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Hon. Lucien B. Caswell: Fort Atkinson's "grand old man." Born Nov. 27, 1827. Died April 26, 1919. 1919

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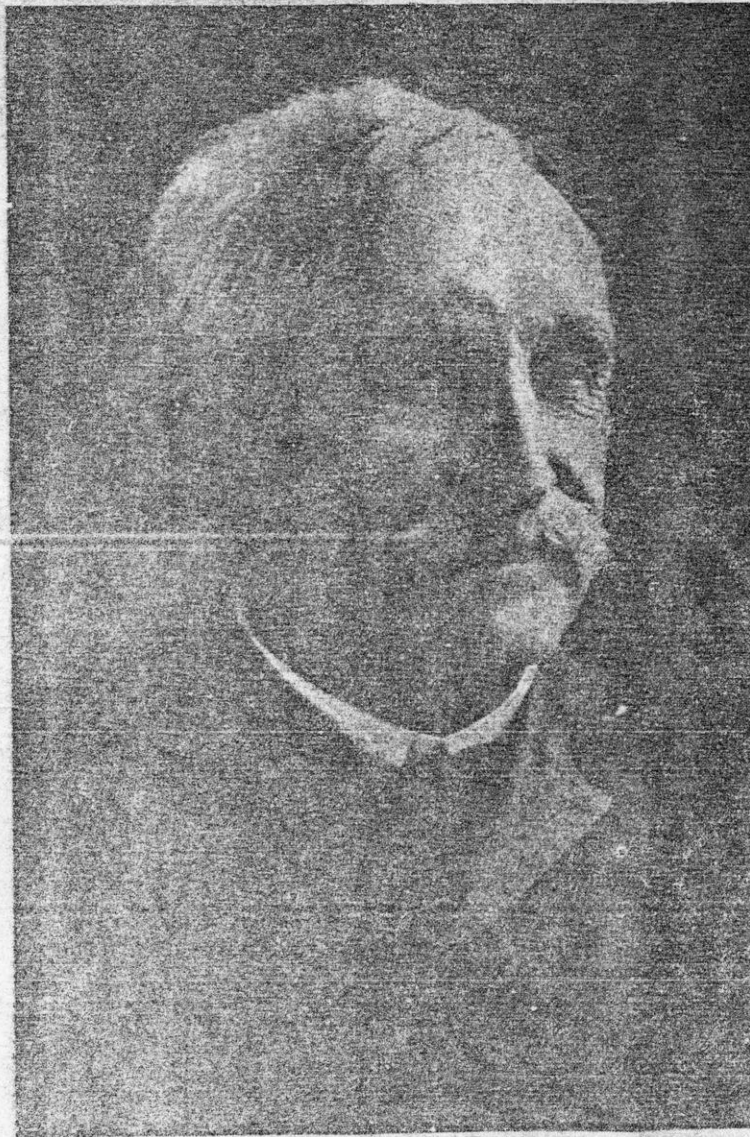
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Hon. Lucien B. Caswell

Fort Atkinson's "Grand Old Man"



Born Nov. 27, 1827. Died April 26, 1919.

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To have lived honorably and successfully a life of ninety-one years—sixty-seven years of continuous residence in one community—holding during sixty-five of those years one of the most important offices of trust and responsibility in the gift of its citizens, and to have been actively identified with every movement for the uplift and progress of the community that he had seen grow from a little pioneer settlement to the thriving city it is today, is the enviable record of Hon. L. B. Caswell, Fort Atkinson's "grand old man" who answered the final summons at his home in this city at 10 o'clock A. M. Saturday, April 26th.

When it became known three weeks ago that Mr. Caswell was suffering an attack of pneumonia his many friends were alarmed, fearing for his recovery and in every home in the city the question would be daily asked, "How is Mr. Caswell today?" As the disease progressed and the crisis was successfully passed hopes were entertained for his recovery, but it was too much to hope, the battle with the disease having taken of his vitality to such an extent that with his advanced years it was impossible for him to rally.

It would be utterly beyond the scope of this article to adequately estimate the power for good that L. B. Caswell exercised in his town, state and nation.

For more than three quarters of a century a resident of Wisconsin, where his parents established their home in pioneer days, he has both witnessed and assisted in the development of the state and nation and the evening of a long and useful life was passed at his home in Fort Atkinson where, although one of her oldest residents, he was engaged in the active practice of his profession up to the time of his last illness. When taken sick he had several cases in court at the county seat.

