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# Farewell Assemblies

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## Farewell Assemblies

For several hours on Sunday, June 2nd, Overman Hall resounded to the thud of marching feet. Captain Smith had found it necessary to lengthen the periods for drill to teach the recruits some of the fundamental military maneuvers. In the stress of emergency no one in this extremely conservative town apparently expressed surprise when the boys were summoned to drill at the regular hour for church services.

As soon as barnyard chores could be completed, farm wagons, buggies, and many saddled horses brought hundreds of people into Cedar Falls from Black Hawk and surrounding counties. Perhaps on account of the special religious service that afternoon, announced as the Farewell Union Service for the Pioneer Greys, the out-of-town visitors, after finding hitching posts along the elm-lined streets, preferred to join the large, almost silent crowd congregated between First and Second streets in front of the Overman Block on Main Street rather than to attend worship in any of the eight churches of which Cedar Falls boasted. Apprehensive of what lay ahead of the Greys, they heard through the open windows above the sound

of marching. Some drew in their breath a little or sighed audibly as the "shrill energetic orders of their commander" directed the boys in their marching practice.

All over town parents and friends prepared ample food for the last Sunday dinner which the Pioneer Greys would eat with their families. In the grove along the river and in Court House Square (now Overman Park) covers were removed from picnic baskets and red-checked cloths were spread out over the prairie grass. Upon these, cold pork and beef, corn bread and rhubarb pies were set out by the families and friends of the recruits from the "up country".

At twelve o'clock, as soon as Captain Smith snapped "Company dismissed!" a special committee, headed by J. B. Van Saun, undertook the task of transforming Overman Hall from an armory into an auditorium suitable for the Soldier's Farewell Service scheduled for two-thirty. With complete disregard for fire hazards they crowded all available space with chairs. Even before the last tack had been driven into the wall to hold in place the red, white, and blue bunting and before the last flag support had been adjusted, townspeople and farmers began to fill the hall. Exactly at the appointed time, with Captain Smith at their head and all the ministers in town bringing up the rear,

the boys of Company K and the Cedar Falls Band marched in and took the places reserved for them directly in front of the flag-decorated platform.

Reverend Fifield's address to the soldiers had been announced at the Citizens' Mass Meeting on the previous Monday night and had been duly stressed with three announcements in the Friday issue of the weekly *Gazette*. Also in their mid-week search for recruits Salsbury and Mullarky had circulated word of this meeting as far north as Charles City. A special committee for this service had chosen the eloquent Congregational minister as the speaker of the day because his "earnest impetuous style of oratory" could be counted upon to impress the departing boys and their relatives and friends with the critical character of the period through which the nation was passing and with the patriotic quality of the service which the Greys were rendering. Fifield had been trained for the ministry when grandiloquence of speech and appeals to sentiment were cultivated as special qualifications for public speaking.

On this occasion his earnestness and sincerity, added to his emotional delivery, carried conviction. As a patriot he eulogized the Pioneer Greys because they had chosen to make a voluntary response to the President's and Governor's calls for aid. As a minister he cautioned the boys against

evils in camp and army life; urged them to adopt Christian principles of living and to be satisfied with nothing less than moral and physical courage. His address reached its climax when he set before Company K the examples of "gallant Havelock", the hero of the Battle of Lucknow, and of Colonel E. E. Ellsworth of the New York Zouaves, who only the week before had lost his life in protecting the American flag from dishonor. The speaker rounded his address to an oratorical close with an appeal to the Pioneer Greys to emulate these "examples of knightly patriotism".

Though the sermon on Sunday afternoon was much more political and military than Biblical, the occasion was essentially religious in spirit. The soldiers and their friends left the hall with reverent appreciation of spiritual solace. Faith in the divinity of destiny would provide comfort in the trying days to come.

It never entered the minds of the conservative citizens of Cedar Falls to send their soldiers to war with a sumptuous banquet or a gay ball. Instead, as the local editor noted, they called another Citizens' Mass Meeting on June 3rd, the eve of departure, "to give expression to the love and interest they felt in the sons and brothers and fathers who in the morning would go forth to the performance of a dangerous duty." This gather-

ing differed from the two earlier ones, held on April 30th and May 27th, only in the special honors that were conferred upon the Greys. Though the program was lightened by vocal solos, duets, and music by the band, this meeting began as solemnly as had the religious service of the afternoon before. "Each person assembled there," Editor Perkins reported, "seemed to realize that it was a solemn hour when mirth and levity would be out of place."

