

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM**

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

United States Senator James F. Wilson Historic Resources

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

United States Senator James F. Wilson Historic Resources in Fairfield, Iowa: 1853-1895

**C. Geographical Data**

Corporate limits of the City of Fairfield (Jefferson County), Iowa.

☐ See continuation sheet

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official

State Historical Society of Iowa

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

Date

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## **E. Statement of Historic Contexts**

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

The properties associated with the life of James F. Wilson reflect his twofold stature in Iowa history. His key role in the state's political life, especially during the post-Civil War years, illustrated the national drama of postwar reconstruction events and the course of Iowa Republican factional politics. And secondly, his active contributions to the development of commerce in Fairfield left a deep impression upon the community.

Politically, James F. Wilson was intimately associated with all the great questions arising out of the Civil War period. As chairman between 1863 and 1869 of the highly important U. S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives, Wilson dealt with the questions relating to wartime measures and to the postwar reconstruction of the southern states and their readmission into the Union. Three actions might be mentioned that illustrate his active and influential involvement in leading issues of the day. First of all, he led the fight in the House for the Civil Rights bill of 1866 (forerunner of the Fourteenth Amendment) against charges of unconstitutionality and he may be regarded as author of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution ending slavery or involuntary servitude in America. Secondly, he changed the course of impeachment proceedings against President Johnson by refusing to accept the Radicals' initial effort to indict the president on eleven articles of impeachment. Instead, he issued his own minority report (elaborately reviewing the evidence and the history of impeachments) presenting views which persuaded a majority of the House to sustain his position. Later, when new charges were made based on alleged violations of penal statutes, Wilson reported from the Judiciary committee a resolution in favor of impeachment and accepted election as one of the managers of the House to present the case before the Senate. Third, as a Reconstruction leader working to "maintain legislative supremacy over judicial as well as executive authority," James Wilson "subtly and adroitly prevented a judicial review of military reconstruction by adding to a general judicial act an amendment repealing the jurisdiction of the supreme court under the *habeas corpus* act of 1867" (Ross; "James F. Wilson, Legalistic Free-Soiler," p. 370). Overall, "his actions as committee chairman," concludes historian Leland L Sage, "show him in a good light as a statesman rather than a politician. Although considered a good Radical, he proved to be independent in his judgments, defied intimidation, preserved a judicial manner, and refused to go along with the Radicals simply because he was a member of the group" (*A History of Iowa*, p. 177).

Wilson was born in Neward, Licking County, Ohio, October 19, 1828. He was schooled and then apprenticed to a harness maker from 1841-1850. Wilson studied law during this time, was admitted to the bar in 1851, and practiced in Neward until 1853 when he moved to Fairfield, Iowa. Wilson renewed his law practice in Fairfield. He was a member of the Iowa state constitutional convention in 1857, elected a member of the Iowa State House of Representatives in 1857 and 1859, and served in the Iowa State Senate 1859-1861, acting as its president in 1861. Wilson was a delegate to the Republican National Convention at Chicago in 1860. He was elected as a Republican to the Thirty-seventh Congress to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Samuel R Curtis; reelected to the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth, and Fortieth Congresses and served from October 8, 1861, to March 3, 1869. Wilson was not a candidate for renomination in 1868. Wilson was, as already mentioned, one of the managers appointed by the House of Representatives in 1868 to conduct the impeachment proceedings against Andrew Johnson, President of the United States, was tendered the position of Secretary of State in the Cabinet of President Grant, which he declined, and was subsequently appointed by President Grant as government director of the Union Pacific Railroad and served eight years during which time he acted as secretary and prepared reports for federal review.

In 1872, Wilson was an unsuccessful candidate for the Republican nomination for United States Senator. He was elected as a Republican to the United States Senate in 1882 and reelected in 1888. He served from March 4, 1883, to March 3, 1895 and was not a candidate for reelection in 1894. Wilson died in Fairfield, Iowa, April 22, 1895 and was interred in Fairfield's Evergreen Cemetery.

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Another James Wilson from Iowa also contributed to state and the national politics. "Tama Jim" Wilson (named after his hometown of Tama, Iowa) served as U. S. Secretary of Agriculture in the McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Taft administrations. These two James Wilsons are sometimes confused because of their names.

Three intellectual currents stand out in Wilson's career: 1) support of the anti-slavery movement--and by extension the struggle for enfranchisement of Black Americans, 2) a crusade for the restriction of intoxicating beverages, and 3) responsible government under the rule of law. In addition, Wilson was publically perceived as an official with high commitment to integrity in government, which sharply contrasted with the general level of honesty in government in the unsettled years following the Civil War. Wilson was a skilled committeeman, where, by legal nuances, he was able to shape legislation before it reached the floor of the Congress (as cited above in Ross; "James F. Wilson, Legalistic Free-Soiler").