He was born of Revolutionary ancestry at Swanton, Vt., Nov. 27th, 1827, his parents names being Beal and Betsy Caswell. His father died when he was three years old and later his mother married Mr. Augustus Churchill and in the fall of 1836, when he was nine years old, the family came west. Mr. Caswell retained a vivid recollection of that journey and delighted to tell of it. He said they made the trip in one of the time honored "prairie schooners" and came around the southern end of Lake Michigan, passing through the "village of Chicago" on their way. Coming up the west shore of the lake they spent the winter with Solomon Juneau at his trading post on the spot where Milwaukee now stands. It consisted of a small village with one hotel built of boards. Mr. Caswell retained a distinct remembrance of Solomon Juneau and also knew Byron Kilbourn, another one of Wisconsin's pioneers.

In the spring of 1837 they left Juneau's place and journeyed to the shores of Rock river where they settled at the southern extremity of Lake Koshkonong. Of their journey across the Wisconsin and Illinois prairies Mr. Caswell said, "As we drove along, the oak openings and the prairies were all abloom with wild flowers—a very beautiful sight."

The boyhood and youth of Mr. Caswell were spent on the pioneer farm in Rock County at the foot of Lake Koshkonong and many of the experiences of the early pioneers were his. The house of the Churchill family was the only habitation within ten miles and was a stopping place for all travelers who passed that way. The great army trails left by Gen. Atkinson's army of regulars that came through there during the Black Hawk war, ran not far from the house and Mr. Caswell often spoke of following up the trail for his own amusement when a small boy. He said, "It was the only road we had; the whole country was like a great park, we could drive anywhere in the oak openings and on the prairies."

The house was built of logs as were all pioneer dwellings and most of the furnishings were crude and simple in the extreme. Imagine the joy of the family when one day, after a few years, a raft came down the river with a load of real wooden chairs from the mills to the north. Mr. Caswell, then but a young lad, took his canoe and paddled out to the boat where he traded a large pan of freshly dressed wild ducks which he had shot on lake Koshkonong for two of the chairs. They were a great luxury for those days and one of the chairs is still in good condition and prized as an heirloom by the family.

Mr. Caswell remembered well the discussion concerning the location of the capital of Wisconsin and when it was finally decided in favor of

Madison in 1838 and work was begun on the building he was often called upon to row workmen across the river in his canoe, on their way to work upon the capitol building at the "Four Lakes" as Madison was then called. At that time there were but two other houses in the whole of Rock County, one belonging to a settler named Janes, living on the Rock river ten miles away and for whom the city of Janesville was named, the other was owned by a settler named Johnson and for whom the village of Johnstown was named.

Soon after his arrival, while still a small boy, Mr. Caswell went through the woods and across the prairie on foot to the Janes place and there he again saw Solomon Juneau who had come to stay over night with Mr. Janes. The conversation between the two men was carried on entirely in French so that he understood little of it.

Mr. Caswell's parents remained on the farm in Rock County until the year 1854. His stepfather was a man of strong individuality and by nature well fitted for the life of a pioneer. His farm was productive and he was influential in local affairs. In 1854 they moved to Fort Atkinson where they resided until their death.

In these pioneer surroundings Lucien B. Caswell grew up strong of body and mind. The pioneer schools awakened his ambition for a broader education secured in Milton Academy and Beloit College, the latter conferring upon him the degree of A. M. He read law in the office of that great lawyer and senator, Matt H. Carpenter, in Beloit, and in 1851 was admitted to the bar in Wisconsin and afterwards to the supreme court of the United States. In 1852, sixty-seven years ago, he established his law practice in Fort Atkinson and practiced in all the courts up to the time of his death. During his active work in the profession he attained a reputation for careful handling of suits and has enjoyed the rewards of a strong and successful lawyer.

In 1863 Mr. Caswell organized the First National Bank of Fort Atkinson, and at the time of his death was president of the same. In 1885 he organized the Citizens State Bank and was its president for many years. In 1866 he organized the Northwestern Mfg. Co. and was connected with it during his life time. As a citizen he has always been ready to take his share in public duties and he was elected to his first office in 1853. He then became a member of the board of education where he has served for nearly sixty-five years, and as one prominent author has said, "Certainly no citizen of Wisconsin had a more intimate knowledge of the varied changes and improvements in the educational system of that state. His record of continuous service on the school board is one that cannot be duplicated in Wisconsin, and it is doubtful if it can be in any other state in the union. The name of Mr. Caswell will always be identified with the history of education in Fort Atkinson. He was one of the 'grand old men' of his state and to his wise and conservative policy much of the success of the Fort Atkinson school system is due."