By dint of close crowding of chairs 800 people, the largest group which had ever gathered in Overman Hall, found standing or sitting room there. Hon. A. F. Brown, the local State Senator, acting as presiding officer, called upon the Presbyterian minister, William Porterfield, to give the invocation. The choral singing of "America" introduced the patriotic note in the evening's ceremonies.

Enthusiastic applause greeted every announcement of the chairman. During the afternoon the Greys had held a meeting and organized as a military unit in the democratic manner then followed. Senator Brown congratulated the men on their choice of officers, and assured the audience that Company K was leaving Cedar Falls under excellent leadership. He took pleasure in praising John B. Smith, the reëlected captain, for his thor-

oughness as a drillmaster and for his executive ability. During his few brief months of residence in Cedar Falls, Captain Smith had made a place for himself not only as host of the Carter House but as the organizer of the local militia. He praised, too, the choice of the other officers: Fitzroy Sessions, the first lieutenant; C. H. Mullarky, the second lieutenant; and W. B. Hamill, the orderly sergeant. Within a month the twenty-nine-year-old first lieutenant was promoted to the position of regimental adjutant.

Particularly for the benefit of visitors, the chairman enlarged upon two events of the past week — the work of the fifty-three feminine seamstresses and the arrival that afternoon of twenty additional recruits. Eulogistically he referred to the long days of tedious work which the women of Cedar Falls had cheerfully given to the fashioning of the hundred fatigue uniforms. Not only had they donated laborious hours of time, but some had engaged in a successful house-to-house canvass and secured more supplies of socks, drawers, and shoes for needy soldiers. All in all, he made it clear that the feminine contingent had rendered a distinguished and patriotic service to the community and to the Pioneer Greys.

Chairman A. F. Brown waxed even more eloquent when he described to the audience the cele-

bration that had occurred just before Company K met for election of its officers. Over the Cedar River Bridge a cavalcade of forty teams brought into Cedar Falls upwards of 350 people from farms and hamlets along the Shell Rock and Cedar rivers. With them came twenty recruits, mostly from Waverly, the largest group to enlist from the "up country" under Captain John B. Smith. The brass band again headed an impromptu parade in honor of these newest recruits, and the mayor of Cedar Falls congratulated them. As Chairman Brown pointed them out where they sat with the Greys in the audience, cheer after cheer greeted their ears.

Two other events, coming as surprises, continued to transform the mass meeting which had begun with solemnity into a patriotic demonstration. Darius Allen, an attorney, rose to make a presentation speech. Walking to the platform he requested Lieutenant Sessions to come forward. Then, speaking in behalf of young Sessions's neighbors, John O. Carter and B. F. White, he presented the first lieutenant of Company K with a Colt navy revolver.

Following this a second presentation was made by Chairman Brown himself. Summoning Captain Smith forward, he informed him and the audience that certain public-spirited citizens of Cedar



Falls, on that very afternoon, had raised a fund for the purchase of a sword and epaulettes suitable for the captain of Company K. Although local stores could not supply them, these martial insignia would be delivered as soon as possible. After thanking the donors, Captain Smith generously announced that he would regard the gift not "so much as a compliment to him as to the Greys" of whom, he declared, "I am very proud."

Before the evening was over, eight additional speakers were called upon to praise or advise the Greys, and to call attention to the sacrifices the boys were making for Iowa and the nation in leaving their homes, their farms, and their forges. The first two speakers had represented the locality in the State legislature, Zimri Streeter and J. B. Powers. Both eulogized the Pioneer Greys as patriotic soldiers who were going forth not as drafted men but as volunteers who, without compulsion, chose to defend their country.

At a late hour W. H. Nichols was designated to deliver the parting remarks to the boys of Company K. No record remains of this speech except that his words were "impressive and pertinent". They must have been sincere, for on June 8th, after riding overland with three other boys from Cedar Falls, Thomas Boggs, Michael Rambach, and L. S. Taggart, he joined the company at Keokuk

and with them was there mustered into the army. After Nichols's address, to the accompaniment of the band, eight hundred men, women, and children rose to join in the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner". A little later they passed down the two long flights of stairs into the June night. Swinging lanterns lighted the people to their homes or to their wagons or saddled ponies. Many of those, however, who attended the Citizens' Farewell Meeting remained overnight in Cedar Falls to watch the entrainment of the company on the following morning.

LUELLE M. WRIGHT