

**CONGRESSIONAL
REMINISCENCES: ADAMS,
BENTON, CALHOUN, CLAY,
AND WEBSTER. AN ADDRESS**

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Congressional Reminiscences: Adams, Benton, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster. An Address by
John Wentworth

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JOHN WENTWORTH

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CONGRESSIONAL REMINISCENCES.

ADAMS, BENTON, CALHOUN, CLAY, AND WEBSTER.

AN ADDRESS:

DELIVERED AT CENTRAL MUSIC HALL, THURSDAY EVE, MARCH 16, 1882,

BEFORE THE

CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

WITH

NOTES AND AN APPENDIX.

BY CHICAGO'S FIRST CONGRESSMAN,

JOHN WENTWORTH,

AN EMIGRANT FROM SANDWICH, N.H., TO THE TOWN OF CHICAGO, 25TH OCTOBER, 1836;
 VOTER AT CHICAGO'S FIRST CITY ELECTION, 2D MAY, 1837; FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS,
 FROM 1836, EDITOR, PUBLISHER AND PROPRIETOR OF THE "CHICAGO DEMOCRAT,"
 FIRST CORPORATION-NEWSPAPER; MEMBER OF CHICAGO BOARD OF EDUCA-
 TION IN 1838, 1861-3, AND 1867-70; MAYOR OF CHICAGO IN 1857 AND 1860;
 MEMBER OF ILLINOIS STATE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1861;
 CHICAGO POLICE- AND-FIRE COMMISSIONER IN 1863; MEMBER OF
 ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE IN 1864; MEMBER
 OF CONGRESS FROM THE CHICAGO DISTRICT FOR TWELVE
 YEARS: - 1843, 1844, 1845, 1848, 1852, AND 1864;

ALSO,

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE MAINE, NEW-HAMPSHIRE, AND VIRGINIA HISTORICAL
 SOCIETIES; MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY; VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE
 NEW-ENGLAND HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF BOSTON, MASS.;
 PRESIDENT OF DARTMOUTH-COLLEGE ALUMNI FOR 1882; ETC., ETC.

COMPLIMENTS OF

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AUTHOR'S EXPLANATION.

THIS lecture was prepared from a great variety of notes, made by the author from time to time, with a view of drawing upon them, as occasion might require, whilst contemplating a visit to each of the county seats of counties that he once represented in Congress; and where it was but natural that he would be expected to say something of olden times to the people.

His first district, under the census of 1840, now embraces nineteen counties. His second district, under the census of 1850, now embraces seven counties, taking three new ones and throwing fifteen of the old ones into other districts. He represented, prior to the disruption of the old political parties by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, in 1854, what are now twenty-two counties, containing a population of 1,300,000 people, more than five-twelfths of the population of the State, and controlling fully two-thirds of its wealth. Since he represented those counties, many populous towns have grown up, and some of them are more important than their own county-seats, and contain among their residents many of his early supporters. These twenty-two counties now comprise six entire congressional districts and parts of five others; there being twenty districts in the State. To visit and address all such communities and pass the desirable amount of time with them was impracticable, and his notes, col-

lected for such occasion, were likely to prove of no account.

But having been invited by the Chicago Historical Society to deliver a lecture, and being willing to assume, with his fellow-members, his full share of the labors of keeping alive the interest in so desirable an organization and after consulting with the president and other members of the Society, he concluded to secure the most capacious hall in the City, with a platform large enough to seat the members of the Society apart from the main audience, and thus give the old residents, not members of the Society, an opportunity to hear experiences which they had so confidently given him in early life an opportunity to obtain.

Since its delivery, Mr. Robert Fergus, a settler of 1839, having expressed a desire to publish the lecture as one of his "Historical Series," the author, in order to make it, to a greater extent, conform to the design of Mr. Fergus, in publishing his Series, as well as to promote the general objects of the Chicago Historical Society, has added many notes and an appendix, which may make some parts of the lecture more readily understood, and bring to the front the names of the men who assisted in nominating him for Congress, whilst exhibiting the obsolete platforms which divided parties prior to the repeal of the Missouri-Compromise act.

The author is anxious to obtain the present post-office address of any of the delegates mentioned in Appendix A, now living, or of some of their descendants, if deceased; and the same will be published in the next edition, if one should be required.