In connection with his service on the school board it is interesting to note that he hired for his first teacher, Miss Elizabeth May, who soon afterwards became his wife. Another interesting incident occurred while he was visiting one of the grade rooms in his capacity as a member of the Board. The pupils in history were reciting the story of the capture of Major Andre as a spy and in the book they were using was a picture of the large silver watch that Andre offered as a bribe to the officers to allow him to escape. At that very moment the identical watch was in Mr. Caswell's pocket. It was owned by a family living in Hebron east of Fort Atkinson and had been loaned to Mr. Caswell to take to the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia that year. The watch had Maj. Andre's name engraved inside the case and the date on which it was presented to him. Mr. Caswell took it to the Centennial and afterwards to Washington. It created much interest in both places. It was afterwards restored to the people who loaned it to him. They had procured it in a pawn shop in Philadelphia.

They afterwards left Hebron and all trace of them and the watch was lost.

Mr. Caswell was always a staunch Republican. He served one term as district attorney of Jefferson Co. and three terms in the state legislature. At the time of the Civil War he served as Commissioner of Enroll-

ment, with headquarters at Janesville, recruiting volunteers and helping to make provision for families of soldiers who were at the front. Shortly previous to this time he had a sad but notable experience. He was with the party that accompanied Gov. Louis P. Harvey on his trip to deliver a large consignment of hospital goods for the soldiers after the battle at Pittsburg Landing. On this trip Gov. Harvey was accidentally drowned. The accident happened late at night; the party was going aboard their boat on the Tennessee river and a smaller boat was used as a wharf. There was a pouring rain, and blinded by the lights of the larger boats, the governor missed his footing and stepped off into the water and in spite of all efforts to save him, was borne down river by the swift current. His body was recovered a week later. In writing of this sad accident Mr. Caswell said, "Thus perished one of the noblest governors Wisconsin ever had". It was on this trip that Mr. Caswell saw Gen. Grant for the first time. He said, "Grant as usual was silent. He had done the work but talked to few."

In his last days Mr. Caswell derived a great deal of satisfaction from his connection with the Grand Army of the Republic and made a special request that the representatives of it should be given a place at his funeral.

In 1874 Mr. Caswell was chosen to represent the 2nd district in Congress and from then on for fourteen years the history of his career is closely allied with that of the nation and the state. His record in Congress was marked by an earnest devotion to the interest of his state and district and a sound attitude toward all national problems. He was a man of remarkably sound judgment which gave to his opinions great weight and assisted in the formation of all public sentiment on all questions affecting the interests of the state, and community. Endowed by nature with great intellectual power and dependent in early life for success upon himself he was cautious in his expression upon all public questions until he had investigated the subject to which they related. His conclusions formed by reflection and examination were usually found to be correct and not only controlled his own actions but influenced largely the views and actions of others. Frankness and candor marked his intercourse with people throughout his life; he was honest with himself and candid with others and in his national life as well as within the confines of his own home town, he commanded the admiration of all by the candor he exhibited in public and in private life.

Following are some of the facts in his record in Congress—he was in favor of extending the franchise to women; he was the author of the bill reducing postage from three to two cents; he introduced the bill in Congress which became a law and by which the states were refunded many millions of dollars for a direct tax levied during the Civil War and of which Wisconsin's share was \$444,000; he had charge of the bill in the House creating the U. S. Court of Appeals; he was one of the committee on the re-organization of the Northern Pacific Railway; and was invited by President Villard, president of the road, to go with a party of distinguished men to the end of the road where the golden spike was driven that united the east and west by rails of steel. He complied and was present on that interesting occasion; he was on the committee which reported on the foundation plan of the Congressional Library building in Washington at a cost of six and a quarter million of dollars and while a member of the judiciary committee had charge of the bill which became a law for readjusting the salaries of the district and circuit judges of the United States.

Since the closing of his congressional career Mr. Caswell has carried on his law practice in Fort Atkinson and has continuously resided here with the exception of the time spent in travel in Europe and his own country. Among the many advantages accruing to the city through his agency was the organizing of the branch of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad that passes through here and settling the location of the road so that Fort Atkinson would be on its route. The little pioneer settlement had long been working for a railroad and just when all their efforts seemed in vain Mr. Caswell stepped into the breach and went to New York, met the committee and put the project through. The history of the movement is full of interest and shows his indomitable perseverance when working for the interests of his community.