Wilson was one of the founding fathers of the Republican Party in Iowa. He became a leading figure within the Grenville Dodge wing of the party and later, with William Boyd Allison, as Dodge's successor to the mantle of "Boss" of Iowa politics. In the two great causes animating Nineteenth Century politics in Iowa--antislavery and the Temperance Movement--James F Wilson's strong advocacy for them placed him at the center of the bitter partisanship and party strife that attended these issues in this state.

Wilson was, by background, a man of modest means. He stepped down from public office in 1869 and returned to Fairfield to improve his financial affairs and spend more time with his family. During the next twelve years, Wilson worked on a variety of legal cases, rarely in Fairfield, and mostly in state and federal courts as legal counsel to private clients.

James F. Wilson's importance to local commercial development manifested itself in the mid-1870s. He had already helped found the First National Bank in 1865 and continued to serve as president when he returned to Fairfield. Some local projects supported by Wilson and the First National Bank included establishment of a gasification works in Fairfield and underwriting a coal company, based at Perlee (Jefferson County), Iowa, to provide fuel to the railroads.

In 1876 the bank embarked on construction of a new building at the southeast corner of Fairfield's Central Park. At the same time, Wilson secured an agreement from the United States Post Office to rent space in another building which constructed as a private investment. The level of architectural detail for a vernacular commercial building is high in this example. The integrity of this building also is high and adds to its importance. Wilson also constructed the Wilson Building at 106-108 South Court as a private investment. The Former U. S. Post Office stands next door to the Wilson Building which, in turn stands next to the former First National Bank Building. The bank building occupies a corner lot and is much altered in appearance.

Wilson participated freely in the civic affairs of Fairfield. He served on committees which brought Parsons College to the community in 1874 and served on the Fairfield Library Board for many years, a position later taken up by his son Rollin J Wilson.

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Wilson was instrumental while U. S. Senator, in interesting Andrew Carnegie in the Fairfield Public Library. In 1892, Carnegie subsequently gave \$40,000 to construct a new library building in Fairfield and Senator and Mrs., Wilson contributed the site for this building. This was the third library construction Carnegie supported, the first two in his home state of Pennsylvania. The Fairfield Public Library was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 as part of the "Public Library Buildings in Iowa Thematic Resources."

Clouds of silence surround Wilson historiography. Wilson has received no full-scale biography like his peers Dodge, Kirkwood, Grimes, Dodge, Harlan, or Allison, to name a few. The problem lies with adequate documentation for a big book. Leland Sages cites, for example, "loss of his papers" to explain that no biography exists for Wilson (in "William Boyd Allison and Senatorial Politics, 1865-1870," p. 341). People in Fairfield are very much aware of this lack of documentation. In 1956, for example, about 50 documents from the Wilson estate were discovered at the Fairfield Public Library. These turned out to be mostly newspaper accounts, printed speeches, and other published material rather than personal papers about public issues. In lieu of archival resources, historians rely on the eyes of Wilson's contemporaries for opinions about him and bareboned outlines of his career. Because there is so little published material about Wilson, this application has included, as an appendix to the bibliography, a lengthy obituary published in the *Fairfield Ledger*.

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## F. Associated Property Type

I. Name of Property Type Historic Resources Associated with US Senator James F. Wilson

### II. Description

#### Property Types

Potential property types include buildings, structures, sites, and objects. Districts are unlikely since the resources known to be associated with Wilson in Fairfield are well known and cannot be said to constitute an historic district and the potential for districts outside Fairfield are slim.

#### Time Period

Possible historic resources associated with U. S. Senator James F. Wilson will date between 1828 and 1895, the time span of his life. Those resources will call most direct attention to Wilson's career which date between the productive periods of this career--approximately 1853 through 1895.

#### Locations

The historic resources will, most likely, cluster in three locations, his place of birth and childhood, in Fairfield, Iowa, and in Washington, D. C. The associated historic context for this Multiple Property Documentation Form, however, addresses only those historic resources in Fairfield. These resources are well documented, retain integrity of their original fabric, and are directly associated to Wilson's productive life.

Born and raised in Neward (Licking County) Ohio, Wilson lived there until 1853. Buildings possibly associated with Wilson during this period would include his home, a harness maker shop where he was apprenticed, a law office where he studied law, and the Licking County Courthouse where he practiced. The current status of these buildings is unknown.

In 1853 Wilson moved to Fairfield which he made his permanent home for the rest of his life. Buildings associated with Wilson here include possible residences prior to 1867 and the house he purchased from William Hamilton in that year (and which remained his permanent home until his death in 1895). Other historic resources in Fairfield include the First National Bank Building, constructed in 1876 but extensively remodeled about 1904; the Wilson Building, constructed in 1876; the Former United States Post Office (also constructed about 1876) and a commercial building at 56 East Burlington Avenue. The Fairfield Public Library building (already listed on the National Register of Historic Places) calls attention to Senator Wilson's work on behalf of that institution in the gift of money from Andrew Carnegie of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to construct a new building and in Wilson's own donation to the library of the land on which the building is situated. Yet another historic resource in Fairfield is the Wilson gravesite at Evergreen Cemetery.