CONGRESSIONAL REMINISCENCES

BY

JOHN WENTWORTH.

ON the evening of 16th March, 1882, promptly at 7 o'clock, the doors of Central Music Hall (s.-e. corner of State and Randolph Streets) were thrown open to the already-crowded lobbies, and during the time this immense audience were taking their seats, the organ, Mrs. James B. Runnion presiding, pealed forth many old-time melodies, concluding with "Auld Lang Syne"; whereupon, Hon. Isaac N. Arnold, president of the Chicago Historical Society—its members being seated upon the stage—after announcing that Rev. Brooke Herford would deliver the next address, "Gladstone and Bright," before the Society at its hall, upon the North-Side, said:

"The speaker of this evening, Col. Wentworth, the best-known man in the North-West, needs no introduction to this representative and crowded audience, who well know whom they came to hear."

Thereupon, Mr. Wentworth arose, and thus addressed the vast assemblage:

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY; EARLY SETTLERS OF CHICAGO, THEIR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN:

I took my seat in the House of Representatives, 4th December, 1843, and was not only the youngest,* but the least experienced of all the members, never having been at the capital of my State, nor seen any legislative body in session. Illinois was then a frontier state. All north was known as Wisconsin Territory, and

* Mr. Wentworth, born 5th March, 1815, would not have been 28 years of age had the session commenced, as it was possible, by a presidential proclamation on the 4th March, 1843, and had the election not been delayed one year in consequence of the slow progress in the census returns. As it was, however, he was the youngest man ever sent to Congress from Illinois, except Daniel P. Cook, the first member of Congress after the admission of Illinois into the Union in 1818, and for whom Cook County was named.

all west, as far south as the Missouri line, was Iowa Territory. We had no Pacific possessions. Texas had not been acquired, and Florida was but a territory. My district extended from the Wisconsin state-line to the Springfield district at the south; embracing Princeton, LaSalle, Bloomington, Urbana, and Danville; and from the Indiana state-line to the Rock-River Valley at the west.

My congressional terms embraced every crisis in the slavery agitation, beginning with the discussion respecting the propriety of annexing Texas and ending with the adoption of the constitutional amendments establishing the equality of all persons before the law. My Illinois colleagues^{*} in the Senate and in the House were all new members. I think none of them had ever seen Washington before, and I had had but even a passing acquaintance with only two of them. In view of my frontier residence, the speaker placed me upon the Committee upon Territories, and I was the only Northwestern man upon it. I had to be the mouthpiece upon that committee of all the settlements in the wilds of Wisconsin and Iowa, extending to the British Possessions on the north, and to the Rocky Mountains on the west.

As the infant of the House, I intended to assume the role of modesty, and profit by the speaking of others. But upon my ninth day, before a single one of my colleagues had said "Mr. Speaker!" Senator Breese informed me that he was intending that day to announce the death of Senator McRoberts[†] in the Senate, who had died in vacation, and, as he lived in Danville, in my district, I must do the same in the House. I had never seen Judge McRoberts, and knew but little of him; but I hurried around among my colleagues and gathered what information I could, and did my best to make myself ready for the resolutions of Judge Breese, when they should be sent over from the Senate. Thus

* The names of Mr. Wentworth's colleagues, during the period covered by this Address, are given in Appendix A, and also the names of all the delegates to the conventions which nominated him, and the resolutions adopted thereby.

† Samuel McRoberts was born in the town of Mitchie, in Monroe County, Illinois, 20th February, 1799; was the first Circuit-Court clerk of that county, and was elected to the State Senate of the sixth General Assembly from the district composed of Monroe, Clinton, and Wabash Counties, in 1828. He was afterward appointed U. S. District-Attorney for Illinois; Receiver of Public Moneys at Danville; and Solicitor of General Land-Office at Washington. In 1841, he was elected United States Senator, and, after serving through the Twenty-seventh Congress, he died on his way home, at Cincinnati, Ohio, from a cold contracted in crossing the mountains, 27th March, 1843. See *Congressional Globe*, 13th December, 1843. He was brother of Hon. Josiah McRoberts, now judge of the Circuit Court at Joliet.