The close of this long and useful life came peacefully in his own home surrounded by members of his family. It was as though he "wrapped the mantle of his couch about him and lay down to pleasant dreams". In spite of his public career Mr. Caswell had an intense love of home and was interested in the affairs of his home and family up to the last, and talked rationally and cheerfully to his nurse and daughters just a few moments before breathing his last. He was attended through his illness by his son, Dr. H. O. Caswell, with the very efficient aid of Dr. L. J. Bennett.

He was married to Miss Elizabeth May August 7th, 1855. Mrs. Caswell died Jan. 31st, 1890. There were born of this union six children, four sons and two daughters, Chester A. Caswell, Lucien B. Caswell, Jr., Geo. W. Caswell, and Dr. Harlow O. Caswell, Mrs. Isabel Cole and Mrs. May Perry, who all survive and are residents of Fort Atkinson. There are also eleven grandchildren, Mrs. W. R. Ivey and Mrs. Arthur Kammer of Fort Atkinson, Mrs. Arthur McGraw of Whitewater, Miss Marie Cole of Chicago, Miss Lucia Perry, dietitian at Fort Sheridan, Ill., Miss Mildred Caswell, Mt. Sinai Hospital, N. Y., the Misses Marion Perry and Elizabeth Caswell, Downer College, Milwaukee, Miss Mary Caswell, Miss Janet Roper and Master Wm. Roper of Fort Atkinson. The great grandsons are Master Lucien B. Ivey of Fort Atkinson and Arthur Garfield McGraw of Whitewater.

On March 8th, 1898, Mr. Caswell married Miss Anna Rogers, daughter of the Rev. Barton Rogers of Fort Atkinson. She died May 31st, 1902.

It will be of interest to Mr. Caswell's fellow-townsmen to know that for some years he has been engaged in writing a history of his life and that at some future date this record will be published. It will contain material of inestimable value in state and national history as well as in the life of our own community, with which he has been closely connected for so many years.

MRS. J. F. SCHREINER. THE SERVICES

The large and beautiful home, built half a century ago by Mr. Caswell at the most sightly spot on North Main Street, was filled to overflowing Tuesday

afternoon at three o'clock with relatives and friends, many of whom had journeyed from Milwaukee, Madison, Watertown, and other cities, to pay tribute to their departed friend.

The members of the G. A. R., the Wisconsin State Guards, and the teachers of the public schools attended in a body. F. H. Curtis, C. B. Rogers, A. R. Hoard, R. T. Hunter, A. J. Glover and J. F. Schreiner acted as pall bearers and the members of the bar, both local and from out of town, as honorary pall bearers. The casket rested in the south parlor and was banked with flowers in great profusion. Chairs for several hundred guests were placed in six living rooms which formed a complete circle and of which the front hall was a segment.

The funeral services were in charge of Rev. D. Q. Emery, assisted by President Daland of Milton College, and Mr. J. Q. Emery of Albion. Rev. Grabill gave a fitting tribute to the character of the deceased whom he had learned to esteem very highly since coming to the Congregational pastorate here. He was followed by Rev. Daland of Milton who spoke as follows:

There are two reasons why it is to me a delight to bring on this occasion a tribute to the life and character of Mr. Caswell. One is that his early education was obtained in the little school that afterwards became Milton College, and the other is found in the impression that his strong and gentle character has made upon me during the sixteen years that I have had the privilege of knowing him. In 1839 there came to this region another pioneer, then a man grown, while Mr. Caswell was a boy of 12. This was Joseph Goodrich, who founded the village of Milton, and established the school from which Milton College has grown. I have heard Mr. Caswell tell how when he was fishing on Rock River, he gave some information to the newcomer as he was looking about in the vicinity. Afterwards Mr. Caswell attended the school established by the broadminded generosity of Mr. Goodrich, and in this school was laid the foundation of that love of truth and of learning and those noble ideals which Mr. Caswell always exemplified in his life. To the day of his death Mr. Caswell never ceased to speak in the most loving manner of Milton College, and his habit has been during the time I have known him, always to attend its annual commencement exercises and there renew the memories of his youth in Milton.

