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Black Hawk County Old Settlers

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It is upon the occasion of the reunion of the Old Settlers of Black Hawk county that I talk to you today. I feel that I can qualify as an "Old Settler," as I have been around these parts for a long time, and I now begin to realize that just about all the people I knew in my boyhood are old settlers.

As I look back upon my sixty-eight years of life, I also realize that I have seen a great deal of the history of the state of Iowa, and that of Black Hawk county, and that it has been my good fortune to have lived during one of the most eventful periods in the whole history of mankind. Those of us who have lived during this period of time, and the quarter century preceding it, have witnessed the transformation of the prairie wilderness of Iowa into a great commonwealth. I, myself have witnessed the city of Waterloo develop from a small town into a metropolis. As you old settlers look back upon your long lifetime in Iowa, I wonder if you ever stop to think about the fact that each and every one of you, as individuals, have had an important part in bringing about the transformation which your lives have witnessed.

There are, of course, figures which loom above the clouds of our memory as we look backward. When I was a lad, probably the two most prominent men in

¹. An address delivered by State Representative Arch W. McFarlane of Black Hawk county, Iowa, at the Old Settlers' picnic, held Saturday August 29, 1953, at Byrnes Park, Waterloo, Iowa.

Waterloo, and Black Hawk county, were Horace Boies, who distinguished himself as governor of Iowa, and as a man, and a citizen, and Henry B. Allen, who built up the First National Bank of Waterloo, and had a very great share in the development of Black Hawk county and the city of Waterloo, agriculturally and industrially. These men were rather typical of the sort of men who were the original old settlers in Iowa. Boies, born on a humble farm in New York state, spent much of his early life as a farmhand in New York and Wisconsin before he became a lawyer and a statesman.

Henry B. Allen first came to Waterloo in 1855, having in mind the location of land and the occupation of farming. Both of these gentlemen had very limited means at the time of their arrival in this territory, but both recognized the possibilities of the state of Iowa and of Black Hawk county, and they were leaders among their people. However, when we remember these great men who were our early settlers, we must not forget that it was the rank and file—the ordinary folks, men and women alike, whose names are not recorded in the written history of Iowa, and perhaps will appear after their deaths only upon their tombstones, who accomplished the most noble tasks that were performed.

CONTRASTING CONDITIONS CONSIDERED

The old settler's life was a rugged one, and those men and women accepted it as it came. When we contrast the farm life of pioneer days, and even of the years prior to the beginning of this century, we sometimes wonder just how they managed to get along under the conditions the old settler considered as normal. Life in those days was far from ideal and, as one looks back upon it, there comes the realization that at times it was highly uncomfortable. The physical labor involved, if expected from the present day farmhand, would be considered as utterly impossible.

The women, whether on the farm or in the city, found their tasks even more difficult to perform than did the men. They got along without such things as electric lights, telephones, automobiles, radios, and rural free

delivery. Fresh meat and fresh vegetables were a rarity during the winter months. The cream separator had not been invented, nor, of course, the tractor. There were no water systems on the farms, nor electric pumps, to say nothing of convenient heating furnaces. There were no bath rooms, and an inside toilet would have been considered a mark of supreme aristocracy. Water for general use was pumped by hand, and during the winter months it was necessary to thaw out the pump before it could be operated. Only a lad who has had his tongue stuck on a pump handle in the wintertime can appreciate just how nice things are today.

The settler's wife, too, had a lot of things to contend with that are no part of farm life now. She did most of the milking usually, and did it by hand. It was her job to get out in the morning, kick Bossy off the ground or barn floor where she had slept all night, warm her hands on the ground where the cow had slept, and "go to it." When she had filled the buckets, she had to strain the milk through a cloth, and stow it away in gallon crocks to permit the cream to rise to the top. There were no cream can pick-ups in those days. It was also her job, generally, to take care of the chickens. Those early chickens were pretty scrawny sorts of birds, and they didn't lay nearly as many eggs as the biddies do now. After the cream had risen on the crocks, she generally churned her own butter with an old-fashioned dasher churn. The wheel barrel churns were a later invention.

FIRST CREAMERY OPERATING

It was just an ordinary old settler over at Manchester, in Delaware county, who lessened the labor of the farmwife by establishing the first creamery to operate in Iowa. Probably you never heard of him. His name was John Stewart, and he started his creamery in 1872. This same John Stewart, with all due respect to the prominent careers of Horace Boies and Henry B. Allen, probably had a much more profound effect upon the economic development of this part of Iowa

than did either of these great men. In his day, just as now, much of the land in this part of the state was better fitted for dairying than for anything else. Stewart not only established the first creamery in the heart of what is now one of the most highly developed dairy regions in the United States, but he also demonstrated that Iowa butter is good butter. In his time it was difficult to sell it, if an Iowa farmer made butter. There was a prejudice in the Eastern markets against Western butter, so this old settler made up his mind to show the folks back East that Iowa butter was as good, if not better, than any other. He sent his product to the dairy shows back East, and proceeded to carry off most of the medals and ribbons.

