

ISAAC S. HASCALL UNIQUE FIGURE IN OMAHA HISTORY

Life Story of a Lawyer Who Was Also a Pioneer and Who Has Taken an Active Part in the Affairs of the West Since the Early Days of the Oregon Trail

THE SOLITARY occupant of a little house standing on the bluff east of Riverview park, commanding a magnificent view of the Missouri river for miles to the south and giving the eye a clear sweep over many square miles on both sides of the river, is a pioneer who settled in Omaha in 1865, Isaac S. Hascall. A bold and generous heart, a great though idiosyncratic mind, a true and original soul and a sturdy body, these make up the individual of this remarkable man.

As his mind is unique, so is his method of living different from that of other men. To many it would not be agreeable, but a contemplation of it is refreshing to the soul because with the world's conformity to fashion. The door which leads into the house is propped shut from the inside with a board. Judge Hascall meets the visitor at the door with a handshake. No suspicious eye does he cast upon the stranger, for to him all men are friends until they prove themselves otherwise. In the living room the visitor may sit on one of the two nail kegs or on a chair and prop his feet on the kitchen stove. Boxes, books, papers and magazines are piled in a true bachelor style all about the room. A wash basin rests in the top of a nail keg. Some socks hang over the back of a chair. A bucket stands on the stove with some water boiling in it. A curtain is stuck up so as to cover the lower part of the window.

The head of this house is as unique as the appointments of the room. His shoes are not laced and he wears no socks. His form is innocent of a shirt except his undergarment. A piece of stout twine tied around his chest serves to keep his buttonless Prince Albert coat together in front. But he makes no apology for his non-conformity to modern fashion. Why should he? Did Diogenes apologize for his tub? Did Sir Isaac Newton and a host of other thinkers apologize for their dress while their brains were working out world problems? Not at all. No more is Judge Hascall afflicted with self-consciousness before the visitor whose dress may conform more to the style and who may be more afflicted with self-consciousness. But when one has listened to the conversation of this man for an hour and studied his kindly face he grows to like him and his manner of living is but of little moment.

He was born March 8, 1831, in Erie county, New York. His father, Jonathan Hascall, was a presidential elector from New York in 1845. The son studied in the public schools and read law with Judge Lorenzo Morris. He was admitted to the bar in Buffalo, N. Y., in 1853. In the fall of 1854 he decided to start out into the west to seek his fortune. This was soon after the great '49 excitement in California. He went first to Fort Riley, Kansas, where he stayed during the winter of 1854-55. In the spring of the latter year he went up into the Little Blue country and later returned to Atchison, Kan., where he practiced law four years.

Out Among the Indians

He then determined to push farther into the great west, though it was then infested with Indians and overrun with lawless white men. He secured transportation to Denver and there organized a train for Oregon. Dick Darling, afterward of Omaha, was one of the men whom he took with him on this trip and from him he first heard of Omaha. It was a long and very perilous trip from Denver across the Laramie plains to Oregon. Part of his baggage was a great box filled with law books. Through all the hardships of that trip he clung to that box, though other trains were driven to such straits that they dropped even log chains and all heavy things that could possibly be dispensed with. Many times the Indians attacked him and he had a number of very narrow escapes. He tells of a man who had come out from Iowa with a train. When he heard how bad the Indians were he put up some "big talk" to Hascall's party. "If they drive off my stock I'll go out and take them," he declared.

That very night the red men drove off his cattle. The next morning, in high dudgeon, he called his men together. It amused Hascall's party to see they had been drilled. The Iowa man formed them and gave the order, "forward march," and away went the little company. As they reached the foothills the Indians, who were behind the boulders on the mountain side, began detouring and were about to cut off the little army from their camp. Just in time the men saw them, broke ranks and ran pell mell back toward the wagon train, followed by their commander. The latter was shot in the back, the ball going through his body. He recovered, however, but never was known to pursue Indians in that fashion again.

Judge Hascall is the discoverer of the Big Shoshone falls in Wyoming. His party had camped one night when, as the sun was descending, he noticed a great cloud rising several miles to the north. His men thought it was only smoke from an Indian signal fire, but he knew better. The next morning he took several men and went in that direction. When they had approached within a couple of miles they heard the roar of the cataract. When it burst upon them in all its beauty it was a sight to remember. The vast volume of water came thundering down, sending spray twice its own height. Upon a rock below the falls and some distance from them stood a solitary Indian, his bare, brown body gleaming in the sun. One of the men took careful aim with his rifle, pulled the trigger and the Indian fell into the rapids and was swept away. An Indian's life was of no more value than that of a beast in those days.

