



JOHN WEARE.

Distinguished pioneer settler of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Early banker
and railroad builder.

PIONEER PERILS.

I.

AN ADVENTURE ON THE CEDAR RIVER AT CEDAR RAPIDS A HALF-CENTURY AGO.

Valuable as are family histories to climbers of genealogical trees and to historians local and general, few contain very much of general interest. When, now and then, the searcher for Iowa material happens in upon a chapter, or even a paragraph, which at first hand relates some characteristic incident or event of other days, he instinctively thinks of *THE ANNALS* and of the appropriateness of its reappearance in that valuable medium of connection between the present and our recent past.

Among the many memorial volumes recently added to Iowa's Historical Department is a biographical sketch of the late John Weare, of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, prepared by his son-in-law, W. W. Walker, also deceased.*

Away back in the forties the prime-movers in all efforts for the development of the Cedar Valley, and eastern Iowa generally, were two brothers-in-law, Alexander Ely and John Weare, both young men possessed of some means and unbounded ambition, will-power and industry.

Among the several enterprises undertaken by these pioneers was the utilization of the splendid water-power at "the Rapids." The hard work entailed by this enterprise fell mainly upon Mr. Weare, the younger of the two, and bravely did he set himself to the difficult task. His ingenuity and strength were taxed to the utmost, as we shall see. With six yoke of oxen he drew the logs from the woods, and with a small force of men and insufficient machinery he helped lift every timber into its place in the dam. For whole days he would remain in the water, waist-deep, not stopping long enough to partake of the noon lunch. The nerve of the man is well illustrated by an incident which occurred just as the dam was nearing completion. At this point I turn over the narrative to Mr. Weare himself as he related it to his son-in-law shortly before his death, leaving out only such details as are unnecessary to the run of the story. In passing, let me say that while Mr. Weare, like many another pioneer of Iowa, was not especially fluent with his pen, he was an admirable raconteur, and his biographer did well to draw from his own lips, as far as he was able, the story of his eventful and resultful career. The narrative, somewhat condensed, runs thus:

J. B.

We deemed it wise to leave what remained of the old dam, and use it as a protection to the new material as we put it in place below the old structure. This proved a good scheme, in part, but it almost wrecked the whole concern.

*In Memoriam—John Weare, by William Williams Walker, 1897.

The new dam was nearly finished; a millwright had been brought from the East, to set the machinery in the grist mill. We were about ready to drag out the old dam, when the rains began, sending such a flood of water against the old dam, that the new work was in great danger of being destroyed, the timbers of the old dam being driven against them, battering out the foundations. The entire community was deeply interested in the safety of the mills; many of them had spent a season's hard work and all their money in the enterprise; consequently the men, and even the women, did all they could do to save the dam. They collected all the material that could be used and worked in the pouring rain for days and late into the nights.

One morning it was apparent that the dam must go, unless something could stop this battering ram, made by the old timbers. The water was so high and swift we could not get near them to drag them out, even if we could loosen the ends that were held down by the remains of the old dam. We decided to build a crib of heavy logs, float it out into the river above, where the most savage battering was going on, and sink it by filling it with stone. Thus we hoped to make a breakwater, or protection above the old and the new dam. We divided our men into two parties, one to stay on the bank and secure timber or anything that could be made available to strengthen the crib, for often, during high water, whole trees and heavy timbers came floating down the river. I went with the larger party to the woods, to get logs with which to form the crib. Before we separated, we entered into an agreement that, come what would, no man should venture upon the threatened dam while the river was so high. If the dam must go, there should be no loss of life.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon, our party returned with the logs. Before we came in sight of the river, we knew some calamity had happened, for we heard the shouts of men and the shrieks of women. Of course we thought the dam was gone. We were met by a half-witted boy, who

breathlessly exclaimed, "John, I tell 'em I can shoot 'em a chain, but they won't let me." I hurried on to the river ahead of the oxen. A part of the dam was gone, and a party of men were tossing on what seemed loose timbers, in the center of the river, surrounded by a whirlpool filled by loose logs pounding and dashing so violently that no means of escape seemed possible.

A part of the men led by Mr. Ely and the millwright had thought they could dislodge a timber that was doing destructive work. They left the bank in two boats and were drawn into the whirlpool formed by the current and the loosened timbers. The boats were overturned and broken to pieces; the timbers taken out with them were caught in the current and were an added danger to the dam and their lives. They had succeeded in climbing upon the remaining part of the dam, but here there was no safety. Any moment the rest of the dam might be swept away. If they escaped drowning they could hardly escape being pounded to death by the timber. The few men left on the banks had tried their utmost to rescue the party, but had met with failure. They crowded about us and pleaded with us to save their friends. We did not need their appeal. I could see we had material, in the logs just brought from the woods, to make a raft that would safely bring the men out; but how could we get it to them and get it away without its being drawn into the whirlpool? The men were so near it that any boat or raft must have a power pulling back of it to keep it from going into the pool.