Going back to the work of the pioneer farmwife, we must not overlook the fact that there were the children whom "Mama" had to care for, with none of the conveniences which the modern mother enjoys today. Her repayment was the fact that when they grew up, they took a great deal of work off the hands of "Ma" and "Dad." Many of you who are here today grew up on the typical farm of an Iowa old settler.

I was talking the other day to a friend of mine who was born on an Iowa farm long enough ago to qualify him in the "old settler" class. He was doing a little reminiscing, some of which, I believe, is worth repeating. "When I was born," he said, "the doctor couldn't possibly get to the farm. We were snowed in. Grandma and some of the neighbor women took the place of the doctor. My mother tells me that she was up and around in about three days, doing her work as usual. She survived the ordeal, because she is still alive, at the age of ninety-seven, and able to enjoy life."

My friend went on to say that as he grew up, he fell heir to his share of the chores, and it seemed that he grew up pretty fast. One of his jobs, after he got to be eight or nine years old, was to keep the wood box filled. They cut their wood in the summer and hauled it in each fall when it was dry enough to burn. Those were the days of the bucksaw and the sawbuck,

and of the cross-cut saw. They used wood for practically all of their heating and cooking. It had to be sawed into stove lengths, and split for the kitchen stove, and for the heaters. There was a big wood-box right next to the kitchen stove and no matter how much wood was put into it, it seemed to be always empty.

TRUGGED LONG DISTANCES TO SCHOOL

When the average pupil was old enough to go to school, the nearest school was generally about two and a half miles away, by road. They took their lunches and trugged back and forth, rain or shine. Sometimes they got a ride, if someone was going to town, and when it got really rough, Dad would hitch up the old lumber wagon and pick up all of the children in the neighborhood. There was the one-room school, with the potbellied iron stove in the back of the room, which was generally fed with corn cobs. The teacher always boarded with some of the patrons, spending about a week at each home. It often was believed that the pupils learned more from the teacher when she was boarding with them than they did at school. If she was young and good-looking, and she generally was, some of the boys in the neighborhood, the bigger ones, I mean, would see that she got a ride to school and frequently somebody would pick her up at closing time.

The schools usually had about thirty pupils; some came as far as six or seven miles away because no schools had been built in the nearby districts. The teacher had to teach all of the grades. If a boy was fairly smart, by the time he had listened to the classes in the other grades, he was often able to skip a class or two. Most of the boys considered their education complete when they finished the eighth grade, but most of those whom I knew personally went on to high school, at least. I was acquainted with many boys who got up in the morning; milked two or three cows; saw that the horses were fed; then came at least four miles, on foot, to school.

As I look back upon my childhood, despite the hard-

ships and inconveniences, life was mighty pleasant. We lived not far from a good creek that had plenty of bullheads and a good many channel cat. I remember particularly one night that we had a rain storm, followed by a beautiful rainbow, along towards sunset. My Dad jocosely remarked that there was a pot of gold at the end of that rainbow and suggested that it would be a good idea to go and find it. I was quick to follow the suggestion, and equipped with a fishing pole and a can of worms, I started off in search of the end of the rainbow. I never found the pot of gold, but as I recall, I did get a nice mess of catfish.

From the present viewpoint, it seems to me that I did a lot of work as a boy, but I only wish that I might have the privilege of going back to those days and doing it all over again. I believe that most of you here today would be perfectly willing to go back and do the job all over again.

BREAKING OF THE PRAIRIE

Returning to conditions which prevailed when the pioneers arrived in Black Hawk county, it was a far different task that confronted the old settler when he arrived than exists today. The prairie sod had to be broken with oxen, dragging huge sodbreakers, most of which were homemade by the village blacksmith. I have seen some of these sodbreakers and I wonder yet how they got the job done. Modern farm machinery was slow in development. Even the ordinary field mower was slow in making its appearance, and many a harvest of wheat was gathered in Black Hawk county with the cradle and the scythe.

More wheat was raised in Iowa, in those days, than we raise now, because it required somewhat less labor than corn. Nowadays, with a good tractor and a set of gang plows and a modern corn planter, one man can do as much work in three days as it was possible for the old settler, with his team of horses and antiquated corn planter, to do in a month. You husked your corn by hand with a husking peg; even the wrist hook had not been invented. Also, if you managed

to get a forty bushel corn yield, you bragged about it all over the county.

I have already said that the life of the old settler was a rugged one. There is a tendency upon the part of authors and our moving picture films to depict the "Old Settler" as something of a "superman"—big, husky and very sturdy. The facts are that the old settler averaged just about normal. He was plagued with poor health, the natural result of his hardships, which afflicted both him and his family. Even I can remember when smallpox was taken as a matter of course. If it was a bad case of the disease, the victim died, or was disfigured for life. If it was a mild case, they called it varioloid, and didn't pay much attention to it. I am informed that in the early years of Iowa settlement, less than one-half of the babies survived their first five years of life. They died of diphtheria and what they called "membraneous croup," which was an even more virulent form of diphtheria. Scarlet fever took its toll. Under the advancement of medicine, smallpox, diphtheria and scarlet fever have just about been wiped out. They didn't have appendicitis in those days—you just died very painfully of inflammation of the bowels. When you got consumption, there just wasn't much to do about it. If you got well, all right; if you didn't, it was just too bad. Polio was even more prevalent than it is today; generally they called it spinal meningitis, and there wasn't much treatment available for it.

