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March 18, 2009

THIS WEEK: *The Rose of Iowa*

BACKGROUND: SAMUEL H. M. BYERS, son of James Byers, was born in Lawrence county, Pennsylvania, July 23, 1838. He received a common school education, and studied law with Hon. Wm. Loughridge and was admitted to the bar in 1861. Upon the breaking out of the Rebellion, Byers enlisted in 1861 in the 5th Regiment Iowa Infantry, and was appointed quartermaster sergeant. He was soon after promoted to adjutant of the regiment. At the battle of Mission Ridge, Byers was taken prisoner with eighty others of his own regiment, Nov. 25, 1863. He was held a prisoner for sixteen months, and was taken from one prison to another and suffered almost everything but death. After making two attempts to escape and being recaptured, the third time, Feb. 16, 1865, he was successful. While in prison, Byers composed the song, which has become national, "Sherman's March to the Sea." After his escape, Gen. Sherman sent for Byers and assigned him to duty on his staff. Byers, was selected by General Sherman as bearer of the first dispatches to Gen. Grant and the President after leaving Savannah. After the war, Byers returned here. In 1869, he was appointed United States Consul to Zurich, Switzerland. Byers was present in the Senate Chamber during the "Extra Session" on May 7, 1897, when the joint resolution was adopted to make the wild rose Iowa's official flower. Upon the adoption of the resolution, Byers was called forward to present a reading of his poem "The Rose of Iowa." Byers also wrote "Song of Iowa," adopted by the Iowa Legislature on March 20, 1911.

The Rose of Iowa

By S.H.M. Byers

Hast seen the wild rose of the west,
The sweetest child of morn?
Its feet the dewy fields have pressed,
Its breath is on the corn.

The gladsome prairie rolls and sweeps
Like billows to the sea,
While on its breast the red rose keeps
The white rose company.

The wild, wild rose whose fragrance dear
To every breeze is flung,
The same wild rose that blossomed here
When Iowa was young.

O, sons of heroes ever wear
The wild rose on your shield,
No other flower is half so fair
In love's immortal field.

Let others sing of mountain snows,
Or palms beside the sea,
The state whose emblem is the rose
Is the fairest far to me.

The Extra Session of the 26th General Assembly of the State of Iowa adopted the wild rose as the official state flower of Iowa on May 7, 1897.

WHEREAS, the Executive Council has authorized the wild rose of Iowa as one of the decorations on the silver service presented to the battleship "Iowa"; therefore be it

Resolved, by the Senate and House concurring, That the wild rose shall be officially designated as the flower of the state.

A specific variety of wild rose was not named in the legislation through *Rosa pratincola* (Synonym: *Rosa arkansana*) is thought to represent the variety intended by the legislation. The wild rose, adopted by the concurrent resolution, is often referred to today as the wild prairie rose.