

## REMINISCENCES OF TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS AGO.

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THE intimation that a biography of Governor Chambers, one of the territorial governors of Iowa, would appear in the July number, brings to mind, and rather vividly, the circumstances of the time, now twenty-seven years since and six years after the country was thrown open to settlement by the government, securing what was then known, on the maps, as "The Black Hawk Purchase."

In February, 1844, matters, needless to mention, led me to go south as far as St. Louis. No railroads being in existence in the west and the Mississippi being frozen, the only course was *via* Iowa City. The territorial legislature was then near the close of its session. Stopping there two or three days gave opportunity to look around and incidentally to make a few acquaintances. Being about to start next morning, the assistant clerk of the house suggested that as the session was near its end, business hurried, no enrolling or engrossing clerk being provided for by congressional law, and therefore no such indispensable personage in existence, an effort be made to supply the deficiency. He proposed that the writer hereof remain a few hours with that view. Of course no objection was made, and the next morning a resolution passed the house accordingly.

I do not propose to bore the reader with legislative debates, proverbially dreary, but to give some incidents indicative of the surroundings and circumstances of that period.

Chambers was governor and Burr was secretary of the territory. Chambers was a large, well proportioned man, with large head, and face corresponding, his face that of a man self-possessed, of pleasant and social nature and of great strength of character. Burr, also, was large in frame but not near the size of the governor. He, too, was of agreeable looks, in fact was what we usually call a good fellow. One

thing bothered him. He was on duty but had not been confirmed by the senate, and on this point he manifested some anxiety. Before the close of the session, however, the news of his confirmation arrived and he was relieved of all further uncertainty.

Near the city — Iowa City, for that was then the capital of the territory — was a band of Sacs and Foxes. One day Governor Chambers came into the House, arm in arm with the chief of this band. The two advanced within the bar and took a seat, the second from the bar. The house was in session and business proceeded, but there was a complete relaxation as soon as this unexpected freak, or whatever you please to call it, of the governor's occurred. The chief, like the governor and secretary, and as is usual with men who attain eminence by native force of character, was of large size, that is to say, larger than his fellows. He was dressed in full Indian costume and as became his rank. The most noticeable feature was his head dress. His cap, or whatever it might be called, showed little else than a dense row of plumage, four or five inches wide, and extending across from front to rear. The colors were varied, but vermilion predominated.

The moment the governor and chief were seated the latter commenced a series of antics that kept the entire house in a sort of half-amused smile, and the speaker, Morgan, known by the nick-name of "Little Red," from his low stature and red hair, behaved no better. First the chief hastily took off his head covering with both hands and set it on the floor in the passage; adjusted his hair or scalp lock; took up the cap, or whatever the thing might be, and set it in place on his caput. In an instant it was wrong and he removed and set it down again, and so it went for some minutes, the governor watching him good humoredly, as did most of the members, business proceeding meanwhile quite languidly. The chief's vanity probably had abundant gratification through all this process, but there came a sudden change. The door opened and a score or so of red skins, the chief's band, began to file in. The speaker rapped to order, and, as well as the entire

house, assumed a stern expression. The sergeant-at-arms hurried to close the bar and planted himself there. The governor assumed a slightly dignified attitude, and the chief, so childish a moment before, seemed to understand the situation, placed his head covering on his head for the last time, and sat gravely and with proper decorum until the governor arose and the two retired together. I may as well state here that roving Indian bands were common at that period, and no surprise, and hardly any attention, was excited by their presence.

In this house was James W. Grimes, then a young man and previously unknown in Iowa politics. He was, at the time, regarded as leader of the whig side of the house. Thos. Rogers, of Dubuque, also a young man, was leader on the democratic side. Both were slender in appearance, but Rogers was quick and vigorous, and Grimes indolent and negligent of appearance. Years have changed them.

It was during this session, and for the first time in an Iowa legislature, that the woman question came up. That question had begun to be agitated and the agitation had extended to Iowa. Petitions to allow women to vote were in vogue and an afternoon was set for discussing the matter. The house assembled and a good number of ladies of Iowa City took seats among the members, there being a small lobby but no gallery. I could not but notice that the aspect of the ladies was different from their every-day appearance in that body. They seemed to belong to the thoughtful class. There was nothing of the gay or frivolous or desire of show in their dress or looks. They sat silent, eyes downcast for the most part, lips almost compressed as if resolved to endure under wrong, and yet possessed of resolution to have the wrong righted in the end, however distant that end might be. Understand, they did not strike me as of Amazonian nature or anything like it, but true, noble women, conscious that the customs of society, remnants of the barbarian past, kept them in a false position. In short — and I am not joking — they seemed like so many Eves on trial for stealing apples, and before judges equally guilty and the Eves knew it.

