

RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY IOWA.

BY THE LATE JAMES HILTON.

The writer came to Iowa in the fall of 1841, and during that winter made a pedestrian tour of the counties of Lee, Des Moines, Henry, Jefferson and Van Buren. By far the greater part of the settlers in that part of Iowa were from Virginia, Kentucky and Indiana, and were remarkable for their intelligence, industry and self-dependence. But they could hardly have been otherwise when the conditions of emigration at that time were considered. There were then no railroads west of the Alleghany mountains. The only means of transport being wagon and team, and as a consequence, it was only the intelligent, determined and self-reliant, who would load their belongings into a wagon, and with a yoke of oxen or pair of horses, start out to find a home in a new country, on the extreme frontier of civilization, five hundred or a thousand miles away.

There were at the time mentioned, already located in the counties named, nearly all the men who have made a lasting impress on Iowa's history. In proof of this may be named Charles Mason, James W. Grimes, A. C. Dodge, J. C. Hall, George G. Wright, Dr. Elbert, James B. Howell and J. C. Knapp. These men were then but fairly representative of the early settlers, but as time rolled by, they became more distinctly prominent, by the passing away of their fellow pioneers.

The "Blackhawk Purchase" was a strip some fifty miles wide, bordering on the Mississippi river—all west of that to the Missouri river, known as the "New Purchase"—acquired by the treaty of September, 1842. That treaty was held at the Indian Agency, where Agency City, in Wapello county now is, and a great number of the people of eastern Iowa and northern Missouri were in attendance. There were also assembled there all the chiefs and braves of the Sac and Fox tribe; the Sacs were nearly all six feet in height, and as straight and erect as telegraph poles. They were all dressed in new blankets, and new and finely embroidered leggins and moccasins. Many of them had fancy head dresses, and some had necklaces of grizzly bears' claws, or other emblems of their prowess. As those "Braves" in knots of three or four would pass through the throng of whites there gathered, they seemed the very embodiment of courage, dignity and grace. Probably never again will be witnessed such an exhibition of the magnificent manhood of the Indian race.

The territorial days in Iowa were as uneventful as any period in its history. The people were all content and happy and complaint of want or "hard times" was never heard. The tales that have been told of the privations and hardships endured by the early settlers, are nearly all pure fiction, and for many of those stories the old fellows themselves are probably responsible, as not a few of them have been disposed to magnify the trials they endured and the dangers they passed, when encouraged to do so, by the wonder and admiration of their listeners.

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.