It was, I think, at the commencement in 1903, at one of these happy reunions, that I first met Mr. Caswell. From that time to the present I have renewed from time to time the acquaintance thus formed. In his home I have often been a guest, always received with the utmost gentleness and courtesy, and it has been a pleasure to listen to him tell of the experiences of his earlier life. These interviews have led me to admire and love him as the kindest, most loving, most broadminded of men, always considerate of the feelings of others and yet possessed of the most discriminating perception and the most penetrating insight into the characters of those whom he met. When I have preached in the pulpit of the Congregational church I have found in him an always present and most sympathetic listener. There will always remain indelibly impressed upon my memory the picture of his happy life in his home, as he appeared surrounded by young people, whose gaiety and laughter were the delight of his days. Except for his calm restraint he never seemed like an old man, but always was young with his young associates. We do not sorrow at the completion of a life so long and so filled with kindly and gentle deeds. Lives like his make us feel the beauty of passing from this transitory world to one of eternal love and peace. God grant us grace to live lives in some measure such as his.

Following is the substance of the remarks made by Mr. J. Q. Emery, who was for many years principal of the schools of Fort Atkinson and thus came to know intimately the friend of whom he spoke:

In the maturity of a ripe old age, surrendering to the relentless Reaper, he bequeaths the rich legacy of an untarnished name, and of a life freighted with the bountiful harvests of honorable and helpful service of his fellow men in many fields of strenuous activity. I count it as one of the choicest fortunes of my life, that for forty-six years, Mr. Caswell was my friend, cordial, true, helpful, undeviating, with never any unkind word or unfriendly act. My unbounded admiration for him was not alone on account of this friendship, but as well because of his outstanding manhood in every condition, activity, and relationship of life.

He once said to me that the greatest recognition that he sought was that of being "a level-headed business man". Surely, this ambition was realized in life in the superlative degree. Trace the history of the beginning and development of the large, substantial, and well-ordered business establishments of Fort Atkinson, and in most if not all cases, the helping and stimulating hand of this business genius will be disclosed. His was the guiding spirit in establishing and maintaining the First National Bank of Fort Atkinson, the first National bank to be established in the state, that became a veritable Gibraltar of defense to the many business enterprises of the city. Failure was unknown in its vocabulary.

His love of Fort Atkinson was well-nigh passionate. A man of extensive travel, both in this country and abroad, he always returned to Ft. Atkinson as, to him, the charmed spot of all lands.

His sixty-five years of continuous service on the school board has few parallels, if any, and attests the deep interest he felt and manifested in the educational welfare of the city as well as the rare tribute of sustained confidence and approval of his fellow citizens. Those sixty-five years of continuous service on the school board gave dignity and stability to the school interests. I speak from knowledge gained by sixteen years of experience when I say that his services as a member of the Fort Atkinson school board were of inestimable value. He was wise in counsel. He was safe and reliable in action. In no sense an extremist, he completely exemplified the maxim, "Avoid extremes". His hearty good will, his broad common sense, his keen analytical mind that seized quickly the important features of any subject and rejected the unimportant or irrelevant, his zeal for educational advancement for sixty-five years wrought themselves into every fabric of educational betterment in Fort Atkinson.

Favored by nature with a wonderfully vigorous physical constitution, and a man of scrupulously regular

habits, of extraordinary initiative, his industry was marvelous. The amount of work he daily performed was to me a source of amazement, as well as of admiration. In poise, self control, calmness of spirit, evenness of disposition, manifest good-will, he seemed to have fallen little short of the perfect mark.

These sterling characteristics served him as a lawyer. He once said to me that in a majority of cases, he induced his clients to settle out of court. It took twelve years of my life in the public administration of law in the courts to realize the superb wisdom displayed by this course of conduct. In his law practice he carried the same dignity, the same keen sense of fair dealing that characterized all the other activities of his life.

A pioneer in the upbuilding of the state, he contributed as law maker and otherwise, amply of his time and conspicuous talent.

Fourteen years a member of Congress from Wisconsin, during the trying years of reconstruction after the Civil War, his sterling character and preeminent talents won for him a place on the committee on claims and also on the judiciary committee, then the two most important committees of the House of Representatives. His abilities gained for him a national reputation.

Sharing in the splendid development of his fondly loved city, of his state and of the nation during the long period of his life, a development unsurpassed in the annals of history, with Aeneas he could say,

"All of which I saw and a part of which I was."

The beneficent influences emanating and radiating from the characteristics and habits of Mr. Caswell's life can never die.

"Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And live forever and forever."