The discussion commenced. It was in the style of twenty-seven and more years ago and need not be repeated. Few members spoke. Doubtless there were those who felt that it was a large subject, too large for the time to settle or dispose of, but two or three went into regular spread-eagleism and aired their shallowness, their conceit and their devotion to women, as a parlor ornament.

It was at this time that William Crum published the *Iowa City Standard*, a sterling good paper, there being, if I remember correctly, not more than six papers published in the then territory. A. P. Wood, then a young man, was editor of the *Standard*; so it was understood, for his name did not appear in its columns. Van Antwerp, if I do not err, published the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*. The first was whig and the last democratic. Van went by the name of "Old Growler," from his growling propensities. By the way, and a few months subsequently, I had charge of the post office at Fairview, in the absence of the post master. A subscriber to the *Reporter* had vainly tried to stop his paper by repeatedly sending it back. At last some one wrote on the envelope and mailed the paper to the publisher:—

"Old Growler! are you deaf or blind?  
 Canst see, canst hear? Well then, now mind;  
 For Henry Mahan, of Fairview,  
 Pray stop your paper, Growler, do.  
 Vain are your hopes from him of spoil,  
 And vain for him your midnight oil;  
 Dost doubt? Then send your lawyer here;  
 He 'll back return with flea in ear."

It was all in vain. Old Growler was incorrigible. How it finally ended I do not know; but the subscriber removed farther west, three or four years later, possibly as the only way to stop his paper.

The legislative session closed and the members hurried off, most of them glad to escape, for the city was but small, a few scattered buildings along the three sides of the square and the stone state house, now one of the university buildings, forming the base. Burr, the secretary, the writer, and a third

man, slim in make, engaged a two-horse buggy and a negro as driver, to convey us to Burlington. We started accordingly. It was the month of March, the weather bright and pleasant and the roads good. Through that ride of two days it was one continuous prairie, with a few thinly scattered groves of scrub oaks. The buildings were of logs and these were exceedingly rare; except at Wapello and Grandview, the whole number could not exceed a half dozen in the eighty miles traveled.

Where we passed the night after the first day's ride, I do not remember, but Burr's impudence prevents my forgetting that it was a lone log house on the prairie. The occupants were a man, his wife and daughter, the last about seventeen or eighteen. For the situation and surroundings, all passed well; supper, lodging, and breakfast, each satisfactory. But while the good woman was preparing the morning meal the daughter came down—or came from somewhere. It was in the days when ladies' dresses were fastened behind. The mother, it appeared, had no time to fasten the girl's dress. Burr arose, in his lively good humoured way, and, remarking that he always fastened his wife's corsets, proceeded to fasten those of the girl. The latter stood quiet and with the most innocent air, while the Secretary of the Territory of Iowa went as deftly through the operation as though it was his daily business. That done, he resumed his seat, looking slightly as one who thought he deserved a scolding. Soon he got over it and chatted away as before.

At Wapello, then consisting of a few dwellings and a big frame tavern, too big for the place, we met Senator Springer who had reached home the day previous. His office—he was a lawyer—was a frame shanty, a little larger than a hen coop, and I marvelled slightly at finding him in, as it then appeared, so unpromising a spot.

Leaving Wapello, we drove down to the river. The mild weather had thinned the ice; and the team, under charge of the black driver, was sent up stream two miles to a safer crossing. Each of us procured a stout pole, some ten to fif-

teen feet in length, and holding these *a la Blondin*, proceeded to cross the uncertain ice bridge. Not a house nor a mortal was in sight, and should the ice give way — what?

✓Burr took the lead, stepped carefully forward and proceeded along with the same care. I followed a rod behind, and the slim man brought up the rear at an equal distance. We were midway across, stepping quickly and lightly, Indian fashion, each holding his pole horizontally as a support in case of a plunge. Suddenly my boot heel went through; I drew it out and kept on, for it was no time to dally, but the slim man stopped in affright and spoke. Burr stopped, turned with anxiety on his face and an almost angry shake of his head; I glanced back, saw the look of terror on the slim man's countenance and the exact impress of my boot heel through the thin ice; looked again at Burr, and here we were, all three standing stock still. The whole thing, for the moment, was excessively comical, and in spite of the danger I exploded. Burr looked around thoughtfully and changed his course. I followed as before, and the slim man made a *de-tour* to avoid tumbling into the boot heel hole behind me. Finally we reached the bank safe. In a half hour the team came along and we proceeded on our way.

Arriving at Burlington, the driver, a good looking and skilful driver I should add, was paid off and our company separated. The city, like all our river cities of that day, was mainly a single street and abundant gaps between buildings. It had a good and commodious court house and well furnished. Here Judge ✓Williams was holding court. Proceeding to ✓Keokuk, then frequently mentioned in the public prints, I felt some disappointment to find it consisted almost entirely of a hotel. But the hotel was first class for the time and place, built on a steep hill side and almost at the water's edge. Here the river was open and I was enabled to take steamer southward.

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