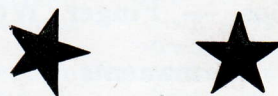




J. B. Grinnell



Founder



No such chronicle as this would be complete without mention of the founder, Josiah Bushnell Grinnell.

Any attempt to compress Mr. Grinnell's abundant vitality and far flung interests into one short chapter is difficult. For those who would like to know about him more in detail, two books are available: his own autobiography, "Men and Events of Forty Years," written during his last sickness, and a comprehensive biography, "Josiah Bushnell Grinnell", written by the late professor Charles E. Payne of the Grinnell college faculty, which is probably as authoritative an account as could be secured.

In addition to being a town founder, Mr. Grinnell was a minister, a lawyer, a farmer, a railroad builder, a wool grower, a state senator, and a member of the United States Congress for two terms during the Civil war years. Aside from all this he held numerous important government and state appointments. He was eloquent in the florid style of his time and he wrote profusely and readily.

J. B. Grinnell was essentially and above all else a promoter. To quote Professor Payne, "His strength lay in moral fervor, generosity, energy and will, rather than in intellectual keenness or power of analysis."

Josiah Grinnell was born December 22, 1821, the son of Myron and Catherine Hastings Grinnell in New Haven, Ver-

mont. The family was of Huguenot derivation, the original family name having been Grenelle. He was brought up in an atmosphere of hard work, poverty and a sternly religious training. At an early age he broke away from the farm in order to secure an education, supporting himself by teaching school. He prepared to enter Yale, but found the surroundings there too light minded for his taste and instead entered Oneida Institute, a hotbed of the radicalism of the day. The ideas which he absorbed there had an important bearing on his later life. Although he completed the course at Oneida he did not receive a college degree, since the regents of the state of New York had refused Oneida the right to confer degrees because of its extreme radicalism.

After leaving Oneida, young Grinnell went to the newly opened territory of Wisconsin as a representative of the American Tract Society, and to recover his health which had been impaired by his Spartan way of life at Oneida. He loved the prairies and began to dream of founding somewhere in this new western country a religious, moral and educational community.

Returning to the east, he graduated from the Theological Seminary at Auburn, New York, in 1846. His first pastorate was at Union Village, thirty miles north of Albany but in 1851 he

went to Washington, D.C., as pastor of Trinity church, raising money for the purchase of the church property by selling pews.

Grinnell's forthright preaching against slavery aroused so much opposition that he left Washington and went to New York, and on Feb. 2, 1852, he married Julia A. Chapin, daughter of an old and distinguished family of Springfield, Mass. In New York he began a three year pastorate, but his throat, always weak, failed him as a result of too much outdoor speaking. In his discouragement he consulted Horace Greeley, who gave him his famous advice, "Go West, young man, go West. There is health in the country and room away from our crowds of idlers and imbeciles." Although this statement has been challenged, there seems no doubt that Grinnell was the one to whom these words were addressed. He relates the incident in his autobiography.

The founding of Grinnell, told of in a later chapter, was the immediate result of this conversation.

From this time on, until his death on March 31, 1891, Josiah Grinnell's main and abiding interest was in the settlement which bore his name, although his unstinted energy carried him far into many forms of activity and into public life. He went first to Congress in 1863. He had won the nomination

after fifty ballots from Samuel A. Rice of Oskaloosa and owed his election to the soldier vote. He was reelected to the 39th Congress in 1865. During his term, occurred an incident which received wide publicity at the time. Grinnell became engaged in a heated debate with Congressman L. H. Rosseau of Kentucky, during which both men descended to personalities. A few days later Rosseau stopped Grinnell on the steps of the Capitol and demanded an apology. When none was forthcoming he attacked the Iowan, using, says Prof. Payne, a light rattan cane. Grinnell made no defense, stating later that he believed that Rosseau wanted him to return the assault in order to have a pretext for assassinating him. After an investigation Rosseau was publicly reprimanded in the House.

Mr. Grinnell treats of this incident at some length in his autobiography, explaining his attitude of non resistance, which led to considerable criticism back home. The incident was largely blamed for his defeat for renomination by a margin of six votes.

Grinnell never held public office again but his energy found an outlet in a variety of ways.