In a god-forsaken part of the Laramie plains they came upon a most god-forsaken Indian. He was just about starving to death. Young Hascall ordered him fed and asked him how far it was to "grass." The Indian laid his head down on the ground three times, thereby signifying one would have to sleep three nights before arriving there. He was taken along and fed by his benefactors, but when he was discovered trying to steal a rifle on the second night he was driven away into the wilderness. The venturesome party was met soon after reaching grass country by the Oregon cavalry, which was regularly employed in escorting emigrants along the trail into Oregon.

Lawyer in the Wild West

For the next five years he was in the midst of the lawless wild element of the great west. He was one of the few lawyers in the new country. In proportion as they were few, their fees were large. He had an extensive practice, most of his cases being for mining claims, ditch rights or dumping claims. All payments in those days were made in gold dust and a lawyer would not look at a case without a retaining fee of from \$500 to \$1,000. He was very successful in this class of litigation. The life was full of excitement, for it was dangerous to ride outside of a town, on account of the Indians and the highwaymen. He did a great deal of traveling, going horseback a circuit of several hundred miles. He was always armed, but it was often a question merely of who got the "drop" first. Once he was riding from Auburn, Ore., and carrying a large amount of gold dust. A man met him, an engaging man of pleasing address, but with a very large rifle lying across his saddle. The man showed a great liking for his society.

"We were approaching the Payette river," says Judge Hascall, "and I thought he intended to 'get me' where there was a long extent of trees near the stream. So I told him my horse was tired and I would stop at a ranch which we were passing. He decided to stop, too. We went in and I told the rancher I wanted a good horse because mine was worn out. He had one, but didn't think I could ride him. He offered to trade for mine with an ounce of gold dust 'to boot.' I told him to bring the animal in. You couldn't get near that broncho. He would jump and strike out ten feet with his fore legs. About six of us got hold of him and saddled and bridled him after some trouble. Then they held him till I was on, and away he went down the road and through the river without once stopping. The highwayman kept up with me for about a mile and then dropped behind. The broncho ran thirty-three miles without stopping. I tied him up at a haystack at the next ranch, when he was so tired he could hardly stand. I slept in the haystack and the



ISAAC S. HASCALL.

next morning we went on after I had paid \$4 for the hay he ate. Hay was expensive in that country."

While out on a prospecting expedition once he had an exciting adventure with desperadoes. He was on his way up the Bald Butte when he met two strangers. They offered to dig the prospect holes if he would give them their feed. He agreed and they proceeded together. They camped that night and when he woke up the next morning it was to look straight into the muzzle of a revolver held by one of the men. The other stood by with a big knife.

"We want this outfit," they said.

Robbers Overhauled But Freed

The young prospector could do nothing but yield. He knew, however, they would have to cross a prospectors' trail as they went down the mountain and he followed them. A party came along the trail just as he reached it. He told of the robbery and they immediately organized a party and followed the robbers through the snow, catching them before they had gone five miles. The outfit was returned to the owner and then one of the men who had helped in catching the robbers handed a big dragon revolver to Hascall.

"Kill them," he said laconically. But Hascall was never a blood-thirsty man and he presented the men with their lives. Such mercy was the exception in such cases rather than the rule. It would have been considered perfectly proper to shoot the two men in cold blood. There were other adventures in those days, many of which he passed through. He saw an odd accident once. A pack mule fell from a precipice into the

top of a tree, 100 feet below, where it was held fast in the crotch of a limb. It had to be left there, though a bullet was mercifully sent through its head.

The young pioneer lawyer became acquainted with many of the leading men in the west at that time, among his close friends being Governor Gibbs of Oregon and Attorney General Wilson, later of Grant's cabinet. Eventually he decided to leave there and took the stage for San Francisco. He remembers many interesting incidents of this trip. He and a Russian Jew were the only occupants of the stage when it reached Jacksonville, where a short stop was made. When they were ready to proceed they found the stage filled with Chinamen. The Jew knew how to deal with the yellow men. He got in and kicked right and left, sending them flying out of the stage. Then the two white men got in and rode in state the rest of the way, while the representatives of the "yellow peril" clung to the top and squatted in the boot.

At one of the stations where the stage stopped a small grizzled Dutchman was waiting. There were no seats left and the driver told him he would have to wait for another stage. A big miner jumped down and started to lift the little man into his place.

"I'll not ride and see the pioneer stay here," he said. The little man was Sutter, the original discoverer of gold in California. He had become very rich, but had gambled away all he had and only his ranch on Feather river remained.

