrecy."

We were more concerned with television cameras fearing some would speak too much and too often. We used the previous question liberally to close off debate after everything had been said twice.

At times there was discussion in the House when members thought Senators were high hatting them. In one early session there was quite a fuss because sand boxes for the House members cost only fifty cents while Senate sand boxes cost seventy-five cents. Sand was for blotting. One House member observed the House ceiling was nine feet higher than the Senate's and the well of the House was an inch and a half higher than the Senate's. This made the Senate the lower house.

In the Pioneer meeting in 1894 a member told of his trip in 1860 to the session. He left his home at New Hampton December 31, 1860, with his bride of a few days. They traveled by democrat wagon behind a team. It was twenty-six below zero. It took six days for the trip and they were lost on the prairie three times.

In 1859 when the legislature adjourned, the water was so high from flooding streams that members in the eastern half of the state took a steamer from Des Moines down the Des Moines River to Keokuk and up the Mississippi to get home.

My first session was in 1945. World War II was on and tires and gas were rationed. I took a bus from Algona to Fort Dodge and the trolley interurban from there to Des Moines.

Des Moines was a battlefield on the weekend—battlefield of the sexes. Hotels Savery, Plaza and one other were occupied by the WACs. Friday afternoons they got passes. Navy boys from Ames and fly boys from Ottumwa came to Des Moines for the weekend. We adjourned at noon and beat it for home.

Iowa was a brown bag state with key clubs for those who wanted it by the drink instead of the bottle. There were slot machines. The Gotham Club, now the Embassy, had machines behind a discreet partition. There was open gambling at the Mainliner on Fleur Drive and Club 100 in West Des Moines.

One event had almost a modern touch in 1947. The House had passed the right to work bill. It was on special order in the Senate. A few thousand union workers came to Des Moines and demanded Governor Blue speak to them. He asked a few of us to come to the west porch with him. The minute he appeared there was a loud boeing. He silenced them by saying he had come at their invitation and if they didn't want to hear him he would go back to his desk where he had work to do. When he said he would sign the bill if the Senate passed it he was again booed. I'll never forget a loud boo that came from behind me. He was a six-foot two hundred plus pounder. Having discretion learned by many a black eye, I ignored him.

In the session sixteen years ago Des Moines had some kind of a sports or new car show. Julius LaRosa, the Bing Crosby or Beatles of that day, was to sing but canceled out at the last minute.

The chamber got a woman singer who was between engagements and asked the legislature to allow her to visit the governor and both houses of the legislature to publicize the change. We felt helpful. She knew how to get publicity. She ruffled the hair of the governor and marched down the center aisle of the House kissing the tops of the bald-headed members.

She could be described as buxom.

I was designated to escort her to the podium. She outweighed me forty pounds.

She took my arm and escorted me to the well of the Senate where to the delight of the assembled multitude of reporters, cameramen, lobbyists, the Senate, clerks and others she mugged me, sloppily, I might add.

Senator DeVere Watson was pro tem and presiding. He took a dim view of the proceedings and put on his scalping face. She took a look at him and felt like Custer at Little Big Horn and decided not to mess around with the Chief of the Pottawattamies.

She made a demure little speech and had to escort herself out. No one would get within ten feet of her. Some Senators in the front row hid behind their clerks. My clerk used a half box of tissues getting the war paint off my innocent face.

In one session a young fellow was irked because his flying instructor would not let him solo. So he stole a plane and had a ball for some three hours flitting around buildings in downtown Des Moines and the domes on the capitol. He flew at treetop height up and down streets waving to spectators. Television networks interrupted programs to put the flight on the air all over the country. Head shrinkers predicted he might make a grand final gesture and crash into a downtown building or the dome on the capitol. There was little coffee consumed that afternoon. He landed perfectly. He just wanted to show that he could fly a plane.

These are some of the things we old timers remember. We don't really recall tense fights. We remember the friends who fought for those legislative battles but can't recall whether one was for or against or what the scraps were all about.

Iowans are and were proud of their state. When Lincoln called the northern governors to Washington at the beginning of the Civil War, Samuel Kirkwood was Iowa Governor. When Lincoln asked him what he could do for Iowa, Kirkwood replied, "I came here not to find out what you could do for my state, but what my state could do for you."

One presiding officer in the old days told the Pioneers in acknowledging their visit: "May the evening of your days be as contented and happy as its morning was full of promise and its meridian full of honor."

As you too march into the past to join us who have served before you it is the hope of the Pioneer Lawmakers that you too will find your meridian full of honor and the contentment of a job well done.