The status of buildings associated with Senator Wilson in Washington D. C. is unknown. These would include rooming houses, single-family dwellings, and office rooms.

#### National Historic Landmarks Potential

Given Wilson's prominent role in Civil War and Reconstruction politics, a case can be made for national significance for his home in Fairfield, the Wilson House, since the potential likelihood of a residence being extant in Washington, D. C. is very low. His home in Fairfield has strong National Historic Landmark potential.

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List of Potential Resources

<u>Name of Resource</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>NRHP Potential</u>
Wilson House(s)	Neward, OH	Status Unknown
Business/Commercial Resources	Neward, OH	Status Unknown
Licking County Courthouse	Neward, OH	Status Unknown
Wilson House(s) [1853-1867]	Fairfield, IA	Status Unknown
<u>Wilson House</u>	Fairfield, IA	Nomination under MPD
First National Bank Building	Fairfield, IA	Radical Remodeling Circa 1904
<u>Wilson Building</u>	Fairfield, IA	Nomination under MPD
<u>Former U. S. Post Office</u>	Fairfield, IA	Nomination under MPD
Commercial Building at 56 E. Burlington	Fairfield, IA	Major 1st & 2nd Fl. Alterations
Fairfield Public Library	Fairfield, IA	Listed NRHP 1983
Wilson Grave in Evergreen Cemetery	Fairfield, IA	W/o Exceptional Significance
Rooming House(s)	Washington, D. C.	Status Unknown
Wilson House(s)	Washington, D. C.	Status Unknown
Office Rooms	Washington, D. C.	Status Unknown

Underlining indicates properties being nominated simultaneously under this cover document.

III. Significance

Criterion B, properties associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, defines James F. Wilson's contribution to Iowa history. James F. Wilson's principal significance lies in his association with national and state politics and with local commercial development. Also, as a leader in the forefront of local public enterprises, in his final years he contributed especially to bringing about a library building for Fairfield, both through enlisting the substantial financial support of Andrew Carnegie and through his own donation of valuable downtown property to be the location for the library building. Associated historic contexts must relate to these primary points in the man's career.

Five known buildings in Fairfield qualify. They include the Wilson Building, the Former United States Post Office, the Fairfield Public Library, and the Hamilton-Wilson-House. All these buildings are being nominated individually under this Multiple Property Listing except the library which is already listed on the National Register.

There are other historic resources in Fairfield related to Wilson but these links are weak. Two buildings in Fairfield remain extant calling attention to Wilson's commercial career. These are the First National Bank Building (now United Federal Bank) and a commercial building at 56 East Burlington Avenue. These two buildings, however, have lost much of their integrity--the bank through extensive remodeling about 1904 and the commercial building through alterations of first floor and second floor

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fenestration. Another type of resource, the Wilson gravesite, was determined ineligible for nomination because it did not qualify as under Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) C of National Register guidelines. Other historical resources remain extant from Wilson's productive life rendering his gravesite without exceptional significance.

**IV. Registration Requirements**

Associated historic resources must have direct associations with James F. Wilson, and his productive life, call attention to an important aspect of Wilson's career, be well documented as to these links, and retain integrity from the period of its significant historic associations.

The integrity of these historic resources will vary. Important features of the resources' original design must remain intact. More leeway should be allowed in evaluating older buildings than newer ones. Residences will range from very altered by changed porches, additions, application of siding, et cetera, to almost original condition. Commercial buildings will often have altered store fronts at the street level. The commercial alterations are to be expected, but these can range from simple changes that are in harmony with the original design, to total sheathing of the facade with a new material. Acceptable alterations must be sympathetic and non-intrusive. Buildings which, for example, have been completely sheathed in modern materials (fiberglass, aluminum, etc.) are considered to be intrusive. In some cases, if these or other intrusive alterations were reversed, there might be sufficient original fabric to allow National Register eligibility. For residential properties, a higher degree of integrity is generally to be expected than commercial resources since dwellings are usually less subject to modernization than are business houses.

If a resource has been moved, the reason for the move must obtain significance for the historic context. The move would also have to have been undertaken during the time period and the original fabric of the building not significantly altered by the move.

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## **G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

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Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

The Area XV Regional Planning Commission, Ottumwa, Iowa, conducted reconnaissance architectural, historical, and archaeological surveys in Jefferson County, Iowa between 1979-1983. This included every building in the City of Fairfield 50 years old and older. Each building was photographed during the reconnaissance phase of this project. During the next--the intensive--phase of this project, buildings having architectural and/or historical significance were researched and evaluated. As a result of these surveys, the Area XV recommended the individual nomination to the National Register of three resources associated with US Senator James F Wilson: the Wilson Block, Former U. S. Post Office, and the Wilson House. Another Wilson related resource, the Fairfield Public Library, was already listed on the National Register.