During his entire public life Mr. Grinnell was largely interested in two issues, abolition and prohibition. He was also a strong advocate of arming the Negroes to serve in the Union armies during the war. During his service in the state senate he was also an earnest and successful advocate of free education.

During his declining years he was more and more interested in the college, always his pride and joy.

His death on March 31, 1891, was due to a recurrence of his old enemies, asthma and bronchitis. At the time of his funeral, the roads were impassable and the members of Gordon Granger Post, G.A.R. carried the casket on their shoulders all the way to the cemetery, a distance of nearly a mile.

Possibly his life may best be summed up in the words of a toast by John W. Cheshire, given on the occasion of the 25th wedding anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell on Feb. 5, 1877. Mr. Cheshire's toast, as

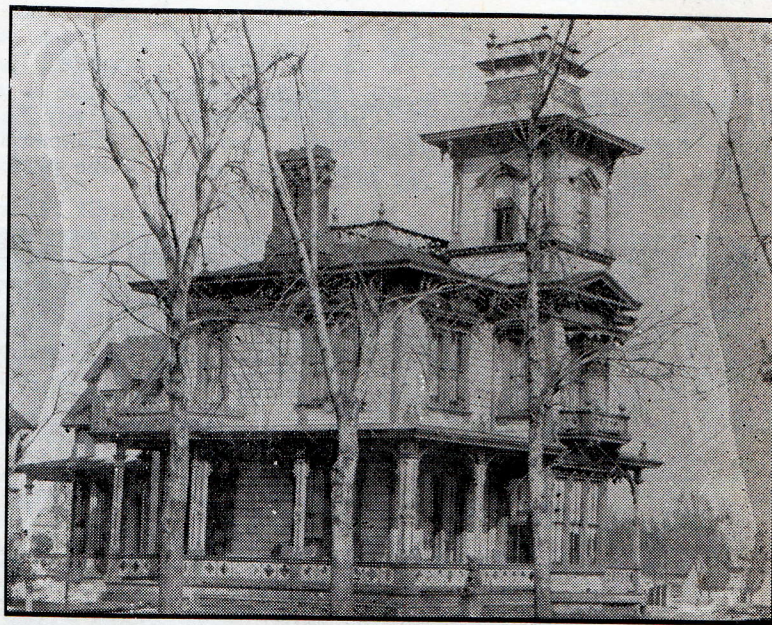
given in the autobiography, was as follows:

"Here is to the citizen who gave a town for education, ground for a 'college green' and a cemetery for the dead; a preacher without pay; a university and bank president without salary; president of the State Society of Wool Growers, with the honors of a competitive sheep shearer at the festival and paying the awards; of the State Horticultural Society chief officer, gathering by proxy the fruits of the orchard, securing the national medal and award for Iowa, and meeting the bills; a lawyer waiving fees to make settlements and

friends of litigants; lecturer and occasional orator as a merry pastime; projector and president of railroads—only reward given, cheers, resolutions and an occasional walking cane; spurning combinations to put him in the national Senate or a governor's chair; liberal orthodox in church; an enigma in politics; a devotee of pure blood in animals; a pardonable weakness for the fair and a teetotaler in habits. From silver goblets on this silver wedding day, here's to your health in the cloud-distilled, fashionable beverage of Grinnell."

Such a man, in brief, was J. B. Grinnell, our founder.

Grinnell's Home



Pictured is the old J. B. Grinnell home, which stood on Park Street just north of the present site of the Hotel Monroe. A spacious lawn stretching south to Third Avenue and embracing all of the present hotel site lent dignity and beauty to the home.

One of the main features of the spacious lawn was the historic elm tree known as the Henry Ward Beecher elm and said to have been planted by Horace Greeley. The elm has been marked with a plaque by the D. A. R. In a heavy windstorm some four years ago, the elm was blown down.

Many famous guests were entertained in the home, including Beecher, Greeley and John Brown. In the cellar was a recognized station of the Underground Railway transporting slaves from the south to Canada.

An attempt was made at one time to secure the home as a Grinnell museum but failed because of insufficient financial backing. A portion of the home is now located just south of York Lumber Company on Broad Street.