

## EARLY EDUCATION OF IOWA MUTES.

BY E. BOOTH, ANAMOSA, IOWA.

To save explanation in the body of this article, it may be advisable to state, at the outset, that the writer hereof belongs to that class known as deaf mutes ; was educated at the institution at Hartford, Conn., and was, afterwards and for seven years, one of the teachers of that school ; also, and as this is intended for a historical, and not for an ordinary Magazine, matters will be introduced, and with some particular minuteness, that might otherwise, and with more propriety, be omitted.

In the spring of 1840, the site of what is now Anamosa did not contain a human dwelling of any kind. At the distance of a mile or more therefrom, and at a point now called Fisherville, stood a log house, about eighteen by twenty feet in size, owned by a company engaged in building mills such as were needed by frontier's men for grinding or sawing. The company consisted of Timothy Davis, of Dubuque, Gideon H. Ford, and George H. Walworth, the first and last named being then and subsequently well known in Iowa politics. There being no house within five miles of the place, Mr. Walworth brought two of his sisters from their home in Illinois, to aid in housekeeping. One of these sisters was a mute from New Hampshire and educated at the Hartford institution. Another mute, a young man, also educated at the same school, Mr. W. found at Alton and brought on as a skillful carpenter. The name of this young man was L. N. Perkins.

In May or June of the year above indicated, a brother-in-law of the writer, Col. David Wood, of Springfield, Mass., arrived with his family, and with him the writer decided to erect a frame dwelling—the first frame dwelling erected in the county, by the way—on the site of what afterwards became the town of Anamosa. The frame was pre-

pared at the mills, near the log house aforesaid, and in June or July we proceeded to dig the cellar.

One day while engaged in this latter occupation, in company with Perkins whom I had hired for the purpose, and no other person being present, the Sheriff of the county, Hugh Bowen, came along in his usual way on horseback. He stopped, dismounted, drew a roll of papers from a tin case and entered our names, place of nativity, etc., in the census of 1840. Having performed this doubtless agreeable duty of prying into every man's history, not to say his private affairs, the Sheriff remounted his horse and proceeded to the log house before mentioned, there to continue his pursuit of knowledge without the aid of a schoolmaster. While he was entering our names and all the *et ceteras*, I noticed that his paper was printed in the form usual on occasions of this kind and that he placed the proper figure under the head of deaf-mutes. I may add, in this connection, that he was an old acquaintance, a tall, rather slender man, with a wonderful nose, large, long, and beaked, with face almost as thin as a meat axe. He was a genuine good fellow, and an inveterate old bachelor withal; and was the first settler in the county, living at Bowen's Prairie, so named after him. He removed to Oregon some twenty years ago, and I have no information of him since.

The taking of the census was completed throughout the country, and in due season printed and laid before Congress and the public; this was three decades ago. Many persons now living will remember the storm which the publication of this census brought up. John Quincy Adams, former president, and then a member of the lower house at Washington, and others, as well as the newspapers, attacked it fiercely as having been manipulated in the interests of slavery. John Tyler was president through the death of Harrison, and John C. Calhoun was secretary of state; the office of secretary of the interior had not been created, and the census bureau had charge of census matters, subject to the control and supervision of the secretary of state. The abolition war was

raging in Congress and out, and southern politicians, and northern tools declared slavery divine, and the best possible condition for the blacks. To prove the truth of this latter assertion the census returns had been so perverted as—falsely—to show that a far greater proportion of the free blacks of the north were variously afflicted with physical infirmities than was the case with the enslaved blacks of the south; but possibly, because there were not enough blacks in some of the northern states, or because the fraud might too easily be detected, or because southern statesmen, in their ignorance of the real state of things in the north, supposed northern mutes were as generally uneducated as were those of the slaveholding regions, the mutes of the north were very liberally classed in the published returns as deaf, dumb, blind, idiotic, insane, and colored!