The owners of the Wilson House, Mr and Mrs Robert T. Daniels, also own the Wilson Block and the Former United States Post Office. Wishing their home listed on the National Register, the owners employed a consultant, W. C. Page, Public Historian, to prepare an application for the Wilson House. The consultant, who had also conducted the historical survey of Jefferson County, said that the other Wilson properties had also been determined potentially eligible for nomination. An agreement was reached whereby all these resources might be included in one nomination.

The consultant proceeded to conduct an extensive literature search and oral interviews. Three other properties in Jefferson County associated with Wilson were identified: the First National Bank Building, a commercial building at 56 East Burlington Avenue, and the Wilson grave site. All these properties are located in Fairfield and all were also excluded from this application. The bank was extensively remodeled in the early years of the Twentieth Century. The commercial building adjacent to the bank on the west had also sustained heavy remodeling on first floor and loss of original fenestration on second. The grave site was excluded according to a National Register criterion ("ordinarily cemeteries, birth places, or graves of historical figures...shall not be considered eligible"). There was a determination of No Exceptional Significance for Wilson's grave because other resources in the community called more direct attention to his life.

During the early preparation of this nomination, the consultant discussed the project with Dr. Lowell Soike, Historian, and Ralph J. Christian, Architectural Historian, Bureau of Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of Iowa (then Office of Historic Preservation, Iowa State Historical Department). A thematic approach was initially begun for the nomination. When the Multiple Property Listing format became available, this nomination was recast into its present form to facilitate processing.



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## H. Major Bibliographical References

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SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

☒ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State historic preservation office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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## I. Form Prepared By

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PRIMARY

- "Senator Wilson Called Home/Death of Iowa Statesman at His Residence in this City;" (obituary); *Fairfield Ledger*; 24 April 1895; p. 3 c. 3-6. This lengthy obituary was clearly written sometime before Wilson's death, possibly with his assistance, and probably by Editor Junkins of the newspaper.
- Howe, Samuel Storrs; "James F. Wilson;" *Annals* [State Historical Society of Iowa]; New Series; Vol 1 No 1; January 1882; pp. 26-27.
- James F. Wilson Business Card; *The Fairfield Weekly Ledger*; 14 July 1853; p. 4 c. 3. Appears to be first advertisement by Wilson in Fairfield.
- "Republican Union Nominations;" *The Fairfield Weekly Ledger*; 6 October 1864; p. 2 c. 1. Includes Wilson's name as candidate for Congress.
- "Hon. James F. Wilson;" *Portrait and Biographical Album of Jefferson and Van Buren Counties, Iowa*; Chicago; Lake City Publishing Company; 1890; pp. 169-172. Includes engraved portrait of Wilson.
- "Wilson, James F.;" *History of Jefferson County, Iowa*; Chicago; Western Historical Company; 1879; p. 520.
- "Jefferson County, Iowa Centennial History;" Fairfield; Privately published brochure by Board of Supervisors, Jefferson County; 1876. James F. Wilson, Member, Citizens Committee.
- "Hon. James F. Wilson;" *The United States Biographical Dictionary & Portrait Gallery of Eminent & Self-Made Men*; Chicago & New York; American Biographical Publishing Company; 1878; pp 780-781.
- Brighman, Johnson; "Glimpses of Iowa Statesmen;" *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*; 32 (April 1934); pp. 99-123.
- "Senator Wilson's Library Now Public;" *Fairfield Daily Journal*; 29 June 1916. Reports approximately 1000 books given to the library from Wilson's estate.

SECONDARY

- Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1971*; Washington, D. C.; United States Government Printing Office; 1971; p. 1939.
- "The Honorable James Faulkner (sic) Wilson--Iowa Statesman;" Typewritten MS; Legislative Reference Service; The Library of Congress; Washington, D. C..
- "James F. Wilson Prominent Figure In Political Circles Of Both the State And the Nation;" *The Fairfield (Ia.,) Daily Ledger*; 2 October 1939; Section D, p 3. Includes photographs of Senator & Mrs. Wilson, James F. Wilson, Jr. (son) & Kitty Wilson (daughter).
- "How the Square Was Built Up;" *Fairfield (Ia.,) Ledger*; 30 March 1929; p. 8.
- Welty, Susan Fulton; *A Fair Field*; Detroit, MI; Harlo Press; 1976; pp. 42, 61, 81-87, 100, 109, 111, 114, 130, 154, 205, 276, 280, 283, 310, 337-38.

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Page, W. C.; Jefferson County, Iowa: An Historical Survey of Buildings;  
Typewritten MS; Area XV Cultural Resources Survey (Ottumwa, IA);  
1980.

Architectural Survey Fairfield, Iowa; Typewritten MS; Area XV Cultural Resources  
Survey (Ottumwa, IA); 1981.

