



# Oak Leaves

## Oak Hill Cemetery Association

1705 Mt. Vernon Rd. S. E. • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52403

*Oak Hill Cemetery is non-profit lot owner association dedicated to preserving the heritage of Linn County, Iowa.*

### Pioneer Railroad Builders – William Williams Walker

*Within the files of Oak Hill Cemetery was the following tribute to Mr. W. W. Walker. It was typewritten, and the author, source and time period are unknown.*

*There are a few clues, such as how the railroad names are presented, but the exact date and reason for the tribute have not been identified.*

*I am relying totally on the author and have not done any fact checking for accuracy, but it does portray an interesting story of his professional life and association with the history of the Midwest Railroad.*

Few men figured as prominently in the railroad history of the Middle West as did William Williams Walker. Not only was he active in the affairs of all the railroad enterprises centering in Cedar Rapids, but he also helped develop transportation projects elsewhere. He was also interested in banking and was an active participant in other business enterprises of Cedar Rapids. His interest in education was demonstrated by his trusteeship of Parsons Seminary and its successor, Coe Collegiate Institute.



He was born August 8, 1834 in Middlefield New York. His parents were William A. and Sarah (Ingalls) Walker. It was the good fortune of W. W. Walker to receive an excellent education. He attended Cortland Academy at Homer, New York, and later was a student at Cherry Valley Academy. For a time he went to Brown University, but in 1853 he matriculated at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute at Troy, New York. He graduated from this Institute in 1856, receiving the honor of acting as class valedictorian.

Shortly after graduation he came west to Cedar Rapids, where, for a time, he was associated with J. G. Davenport in editing the *Cedar Valley Times*. As the Chicago, Iowa and



Nebraska Railroad was being constructed from Clinton to Cedar Rapids it was not long before he became connected with it as a “rod man”<sup>1</sup>.

*In the later stages of construction he was made Superintendent of Construction and was in charge when the road was built into Cedar Rapids. Had his advice been followed there would be no Fourth Street railroad problem in Cedar Rapids today. The “short cut-off” now used by the Chicago and Northwestern was in his original survey and it was in his judgment that this line should be used instead of running trains through the city.*

When in 1859, the Cedar Rapids and Missouri Railroad Company was organized to build a line west of this city to the Missouri, Mr. Walker was active in behalf of the project. The “Times” said that “the first articles ever written in favor of the project were from his pen, while connected with the “Times” and the first speeches in its favor were made by him in the western counties. He spent much time in Des Moines in the winter of 1859 helping secure a land grant for this railroad.

<sup>1</sup> A rod is a unit of length, equal to 11 cubits, 5.0292 metres or 16.5 feet. A rod is the same length as a perch and a pole. The lengths of the perch (one rod) and chain (four rods) were standardized in 1607 by Edmund Gunter. Fields were measured in acres which were one chain (four rods) by one furlong. The rod is still in use as a unit of measure in certain specialised fields. In recreational canoeing, maps measure portages (overland paths where canoes must be carried) in rods. This is thought to persist due to the rod approximating the length of a typical canoe.

In June, 1860, he was appointed Chief Engineer of the railroad. Under his personal direction the road was constructed from Cedar Rapids to Council Bluffs, reaching the latter place in 1867. He also became the Vice-President, Secretary, and Assistant Treasurer of this company.

For years he was closely associated with the railroad projects of John I. Blair and held responsible positions in the various companies. In 1858(?) he was listed as the President of the Northern Nebraska Air Line Railroad Company, organized to build a line between De Soto and Fremont Nebraska. In the Fremont, Elkhorn and & Missouri Valley Railroad he held the position of Chief Engineer. He was a Director and Treasurer of the Iowa Falls & Sioux City Railroad Company (*now a part of the Illinois Central system*). In the Sioux City & Pacific Railroad Company he held the offices of Director, Superintendent, Secretary and Chief Engineer.

