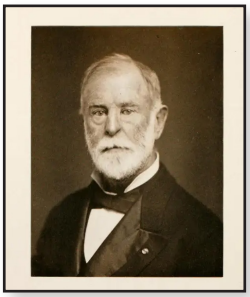
Hoyt Sherman

Clan Elizabeth (Thomas Munson's Daughter)

Setting up Des Moines

by Lori Hahn



Last issue, we talked about the tormented brilliance of General William T. Sherman. His father, Judge Charles Sherman, and his wife, Mary Hoyt, had several boys who would rise to the top of their spot in the world.

Hoyt was the youngest son, born in 1827, just two years before Judge Sherman died of typhoid. Along with brothers John and Charles, he worked in a printing office of the Cincinnati Gazette under the tutelage of publisher Charles Hammond in Cincinnati and studied some law in Mansfield, Ohio, until his majority.

In 1848, brothers Hoyt, John, and Charles headed west for Fort Des Moines. At this time, Fort Des Moines was still frontier. Settlers met with Sioux raids and harsh conditions. Des Moines, the city, wasn't founded until 1850. Hoyt Sherman was there as the area blossomed. Brothers James and Lampson would join him.

Hoyt began his career selling school land grants out of the office of School Commissioner Thomas McMullen. In 1849 he became assistant postmaster to what was then called "Raccoon River." When the postmaster left, he was named postmaster. The post office had been in an old building on Fort Des Moines, but Hoyt had a new post office built and then a second location. He held that job until 1852.

In 1849, he was admitted to the bar and became a top attorney in the area. By 1850, he had turned his attention to the buying and selling of real estate. There was a particular piece of property he wanted to build his home on that was going on auction. He had $100. Unfortunately, others wanted that 5-acre plot as well, and bidding kept hedging up, with him out of money. Then he decided to use his day's wages, all of $5, to make the winning bid of $105. That plot would eventually hold the Hoyt Place, a large home that would later serve many purposes for the citizens of Des Moines.

Things kept moving along for Hoyt in Des Moines. In 1852 he was named Clerk of Courts and in 1853 he built the Sherman Block which included a bank and amusement hall as well as executive offices. In 1854, he decided to build a safer, bigger facility to process money from the huge number of land sales. He opened his first bank, Hoyt Sherman & Co. Its careful management and the integrity of the firm allowed its immediate success.

Feeling pretty good, Sherman went east to Ohio and married Miss Sarah Moultin on Christmas Day of 1855 in Mansfield. He whisked her home and they lived together in Des Moines.

In 1856, Sherman was responsible for building the new statehouse on Grimmell Hill after a skirmish of words between those near the "Fort" and those on the east side of Des Moines. That edifice still stands today on Grimmell Hill.



Hoyt Sherman's First Place in Des Moines

In 1858, the State of Iowa had its new consitution which allowed for the formation of the State Bank of Iowa. Sherman was named the first cashier of the Des Moines branch and he merged his Sherman & Co. bank into the new bank.

While his brother William was deeply involved with the Civil War (1861-1865), Hoyt did his part, too. He had been granted the rank of Major and named paymaster of the army, dispensing millions of dollars in funds over the course of the war. And, of course, the post-war audit found not one penny missing.

In January 1867, the Equitable Life Insurance Co. was becoming quite the firm out West. Sherman was named its actuary. Over the next several years, he moved through the ranks and eventually became president.

He made his mark outside of business as well. He was president of the Old Settlers Association and helped start the Des Moines Water Company.

In 1866 he served a year as an Iowa state legislator. That lead him to the Pioneer Law Makers of Iowa, where he served as president in 1898 for a term.

Things didn't always go his way, though. In 1871, a fire broke out on the west side, wiping out several blocks. One of the buildings completely lost was the Hoyt Sherman place at 6th and Locust. He would go on to build a brick home at the land purchased for $105 at 15th and Woodland

In 1887, Hoyt lost his wife, who was mother to his five children. Sarah Moultin had been ill for over a year, but expected to recover. She took a turn for the worse in late February and died in early March. He never remarried.

Hoyt's brothers who had also made Iowa home, John and Lampson, did well too. John became a U.S. Senator and Lampson was founder of Des Moines' second newspaper, the Des Moines Gazette, and served as Des Moines' third mayor and as City Treasurer. All of his ten siblings died before Hoyt's death in 1904.

Hoyt and Sarah's five children included:
Frank (1856-1902), an attorney who died at age 45 of a stroke. He got his law degree from Columbia University. He practiced privately and served three years as county attorney. Additonally, he organized the first street railway company in Des Moines. He was married with a daughter.

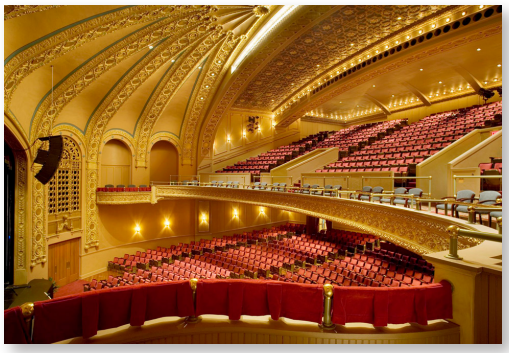
Adeline (1859-1917) married ink baron Frank Wiborg and lived her married life in the Hamptons and NYC. She died in NYC in 1917 and had three daughters.

Charles (1861-1911) married Bertha Bartlett, daughter of General Joseph Barlett of Baltimore. Charles practiced law in Chicago and New York. He died of a stroke.

Arthur (1869-1945) worked in insurance and real estate and retired with his wife to Beverly Hills, California. He was married and had five children.

Helen (1873-1961) married W.O. Griffith and lived primarily in Philadelphia. She was a best-selling children and youth author. She had two boys and two girls.

Hoyt Sherman Place spent time as the Women's Club and is popular today as a music and arts center and theatre.



Hoyt Sherman Place Theatre