

My First Christmas in Iowa

By ISAAC BRANDT¹

In 1858, Christmas occurred on Saturday. As it was my first Christmas in Iowa, some events of the day and notes regarding the Des Moines of that day and its citizens are worth recording.

Des Moines had a population then of about 3,000. We did not have 'possum suppers, for there were only twelve colored people living in Des Moines. Col. Logan at that time was busy working for his old master down in Missouri.

Des Moines had two postoffices, both striving to be the main office. Wesley Redhead was postmaster on the west side and Dr. Alexander Shaw on the east side. They were both appointed by President Buchanan and both stalwart Democrats, but their love for each other was little like that which exists between the *Daily Capital* and *Daily News*. We had two daily mails, one from the east and one from the west carried by the Great Western Stage Company, with Col. E. F. Hooker as general manager, and Joe Boggs driver from Des Moines to Mitchellville and from there back to Des Moines. When old Joe rounded in on Capitol Hill with four bright bays in a jolly trot, champing their bits and Joe tooting his bugle, the squirrels hunted the tallest trees and the young Americans tried to beat the stage to the postoffice. We thought it was a great improvement over the lonely postman that carried the

¹ Written in 1897 by Isaac Brandt, a man of ability, who long was prominent in Des Moines political and social circles; served as deputy state treasurer 1867-73, as state representative in the Fifteenth General assembly from Polk county 1873-4, a member of the city council in 1877 and mayor protem and postmaster of Des Moines 1890-94; a personal friend of John Brown who often stopped at the Brandt home in Des Moines which was one of the stations on the "underground railroad;" solicited, collected and paid into the treasury of the Iowa State Fair society more than fifty thousand dollars in providing grounds for the permanent location of the fair at the state capital; active in the Iowa Pioneer lawmakers association and served as its president.

mail on horseback when Dr. T. K. Brooks and P. M. Casady were our postmasters.

Our mayor was H. E. Lamereaux, a solid young Democrat. The town had fourteen Republicans. We had one marshal and one policeman, both sound money Democrats. There was no trouble at that time over annual appropriations; every officer did something else for a living. They were all members of the board of public works and did their own work.

Des Moines had three weekly newspapers— the *Journal* (Democrat), edited and published by Will Porter; the *Statesman* (Democrat), edited and published by Will Tomlinson, and the *Citizen* (Republican), edited by John Teesdale, with J. M. Dixon as associate editor. They were all three able and strong papers and wielded a great influence in having the state capital located at Des Moines. The members of the first legislature that met in Des Moines in January, 1858, were written up in good style, which was highly appreciated.

We had but one college building then and it was not finished. It stood a little west of Major Hoyt Sherman's residence on Fifteenth street. There was one public school building, a two story brick, corner of West Seventh and Locust streets.

We had several churches, but only one of each denomination, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist Episcopal, Catholic, Congregational and Christian. The ministerial association was composed of very able men, kind, loving and honorable. They preached more for the love they had for humanity than for their salaries. Prominent among them were Thompson Bird, E. W. Peet, G. B. Joyclin, J. A. Nash, J. H. Young, J. F. Brazil, E. M. H. Fleming, Wm. Remsburgh, Ezra Rathburn and N. Summerbell. All have been called to their great reward. We did not have any \$5,000 or \$10,000 organs, or in fact any other priced organ, in our churches, or a well paid choir to do our singing. The minister and the whole congre-

gation would join in singing the songs of praise with a zeal and unction that came from the soul.

The Des Moines medical board was regarded as a very able one, Henry C. Courtney was president of the state medical board, and among the resident physicians were H. L. Whitman, H. C. Grimmell, W. H. Famer, J. D. Skinner, Alex Shaw, W. H. Ward, C. H. Rawson, H. H. Saylor, W. P. Davis, A. Y. Hull, T. K. Brooks, Dennis Tisdale and Tilton Elkins. They gave Des Moines such a good healthy start that it is considered one of the healthiest cities in the state.

Among our leading attorneys were M. M. Crocker, P. M. Casady, J. S. Polk, Thomas F. Withrow, C. C. Cole, John A. Kasson, Daniel O. Finch, S. V. White, John H. Gray, W. W. Williamson, William Phillips, Curtis Bates, Barlow Granger, M. D. McHenry, Wm. H. McHenry, J. M. Elwood, Byron Rice, J. E. Jenett, John Mitchell, Harvey Phillips, Thomas Cavanaugh, T. E. Brown, and several young attorneys, F. M. Hubbell, G. L. Godfrey, Seward Smith, C. C. Nourse and H. Y. Smith.

