

Address of Welcome by Mr. D.O. Mahoney.

To The Pioneers of Vernon and Adjoining Counties: Ladies and Gentlemen: - I have been assigned the very pleasant duty of addressing you on this occasion. Many of you have come a long distance to participate in this reunion and recount the many incidents that make the early history of western Wisconsin peculiarly interesting. As I scan this large audience, I recognize many ladies and gentlemen who have been potent factors in making the early history of this county and who can entertain you much more pleasantly and I hope more profitably than I, by the personal reminiscences of the pioneer life of the and adjacent counties. I feel too, that at this time, the pioneers should be given ample opportunity to relate their experiences and weld together more firmly the ties of early friendship.

For these reasons, I have concluded not to take up much of your time by any lengthy remarks, but, desire more particularly to call attention to a few things that at this time I deem of some importance.

You have come together with your families and friends, under favorable auspices, bringing with you the best of your agricultural products, the choicest of your flocks and herds, the best products of your mechanics and artisans, the handiwork of your wives and daughters, representing the useful industries of house and home, as well as the house adornments and decorations so tastefully arranged in yonder hall. To exhibit the science, products and home industries of the house, garden, farm and dairy, and learn by comparison the products best adapted to your soil and climate, and the best mode of cultivating them; these are among the objects of your agricultural society. I wish to say at the outset that these objects are worthy of your attentions; that the pursuit of agriculture stands first among all the industries in this and every civilized nation. I wish to say further that agricultural pursuits alone give to labor its true dignity, because they are among the most honorable pursuits of life. The purest and best minds America has ever produced have received that right kind of teaching and discipline, so essential to a noble manhood and a true patriotism, from parents whose only means of livelihood was that of tilling the soil. These pursuits have engaged the attention of the best men of every nation and age of the world, from the patriarchs down to the present day.

This excellent display of stock, grains, machinery and fine arts are but faint expressions of the great resources of this magnificent country. The material prosperity of this people you may witness on all sides. These broad prairies and fertile valleys are wonderfully rich in the elements that go to sustain life. Our climate is ... (break in newspaper) ... health giving principles to both animal and vegetable life. The many fine farms and farm houses are certain signs of the material prosperity and the numerous churches and great interest manifest in the schools, proves clearly to me that you believe in the moral as well as the material prosperity. For much of the prosperity that we witness, we are indebted to the pioneer citizens. As your forefathers were the pioneer settlers of New England and the middle states, so are you the pioneers of the county. It was their province to lay the foundations, morally, politically and religiously, which have developed into such grand success in all the industrial departments of agriculture, mechanical arts and commerce, as well as in all its educational, social, religious, political and state departments. In fact it was theirs to lay the foundation of that which has developed into the grandest success ever recorded in the world's history. In all that goes to make up national greatness as well as in all their individual enterprises, they built wisely and well.

In many respects the pioneers of western Wisconsin resembled the early settlers of New England and the middle states. It took courage, pluck, patience and perseverance to leave society, friends and

relatives, and often comfort and ease, and plunge yourselves into the almost unbroken wilderness of Wisconsin and there, in spite of all the inconveniences that pioneers are subjected to, you built home, schools and churches, removed the forests and subdued the stubborn soil.

The history of this county shows that, scattered as your settlements were, and though busily occupied in establishing the new home, you kept the civilizing agencies of the church and school close to your people. It stands to your credit that among the first buildings you erected were the church and the school. They were, no doubt, rude in their construction, but they have become the corner stone upon which your prosperity has been secured.

I believe the germ of all your success and greatness, both materially and morally, was planted way back, forty years ago, in those rude churches and school houses. We cannot trace all the benefits resulting from the education there commenced. But this we do know that there went forth from it an influence for which impressed a likeness more or less permanent, not only upon this county – shaping its destiny – but upon every mind with which it came in contact, and they in turn impressed the same likeness upon other minds – and so on down through the generations, multiplying itself in an ever-expanding geometrical ratio until the mind refuses to trace its further progress – lost, as it is in the trackless wastes of numberless infinity. And permit me to say here that I believe it is our duty to impress a likeness of those great truths that have come to us, upon the minds of our children, that they in turn may impress them upon theirs, and so be transmitted down through the line of generation to follow us. Through these channels alone can we be co-workers with men of this generation in the great work of carrying on and perfecting our splendid systems of government and education which are the pride of America. In them is the germ life of our national and individual success. In this way alone can we keep step in the grand march toward a higher civilization, which leads up to a higher life and a nobler manhood. We say study the history of the early pioneer life, that we may emulate their virtues and adopting in a measure their habits of industry, frugality and sterling integrity, build upon the foundation laid, a magnificent superstructure.

We ought to build better and make greater progress in this grand progressive march towards a higher civilization, because we enjoy better advantages than they. Science, inventive genius and mechanical skill have wrought wonders in these latter times, so that with our improved modes of cultivating the soil it is made possible for us to supply the world not only with breadstuffs, but with beef, pork, butter, cheese, and the whole line of agricultural products. These enterprises and industries have brought the railroad track so that the products of the country, be they lumber, mineral, or agricultural, at once find the best market. The progress made in these respects is simply wonderful. Now with these advantages and these possibilities before us as a people, what is our duty, and what are we to do as subordinate parts of the great whole? We answer, do the very best we can in all things that go to make success. As agriculturalists, we should study to know and do that which is best suited for our soil and climate. Do all in our power to improve our schools and churches, the twin civilizers of society. Beautify your homes and farms, thus making them to you and yours a joy forever. As you add to the beauty and attractions of your homes, farms, and farm life, so you add to the beauty and attractiveness of your country and state, and in no way can we add to the wealth and prosperity of the community in which we live, as well as by improving and beautifying our own farms and homes.

Let me say to you younger people who are in possession of the fruits of the labors of your pioneer fathers and mothers, you have responsibilities to discharge. You have largely to do with making these homes pleasant homes, and the years of these pioneer parents prosperous and happy ones. In the performance of these various duties which are already upon you, gather up, as a guide and help, the strength which the principles of obedience, honesty, temperance, frugality and industry will bring to your aid. Thus working together – the father and son, the mother and daughter, each striving to do his or her share in the great duties of life, you will not only bring prosperity and happiness to you own household, but to the community in which you live, as well.

I hope these meetings may be continued from year to year, that they may increase in interest (as?) the members entitled to be here diminish. Each recurring meeting, I am sure, will in many respects be sadder and sadder for those who come, until finally, when the last of this noble band of pioneer patriots and public benefactors, enfeebled by age, shall come with trembling steps, and with conflicting feelings of pleasure and pain, pain that he sees no more the familiar faces and forms of those who helped to lay the foundation of this grand state, pleasure at the joyful greeting he will be sure to receive from the grateful people he so faithfully served.

I, therefore, in the name of the management of this society, bid you a hearty welcome and hope that you may live many years to enjoy the peace, prosperity and happiness of this magnificent commonwealth.