

Ephraim H.

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OBITUARY.

DR. E. H. HARRIS.

On Friday afternoon, Dr. Ephraim H. Harris passed away at his home on Broad street, at four score and two years of age, and on Sunday afternoon his remains were laid to rest on the western hill where sleep most of that first generation of sturdy Grinnell pioneers. More than half a century of passing years has thinned their ranks until today but two survive who preceded Dr. Harris to the little settlement on the Iowa prairie in the first year of its existence. The two are E. S. Bartlett and Henry Hill. Of all those early comers to the settlement few lived to such an age, or played a so noteworthy part as Dr. Harris. The story of his life and activities here deserves a place in the annals of that courageous and faithful band of settlers whose works do follow them in the town and institutions which we have inherited.

It was one fine day in early spring, the year following the arrival of J. B. Grinnell and his little band, that Dr. Harris first landed in Grinnell. With his father, James Harris, he had driven across the prairies from Van Buren county behind a pair of mustang ponies. Henry Hill recalls clearly to this day how the energetic young doctor pulled up his animals and alighted near where Ramsey's grocery store is now located. He had heard of the new town and College that some New Englanders were starting in Poweshiek county, which were to be dedicated to the cause of freedom and equal opportunity. As he looked about that little settlement and caught the contagious enthusiasm of the first settlers he found it good to be here and from that time Grinnell became his natural home. He belonged here where there was real work for him to do.

At that time he was but twenty-seven years old, having been born on July 29, 1827, in Harrisville, Pa., a town laid out by his grandfather. As a young man he had attended school at Meadville, Pa., where he had prepared for the medical profession and was a roommate of William Boyd Allison, afterwards Iowa's famous statesman

and senator. Afterwards he had been employed in a physician's office at Warren, Pa., and in 1852 had joined his parents and the others of the family in Warren, Lee county, Iowa. There he taught school for a time and there was united in marriage to Rachel Hannlin, whose family was later to be identified with Grinnell through its other members. From Warren he moved with his bride to Farmington to practice medicine and from there came to Grinnell in March, 1855, as we have seen.

In the fall of 1855, after bringing his wife to Grinnell, he felt the need of further equipment for his life's work, though doubtless better prepared than the average practitioner of those days. Taking his wife and sister, Jennie Harris, he went to New York, where all three took a course in Bellevue Medical College. A less energetic, less ambitious young man, who had had to make his own way, might have faced such an undertaking somewhat hesitatingly and it is a mystery to the surviving members of his family how he could manage it, but manage it he did, meeting all their expenses and on his return bought silk dresses for his wife and sister—a thing not lightly to be considered in those days. This was characteristic of the man, and other members of the family acknowledge to him the possibility of enjoying many

advantages. Later his wife graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in Chicago and proved a great help to him in his work here as well as being a successful practitioner herself.

Returning to Grinnell from New York he again took up his practice here and did yeoman service in the terrible spotted fever epidemic of 1862, showing a fearless devotion to duty that was another characteristic of the man. He worked early and late over the sick and dying. Dr. Patten, who came from Newton to help him, fell a victim to the contagion and Dr. Pulsifer was stricken in Dr. Harris' house where he died. Many a one of the early settlers gratefully recalls his service in those trying days.

The coming of the war found Dr. Harris with heart and soul in the cause which had led him in 1850 to break away from the Old School Presbyterian school and help organize the Free School church of that denomination, as a protest against human slavery. The spirit of militant abolitionism was in the very air here. Runaway slaves were cared for at his father's home and returning from long trips in the country at nightfall he would often see prominent citizens of Grinnell, driving across the unbroken country in "prairie schooners" with dusky passengers for the next station on the underground railroad. It was inevitable that he should be drawn into the medical branch of the government service and in 1863 he went into the army, becoming surgeon general of Louisiana and the head of the big marine hospital at New Orleans, where he served through the war and on into the trying days of reconstruction, passing safely through epidemics of the then much dreaded smallpox and other diseases.

In 1866 he returned to Grinnell once more to continue his practice. At one time for a year or two he was located at Newton, but he always came back to his natural nook here. Until recent years the intervening time was spent in active work which called him out in all kinds of weather, in the face of all kinds of trials and dangers to minister to a wide territory in the days when houses were not so close

together and neighboring towns had neither railroads nor resident physicians. Here he at one time associated with him Dr. E. W. Clark, then a young man beginning his practice. In recent years he has lived in quiet retirement, but was a familiar and welcomed figure on the streets, until confined to his room during a long illness following paralytic strokes. His mind remained clear till near the end and his vitality was remarkable, sustaining him long after less rugged men would have succumbed to the penalties of a life of hard work in which duties had been met and not shirked.

There are one or two characteristics of the man that deserve special mention in passing here, as a matter of record. Dr. Harris was a man of broad interests which included whatever worked for human betterment. He was interested in seeing Grinnell go forward, in the College, in the College students, in the churches and in every line of interest he kept abreast of the times. It was remarkable how well he kept up in his later years of feebleness with the latest thought and action in varied lines and especially in theology. He had no use for that old theory that "the dead lead the living merely follow." He believed in progress and evolution. He was said by those competent to judge, to be one of the best read men in Grinnell on theological subjects. In his views he was very liberal and at a time when doctrinal questions were more to the fore than now, he was regarded as a free lance. But he was one of the most religious of men and he took great comfort in his religion because he believed it was based on rational grounds. He never wavered in his views and lived to see most men and churches come to the views which he had held to so long and so firmly. He was equally progressive in other lines and the latest developments in medicine, politics, sociology, science,

literature, interested him intensely. He was a man of tremendous energy and earnestness. Whatever he believed in he went into, with all his force and energy and he followed fearlessly wherever the truth led, for truth had no terrors for him. By nature he was sociable and genial and possessed a sense of humor that stood both him and his friends in good stead. He was faithful to the light as he saw it and lived openly and fearlessly.

He had lived an active life, filled with experiences such as are not given to many men. He took pleasure in living, but at the end was ready to die, passing on, as one lies down to a pleasant sleep after a good day's hard work well done.

Brief services were held at the church conducted by Rev. H. N. Dascumb, his pastor, assisted by Professor S. J. Buck, his old friend. The remains were laid in the family lot beside those of his father, mother, wife, and two sons, Arthur and Willard, who preceded him in death. Two sons, Dr. C. E. Harris of this city and L. C. Harris of Duluth, are the only surviving members of the family. Three sisters, Mrs. T. Worthington and Mrs. R. M. Haines of this city and Mrs. Mary Keagy and three brothers, Samuel Harris of Denver, James Harris of Lower Lake, Calif., and W. J. Harris of Lewis, are also living. Mrs. Mary Kilbourn, Robert M. Haines of Des Moines and W. J. Harris of Duluth, were here from out of town to attend the funeral services.