

MAKING UP THE RECORD.

THE HON JAMES LAIRD'S WORK IN CONGRESS.

A Sturdy, Steadfast and Successful Champion of Western Interests—A Friend of the Farmer, The Defender of the Soldier, a Leader and a Power Among the Nation's Law Makers.

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It is not an unpleasant task to write the record of one who is able, earnest and who has been unusually successful in public station. In reviewing the congressional work of the Hon. James Laird, for public reading, we can but touch here and there upon the more important matters in which he has concerned himself. All data given below have been verified by the public records and the writer's intimate acquaintance with the man and his measures enables him to make this review an accurate and a truthful one.

HIS WORK FOR THE FARMERS.
Taking first the bill making appropriations for the agricultural department for the year ending June 30th, 1888; this bill appropriated \$996,680, to be expended through that department for the benefit of the farmers of Nebraska and the whole country. This appropriation was voted for and advocated by Mr. Laird. Whether his vote for this expenditure was for the benefit of the farmers of Nebraska can best be judged by a consideration of certain objects of the bill. One of the items of the bill was \$500,000 to be used to prevent the spread of pleuro-pneumonia and other contagious and communicable diseases among domestic animals. This law authorized the "commissioner of agriculture to employ as many persons as he might deem necessary, and to expend any part of this sum in the purchase and destruction of diseased or exposed animals, and the quarantine of the same when essential to prevent the spread of the disease."



When this act was passed there were \$1,200,000,000 worth of cattle endangered by a disease then raging in ten states and five great cities, namely, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois and in the cities of New York, Brooklyn, Baltimore, Washington, D. C. and Chicago. The farmers and stock men of Nebraska had 1,844,563 head of cattle valued at \$47,437,963, exposed to this disease.

The danger to Nebraska farmers from the spread of this plague, which it was the object of the appropriation to check, and which it did check, may be argued from the loss sustained by the cattle owners in the states where the outbreak then existed. The loss sustained by cattle owners in Ohio was put at \$1,000,000; in Missouri at \$2,000,000 in Kentucky at \$10,000,000; and the loss to Illinois is now presumed to estimate.

The enormity of the danger of this disease, if it once got into the herds of this country can be better understood, when it is known that from 1842 to 1869, England lost from the same plague 5,549,780 head of cattle worth \$400,000,000. In forty years the loss of Great Britain, with only 6,000,000 head of cattle, ran up to \$500,000,000; at this ratio in the same time, the loss of the United States with its 45,000,000 head would have reached the extraordinary total of \$3,500,000,000.

Unless congress or the states paid for the cattle belonging to private persons, and slaughtered to prevent the spread of the disease, the loss would fall upon the farmer owners alone, and hence the importance of this appropriation to every owner of a head of stock. With this money, and the authority of congress, and the consent of the states, this disease is under control and will be eradicated without ruin to the farmers of Nebraska or other states. Had the policy of prolonged investigation been pursued in this country as it was in England, and the disease been thereby permitted to spread through the west, no limit short of utter ruin of our cattle owners, could be set to its ravages.

The making of this appropriation was opposed by the democratic party in congress and only passed the 48th congress by a very small majority. The measure was advocated by the agricultural states and it was owing to the energy, advocacy and votes of western men, among whom Laird was one of the foremost, that the law was enacted and is to-day continued on the statute books. The appropriation of \$500,000 for the suppression of this disease was reported for the fiscal year 1888-9 by the committee on agriculture of which Mr. Laird is a member, and through his exertion a portion of this sum is set apart for the purpose of further investigating the hog cholera until lately so destructive in Nebraska.

In this connection it will be remembered that when the hog cholera broke out in Nebraska, Mr. Laird caused government experts to be sent to Nebraska to investigate the disease and give what aid it was then in the power of the department to give.

The agricultural appropriation bill for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 1889, reported by the agricultural committee, of which Mr. Laird is now a member, carries \$1,555,297. Of this sum over a million dollars is to be expended directly for the benefit of the farmers of the United States, Nebraska included. This is the largest annual appropriation ever made for agriculture. And not only did Laird vote for it but was one of its strongest advocates both in the committee and on the floor of the house. \$500,000 of this sum goes to the bureau of animal industry to be used in suppressing diseases of animals, the other

large item, \$595,000 is to be given equally to aid state agricultural experiment stations and schools, of which Nebraska of course gets her share.

