

Joseph Lawless

The subject's paternal grandfather was a steward for a Quaker named Penrose. He was a united man in the rebellion of 1798 or what the English termed a rebel, and he was active in asserting his rights against English oppression. Mr. and Mrs. James Lawless were married about 1822. After the death of the former's father, James Lawless succeeded him as Mr. Penrose's steward, later working for others in the same capacity. Later he took up farming, but times continuing hard, he finally emigrated to America with his family, the trip to New York on the old sailing vessel Abypratt requiring seven weeks. There the father and children were soon found remunerative employment, later returning to Ireland for the purpose of disposing of some of his wife's property in Arklow, after which he returned to New York, bringing the subject, who had been left in the home land, he being about five years old at that time. It was a trying voyage, many deaths occurring on the ship from plague, the trip requiring twenty-eight days. For a time after landing there was sickness in the family and they had a hard time. Later the father took his family to Beloit, Rock county, Wisconsin, where he found employment on the farm, digging wells and doing whatever he could to earn an honest living. He soon had a start in the new country, securing some good land where he established a good home and made a comfortable living, clearing and developing the land into a good farm, after undergoing the usual hardships incident to pioneer life in the north sixty years ago. In 1855 James Lawless added to his place by buying forty acres more and farmed successfully until he met death in a runaway accident, September 1, 1857, after which the subject and his brothers had to work hard to support the family and keep the farm up, Joseph then being fifteen years of age. The place being divided, he and his mother remained on one half of it. Joseph remained at home during the war, he being the only support of his mother. He worked in a butcher shop for some time and farmed some. His brother Andrew had gone to Nevada and returned home on a visit, and in the spring of 1864 Joseph returned to the far West with him, making the long overland journey across the plains in a wagon, there being several in the party. The trip was both a pleasant and eventful one, their experiences being somewhat trying at times, and it is very interesting to hear the subject relate the various incidents of this trip. He is a fluent conversationalist, and having always been a keen observer, his accounts not only of this trip, but of his voyage from Ireland to America, then from New York to Wisconsin along the route of the Great Lakes, are both interesting and instructive, bringing back as they do vivid pictures of pioneer days and conditions of another and much different period than that of the present. They arrived in Nevada the following summer, having been over four months on the way, and there they went to farming and were successful. After remaining in that state a few years, Joseph Lawless went into California and visited many different places in 1866. Boarding a steamship at San Francisco, he started, in the fall of that year, back to New York city, by way of the isthmus of Panama, which they crossed by train, then boarded the steamship Arizona, and proceeded up the Atlantic coast, landing in New York November 1, 1866, the entire trip from San Francisco requiring twenty-one days. Mr. Lawless and three other young men, whom he had met on board the ship, one bound for Wisconsin and the other two for Iowa, started West the following day, making the trip by rail and boat back to his old home near Beloit, Wisconsin. He spent the following winter visiting with his mother, now grown old, and with relatives and friends in that locality. Joseph Lawless had saved about a thousand dollars while in the West, which together with the proceeds from the old home place which was sold soon after his return, gave him sufficient capital to start up anew. He decided to make his future home in the state of Iowa, having been favorably impressed with the same upon his trip west, so he came to Hardin county, leaving Beloit, Wisconsin, March 1, 1867, but after visiting awhile in the southern part of the state he returned to Wisconsin somewhat discouraged, but soon afterwards he started again for Hardin county, Iowa. Here he purchased one hundred and sixty acres at three dollars and fifty cents per acre. He was pleased with the new country, and found numerous species of wild game and such conditions as one would expect to find in a new country at that period. He began improving his wild land and, by dint of hard toil and perseverance, soon had a good farm developed and a good home established, having in the meantime purchased five acres of timber near by. Hardin county was then practically all wild, only a few scattering houses here and there on the prairie, and there were practically no roads and few conveniences of modern civilization. But he in time had made preparation to bring his mother here, and begin the work of home building in earnest, Mr. Lawless having remained in Iowa until the latter part of 1867 when he went back to the old home for his