The mercantile trade in its various branches was taken care of by W. W. Moore, R. W. Sypher, John Tierman, Harry Stevenson, C. P. Luse, Geo. M. Hippee, Wm. Baker, F. M. Mills, E. Sanford, Stacy Johns, Charles Corning, John McWilliams, Wesley Redhead, J. H. Hatch, A. Z. Rawson, Louis Harbach, Chris Harbach, Joseph Kuhn, Isaac Kuhn, Isaac Brandt, A. E. Garrison, B. F. Little, Laird Bros., Strauss & Simon, J. W. & J. A. Dunkle, W. F. Burkett, J. M. Moody, Newton & Keene, Beekman & Poindexter, Carter, Hussey & Curl, Gailbraith & Latshan, Childs & Howell, John H. Given, Geo. W. Cleveland and Charles Good.

Among our builders and contractors were Conrad Youngerman, S. A. Robertson, Charles Weitz, John Woods, H. N. Woods, Charles Nichols, James Garrity, John Bryan, John Hyde, U. B. White, M. P. Turner, Levi J. Wells, A. J. Gill and Mathew Sleninger.

Our bankers were few: Callanan & Ingram, Seare &

Harsh, A. G. Stevens, Hoyt Sherman, F. R. West and B. F. Allen seemed to lead them all.

Our lumbermen were J. K. and W. H. Gilcrest and Michael Drady's, Lovejoy's lumber yard, and Scribner's and White's saw mills. Our justices of the peace were Benjamin Bryant and E. M. Bolton.

The year 1858 was a very wet one. In May it rained by day and it rained all night. Our rivers were very high, so high that steamboats made almost daily arrivals. I will quote from Will Porter's weekly *Journal* of May 8, 1858:

"Arrivals of steamboats at the port of Des Moines:

"Sunday, May 2, steamer Clara Hine.

"Monday, May 3, steamer Defiance.

"Wednesday, May 5, steamer Alice.

"Thursday, May 6, steamer Ed. Morgan.

"Friday, May 7, steamer Ed. Manning.

"Several other steamboats are on their way up the river. The river is in good boating stage and will probably remain so for some time."

In the same paper appeared the following notice on Christmas day, December 25, 1858. It is proper to state that the old Savery house, now the Kirkwood house, was not opened as a hotel until a few years later; church meetings were frequently held in what is now the dining room:

Christmas services will be held in the Savery hall Christmas afternoon at 4 o'clock. Elder Summerbell will officiate.

Savery hall is open for religious services every Lord's day at the usual hours. Preaching at 11 a.m. and Sunday evening lectures at 6:30. The public is respectfully invited to attend.

(s) N. SUMMERBELL, PASTOR

As that dining room was the nucleus or starting point of the Christian church, Brother Breeden should give some of his Jerusalem lectures in it to remind us of the days in which Brother Summerbell told us of what happened in the holy land.

Thirty-nine years have made a great many changes in Des Moines. It now has some sixty or more papers, journals, periodicals and magazines of various kinds,

published within its borders. But Christmas comes just the same as it did years ago.

Christmas day, 1858, was not cold; it rained a little and snowed some. The sun tried to shine both in the forenoon and in the afternoon, but did not make a success of it. All our postoffices, stores and banks were open all day. We all did a good business.

I ate my first Christmas turkey in Iowa with my wife and children. In the evening I went to a Good Templar lodge and heard some good temperance speeches made by Colonel T. A. Walker, Rev. William Remsbury and Levi J. Wells. So ended my first Christmas in Iowa.

Iowans in Portraiture

Iowa has one of the finest portrait collections extant of pioneer officials of the state and the state makers of its first century. There are over 200 fine oil paintings of an aggregate estimated value of from a quarter to a half million dollars.

The two art rooms set apart fifty years ago in the State Historical building at Des Moines are crowded to overflowing, and many of the portraits, of necessity, are almost out of sight. Eminent artists say that this Iowa gallery has only a few equals among all the states, and certainly it is far superior to any other in the midland states. All the early governors are represented and very many of the legislators, state officials, journalists, and leaders in many professions.

In recent years all the additions have been donations; many of the paintings cost from \$1,000 to \$2,500 each, and one is said to have cost \$15,000.

The State Department of History and Archives has just printed a complete catalogue of the portraits, and also of the busts in marble and bronze. It is given to all who wish to know more about these Iowa state makers of the first century.

A study of the state portrait gallery would surprise many Iowa people as to the number of Iowans who have achieved greatly in all fields.

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