Another item of great importance to Nebraska and the west, carried by the appropriation bill, is one for \$100,000 to be expended by the commissioner of agriculture in completing and perfecting experiments already made for the manufacture of sugar from sorghum. The first appropriation for this purpose was \$50,000 in 1885 and \$95,000 for 1886-7. Mr. Laird was one of the pioneers of this legislation and as such can with reason claim that some portion of the last appropriation shall be expended in experiments in Nebraska. So far the experiments have been confined to Kansas and New Jersey.

The importance of every practical step in the direction of the western growth and manufacture of the sugar supply of the United States will be seen from the following facts: In 1887 the sugar consumed by the people of the United States cost \$142,707,103, and to this cost of transportation, charges of refiners and profits of jobbers and merchants, probably twenty per cent or over, \$28,000,000, and the aggregate cost to the consumer runs up to \$171,248,523. Of this only 181,123,870 pounds were produced in the United States and 3,136,443,240 pounds were imported and paid a tax of about two cents a pound equal to nearly \$66,000,000.

Less than one seventeenth of all the sugar consumed in this country is produced in the United States. If this can be changed, and we successfully make sufficient sugar at home to supply our wants, not only would the price of sugar be made much cheaper to the consumer, but the millions now paid into the pockets of foreigners for sugar would go into the pockets of our own people and to that extent our own country be enriched. The question whether this can be done is now practically settled. It can be done, not in the south, but in the west, in Nebraska, Kansas and the states where sorghum can be grown successfully. The process by which commercial sugar can be made from sorghum cane has been discovered by experiments made by the government in Kansas and New Jersey, with money appropriated as in this item. When the further experiments and demonstrations now in progress are made by the government, the money for which is already provided, western enterprise and capital can be trusted to do the rest, and with the rise of this new industry will rise the value of our farms and the prosperity of the farming classes be greatly promoted.

Professor M. Swenson, who has had charge of the Ft. Scott, Kansas, government sugar experiments, concludes his report with these words, "I say without hesitancy that sugar can be produced as cheaply in Kansas as in Louisiana."

The interest of the Kansas farmer in this production is demonstrated by the following facts: One man and team can care for and harvest fifty acres of cane, the average yield in that state is put at twelve tons per acre, this gives 600 tons of cane which sold last year at two dollars per ton, giving him \$1,200, for the labor of himself and team and the use of fifty acres of ground. The crop can be grown and harvested in four months; time. Clearly what can be done in Kansas can be duplicated in Nebraska.

FIGHTING FOR PURE FOOD.

The evidence taken during the lard investigation before the house agricultural committee at the present session of congress, showed that the effect of the manufacture of compound lard composed of sixty per cent hog's lard and forty per cent cotton seed oil, and other cheaper fats, was to lessen the value of the farmers' hog crop from this cause alone from \$13,000,000 to \$15,000,000 per year. Mr. Laird voted to report a bill from that committee to inspect and tax compound lard, and compel its makers to sell it for what it really is, and thus protect the producer, which bill is now on the calendar, ready for the action of the congress.

In this connection it will be borne in mind that in the Forty-ninth congress Mr. Laird voted for and was one of the most active workers for the advocates of the passage of the Olemargierine bill, the passage of which by a close vote (opposition mostly southern democrats) was the means of saving the dairy interests of the United States from loss and destruction.

On the 25th of August, 1888, Mr. Laird reported from the agricultural committee his bill 11,266 for the establishment of a pure food division in the department of agriculture, to provide for the inspection of live stock, about to be slaughtered, at slaughter houses, canning, salting, packing and rendering establishments, the carcasses or products of which, are intended for human consumption in any state or territory other than where slaughtered, or for exportation to foreign countries, and to prevent the introduction of adulterated or branded food or drugs, into any state or territory from any other state or territory, or foreign country.