While the feeling on this subject of falsifying the census was at its height, I received a copy of the *Hartford Courant* in which was a communication, probably written by Mr. Weld, the principal, or some one of the teachers, giving localities of former pupils of the Hartford institution, and now published by the government as colored, and overwhelmed by all the ills that can afflict humanity. The mutes of Jones county, Iowa, that is, the writer hereof and the two mentioned above, I now learned for the first time were, in the archives of the government and for the information of the coming ages down to the end of time, described as “deaf, dumb, blind, idiotic, insane, colored.” I pause for breath!

There are those who are readily irritated at trifling annoyances, but bear great misfortunes with a quiet philosophy or a stolid indifference. The statement just quoted was too atrocious, too extravagant, and too absurd for indignation. It brought gently to my recollection the wrathful exclamation found in Shakspeare:

“Get thee glass eyes,  
And, like a scurvy politician, seem  
To see the things thou seest not.”

Years passed until 1847, and the territory of Iowa became a state. The subject of a school for the deaf mutes within our borders had occasionally crossed my mind and been dis-

missed as untimely. As a territory, nothing could be done save in a private way. Iowa being a state, provision could be made whereby mutes might have equal educational privileges with hearing children. But the state was neither populous nor wealthy enough to embark in costly schemes, and I therefore wrote to Thomas Officer, principal of the institution for the education of the deaf and dumb at Jacksonville, Illinois, to ascertain whether and on what terms his school would receive and educate the mutes of Iowa. His answer was favorable, the terms, I think, were one hundred dollars a year for board and tuition. This was during the early part of the session of 1848 and 1849, of the Iowa legislature.

On receiving Mr. Officer's answer I immediately wrote to Dr. Nathan G. Sales, then representing our county in the lower house, requesting him to inaugurate and press through a bill authorizing the sending to the school at Jacksonville such Iowa mutes as were of educational age, and before they became too old to enjoy this advantage, at the same time stating that our new commonwealth was too young and not sufficiently advanced in population or ability to start a school of our own. Incidentally, and as a tolerably good joke, though at my own expense, and never dreaming of the use to which the doctor would put it, I told him that, by the census of 1840, all the mutes of Jones county were bound up in calf, and laid away in the government library, and published to the world as "deaf, dumb, blind, idiotic, and insane niggers," asking him at the same time, and he being a physician ought to know if he didn't, whether it was possible for a person to be at once idiotic and insane? In this letter I enclosed the one from Mr. Officer.

The Doctor, as he afterwards told me, read my letter in open session and there was a general laugh—as well there might be. He brought in a bill making provision for the education of the mutes and blind of the state, but met with opposition on the score of poverty. He therefore resorted to strategy. There was a bill providing for a sword for some officer who had distinguished himself in the Mexican war;

the Doctor made his vote for this conditional on the passage of the bill for mutes and blind. Having forgotten the name of the officer, I wrote to the Doctor, now a resident of Colorado, stating my object, and requesting him to give more minute particulars. Below I append his answer :

“GOLDEN, COLORADO, Sept. 6, 1871.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Now to the mute bill of Iowa. In the year 1848, I having been elected to the house of representatives by the counties of Jackson and Jones, Iowa, and there being several mutes in my county, one of whom was Mr. Edmund Booth, a very intelligent gentleman, who, I learned, had formerly been a teacher in a deaf and dumb asylum in the east, who called to my mind the fact that in Iowa there was no provision made for the education of the mutes of our state, and spoke to me of the propriety of asking the state to make a small appropriation for the education of the mutes, in some asylum out of our own state as we had none in the state at that time; accordingly in the fore part of the session, the following December, I introduced a bill asking for an appropriation out of the state treasury, I think of two hundred dollars a year for the education of each mute and blind person of our state who would apply for it. I talked the matter up with the members for a short time; most of them considered it perfectly just, as there was no provision made by the state for mute and blind education; many said we were too poor to do it then, but after working for it several weeks, I concluded I had secured enough friends for it to put it through; so I had it brought up on its second reading, and to my surprise, several of the most prominent members, who had promised me to go for the bill, arose and made speeches against it, pleading the poverty of the state, &c. Notwithstanding I had previously, through the persuasion of these poverty-stricken members, inserted in the bill a clause (that I called a begging clause), providing that no mute, or blind person, should be entitled to the benefits of the act who was able to pay for his or her own tuition. When I found my bill was receiving such vio-

lent and unexpected opposition, and fearing it would be defeated if allowed to go to a vote, I moved it be referred to a select committee of three, with a Mr. Harrison, of Johnson county, as the chairman.

