

# A Pioneer Iowa Wedding

By JAMES B. WEAVER\*

The Mexican war was technically terminated by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo concluded February 2, 1848, though the military power of Mexico had been broken by the splendid victories of Scott and Taylor near the close of the year 1847. As a consequence the whole population, including the school children, were filled with the military spirit, from the least to the greatest. About the close of the latter year there came to our town a Captain Wilson, fresh from the field. He brought with him his sword, pistols and a handsome uniform which he had worn in the service. Being a clever fellow he soon became the pride of the town and his word was law. We will now lose sight of the captain for a short time, but we shall meet him again later on.

At this time there lived south of our county just across the state line in Missouri a comfortable farmer, well supplied with sheep, cattle and horses. He had several wagons and his cabin furnishings were ample and attractive beyond what was usually found on the frontier. Furthermore there was in the family a beautiful auburn-haired girl, about 18 years of age, as blithe and bonnie a lass as ever tripped across the downs or gathered wild flowers from the heather.

North, some six miles in Davis county, Iowa, lived a young swain by the name of John Paris. He was batching on a splendid claim of about fifty acres of timber and about one hundred and ten acres of adjoining prairie. John was just 21, tall, strong and resolute. He was extremely poor, but rich in good health, physical endowments and power of will. Nothing discouraged or daunted him. He knew he could plow, plant and cultivate, and that providence would do the rest.

\* James B. Weaver came to Iowa in 1842 and became a well-known figure in Iowa political life after the Civil war. He received 22 electoral votes as the People's Party nominee for president of the United States in 1892.

This knowledge made him master of himself and of his environments. But John had a heart. He had spent more than one Sabbath evening at the hospitable cabin of the rugged old farmer and had chatted with the bonnie auburn-haired girl. The old gentleman, while very courteous and hospitable, informed the neighbors, John included, that he expected to move west to Utah the next spring. The farm had already been sold and things necessary for the tedious journey were slowly accumulating. The daughter mentioned her father's purpose and John bluntly inquired why he was going to Utah.

#### SHE WAS EIGHTEEN

Emeline, for such was her name, replied: "I guess father is a Latter Day Saint and wants to live among the people of his faith. But I do not think he ought to go, and I wish he would abandon the idea."

"How old are you, Emeline?" inquired John.

Her face flushed as she replied, "I am 18 past and do not want to go any further west, but father seems determined and I presume we shall have to submit. Mother is not settled in mind about it, either."

The hour had arrived for John to return to his cabin, and so he bade Emeline a cordial good evening and mounted his horse for home, but first made an engagement to return the next Sunday afternoon.

The week was spent in fall breaking, as it was called. The tough sod was turned upside down to the depth of about six inches and left to absorb the moisture and to freeze during the winter. Somehow John's claim began to take on a new charm, and he declared there was not another chap in all the country who had its equal. Everything about it was perfect and his strong hands were fully able to make it bud and blossom. As a side job, John dug a well during the week, walled it with stone and constructed a well sweep to lift the water. He said he located the well close to the cabin so the women would not have to carry the water so far. The human heart is full of the prophetic and our nobler impulses are creative. This week had been one of severe toil, but our hero had been buoyed up by visions which

none but the initiated can fully understand. He longed every moment for the Sabbath to come. Accordingly, about 2 o'clock on that day he mounted his horse and rode away to the home of the young lady. He was received with cool gentility by the father and mother, but with charming though half concealed cordiality by Emeline.

During the afternoon they took a horseback ride and John made it convenient to visit his claim and treated Emeline to a cool drink from the new well. He pointed out the lines and the lay of the land. As they rode away Emeline remarked that it would make a beautiful home and that it was so nice to have the big elm tree right in front of the door. John, with unaffected simplicity, asked how she would like to make it her home.