In his report accompanying this bill, it appears that most of the countries of continental Europe, have restricted or prohibited the importation of American bacon, hams, and various forms of cut meats; notably, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Roumania, Turkey and Portugal. The reason for this exclusion is that the American products are suspected of being unhealthy, principally because they are never subjected to competent inspection by disinterested authority at the time of slaughter or preparation for export. This embargo, based on suspicion, has resulted in a heavy reduction of the American export trade, which at one time included about one-fourth of the entire swine product of the United States. The tables of statistic show a decline in the exports of bacon and hams of 340,000,000 pounds or 45 per cent in the last seven years. In 1887 the American hog crop fell off 1,474,207 in numbers and the decrease in value of the product in the last six years amounts to \$66,976,301.

Unless something can be done to restore foreign confidence in American meat products, this country may look forward to the destruction of her export trade in food commodities, and if this calamity should come it would involve the loss of millions of dollars by the farmers and producers of the country. It is to save these markets, and these losses, that this bill prepared by Mr. Laird is presented.

He is endorsed and supported in his position by thousands of letters, petitions and memorials from farmer, labor and trade associations and leading agriculture journals all over the union. The passage of the bill will set at work causes that will add millions of value annually to the meat output of the farmers of the west.

AGRICULTURE IN THE CABINET.

Mr. Laird voted for and advocated the passage of the bill making the Commissioner of Agriculture a cabinet officer, thus giving to any farmer holding that office as much importance as the

secretary of war, state or navy, and tending to give a standing and consequence to agriculture as a calling such as it has always deserved, but has never received before.

He also voted for and advocated this law in the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth congress where it was beaten principally by democratic votes. This measure was supported by the officers and representatives of the state grange of Nebraska, and by leading agriculturists and journals generally.

Up to the second session of the Forty-ninth congress any creditor not a resident of Nebraska holding a claim, note or mortgage against a resident of the state for \$500 could sue on such claim in the United States courts at Omaha or Lincoln, and thereby put his debtor to an expense sometimes equal to the debt to defend it. Largely through Mr. Laird's bill, and instrumentality, a law was passed in the second session of the Forty-ninth congress, providing that no action should be brought by a non-resident of Nebraska against a resident, in the United States courts, unless the debt sued on was \$2,000 or more. The effect of this will be to save thousands of dollars taxed against farmers on mortgage suits made doubly expensive by being brought in a distant and expensive court. And further the passage of Mr. Laird's bill to establish a term of the United States court at Hastings and Norfolk, Nebraska, will be of advantage in saving expense to litigants by bringing the court hundreds of miles nearer to them.

PRIVATE RELIEF BILLS.

Our representative, among other things of local interest, introduced and procured the passage of a bill for the relief of Wesley Montgomery of Hastings, Nebraska, allowing him without settlement 160 acres of land in lieu of the like amount entered by him in Illinois in 1874, the title of which failed, because of a prior entry of it by another, which entry did not appear on the records when Montgomery took it.

He also introduced and procured the passage of a bill for the relief of W. H. Tibbits of Crab Orchard, Nebraska, who entered and lived on land that afterwards proved to have been patented to the railroad. Bills for the payment of losses sustained by Indian depredations by James Painter of Spring Hanché, Clay County, Nebraska, and by John M. Comstock of Elkton, Nuckolls county, Nebraska, and several others amounting to some \$35,000, were introduced by Mr. Laird and favorable reports procured by him, each congress, from the committee on Indian affairs. He also voted for and actively supported the Withorne bill providing for the reference of these claims to the court of claims and the payment of all sums found to be due by such court. The men who will get the benefit of this work are Nebraska farmers and pioneers.

Among many other private bills introduced and passed through the house for the benefit of Nebraska applicants for pension, by Mr. Laird, was one for Mrs. Juliet G. Howe of York, Nebraska, and also for Mrs. E. Painter of Lincoln, each of whom had rendered long and valuable service without pay, as nurses in the field during the war, and had contracted disability in such service. These bills fortunately escaped the veto. Speaking of pension matters the amount of this work done by your representative is extraordinary. Taking the requests of applicants for pensions, for pay, bounty, remuster, land entries and contests, and other subjects of interest to soldiers and settlers, he has made over ten thousand personal calls for action in the departments and has written over twelve thousand letters this year, and for that matter, for each year during his service.

THE KNEVALS BILL.