Fulton, Charles J.; History of Jefferson County, Iowa; Chicago; S. J. Clarke  
Publishing Company; 1914; Vol. 1; pp 304-05, 307, 310. Vol. 2; pp 5-12.  
Wilson's is the first biographical entry in Volume 2 (the biographical  
volume of the series). This indicates his stature in the community as its  
premier citizen.

"Sen. Wilson Papers, Missing 40 Years, Found At Library;" *The Fairfield Ledger*;  
9 March 1956; p. 1, c. 1-3. Includes photograph of Wilson. Unfortunately  
this reporting was premature. Wilson's papers remain missing.

Clark, D. E.; History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa; Iowa City; State Historical  
Society of Iowa; 1912; pp. 187-199; 210-215.

Ross, Earle D.; "James F. Wilson, Legalistic Free Soiler;" Annals of Iowa; Third  
Series, 32.5 (July 1954); pp. 365-375.

"Century-Old Fairfield Home Sold to College;" *Fairfield Ledger*; 25 February  
1964. Includes photograph of the Wilson House.

"Library Board Grants Wilson Portrait Loan;" Fairfield Ledger; 13 January 1965.  
"the portrait will be hung temporarily in the office of Gary Cameron,  
Fairfield, who took office this month as [Iowa] secretary of state."

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"SENATOR WILSON CALLED HOME.  
"Death of the Iowa Statesman at His  
"Residence in this City.

"Ex-United States Senator James F. Wilson died at his home in this city Monday night at 9:38. His death was due to nervous prostration, a general breaking down of the nervous system which can be traced back to his first senatorial campaign and was aggravated by an attack of la grippe while in Washington City about five years ago. Those most intimate with him have noted with deepest regret the gradual but marked decline in health and strength which he has exhibited, and members of his family have considered his condition alarming for some time past. Since his return from Washington, perhaps six weeks ago, he has been constantly under the care of Dr. W. H. Conner and the subject of many consultations with other physicians, but medical skill seemed powerless to stay the progress of the disease. For a week past Mr. Wilson had been hovering between life and death, and gradually but certainly growing weaker with each succeeding day. He was unconscious much of the time, but there were many moments when he suffered extreme pain. He passed away peacefully and calmly, surrounded by the members of his immediate family.

"James F. Wilson was born in Newark, Ohio, October 19, 1828, the eldest of three children of David S. and Kitty Ann Wilson, who were married in Newark, the former being a native of Morganstown, Va., and the latter of Chillicothe, Ohio. His parents, while poor, were worthy, christian people, and active and esteemed members of the Methodist Episcopal church. David S. Wilson died in Newark, Ohio, in 1839, while the mother's death occurred in Fairfield January 28th, 1875.

"Upon the death of his father, this son, then only ten years of age, became the sure and strong reliance of his mother, younger brother and sister for support. For a term of years he was apprenticed to the harness-making trade, but found the time, principally through his own efforts, with private recitations to immediate personal friends, to acquire a fair education, including a knowledge of the Latin language. He early formed the determination to be come a lawyer. This purpose becoming known to William B. Wood, then a member of the bar of his native town and late (*sic*) an associate justice of the supreme court of the United States, he placed at the command of the aspiring youth the necessary books and voluntarily became his legal preceptor. Thus did the apprentice of a harness maker gain a somewhat liberal education and grow into a knowledge of the law, rendering possible a remarkably successful professional and political career.

"In 1851 he was duly admitted to the bar of his native county and continued in the practice for more than a year and a half. November 25th, 1852, he was married to Mary A. K. Jewett of Newark, Ohio, the second daughter of Alpheus and Aletha Jewett. The newly married pair set out immediately to plant a new home in the then little known and far west. They proceeded first by water to St. Louis, then up the Mississippi to Burlington, and thence by stage to Fairfield, where they located and have since resided.

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"Mr. Wilson at once commenced the practice of law, nor was he long in commanding recognition as an able, conscientious and successful practitioner. He rapidly acquired a flattering business and soon stood in the front rank of his profession, but it was not as a lawyer trying cases in state and federal courts wherein he was destined to attain the full measure of his success and prominence. However certain or choice would have been the promotions accorded him within the narrower limits of his profession, they could not have been more satisfactory to himself or useful to the public than those resulting from his pre-eminent services in the broader field of state and national organic and statutory law making.

"In his early days, amid fast accumulating professional duties, he found time to write the leading editorials of his party's local paper. The rare ability there displayed in dealing with political questions, then in a formative state, won for him an abiding confidence in the integrity of his political thought and actions that has followed him closely throughout his extended public career.

"In 1856 it was deemed wise to revise the state constitution. A convention was duly convened with this purpose in view. Mr. Wilson, then only three years a resident of the state, was chosen to attend this constitutional convention and was next to the youngest of its members. Young in years, perhaps, his associates soon found him old in the resource that make men valuable in such bodies. The record of its proceedings abounds in evidence of the wisdom of his selection, and reveals the marked ability with which he performed his part of the great work of the constitutional revision. As the state's constitution was then and there recast it stands to this day without serious change or modification, and the mental, moral and material environments of this great commonwealth are the best evidence of its fostering care and concernment for the 'life, liberty and pursuit of happiness' of its people.

