

CLASS OF 1822

PHILIP VIELE

Son of Abraham and Hannah (Douglass) Viele
Bap. September 13, 1799 at Schaghticoke.
Married Catharine Gertrude Brinkerhoff, June 4, 1828.
Died March 30, 1881, at Fort Madison, Iowa.
Catharine died August 4, 1869.
No children.

In 1817 Philip entered Union College, Schenectady. In 1821 he commenced the study of law in Waterford, N. Y., probably with his uncle, John L. Viele (Union 1811), who was practicing law in that place. Philip was Surrogate of Rensselaer County from April, 1827, to March 28, 1835. In 1837 he went out to Fort Madison, Iowa, where he was four times President of the village, and later Mayor of the town of Fort Madison. He was three times chosen Judge of Probate for Lee Co., Iowa. He was a man of eloquent speech and courteous manners and his great love for children was manifest in his annual Christmas treat for all the children of Fort Madison. At his funeral 200 children walked in procession and threw flowers into his grave.

FROM Viele Records p. 215
Kathlyne Knickerbacker Viele
Tobias A. Wright
New York 1913.

PHILIP VIELIE, Esq., 1822, a resident of Troy, N.Y., was a member of the Philomathean Society.

Philomathean Catalogue 1830

1822

PHILIP VIELE

Philip Viele came to Fort Madison in 1837. At the second term of the District Court held there in 1837, the record shows that he was appointed Prosecuting Attorney, and likewise at the third term, held there in April, 1838, which was the last one so held while we were a part of the Territory of Wisconsin.

He was a New Yorker by birth; a graduate of Union College; a classmate and intimate personal friend of William H. Seward; an accomplished scholar; a lover of literature; a collector of art treasures, and an antiquary. As a lawyer, he was able, and would doubtless have gained wide pre-eminence had he been so disposed and not allowed politics to interfere with his professional career, for, in addition to his legal attainments, he was an advocate of extraordinary eloquence, pathos and dramatic power. Colonel J. M. Reid, a member of the Keokuk Bar, who knew him well, says of him: (In "Sketches and Anecdotes of Early Settlers" by Col. J. M. Reid, Keokuk, 1877)

"He was full of fun and French vivacity, and could be sublime, pathetic or facetious. He could work up the sympathy of a jury and shed tears himself, when appealing to them as an advocate, with dramatic effect."

Touching somewhat his personal appearance, he further said:

"Judge Viele showed the blood of the Mohawk Valley Knickerbockers in his face, which when young, glowed with the rosy hue of health. Captain Jesse Brown, alluding to his roseate complexion at a bar banquet, gave this toast, which created much merriment: 'Here's to Philip Viele! The deepest red lawyer in Iowa!'"

He was born in Rensselaer County, New York, in 1799, of Holland-French descent. His paternal great-grandfather, Amaud Cornelius Viele, was a Frenchman by descent, and a Hollander by birth. He himself belonged to a family of nine children, one of whom, Delia Maria, became the wife of Judge David Rorer, of Burlington; and a lovely, dignified lady she was, as I can myself testify. After three years of legal study under eminent New York lawyers, Mr. Viele was admitted to the bar there in 1824. It was in that

year that he suffered himself to be drawn into politics. William H. Crawford was the Democratic nominee; General Jackson, John Q. Adams and Henry Clay were each independent candidates. Young Viele exposed the cause of and took the stump for General Jackson. He distinguished himself as an orator, and the youngest one in the campaign. A gentleman who knew and heard him at that time, said of him: "No other speaker, old or young, in Eastern New York, could draw together such large crowds and raise them to the same pitch of excitement as young Viele."

In 1827 Governor DeWitt Clinton appointed him Judge of the Surrogate Court of Rensselaer County, and he continued to hold this office for eight years, until 1835. Two years thereafter, in June, 1837, he arrived and settled in the little village of Fort Madison. As we have seen, he started out as a Democrat. In the struggle between what was known as the "Albany Regency," and the Clinton Wing of the Democratic Party, he sided with the latter. The "Regency" gained control, he became disgusted, and joined the Whig Party, then under the leadership of Henry Clay. In the Harrison-Van Buren Presidential Campaign of 1840, he took the stump for Harrison. This was after he had become a resident of Fort Madison. The leading Whigs desired him to become their candidate for Congress, and brought his name before the nominating convention for that purpose, but owing to circumstances not necessary to relate, he was defeated by a few votes, and Alfred Rich became the nominee against General A. C. Dodge, the Democratic nominee, by whom he was defeated.

Note.-Of this event, Hawkins Taylor, who was a contemporary with Viele thus writes, in the Annals of Iowa, July number, 1870:

"The first Whig Territorial Convention held was in May or June, 1840, in Muscatine. It was a mass convention to nominate a candidate for Congress. There was a large delegation from Lee and Des Moines counties. The candidates for nomination were Alfred Rich and Philip Viele, both lawyers and citizens of Fort Madison, and both men of ability. Rich was one of the brightest young men in the Territory, but fell an early victim of consumption. Judge Viele still lives at his old home in Fort Madison, rich and honorable. The contest was exciting and almost bitter. Rich was the pet of the young America of his party, while the Judge was rather the representative of Whig respectability."