Arriving in San Francisco, young Hascall remained there a few days and then went to New York by way of the Isthmus of Panama, a trip of thirteen days down the west coast, a day by railroad across

the isthmus and nine days up the east coast to New York. He visited in his old home where he had left his wife when he went from Kansas into the far west. They had been married some years before. But he was not satisfied with the east and soon left for Omaha, of which he had heard so much. He arrived in the growing town in March, 1865, and found things "booming," so that he could hardly find a place to stay. He finally succeeded in purchasing a building at the northeast corner of Fifteenth and Farnam streets, where a Mrs. Corey had been conducting a store. He went to housekeeping there with his wife and opened a law office in the old Pioneer block.

County Judge in Omaha

His identity with politics began almost with the day of his coming to the city, for he was appointed county judge to fill out the term of Judge Dickinson, who had died. The following year he was elected to the office. He was afterward a member of the constitutional convention and cast the deciding vote in the senate on the constitutional provision regarding the negro, under which Nebraska was made a state. He was elected to the senate again in 1869 and was in that body when it impeached Governor Butler in 1870. He was acting governor of the state for a short time in the early days. In city politics he has been a power and has often been referred to as "boss" of the council. He was councilman-at-large two terms, served one term as councilman from the First ward and one term as councilman from the Second ward.

Regarding all these political honors, Judge Hascall is extremely modest.

"I just went into the council to get something done," he says. "They were spending too much time fooling around with little things and we needed improvements."

The first year he was in the council he secured the building of the big Jackson street sewer. He was a man most remarkable for his thorough knowledge of the property in the city. He had a perfect mental picture of any lot that might be mentioned. He gained a reputation, also, for doing things and for sterling honesty. None could excel him in shrewdness, but he was as generous as he was shrewd. He conducted extensive speculations in real estate, chiefly in the south part of the city. He has left a permanent monument in the foundation for a million dollar hotel or castle which he had projected. The foundations still exist, embracing an area of more than a block just north of the Vinton street park. People have named it "Hascall's folly." Even if the term is justified, it is the folly of an optimist, of a builder, of the kind of man that is not afraid to risk money on enterprises, of a man who contributed much toward the upbuilding of Omaha.

Unique Among His Fellows

Today, in his 76th year, Judge Isaac Hascall is a man unique among his fellows. He lives in his little home overlooking the lordly Missouri, a philosopher among his books. In many ways he resembles Diogenes, the Greek who lived in a tub. But he differs from that worthy in that his soul is not bitter toward his fellowman. It is related that the Greek said to a man who called upon him at his tub, "Stand out of my sunshine." Isaac Hascall says to the visitor, "Come in," and if any refreshments are on hand, the visitor is invited to help himself.

Upstairs the two rooms of his little house are bare of furniture to give comfort to the body, but they are liberally and profusely supplied with books to give pleasure and wisdom to the mind. Four great cases are filled with the volumes. There are "Grant's Memories," "Modern Eloquence," "Twenty Years in Congress," "Library of Choice Literature," "Character Sketches," "Pope's Works," "Life of Washington," "Life of Lincoln" and a thousand others. And in all of them this remarkable old man is versed. History, literature, science, philosophy, all have engaged the attention of his active mind. He is doing some writing himself and if his works partake of the interest of his individuality and his conversation, they should find a ready sale. His conversation is pithy and interesting, with the added charm of an unique piquancy of expression. Of his own life and accomplishments he is extremely modest. He likes to talk, but would rather talk on some subject other than himself.

Judge Hascall has one daughter, Mrs. R. F. Williams of this city. He and his wife separated a number of years ago. And now this unique man is about to marry again. His bride he remembers as a pretty little girl he met at a boarding school back in New York nearly half a century ago. Her name was Portia Hawkins. Her father and Judge Hascall were warm friends in the former days, and their admiration for the works of Shakespeare drew them together. Miss Hawkins married, but is a widow, and lives in Buffalo, N. Y. They corresponded regularly. This spring Judge Hascall expects to go east, and the wedding will take place then. Judge Hascall is still the hearty, vigorous man his free manner of life has made him. He lives a mile from the car line, but thinks nothing of the journey down town, even in the most disagreeable weather.

Judge Hascall has been a Mason all his life and is proud of the fact that his father and grandfather were members of the same honorable order. He has never affiliated with any church.

"There were so many 'isms' that I couldn't decide on any particular one of them," he says. But a well-worn copy of the Bible on the shelves of one of his bookcases indicates that he has made a close study of that book.