"The governor of Iowa, in 1857, appointed Mr. Wilson assistant commissioner of the Des Moines river improvement, then a matter of chiefest concern to the people of the state. Later in the same year he was elected, as a republican, to the lower house of the general assembly of Iowa, and during his term was chairman of the committee on ways and means. In 1859 promotion followed in his election to the state senate, and here again he rendered most valuable service during the first year of his term as a member of the judiciary committee, through whose hands passed for final inspection a then recent recompilation of the laws of Iowa, afterwards and now more familiarly known as the revision of 1860. During his second year in the state senate he served a president of that body.

"Possessed of great natural ability as a writer and speaker, well disciplined in the law, familiar with parliamentary rules and usages, painstaking to a degree, unsurpassed in every undertaking and patriotic to the core, Mr. Wilson was elected as a republican representative in congress for the unexpired term of Gen. Samuel R. Curtis. He was re-elected, without opposition in nominating conventions, to the Thirty-eighth, Thirty-ninth and Fortieth congresses, serving from December 2nd, 1861, to March 3d, 1869, his retirement in the latter year being made possible only through his positive and repeated declinations of further re-nomination. On his entrance into congress he divided with one other the sole responsibility of representing the state of Iowa in the house of representatives.

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"The labor performed in committee work is universally recognized as 'a fair test of any man's zeal, industry and influence in any legislative body.' Without regard, then, to Mr. Wilson's conceded power as an advocate, his logic and eloquence in the arena of debate, and simply applying to him this fair test of legislative usefulness and fidelity, it will be found that, while he may have had equals, he had no superiors in this particular among all his able contemporaries. A hard worker at a mechanical trade at twenty-one, chairman of the judiciary committee of the American house of representative at thirty-three, is tribute enough to the man and his talents and equally splendid to the absolute freedom of aspiration and achievement accorded the single individual under our matchless republican institutions. Mr. Wilson was, perhaps, the youngest man ever assigned to this important committee, yet he served thereon throughout his entire service in the house and during the last six years, as already indicated, was its honored chairman. This committee, on account of prevailing civil war, the consequent conflicts arising between constitution and statutes intensified by the suppression of the rebellion and the intrusion upon congressional action of a perfect multitude of perplexing legal questions attendant upon the reconstruction of erring states, was forced into a controlling rank and a conspicuous responsibility unknown before of since. It was a severe test to any man, however ripe in years of special acquirements, but when applied it found in Mr. Wilson an all sufficient conscience and capacity. 'That he remained uninterruptedly at its head, and that no measure favorably reported upon by him from this committee failed in the house, is the best assurance of the confidence placed by congress in his work.'

"Mr. Wilson marked his entrance to congress by the introduction, in December, 1861, of a resolution to instruct the committee on military affairs to report an additional article of war prohibiting the use of United States forces to return fugitive slaves. December 7th, 1863, the first day of the session of the Thirty-eight congress, he gave notice of his intention to introduce a joint resolution for an amendment to the constitution abolishing slavery. This was the first action looking to that end ever taken in the congress of the United States. Shortly after he reported the resolution from the judiciary committee and brought on one of the most memorable parliamentary struggles of those stirring times. The final passage of the resolution was largely due to the speech delivered by him on that occasion, and which was considered 'one of his ablest and most effective efforts.' Early in the first session of the Thirty-ninth congress he reported from the judiciary committee a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the constitution to forbid payment of any portion of the rebel debt, and materially aided its passage in the house. While the senate neglected to take concurrent action upon it, its purpose found sustained fulfillment in a subsequent provision of the fourteenth constitutional amendment. Among the bills favorably reported by him from the same committee, and in whose final passage he was a most potent factor, was one providing for the enfranchisement of the colored people of the District of Columbia, another giving freedom to the wives and children of the colored Union soldiers, and the great civil rights bill. Mr. Wilson always commanded a host of ardent admirers, and one of the several claims they confidently assert is that he stood with few, if any, rivals in early and zealous contention in legislative halls for the abolition of human slavery and the granting to all men of equal rights before the law. This claim it would seem has an enduring foundation. Before ever entering congress he had been persistently waging war on the retention of the word 'white' in the constitution of his adopted state, nor did he desist until he saw it finally eliminated and a standard of citizenship established in both federal and state law such that, to use the form of public utterance in debate, no person can tell from the reading of them what color is stamped upon the faces of the citizens of the United States.