He was afterwards elected Judge of Probate of Lee County, and served with such general satisfaction that he was re-elected for two successive terms. During the agitation of the slavery question, growing out of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, he sided emphatically with the Anti-Slavery Wing, became one of the organizers of the Republican Party, and was chosen President of its first convention, which was held at Iowa City in 1856. In 1859 he was elected a member of the State Board of Education. He took deep interest in all public enterprises, and to his efforts was due more than to any other factor the building of what was known as the Fort Madison, Farmington and Western Railroad, one point upon which was named in his honor, "Viele Station." Speaking of that enterprise, and as illustrative of Judge Viele's personal magnetism and influence, his old friend and contemporary, Daniel F. Miller, thus said of him:

"In the early part of 1870, a meeting of the stockholders and citizens of Fort Madison was called in reference to a railroad project, which they had worked hard to accomplish, but which, owing to untoward circumstances, seemed likely to fail. The speeches of those who had it in special charge were desponding, and it was generally considered a 'lost cause,' when the Judge, inspired by the necessities of the occasion addressed the meeting with all the authority of age, and all the fire and eloquence of youth. He stirred the local pride of the citizens to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, and they entered into the spirit of the cause with such energy, that it passed immediately from doubt to certainty."

Later in life he retired from public affairs, and quietly devoted himself to the enjoyment of his literary tastes and aesthetic instincts.

Recollections and Sketches
of Notable Lawyers and
Public Men of Early Iowa.
pp. 322-325
Edward H. Stiles
Des Moines 1916.

Philip Viele lived and died at Fort Madison. He was from Rochester, New York. He was very emotional and had great influence with juries. He sometimes would be so wrought up in his argument that he could not restrain his tears. He was a great home man, of a literary turn of mind; he had a very fine library, a great many works of art. He was a good deal of an antiquarian and had a collection of rare coins. He seldom went out, and was not often seen except at court or some other public occasion. He was a candidate at the time Alfred Rich was nominated for Congress against A. C. Dodge. I was a member of the convention, and Viele was sorely disappointed by his defeat. He was regarded as a very able lawyer.

By Theodore S. Parvin.

Recollections and Sketches
of Notable Lawyers and Public
Men of Early Iowa.

p. 568

Edward H. Stiles

Des Moines 1916

Philip Viele showed the blood of the Dutch
Talley Ketchikan in his face, which was
ruddy, mixed with the rosy hue of health.
Captain Jesse Brown, alluding to his vigorous
constitution at a bar banquet, gave this toast,
which created much merriment: "Here's to
Philip Viele! The dearest son lawyer in Iowa!"

He was born in Hamilton County, New York, in 1799,
of William-Grant descent. His paternal great-grand-
father, Israel Cornelius Viele, was a frontiers
soldier, and a Hollander by birth. He himself
belonged to a family of nine children, one of whom,
John Viele, became the wife of John Wells Brown,
of Burlington, and a Lowell, dignified lady who was
as I can myself testify. After three years of legal
study under William Fox, his superior, Mr. Viele was
admitted to the bar March 10, 1826. It was in that

PHILIP VIELE, '22

Judge Viele was born at the Valley, now Valley Falls, in the town of Pittstown, Rensselaer county, N. Y., Sept. 10, 1799. His great ancestor, on his paternal side, was Arnaud Cornelius Viele, a Frenchman by descent, and a Hollander by birth, who emigrated to America and settled in Schenectady, on the Mohawk River, in the latter part of the 17th century. The parents of Judge Veele resided on a farm at the time of his birth, and he remained with them until his fifteenth year, when he was sent to the academy in Salem, Washington county N. Y., where he remained three years. He entered Union College at Schenectady, N. Y., in 1817, and there for several years, pursued his studies with zeal and success under the instruction of the learned and distinguished Dr. Nott. He commenced the study of the law in October, 1821, in Waterford, Saratoga county, N. Y., and was admitted to the bar of the supreme court of that state in 1824. Judge Viele was possessed of many qualities which must necessarily have raised him to an exalted position as a jurist and advocate, had he confined his attention to law studies and the practice of his profession. But like many others he left his Blackstone and Coke to slumber in his office, while he was drawn into the excitements of politics. At the presidential election of 1824, Judge Viele caught the enthusiasm of the hour, and took the stump in behalf of "Old Hickory." His youth and splendid speaking ability soon gained him a wide reputation as the "Boy Orator." Such were his services to his party, and so highly were his merits esteemed that De Witt Clinton, then governor of New York, tendered him the office of surrogate of Rensselaer county, which he accepted in 1827, and held it until 1831, when he was reappointed by Gov. Throop, and then held until 1835.

In June, 1828, he married his wife, Catherine G., daughter of Isaac Brinckhoff, of Troy, a most estimable lady, whose death which occurred a few years since was a very severe loss to her husband and to all who knew her. Having become security for a relative for a large amount of money, and the relative failing in business, he honorably yielded up his property even to his homestead, and with his wife, started westward. After a tedious travel of a month or more by stages and steamboats, he "pitched his tent" at the place where now stands the thriving city of Fort Madison, then in the territory of Wisconsin, on June 2, 1837, where he has ever since made his home. The place soon grew into business and legal importance, and for six or eight years the Judge continued at the bar with a growing business. But he still had a lingering love for the excitement of politics, and in 1836, the Judge took the stump for Gen. Harrison against his old associate Van Buren. In 1846, he united in a political movement of a local character, which once more separated him from his profession, to which he never again returned. The Judge with some other friends, conceived the idea of dropping the big name for a season, and calling on the honest men of all parties to unite for the redemption of the county under the name of the "Union Retrenchment, and Reform Party of Lee County." The masses of both parties gladly responded to the call and a meeting of the citizens, irrespective of party was held to nominate county candidates in 1846. The whole ticket was elected at the fall election of 1846, by a large majority.

He was elected three terms successively on the reform ticket, as judge of probate of Lee county, and gave universal satisfaction in the performance of his duties. In 1852, he was nominated by the whigs as candidate for congress for the 1st congressional district of Iowa, but running in a party garb, was defeated. Judge Viele is a very highly valued citizen of Fort Madison, and in addition to various places of responsibility and trust, has been four times elected mayor of the city.