Weidensall Writes of Switzerland Y. M. C. A. Work

DURING my visitation of Europe I passed through Switzerland several times, but stopped at two cities only for any length of time, Geneva and Basle. I first entered Switzerland from Italy in July through the great Simplon tunnel, the largest tunnel in the world. At this time I stopped in and about Geneva for sixteen days, when I made a study of the nations of Europe with the secretaries of the world's committee, who treated me very kindly. A trip to Europe was outlined for me, but made in sections of nations and groups of nations. The first section included the northern nations of Europe, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Russia, as I desired to visit them in the warm months of the year. Then followed the nations southward, finishing up with Portugal, Spain and France. During this stay in Geneva I had frequent helpful conferences with the secretaries of the world's committee concerning the nations I was to visit, making special mention of the national committees and committees of local associations, and securing from them a list of the names of the officers of both committees. A very helpful route of travel by land and water was marked out for me. During this stay I had also a most satisfactory visit with Mr. R. Sarasin, president of the world's committee, at his own request. It was far up in the Alps, in sight of the high, snowy range, including the Matterhorn and Mt. Blanc, where he and his family were spending the summer. I gave him a running statement of my visitation of the nations and associations of the

far east and Italy, which I had visited on my way to Geneva.

I then desired to learn of him what he wanted me to do in my visitation of the nations of Europe and in my conferences with their national and local association workers. He was deeply interested in all association work and was specially interested in my world trip. He and his family did all that could be done to make my sojourn with them enjoyable. When I left I had not only his words of counsel and advice, but his well wishes and his heart love. Leaving Geneva about August 1, I went to Norway by way of Berlin, Copenhagen and Stockholm. After visiting Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Russia I returned direct from St. Petersburg through Berlin to Geneva, Switzerland, to attend the meeting of the world's committee Young Men's Christian association September 27, 1906. I was delighted to attend a meeting of this committee and an opportunity was kindly afforded me to give a running report of my world trip of the associations, and particularly of the European nations I had just visited, and my proposed visits of all the other European nations. All I had to say seemed to be most heartily received and appreciated. I met in that committee meeting some prominent association men that were very helpful to me in my subsequent trips, notably Mr. H. Helbing, secretary of the German national committee. He cordially invited me to meet with his national committee at its headquarters, Barmen, Germany, October 9 and 10, 1906. This proved a very

great help to me in my visitation of the associations and association men in the German empire. During this second visit to Geneva I had more special conferences and interviews with the president and secretaries of the world's committee about my future movements. A new outline of travel was afforded me. I left Geneva September 29 for a continued trip through Germany, Austria and Hungary and returned to Basle, Switzerland, October 27 and stayed in the home of the president of the world's committee, Mr. R. Sarasin, where I was well provided for and made one of the family.

I visited some of the associations and association buildings with Mr. Sarasin, and with others. There is an unusual number of independent associations in Basle, which are scattered throughout the entire city, and are working together quite harmoniously. It is not a metropolitan work with branches, but is doing a metropolitan work in another way. These independent associations are of long standing and are coming closer together in their work as they are animated by the one spirit in their work for all the young men of the city. I think they will of themselves grow into a metropolitan work. The large number of associations there, many well located and well equipped buildings and rooms, and their 1,000 active Christian members, enable them to do an excellent work, but they are capable of doing a much larger and better work, and I believe they will do it. A banquet was prepared by Mr. and Mrs. Sarasin in their home for the presidents of all the

Young Men's Christian associations in Basle to meet me in conference. Over twenty were present, earnest, capable men. At the close of the banquet I was requested to address them. It was a real pleasure to do so. Mr. Sarasin was my interpreter. I presented them many of the greetings I brought with me from many parts of the earth, which were heartily received, when I spoke to them of the tremendous importance of the association work, the fitness of the association to do the work and of its marvellous success wherever it has had a reasonable opportunity to undertake it. I urged them to do all they could to put the Basle association work in the front rank of association effort; then their work would be worthy of imitation. It was a very helpful and enjoyable banquet and conference. I left Basle October 31, 1906, to attend the national convention of the French associations in Nancy, France, with Mr. R. Sarasin, at his request. This finished up my trip in Switzerland.

Geneva is an extraordinary city, charmingly located at the end of Lake Geneva. It is cut in two by the majestic River Rhone as it rushes out of Lake Geneva on its course to the sea. Geneva is a large and busy city, with a population of 110,954 inhabitants. It is one of the centers of continental travel. It has almost everything to make it an attractive city. Its great lake of superior excellence, its majestic river, unexcelled by any other; its panoramic view of the Alps, including Mt. Blanc; its splendid public buildings, univer-

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