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"Not among the least distinguished of his labors in the lower house of congress were those performed in matters relative to the famous impeachment proceedings against the president of the United States. During the second session of the Thirty-ninth congress the subject was referred to the judiciary committee, and consideration of it was resumed in the Fortieth congress. The result was the presentation from the committee of minority and majority reports. Mr. Wilson was with the minority, and in its behalf reported against the proposed impeachment. The fact that, after an extraordinary and exciting debate, he carried his proposition through the house, is indicative of his personal influence as well as corroborate of that degree of confidence reposed in him by his associates in all matters with which he and they were compelled to deal. In an interesting volume, called 'The Fortieth Congress,' Mr. Wilson's connection with the impeachment question is thus forcibly set forth:

"He went to the examination of this case with the prevailing idea, with regard to the law and the practice in cases of impeachment, that the power to impeach is a vast, vague, almost illimitable prerogative resting substantially alone in the judgment of the senate as to the character of the offensive acts and the exigencies of the public welfare. The known deeds of the executive led him to anticipate the necessity of reporting in favor of impeachment, and he was not inclined to suspect the legal power to meet the admitted acts by the extreme remedy of the constitution. But the careful study of the law and history of impeachments which the occasion imposed upon him forced him to the conclusion that, at least under our constitution, no federal officer could be impeached for any offense which was not named in the constitution, or which was not a criminal offense under the laws of congress. No such offense was shown. In support of his views he comprised in his report a careful but succinct review of every important case of impeachment in the British parliament and of every case brought before the senate of the United States, with an elucidation of the law and practice under both governments, which forms an interesting and valuable treatise for the evidence bearing upon every charge made against the present and a consideration of the character of each specific charge.

"When the subject came a second time before the house, on new charges, Mr. Wilson was one of the most prompt and decided of those who demanded the impeachment of the president. In this instance, in his judgment, there as no doubt about the power and duty of congress. In his view a penal enactment of congress had been violated, clearly, knowingly, intentionally, defiantly. He was made one of the managers appointed by the house to carry the articles of impeachment, that were found against the present, before the senate, and to prosecute them there, and to that prosecution he gave his best and most active efforts.'

"Mr. Wilson retired from congress as General Grant entered upon his first presidential term. The president tendered him the position of secretary of state, and then again the choice of two other cabinet appointments. Strong as the influences were that seemed conspiring to break or bend his resolve to quit public life long enough, at least, to mend his private fortunes, the better to superintend the affairs of home and give a safer care to the education of his children, they were powerless to change the hour or order of his going. The twelve intervening years were busy ones to Mr. Wilson, and they found him pressing principally those private ends whose needs of his closer attention had been so potential with him. While seldom, if ever, appearing in local courts, his wise counsel and professional services were sought by imperilled interests far and wide, and his presence became familiar in the highest state and federal tribunals. Nor was it possible for him in those days to be unmindful of the debt of gratitude he was under to the great political organization that had opened up to him his public opportunities. His wisdom and political sagacity were ever present in its conventions, clearly shone forth in most of its state platforms, and his voice was never more eloquent than when raised in advocacy of the principles thus proclaimed and submitted for popular approval at the polls.

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"His only official service in this interval was rendered as a government director of the Union Pacific railroad, to which position he was assigned by President Grant, and continued to discharge its duties for eight years. He wrote all the reports made to the secretary of the interior by the government directory during his connection therewith, and thereby furnished much accurate knowledge to the department concerning the interest involved, supplemented with wholesome recommendations as to needful legislation.

"In 1881 Mr. Wilson determined to reenter public life and submitted to the people of Iowa his candidacy for a seat in the United States senate. His manner and method of conducting a campaign for this high position were as exceptional as they proved in the end to be effective. They discarded adverse criticism or personal abuse of opponents and were confined instead to a process of public education. Mr. Wilson delivered eight written addresses on subjects of deep interest to the people, on topics scientific, literary, theological, historical and political. The character of these addresses suggested thorough study, deep research and a broad and diversified knowledge that enlightened the people of Iowa as to the capabilities of the man and won for him a place in the senate without opposition. He took his seat in that body March 4th, 1883, and was re-elected in 1888, his second term expiring March 3rd, 1895. At the time of re-election he gave public notice of his intention to permanently retire from public life, if spared to fill out the term to which he was then acknowledging an election. None knowing the man misunderstood or stopped to question the sincerity of this declaration.

"In the senate Mr. Wilson served on the following committees: Revision of laws, foreign relations, postoffice, pensions, education and labor, census, interstate commerce and the judiciary. He was

chairman of the committee on revision of laws and ranked second on judiciary. His service in the senate was marked by that same ability, industry and integrity that he has always displayed in whatever public capacity called upon to act. In matters of constitutional law his judgment commanded the highest deference. The several addresses he delivered in this most conservative and dignified body only added to his reputation as a broad, liberal minded statesman. He was the author of the law passed by the Fifty-first congress known as the 'original package act,' its purpose being to give force and effectiveness to the enactments of the several states regulative or prohibitive of the traffic in intoxicating liquors. The necessity for the passage of such an act was anticipated by Mr. Wilson in a pending measure and became doubly manifest upon the 'original package' decision of the supreme court of the United States. This act of congress emancipated the police powers of a state in their operation upon the liquor traffic from judicial diminution, that for a time seemed to portend their absolute destruction.

