

Iowans Celebrate Governor Samuel Merrill's Mausoleum Restoration

June 10, 2016 By Anita Morrill



Iowa Governor Terry Branstad (red) visits with attendees.

Photo credit: Anita Morrill

Last Sunday, nearly 100 Iowans gathered to remember former Governor Samuel Merrill by dedicating his newly restored Mausoleum in Woodland Cemetery in Des Moines.

Organizer Jonas Cutler described the former condition of the resting place, saying, “After a century of neglect and a falling oak tree this mausoleum became home of opossums and raccoons. Upon inspection of the damage it appeared that we really were risking losing this monument forever.”

Cutler took a few minutes to describe Merrill’s contributions. “When the shots were fired at Fort Sumter Iowans responded,” said Cutler, “Those uniforms of the first, second and third volunteer regiments [during the Civil War] were funded by Samuel Merrill. Those men that fought at Wilson Creek were wearing Merrill uniforms.” He went on to describe how Merrill was wounded leading a charge in the Vicksburg campaign.

After the war, Merrill became governor from 1868-1872, during what’s commonly called Reconstruction. Cutler quoted from Merrill’s first inaugural address regarding the former slaves, where he said they would come to Iowa ““transplanting to our soil that love of liberty which impelled them from their old homes. The sturdiest defenders of freedom are those who have felt its loss.”

Organizations and individual Iowans came together to make this project a reality, including Patriot Outreach, former State Senator Denis Black, Westbrooke Construction, and others. “Congressmen, state legislators and yes even the longest sitting governor acted donating their money rather than the public purse,” said Cutler.

Attendees applauded the private efforts as well. “I attended the re-dedication of the Merrill mausoleum because I believed that Jonas Cutler deserved a public salute for the initiative and determination that he had demonstrated with this project. He set a fine example by conceiving and executing a plan to restore the tomb by private and voluntary action, rather than seeking to have government tax his fellow citizens to pay for his own priorities,” said Richard Rogers, of West Des Moines.

Michelle Bullock of Ankeny said, “I’m proud of and inspired by him for practicing what he preaches, finding a way to raise money privately instead of through public force. It gives you a sense of community pride to see all that!”

Governor Branstad also spoke at the dedication. The ceremony was attended by other public figures as well, including Congressman David Young, and Polk County Sheriff candidate Dan Charleston.

The project took two years, and raised about \$25,000 in donations, plus another estimated \$25,000 value in donated time from lawyers, researchers, artists and other professionals.

Cutler was especially impressed with Westbrooke Construction, and lead Kevin Conway. “[They] worked with us, never walking away when we experienced delays. They were so conscientious that just prior to sealing this, they swept up the floor despite the fact that no one living would ever see that floor.”

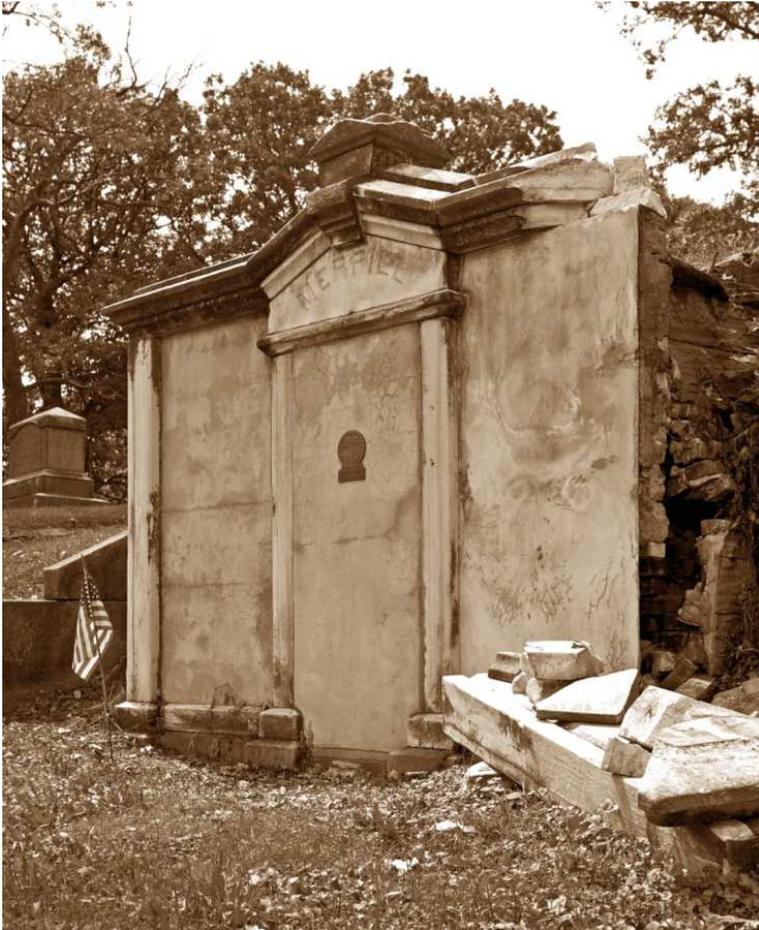
Rogers added, “The public ceremony was a well-deserved reward for those who contributed time, effort and money to the restoration project.”

Cutler closed his words at the ceremony with a challenge to Iowans: “long may we follow his tradition and our [state of Iowa] motto because ‘our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.’”



Jonas Cutler led the movement to restore Samuel Merrill's mausoleum.

Photo credit: Anita Morrill



Governor Samuel Merrill's mausoleum before the restoration.



Anita Morrill

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