Emeline rode some distance in silence and finally said: "John, if you are in earnest about the matter which you suggested a few moments ago, you should mention it to father and mother." John said he would that evening. They reached home a little late and the young man lost no time in engaging the attention of the old folks. The father met the matter with a brusque "no." The mother asked if he had talked it over with Emeline. He replied that he had. John soon made it convenient to leave for home, where he spent a restless and wakeful night. He resolved, however, to continue his visits and felt confident that he was safe in the affections of Emeline.

#### NEIGHBORS TO THE RESCUE

As spring came on apace all things were put in shape for the journey to Utah, and early in May they drove away, Emeline with the rest. The following day about 10 o'clock the caravan passed through Bloomfield and struck the Drakesville road at Ephraim Nelson's farm, but John arrived in town ahead of them and complained to his uncle, James Price, a merchant in town, that the father was taking his lady love away to Utah against her will, that they were engaged and wanted to get married. The uncle laid the matter before Captain Wilson, the Mexican war hero heretofore mentioned, who at once sent a messenger to the school house and called

for the writer. The teacher excused me for the day and I reported at once to the captain.

Without ceremony he called for volunteers to rescue the young lady. Ten or fifteen of us, men and lads, sprang into line while the friends scurried for muskets and carbines. Within thirty minutes we were all armed and on the march. Captain Wilson carried his sword and wore a plume of mixed red and white, which nodded beautifully in the breeze. My father was clerk of the district court, but was absent at St. Louis. Hosea B. Horn was at that time justice of the peace and deputy clerk. We pressed him into the service and he took precaution to take the seal along for emergencies and also a blank marriage license. We overtook the caravan just west of Ephraim Nelson's house, where they had halted for dinner.

We approached the camp cautiously and when near the great covered wagon, which was a veritable house on wheels, constructed for the comfort of the family, the Captain ordered us to halt and commanded, "Order, arms!" The Captain acted as spokesman and the following colloquy took place.

#### INTERROGATED THE FATHER

Addressing the father, he said, "We understand that you have a daughter with you who is of legal age—18 years. Is that so?"

The old gentleman replied that it was.

"We further understand that she does not wish to go to Utah with you, but desires to remain here and to marry Mr. John Paris to whom she is engaged. Is this true?"

"The girl can answer for herself," responded the father.

"How is it, Emeline?" inquired Captain Wilson.

"I don't want to go and I want to stay here, and I am engaged to Mr. Paris."

"You can be married here if you so desire," rejoined the Captain. "We have the clerk with us and a justice of peace. Mr. Paris is here and you had better get out of the wagon and talk it over together."

This was done and in a few moments they both de-

clared they wanted to be married at once. The license was accordingly issued by Mr. Horn with seal attached. He told them to join hands and in the most approved style pronounced them man and wife.

The father and mother, the many neighbors who had gathered on horseback and the military contingent all wished them great happiness. The father treated all hands to the hard cider, a barrel of which he had in his wagon. He then unloaded the young lady's personal effects and we loaded the bride and groom into an old buggy and took up our victorious march for town. The groom was in his shirt sleeves and wore coarse cowskin shoes without stockings, but was as proud and light-hearted as a prince. When we reached the public square, the whole town was out to greet us and to cheer the new couple. School had dismissed for the occasion, flags were flying everywhere and as we filed up in front of the business place of the groom's uncle and fired a salute, the crowd made the air ring with their shouts. "Jimmer," as the uncle was called, set up the egg-nog to the volunteers.

The Paris of Homer's *Iliad* carried away Helen of Troy and her "celestial charms for nine long years set the world at arms." Our Paris, by force of arms, carried away Emeline and sealed the martial deed with vows that were both gallant and holy. Peace, plenty and a happy family crowned these extraordinary and blissful nuptials. The union proved to be a happy one in every way. The claim soon became a very beautiful farm and the couple and their children were numbered among the substantial citizens of the county.

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If America forgets where she came from, if the people lose sight of what brought them along, if she listens to the deniers and mockers, then will begin the rot and dissolution.—Carl Sandburg, *Remembrance Rock*.

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