"During Mr. Wilson's entire life in Fairfield he was closely identified with her growth and prosperity. In a period of time embracing almost half a century no measure was ever offered for the advancement or advantage of his home town with which he was not prominently connected. He was a man of only moderate wealth, but his gift of time and labor and influence were always supplemented by liberal contributions toward all public enterprises.

"An ardent friend of education, he early recognized the value of study outside the schoolroom and foresaw the benefits of the public library. One of the first dollars he earned in his new home was given as a contribution to the Jefferson County Library association, then in the earliest stages of infancy, and from that moment until the day of his death he was its firm friend and benefactor. His contributions to its wealth of books and material



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were continuous and bountiful through a long series of years. It was directly through his influence that the interest of Andrew Carnegie was enlisted in behalf of the institution, and the donation secured through which it was provided with its present magnificent home. The beautiful site was the gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. No pressure of business or political affairs ever served to divert Senator Wilson's attention from this library. It was the constant object of his thought and his attention. He saw in the handful of books which marked its humble beginning the foundation for an institution which would give Fairfield more than state wide fame and add to her educational resources advantages beyond any present estimate. He and those who labored with him builded better than any of us knew.

"Crowned as Mr. Wilson's life had been with a series of professional, political and financial successes, nothing ever served to swerve him from the home of his early choice and the friends of his early life, or tempted him to remove to fields affording wider possibilities and greater opportunities. His love and his devotion for the humble little village and the people with whom he cast his fortunes in his young manhood were really remarkable. No difference where he labored or where duty called him, his thoughts were ever centered in his home on the Iowa prairies, and here he ever sought that rest and freedom from care which his arduous duties in public life rendered necessary. His comfortable home and handsome grounds near this city gave ample evidence of the pure domesticity of his tastes, and here amid his flowers and trees he loved to spend his spare hours in recreation and study. It seemed strange, indeed, that one so simple in his tastes could have had such high aspirations and reached such rank as he attained among the great men of a great nation.

"James F. Wilson had been so great a factor in the professional, commercial, political and social life of Fairfield for so long a period of time that he will be sadly missed. He has left his impress upon this community as no other man has done, and probably as no other man ever will. Possibly others may rise up to take his place, but they must be great and stalwart to fill the measure as he filled it. The people of Fairfield loved him for the purity and simplicity of his life, for his fidelity to every interest committed to his care, for his sterling honesty and integrity among all the temptations of public life, and for his splendid talents. Their tenderest sympathies have been extended him through all his long and painful illness, and they will cherish his memory in the innermost recesses of their hearts. And one who has known James F. Wilson long and well says that he is fully worthy of all the honors that may be shown him at this time, of all the tributes that may be paid him as his mortal remains are laid away, of all the trust and confidence that this people have reposed in him.

"Mrs. Wilson and three children survive the husband and father. Rollin J., the eldest, is a prominent attorney of this city; Mary B., the only daughter, resides with the mother; and James F., jr., the youngest son, is a young business man of Fairfield. David B. Wilson and Mrs. Mary Blair, brother and sister of Mr. Wilson, also reside here.

"THE FUNERAL

"Senator Wilson's remains will be interred in the Evergreen cemetery, this city, tomorrow, Thursday, afternoon. Services will be held at the family residence at 2:30, and will be conducted by Rev. A. F. Marsch, Rev. J. F. Magill and Rev. E. L. Schreiner. The pall bearers are Messrs. Ward Lamson, James Eckert, W. W. Junkin, John Williamson, B. S. McElhinny, A. T. Wells, H. D. Blough and J. A. Spielman, old time friends and business associates of Mr. Wilson. In accordance with the proclamation of Mayor Jaques business will be suspended in the city during the funeral hours and business houses will be very generally closed. The school

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board has issued an order for the closing of the schools at noon, and students of Parsons College will attend the exercises in a body. At the request of the Fairfield bar Judge Eichelberger adjourned district court out of respect to the dead statesman. The family is in receipt of telegrams of condolence from all over the country, and it is quite probable that many prominent Iowa people will be present at the funeral. Senator Allison, ex-Senator Harlan, ex-Senator Wright, Gen. F. M. Drake, Maj. S. H. M. Byers and others have already expressed their intention to attend the obsequies."

Source: *The Fairfield Ledger*; 24 April 1895; p. 3 c. 3-6.

The length of this obituary (certainly one of the longest in Fairfield newspaper history) indicates considerable work prior to Senator Wilson's death. The extended time of his final illness made this possible. Author of this obituary was certainly C. M. Junkin, editor of the *Fairfield Ledger*. Junkin also published a sketch of Wilson's life in *Midland Monthly*; 4 (July 1895; pp. 48-50. This obituary is a sympathetic account of Wilson's career which leaves unmentioned his unsuccessful campaign for the United States Senate in 1872, but which also avoids hagiography.