"In about an hour after my bill was so referred, the secretary of the senate reported a joint resolution having been passed by the senate, making an appropriation out of the state treasury of two hundred dollars, I think, for the purchase of a sword, to present to Capt. B. S. Roberts, of Iowa, for his bravery in hoisting the first American flag on the capitol of Mexico. The resolution was at once brought up and put on its passage, and I, yet feeling rather sore at the probable defeat of my first bill of the session, jumped up and opposed the resolution in a short speech, telling them, among other things, that it did not look consistent to be making presents to a man who was amply able to take care of himself, out of a treasury that was too empty to render any assistance to the education of the helpless mute and blind of our state. Judge McFarland, of Lee county, who sat near me, sprang up, and stated that his resolution was a matter of *honor*, and for the benefit of the constituents of the gentleman from Jones, he would call for the Y's and no's; I replied, that I did not care for his Y's and no's; and when the names were called, a Mr. Thompson, of Henry county, and myself were the only members voting no. After the passage of the resolution, I immediately stepped over to Mr. Harrison, to whom my bill had been referred, took it and drew my pen over and erased the begging clause, and asked him to report it immediately, as amended, which he did; and it coming up at once on its third reading, passed without a dissenting voice. On the reading of the journal the next morning, Mr. Thompson and I were induced to allow our votes to be changed, so they would appear on the journal, unanimous for the resolution.

"Yours truly,  
N. G. SALES."

In what way the bill passed the senate I never learned, but it became a law, and appropriated fifty dollars to each mute

sent to the institution at Jacksonville; the parents or friends paying the balance sufficient to make up the one hundred required annually. It was the best that could be done at that time.

In the spring of 1849, I went to California, and returned in the spring of 1854. On inquiry, I ascertained that the law had been so changed as to allow to each mute one hundred dollars annually in the Illinois school. During my five years of absence, the state had grown remarkably in population and wealth, and I now thought the time had come for a school of our own. With this view, I again wrote to Mr. Officer, the principal of the Jacksonville institution, for data regarding the number of our own pupils, etc., and hinting at the establishing of a school in Iowa. Trouble in one of the lungs, resulting from a lung fever during student days, forbade taking the work of teaching on myself; I therefore wrote to David E. Bartlett, who was conducting a private school of mutes at Poughkeepsie, N. Y., stating how the matter stood, and suggesting to him to come and start a school for deaf mutes, at Iowa City, the then capital of the state. Mr. Bartlett had formerly been a fellow-teacher with me in Hartford, and I knew him to be abundantly qualified, he being by nature a hearty enthusiast in his profession, and having the love and respect of his pupils, and all the mutes of his acquaintance. To my great regret he declined the proposal, giving as reason, "age and seventeen little responsibilities," by the latter meaning his pupils. Knowing no other teacher of mutes, outside of the regular institutions, worth having, and knowing also that no teacher, properly qualified, naturally and otherwise, and connected with any established institution, would sever such connection for what might appear a Don Quixotic adventure into a frontier state, and the up hill work of starting a new school. I concluded to wait until near the time of the assembling of the next Iowa legislature, and then by letter or in some way interest a few of the prominent men of Iowa City in the project, induce them to bring the matter before the legislature, and obtain an appropriation for the founding of an

Iowa institution for the education of the deaf and dumb, to be located at the capital of the state. A foundation of this kind once laid, I knew there would not be the slightest difficulty in obtaining any one of the best teachers in the older institutions to take charge of it.