In the second session of the Forty-ninth congress, Mr. Laird introduced and procured the passage of an act for the relief of settlers and purchasers of public lands in Nebraska and Kansas, commonly known as the Knevals bill, the effect of this law was to pay \$250,000 to some three hundred settlers and farmers in Clay, Nuckolls, Thayer, Jefferson, Fillmore and Adams counties, Nebraska, who had lost their homes through conflict between their patents and a prior grant of the same lands to the state of Kansas for the benefit of the St. Joe & Denver railroad.

The bill, H. R. 7,901, repealing the timber culture, and re-emption laws of the United States, recently considered in the house, was amended in some particular by Mr. Laird, and other amendments of great importance to western settlers, offered by him were defeated by a democratic house. He offered an amendment to allow any entryman who took land by homestead entry under this law, to pay out on the same after one year of settlement and compliance with the law. This was opposed by the democrats and defeated, so that now if the bill passes the senate no title can be obtained to government land short of a continuous residence of five years, a condition of things that will make it nearly impossible for poor men to get land at all. Had such a law as this recently passed by the democratic house, prevailed prior to the settlement of the country west of the Missouri river, it is highly probable that we would have had no west as we know it to-day.

To the same bill Mr. Laird offered an amendment allowing any honorably discharged union soldier the right to deduct his service in the army from the five years' settlement required to obtain title to a homestead. He also offered two other amendments to this bill, that were debated at great length, and in the course of his remarks on which, Mr. Laird took occasion to review the Sparks land policy, and point out the outrages perpetrated by that officer upon the long-suffering settlers of the west, the amendments were in substance as follows:

"And no settlers on the public domain, under the provisions of this act, shall be deprived of his title to any lands based upon a receiver's final receipt except upon an open and public trial under and according to the forms of law relating to contest cases."

"That after final proof is made and a final receipt issued to the settlers by the local land officers, such receipt shall be proof of title, and all innocent purchases thereunder, shall be protected. And the burden of proof in any action or proceeding to vacate such title shall be upon the government."

These amendments were beaten by the democrats under the lead of Mr. Holman of Indiana. Two other amendments offered by Mr. Laird to this bill were adopted, namely: In an action between a settler claiming title to land through any existing land law and a railroad or its grantees, claiming the same land through a grant congress, to allow the settler to defend on the ground that such railroad had not complied with the conditions of the grant, or make any defence which the United States might make.

Allowing settlers to purchase without settlement fractional pieces of land

laying in streams abutting on their claim.

THE SCHOOL LANDS.

It is claimed that the state of Nebraska is short from 30 to 40 thousand acres in her quota of school lands and that she cannot make this good under existing law, which requires indemnity land to be selected in the same land district where the shortage occurred. This rule would defeat the claim of the state, and therefore Mr. Laird offered a bill to allow the state to select any unoccupied government land within its limits. This bill is hung up in the democratic committee on public lands.

MORE WORK FOR SETTLERS.

In the course of the consideration of the sundry civil bill Honorable Mr. McShane, democratic M. C. from Nebraska, moved to amend the bill by striking out an item of \$95,000 for the pay of special land agents, engaged under this administration in hunting down honest settlers on the public domain. The McShane amendment was beaten by the vote of the democrats after several hours of vigorous and bitter debate participated in by both McShane and Laird.

In the recently considered bill for the organization of the territory of Oklahoma, Mr. Laird advocated and voted for two amendments of great importance to every person contemplating settlement in this new territory. The bill as presented, proposed to compel all settlers to live on the land three years and then pay \$1.25 per acre for it, the \$1.25 per acre being the estimated amount of the Indian claim to the land.

Mr. Payson of Illinois offered an amendment to compel the United States to buy in the Indian title and allow the land to be taken by settlers under the homestead law without other costs than the fees now charged, this having been the hitherto settled policy of the government under the republican party. The amendment was opposed by the democrats and beaten; 57 for to 107 against.

The other amendment was to allow honorably discharged union soldiers the benefit of their service in making settlements on this land, and to relieve them from the payment of the \$1.25 per acre. This amendment was also opposed by the democrats and beaten.

DISABLED SOLDIERS' HOMES.