I am not reviewing these unpleasant features of the life of the old settler because the recital is enjoyable, or to attempt to demonstrate that all of the pioneers were martyrs, but simply to set down while I am still living, some of the facts which ought to be remembered in appreciation of what you have done for your community. If I went too far along this line, somebody might get the idea that your life was absolutely unbearable, which is not true at all.

ENJOYMENT OF PIONEER LIFE

I have an idea that the old settlers, in many respects,

enjoyed life more than does the present generation. They didn't expect so much, and, for that reason, what they did get, in the way of pleasure, was far more appreciated. There were dances and horse races, husking bees and box socials galore. There were barn-raisings and housewarmings, and weddings and funerals. A good funeral was a social event in those days; it was a regrettable incident, but it brought the family together from far and wide and rather broke the monotony of existence.

There were county fairs and there were baseball games, and wrestling matches, too. There was sleighing and skating in the wintertime, and swimming in the summer, and then there was the good old-fashioned Fourth of July. I kind of miss the thrill of that occasion, with its fireworks and a great man of the community reading the Declaration of Independence, and the Civil war veteran, who had to be at least a colonel, waving the "bloody shirt" and making the eagle scream. There were Decoration days with veterans of the Civil war providing their own fife and drum corps, and then there were Thanksgiving and Christmas. The life of the old settler was not a dull one. He got around a good bit, and lived a full and interesting life. We have lost something, I believe, with the passing of the simpler life of pioneer days.

I remember back in 1902, when I, a high school student, delivered Lincoln's Gettysburg address, at a Memorial day gathering of the veterans of the Civil war, the G.A.R. and friends, in Brown's old opera house, here in Waterloo, and the building was packed to capacity. I am of the opinion that the pioneers were considerably more patriotic than the youth of today, which is a sad commentary, to say the least.

Of these things, you have been a part, and you have also been a part of the creation of the world in which we live today. We did not have the unified community of the present age, in those early days. The old settlers were men of varied types and varied nationalities. We had the Yankees, men of the Boies and

Allen type, who came from New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. We had a good many who came from the South. There came into Black Hawk county, and into Bremer, our neighboring county, thousands upon thousands of men and women from Germany, from Bohemia, from the Scandinavian lands, from England and from Scotland and from Ireland. They didn't always get along well together. I can remember, as a lad, the boys who came from Yankee stock, gathering up in little gangs and invading the parts of town where the Germans predominated, and proceeding from thence to the territory where the Irish held forth. The Danes established their settlement in Cedar Falls, and in each territory, the particular characteristics of the predominant nationality were manifested. Today, those conditions have almost entirely passed away, and we are all Americans.

CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN

The time is not distant when those who can truly be termed "Old Settlers" all will have passed away. Their names will be forgotten, for the most part, but the work they did can never be forgotten. I hope to do my part in handing down the tradition of the old settlers to those who will live in the future. All of the United States today stands as a monument to the old settlers of all of the generations that have passed since the landing of the first white colonists upon the shores of North America.

The world will not see again the amalgamation of the various nations of the earth, through the old settlers, which they sent to America. I do not believe that the United States would have become the powerful nation that it is today had its old settlers been confined merely to the citizens of a single nation. I do not believe that we would have the United States of today, for example, had it been colonized in entirety by the Spanish, who claimed the land originally, by right of discovery. I do not believe we would have the United States of today had the French retained and colonized the great Louisiana Purchase, in which they

established the early settlements. I do not believe that we would have been as great as we are today without our German and Scandinavian settlers. I do not believe Northeastern Iowa would be as good a place in which to live without its tincture of Bohemians. I do not believe that Grundy county would have attained its proud rank as, perhaps, the leading agricultural county of the state without its Dutch. I do not believe that we in Black Hawk county could have well dispensed with the Danish people, who have had so much to do with the agricultural development of Black Hawk county, and who are initially responsible for the introduction of the Holstein breeds, without which our dairy herds would be a loss.

I am proud of the fact that it was my privilege to have been born among the old settlers, and to have lived in a period time that I could witness the results of the things which you old settlers did so nobly, and which have given us the land of the free and the home of the brave in which we live today.

Dedicated Dr. Carver Marker

Over at Ness City, Kansas, on October 11, 1953, 2,000 persons assembled in a memorial service dedicating a marker to the late Dr. George Washington Carver, Negro scientist. The marker was erected on the old Carver homestead, 17 miles southwest of Ness City. The farm was homesteaded by Carver in 1886.

Lt. Gov. Fred Hall gave the dedicatory address, lauding Carver as "a man who rose from slavery to the greatest heights."

Carver studied at Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa, and was graduated from Iowa State college, Ames. Much of his research work was done at Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Ala.

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