While I was waiting the lapse of a few months, and the coming of the right time, the Iowa City papers informed me that a Mr. Ijams, of the Jacksonville institution, had appeared, with the intention of starting a school for mutes. Of course my project went by the board, or rather went into abeyance until I could know the result of Mr. Ijam's action. I knew nothing of him, but knew well that teaching deaf mutes required peculiar qualifications, and in a large degree, the qualifications that pertain to an actor; once started, however, and under legislative sanction and fostering care, I was satisfied that things would eventually go well, whatever might be the case at beginning. Prominent men in Iowa City enlisted in the project; the legislature responded favorably, and success crowned the effort. With Mr. Ijams and his assistant teachers from other schools, much good resulted, as I learned by conversation with pupils during their vacation visits home. There were also unfavorable aspects, causing doubt regarding the management; but with so much grumbling in the world I did not wish to form any decided opinion. At the first state fair held at Iowa City, I attended and called at the institution a half hour every morning before the fair was fully opened. It was vacation, but a few of the pupils were present and with these I enjoyed an old familiar chat in the language of signs, also making the acquaintance of Mr. Ijams. During these visits, it became clear to me that a principal was wanted from some one of the older institutions, one who had a larger experience in teaching and larger acquaintance with the various schools and the modes of instruction. A few months later, Mr. Ijams retired and Mr. Benjamin Talbot, of the Ohio institution, was appointed instead. With Mr. Talbot I have no personal acquaintance, but all the reports regarding him and his management are favorable.



When it was proposed in the legislature to erect a new building and give the school a permanent location, Dr. Sales suggested to me to get up a movement in favor of its removal to Anamosa. "No," I replied, "public institutions are liable to mismanagement and abuse by those in charge, and it is essential to have this school at the state capital where it will be under the immediate eye of the legislature and the state officers." The Doctor acquiesced in this view and the institution went to Council Bluffs.

And now let me dispose of the politicians who have figured in this article. After serving a term in the lower house of the legislature, Dr. Sales was elected to the senate. This was in the days when democracy ruled in Iowa. He was next receiver in the land office at Chariton, which position he held three years and then resigned and returned to his home in Anamosa. He was afterwards elected mayor of the city, and ran for other offices. On one of these occasions we met on the street, and he said to me:

"I expect the votes of all you mutes, for I am the father of the institution for the deaf and dumb."

The effrontery of the remark was, for the moment, astounding in its effect. He was the leader of his party — the democratic, — the war of the rebellion was raging, and I was the editor of the only republican journal in the county. As soon as I could recover, I replied:

"I claim that honor; you was only my tool. If any other man had been in your place in the legislature, I should have sent my letters to him." He laughed, and admitted the justice of that view, and added:

"I always thought I was the father of that institution."

I passed on, marvelling at the impudence of politicians and the shifts to which they will resort for votes. As to the honor as mentioned above, I had never given it a thought. Each had done his duty in the premises, and each ought to be satisfied, and certainly I was. To do him justice, he was, and is an awful politician, on the democratic side, but is a good fellow in general, a man of wealth, liberal in the matter

of public improvements, etc. For many years he has been troubled with asthma, and, two or three years since, removed and fixed his residence in Colorado, finding there the only relief and freedom from chest and throat complaints.

Some time in the course of the rebellion, three or four lines in the newspapers announced the death of John Tyler, and that was all the notice the event received. He was merely a specimen of the nobodies we place in high position. John C. Calhoun died some years previous, an astute politician, and only half a man because, lacking a third story to his head, he was unable to understand that the world is governed by natural, or, as we say, moral laws. He was useful however; he combined, concentrated, and intensified all the strength and venom of slavery for its last grand struggle with freedom. In the encounter slavery was worsted and swept out of existence. He may still be of use, for, to quote Shakspeare again :

“Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,  
May stop a hole to keep the wind away.”

---

## EARLY EXPERIENCE IN IOWA.

BY R. B. GROFF, MARENGO, IOWA.

---

I was standing on the hurricane deck of the steamer Potosi, on the morning of the 7th of April, 1845, looking out through a heavy fog for the soil of Iowa. Suddenly, large stacks of brick and mortar appeared in view, and the captain kindly informed me that these were a part of the city of Burlington. After a journey of twenty-two days in coming from Strasburg, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, eleven of which had been spent on the water from Pittsburg, I was glad to feel safely landed. I was much pleased with Burlington. She had a beautiful situation surrounded by rich farming lands, which would eventually build up a great city. But I

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.