Early in 1874, Mr. Walker became the Central Superintendent of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railroad, and succeeding William Greene, who in turn became the Vice-President in succession to Dr. John F. Ely, resigned. In 1875, Mr. Walker resigned his office in this company.

He was also connected with the St. Louis, Hannibal and Keokuk Railroad, which was organized largely by Cedar Rapids men. In 1879 he was listed as Vice-President and General Superintendent and in 1882 he was elected to the office of President.

Naturally, being an engineer, Mr. Walker would be interested in railroad construction companies. When the Iowa Railway Contracting Company was incorporated in 1865 with John I. Blair as President, Mr. Walker's name appeared on the roll of officers as "General Agent." This company was capitalized at \$3,000,000. Among the other officers and Directors of this corporation were prominent Eastern financiers, including Oakes Ames, Charles E. Vail, Charles A. Lombard, William T. Glidden, Dewitt C. Blair, and J. M. S. Williams.

Mr. Walker was also a Director, General Agent and Secretary of the Sioux City Railroad Contracting Company and a Director and General Agent of the Iowa Railroad Contracting Company.

In the Moingona Coal Company one of the Blair interests incorporated in 1866, he was a Director, Vice-President and Treasurer.

Not all of Mr. Walker's attention was absorbed by railroad enterprises. In 1864 he was instrumental in organizing her First National Bank. This bank was authorized by the Comptroller of the Treasury on August 23, 1864, about a month after the Bevers and their associates had been authorized to open City National Bank. The First National Bank, had at first a capital of \$50,000, but this was soon increased to \$75,000. W. W. Walker was President and John Weare Jr., the Cashier of this institution. This bank was opened October 31, 1864, in the Ely Block. In 1872,

Mr. Walker resigned the presidency of this bank and was succeeded by Mr. Weare.

When the Cedar Rapids Building and Loan Association was incorporated on April 3, 1874, Mr. Walker's name appeared among the Directors and also as President. In the Williams Harvester Company, organized in 1878, he held the position of Secretary.

He was among the incorporators of the Cedar Rapids Water Company in 1875 and served the company as Secretary and President. Since his first work in Cedar Rapids had been on a newspaper, it is not surprising to find him among the organizers of the Republican Printing Company in 1872. For a time he was Editor and General Manager of the "*Daily Republican*" and he also served the company as Secretary, Treasurer, and President. While connected with this newspaper, he was elected President of the State Press Association of Iowa.

Mr. Walker was a devoutly religious man and was very active in the First Presbyterian Church. It was he with Dr. and Mrs. Ely, it will be recalled, who presented the church with its Chapel. One outstanding trait of Mr. Walker during his years of railroad building was that he would not allow any Sunday work. For a time he was Superintendent of the Sunday school of his church.

Of his interest in education it is unnecessary to speak further. The account of Parsons Seminary has brought out his connection with it as Trustee and Treasurer. The history of Coe Collegiate Institute will reveal his services to that predecessor of Coe College.

It remains only to make brief mention of the family of Mr. Walker. On October 15, 1857, he was married to Miss Mary Ann Hitchcock of Homer, New York. He has two daughters by this marriage. His first wife died in April 28, 1862. About two years later, on September 7, 1864 he married Miss Laura Weare, the daughter of John Weare, Jr., his banking associate.

On September 23, 1893, Mr. Walker died in Chicago.

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#### *His Colonial Connection*

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William Williams Walker was born in Middlefield, Otsego County, New York, on the 8th of August, 1834. His parents were William Ames and Sarah Williams (Ingalls) Walker.

Mr. Walker's ancestry on his father's side was of New England and old English stock — most of them intelligent and progressive tillers of the soil. On his mother's side was the New England family of Ingalls and also the distinctively Connecticut family of Wolcotts.

*Oliver Wolcott, one of the singers of the Declaration of Independence*, (Oliver was both the son of and the father of a governor of Connecticut) *was Mr. William Walker's great-great-uncle.*