Early in the session Mr. Laird offered a bill to pay to the states and territories maintaining homes for disabled soldiers \$100 per annum for each soldier cared for. This bill was referred to the committee on military affairs, and there referred to Mr. Laird, and by him favorably reported to the house, where he afterwards called it up, had charge of it in the debate in the house where it was passed, had charge of it afterwards in the conference, and followed it through until it became a law. This act will relieve the farmers of Nebraska of one-half of the tax necessary to maintain a disabled union soldier, will secure homes and comfort for the disabled veterans of Nebraska, many of them farmers, and its passage ought to be a source of congratulation to every lover of the country, who believes in protecting for life the men who protected the life of the republic. The money carried by Mr. Laird's bill is \$250,000, but it commits the nation to the policy of aiding the states to care for their broken down veterans, and will involve between this time and the death of the last helpless defender of the nation the expenditure of millions. Who objects? They loyally gave their lives. Shall we less loyally and liberally give our money?

Speaking of the soldiers, Mr. Laird also introduced, reported from his committee, and caused to be passed, a bill giving \$150,000 to enlarge the accommodation of the existing United States homes for the care of disabled ex-union soldiers and sailors.

When the urgent deficiency bill was under consideration in the house, Mr. Laird offered an amendment appropriating \$1,320,000 to pay the claims allowed to soldiers and sailors for back pay and bounty, &c., during the interval in the passage of these appropriations. Under the present system the accounting officers will allow a claim, but as there is no money for payment until congress appropriates it, the man who has waited nearly a generation already for his two or three hundred dollars of bounty, or forty or fifty dollars of pay, has to wait another year or two, on the doubtful action of congress. Under the old republican rule, these appropriations were made in advance, and Mr. Laird sought by this means to save his old comrades the agony of longer delay. His effort was in vain. The amendment after a day's argument was beaten on a point of order made by a democrat and sustained against a fair construction of the rules by a democratic speaker.

GOVERNMENT SUPPLIES.

During the consideration of the army appropriation bill in the house, Mr. Laird added an amendment to that bill, of great importance to the farmers of Nebraska namely—requiring that the supplies bought for the army be purchased in the district where the troops are stationed, cost and quantity of course considered. Heretofore the practice has been to purchase these supplies near some supply depot, such as Jeffersonville, Indiana, New York and then ship them to the troops. The adoption of this amendment is in the interest of economy to the government and prosperity for Nebraska.

Another effort of this gentleman for his constituents and comrades will be remembered favorably. At the request of various sufferers from deafness contracted in the service, Mr. Laird drew and introduced a bill increasing the rate of pension allowed for total deafness; this bill was favorably considered by the committee on invalid pensions, reported, passed the house, and is now in law.

RELIEF OF SETTLERS.

A bill for the relief of such settlers upon the public domain as took lands by homestead entry and afterwards committed the same to a cash entry, was introduced by Mr. Laird for the benefit of western settlers, the result of its passage would have been to secure the repayment of those who had paid out on homestead entries provided they afterwards continued their residence and complied with the homestead law the same as if they had not committed. This bill was argued by its author before the democratic land committee, where it is pigeon-holed for future action.

One of the most vexatious and expensive incidents of settlement on government land in the west, is the liability of the settler to be contested on the ground of alleged failure to comply with the law, but often in reality inspired by anger or the hope of gain. The fact that the contestant risks nothing, not even the costs of the contest, tends to multiply these expensive suits. To put a check on this business, Mr. Laird has a bill pending before the land committee, requiring contestants to pay or give security to pay all the costs if the case goes against them. If the democratic

house will pass this bill, there will be an end to fraudulent contests.

Some years ago the supreme court of Nebraska decided that a contract in a note or mortgage to pay an attorney's fee, in addition to the debt in case of its collection by suit, was illegal and could not be enforced. The United States courts allow judgments for attorneys' fees in addition to the debt, which is manifestly a great burden to debtors owing mortgages that are large enough to be brought before the federal court. To remedy this Mr. Laird early in the present session, introduced a bill providing that no judgment shall hereafter be given for attorney fees in suits for the foreclosure of mortgage on real or personal estate, or for the collection of money on promissory notes or other contracts in writing. He is promised the favorable consideration of this bill by the judiciary committee and will no doubt be able to secure its passage to the great relief of litigants now compelled to pay certain of the expenses of both sides.

