

From the Annals One Hundred Years Ago

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The times, indeed, are not propitious, as the nation is involved in a most unhappy civil war, the like of which, for extent and atrocity, the world never saw. A half million of volunteers, fully armed and equipped as soldiers, with improved cannon, muskets, rifles, revolvers, and sabres, on land; with three hundred vessels of war, in part iron-clad and turreted, and manned with fifty thousand hardy sailors, on the seas and rivers, compose the grand army and navy of the United States against the insurgent attacks of nine southern states leagued in rebellion against the General Government of the Union. And, here, on American soil, is to be settled forever—the great principle, that a free, popular, constitutional Government can defend itself against domestic traitors, as it has done against foreign foes. Already the nations of Europe have begun to learn a lesson of warfare from this national struggle, which will change the deadly implements of carnage for those more defensive or offensive than were ever before invented. So that civil war, and all war, will hereafter be a terrible venture, that men of ambition and blood will scarcely dare to try.

In this conflict for national life and liberty, against domestic enemies, the State of Iowa has embarked, from first to last, with fifty thousand picked men as volunteers. Their blood has flowed like water on the battle fields of Springfield, Blue Hills, Belmont, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, Iuka, Corinth, Arkansas Post and Vicksburg; and wherever, in the Southwest, the fight has been the fiercest, Iowa men have been foremost in the assault.

Shall not such a State, already grown so great, have a history? And will any one say that its authentic Annals are too soon begun. . . . With . . . trust, this humble publication is begun, relating to a State, already illustrious in aims; but destined . . . to be still more illustrious, when arms shall yield to peace and prosperity throughout the whole land.

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A dispute arose between the State of Missouri and the then Territory of Iowa (in 1839) as to the boundary line between

them, and so determined were the authorities on both sides to exercise jurisdiction over the disputed territory, that it resulted in what is known to the Old Settlers as the "Missouri War." Davenport and Rockingham men met, embraced, buckled on their armor, and side by side shouted their war cry,—“Death to the invading Pukes!” . . .

The weapons carried by some of these volunteer patriots, were not satisfactory to the commanding officers and about one fourth of the army were ordered out of the ranks and their services dispensed with, unless they would procure others . . . more in accordance with the army regulations. The objectionable weapons consisted of a plough colter, carried in a link of a large log chain . . . Another was a sheet iron sword about six feet in length, fastened to a rope shoulder strap. Another was an old fashioned sausage stuffer. Another was an old musket without a lock, and the balance of like character.

The order was given for the owners of these nondescript weapons to march out of ranks three steps. The order was obeyed. The ranks closed up, and the offending soldiers were discharged with a reprimand.

. . . The amount of bravery dismissed was equal to that retained; for no sooner were the discharged soldiers clear of the line of the regiment, then they formed a company of cavalry, a company of dragoons, and a company which they called the "Squad," and then, under the superior generalship of their leader, the knight of the six foot sword, they made a bold charge upon the regulars, broke their line, drove not a few of them into the river, some into and some around the Ferry House, some into the grocery, and some out of town; thus defeating and dispersing the regular army without the loss of a man on either side.

The conflict was disastrous in its results to the regular army, and before the forces could again be collected, peace was declared and the army disbanded.

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At this early day, (1836) business of all kinds was dull, and the inhabitants sought pleasure and pastime in hunting and

fishing . . . Cat fish were taken, weighing from 150 to 175 pounds. I caught a species of the pike called the Muskelunge, in Sugar Creek which empties into Cedar River in June, 1837, that weighed thirty five and a half pounds, and measured five and a half feet long . . . Vension was often purchased for two or three cents per pound. Wild turkeys, for twenty five to fifty cents, and prairie chickens were so plentiful that they were generally given away by the sportsmen.

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In August of this year, (1841) the "Davenport Weekly Gazette" issued its first number . . . To enter upon such an enterprise, at such a time in the financial world as was presented in 1841, required no little energy, ambition and perseverance. Such did Alfred Sanders possess, when on the 11th day of August he landed from one of the smallest steamers that ever pushed up our river. This arrival was announced and soon the landing was thronged with anxious spectators to behold the new press and its editor. Moved by a spirit of grateful acknowledgement, and a cordial welcome to this new arrival, all hands were eager to assist in landing the press. There being no wharf then built, and the water very low, a long plank walk was laid to the boat on which in attempting to carry the press it was precipitated into the Mississippi River, as if to purge it of any of its old sins, and baptise it anew, before entering upon the virgin soil of Iowa.

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The work of location and construction (of a railroad bridge across the Mississippi at Davenport) commenced in the spring of 1854 . . . It was deemed a great triumph of art, a noble achievement of enterprise, to connect the eastern and western banks of this old Father of Waters, with a continuous railway, over which the products of Iowa might roll onward to eastern markets, without delay.

This bridge is fifteen hundred and eighty feet long, and thirty feet high across the Mississippi to the Island, and four hundred and fifty feet across the slough, from the Island to the Illinois shore.

The number of boats that passed through the draw, during

the year 1857, was one thousand and twenty-four, and the number of rafts, during the same time, was five hundred and ninety-four. On the sixth of May, eighteen fifty-six, a large and splendid steam boat called the Effie Afton, while attempting to pass the Rock Island draw of the bridge in a gale wind, was thrown against the draw pier, and rebounding swung around the stone pier east of the draw, and the smoke pipes coming in contact with the superstructure, were thrown down, setting fire to the boat in several places. She stuck fast under the bridge, and the flames from the boat ignited the framework of the bridge, and burned off the end of the span which fell, and with the burning hull of the boat, floated three quarters of a mile down the river. During the summer and fall of 1856, this burnt span was constructed anew.

The accident of the Effie Afton was the signal for the bursting forth of the long suppressed wrath of the citizens of St. Louis, (who feared such structures over the Mississippi would) . . . divert from St. Louis the commerce which formerly followed this natural highway from St. Paul southward. . . . St. Louis merchants fancied that they saw certain ruin to their previous monopoly of the river trade, if the bridge remained . . .

In the first part of June, 1859 some malicious persons attempted the destruction of the bridge by fire. A large quantity of lath, okum, rosin, sulphur, tar, turpentine, saltpeter and oil were placed on the bridge . . . A few moments before it was ready for firing it was discovered by the watchman, and a skiff with the incendiaries in it shoved off down the river and escaped in the darkness.

In November, 1859, New Orleans voted to raise 50,000 dollars to aid St. Louis in destroying the bridge (by legal action). . . . But though the struggle is fierce, and waged with an enormous outlay of money, it will eventually terminate, as is believed, in favor of the bridge. This great structure is the link binding Iowa with the East, and when the different railroads projected in this state are completed, and the Missouri river is reached, then the paramount value of this bridge will be ascertained.

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