The sale of land, in the foreclosure of mortgages in the United States court is not under existing law and the rules of the court, required to be advertised in the county where the land is situated an advertisement where the court is held being sufficient. As a consequence of this practice several instances of great hardship and expense, have happened in the district represented by Mr. Laird. To remedy this evil, he has a bill now pending requiring sales to be so advertised as to give the owner and those interested knowledge of the fact, so that they can come in and protect themselves, if they desire. As it is now, their land may be sold and deeded away before they know it. This bill is pending before a subcommittee of the judiciary committee, they having agreed to a favorable report.

FOR THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR.

There is a sum variously estimated from \$3,000,000 to \$15,000,000 claimed to be due to them from the United States by men employed by the government under the eight hour law. During the entire term of Mr. Laird's service representatives of the Knights of Labor and other labor organizations have attended the sessions of congress and asked consideration of the bill for the payment of this sum. They have found in Mr. Laird an able, loyal and active friend. He has always spoken and voted for justice in their behalf and for that reason is regarded by the labor representatives here as one of their truest and strongest friends. The reason why action is not had on the claims of these laborers is not the fault of the republican party. The non-action is chargeable to the democratic committee on rules, which refuses to give the labor man a day for the consideration of their matter, because the committee on rules fear that if they report any rule allowing time to any measure, they will have to allow the consideration of the disability pension bill also. For this reason, the laborer and the soldier suffer together. The democratic party in the house stands in this position: They will not do justice to the laboring man, because they are afraid to do justice to the soldiers. They dare not consider one of these bills without the other, and they dare not consider both, because Cleveland would veto the pension bill.

THE POSTAL TELEGRAPH BILL.

Over six months ago the committee on commerce of the house reported favorably a bill for the construction of a postal telegraph by the government. From the day the bill went on the house calendar, March 8th, to September, not an effort was made by the democratic majority to get the bill up for consideration. September 3d Mr. Laird offered a resolution demanding that some action be taken on this measure. His resolution was referred to the committee on rules controlled by democrats, where it will be strangled to death, as the laborer and soldiers bills are, and with it will die the last hope of legislation on these subjects for this congress. The postal telegraph bill dies because the democratic party is too cowardly to attack the great corporation that stands behind the present system, and whose manager contributes \$10,000 to the Cleveland campaign fund. The labor and dependent pension bills are doomed, because, in the one instance the democrats dare not trust the liberality, and in the other, the loyalty of Mr. Cleveland.

RAILROAD LAND FORFEITURE.

On the 9th of January, 1888, Mr. Laird introduced a bill to forfeit all lands granted by congress in aid of railroad and telegraph lines wherein the conditions of the grant had not been complied with, and upon which, the cost of surveying, selecting and conveying, has not been paid, and also providing for the protection of purchasers in good faith of such railroad, prior to the forfeiture of the grant. This bill with others went to the committee on public lands and was considered, reported in substance, in the substitute of Mr. Stone of Missouri, which received the support and vote of your representative.

HIS WORK SUMMARIZED.

In looking up this record we find that Mr. Laird has been one of the hardest workers in congress, that he is recognized as a power in the important committees on which he serves and in the house; that he has voted for and advocated every bill offered in behalf of the settlers of the west, standing up for their interest and honor, without reference to party, under all circumstances and against all comers and that in the effort to secure them, he has presented and procured the passage of many measures of great importance; that he has been the firm friend of the farmers of the country and particularly so of those of Nebraska; that he has voted for and advocated every bill introduced to aid them generally with others, or to advance their interest as a class, being recognized as a pioneer of legislation for their benefit; that he has been a faithful friend of the labor interests, has voted for and advocated their rights whenever opportunity offered, and is recognized by their representatives on the ground, as an advocate of the labor cause on its merits; that he has toiled early and late working to secure justice for the high and the low of his comrades; that there has never been a task imposed by a sense of duty towards the ex-soldiers of the country that he has not done, or tried to do; that his hand, his voice and his heart have been felt in every contest for their rights during his service; and generally, the writer of this article, has found that this member has modestly, conscientiously and fearlessly done his work and done it well; that he has been one of the most radical supporters of the right to reclaim for the benefit of the whole country, the grants of land for railroads that have not been earned by a clear compliance with the conditions of their grants. That in these ways his public career proves him an unflinching worker for and an unchanging friend of the people of his state and country.