During our perplexed questioning, the poor foolish boy kept dancing before me, exclaiming, "I can shoot a chain to 'em; let me shoot!"

I urged the men to make the logs into a strong raft. The night was coming on; the rain continued; the strength of the men on the dam could not hold out, even if the dam did. The boy's importunate demand brought to my mind something I had read, or heard, about establishing communi-

cation by means of an arrow. I knew the boy was very skillful with his bow and arrow. I went over in my mind a scheme to take our raft up the river above the whirlpool, cross to the west side, then drift down near the dam, secure the raft firmly to our boats; one man to go on the boat with the boy and he to shoot an arrow carrying a string attached to a heavier string, and that to a heavier, and in this way to send them a chain that could be fastened to some firm timber in the dam. This would keep the raft from swinging into the whirlpool, while the men could be loaded upon the raft. Then the men in boats could pull the raft to the other side and thus our friends would be saved.

I incurred censure by spending precious time experimenting with this boy and his arrows. The string was heavy and would tangle. I was ready to give up when an old lady came to me with linen thread and beeswax. We wound the thread and waxed it, so it would not tangle; we laid it loosely in a basket, and then tied one end to the arrow. The boy shot it and the arrow went to the mark, and with it the string attached.

Ever since that day I have known the joy of an inventor in the success of his labors.

The raft was finished as soon as we were ready for it. We could muster nine boats, two of them flatboats, the others skiffs and canoes. We chained the raft to these boats and collected all the rope, chains and strong string to be found. Thus equipped, about twenty-five strong men, and our half-witted boy pushed out into the river. Every man had either a paddle, an oar, or a pole. We were all strong, expert boatmen, and we had the life of our little community in our hands. When our boats started we realized as we had not realized before, that every man in the settlement was on the river, and in greatest peril. It was no time for weakness. I felt so sure of success that I urged the women to go home and make coffee and have a good supper ready for us when we should come back with the rescued men.

The Cedar river as it now is at "The Rapids" gives no impression of the stream as it was then. It was fully two miles wide. No one could estimate the depth of it. It was full of drift-wood which was dashing and plunging like so many demons. The heavy raft was in great danger, but it seemed a miracle that our little boats lived at all. All excepting the flatboats were capsized at least once, and some of them many times. We moved up the east bank of the river that we might escape the influence of the whirlpool. We crossed in safety. We then drifted down on the west side until we felt the pull of the whirlpool. Here we were dependent upon the boy and his arrows to reach the men on the dam with a line attached to the raft which they could draw to themselves and thus obtain control of the raft; otherwise there was not power enough in the oarsmen in the boat to keep it out of the whirlpool. The first shot fell short, but it was not entirely lost, as it attracted the attention of the men and gave them an idea of our plans. The second arrow reached the dam and lodged in one of the timbers. The thread was secured by the millwright and drawn over, then the string attached to it, then the rope fastened to the string and, finally, the chain which they were to make fast to some firm timber of the dam. This was finally accomplished with great effort for the party were very weak, and the water was swift and strong.

The next difficult task was to loosen the raft from the boats and yet leave it fastened to the flatboats by ropes long enough to let it drift to the men and strong enough to tow the raft out of the current. Rude as our appliance was, I had confidence that if our men would but pull together, we would succeed; but I confess to fear as I left the boat and set out on the raft. The party on the dam were almost exhausted. They never could have boarded the raft alone, much less keep it from getting into the current. The raft was not large enough to bring back the party if laden with more than two men. A courageous young man accompanied

me. As we left the boats our charge to the men was, "Hang to the ropes and pull when we wave our caps."

We seemed to shoot down to the dam, and came against the timbers with a crash; but thus far, we were safe. The chain was drawn in and it held us from the current. All the men got on the raft. Never were caps waved more gladly. We were supplied with poles, and we worked to the utmost of our strength to start up stream, but could not move her.

Someone said, "The chain from the dam has not been taken in." This was true; we were chained to the dam. We were too far from it to reach the fastened end of the chain, and we could not make our men in the boat understand that all their heroic efforts in rowing only strained the chain tighter, and kept us from returning to the dam to loosen it. If we, on the raft, stopped poling a moment, we would swing into the current and drag them with us, and all would be lost together. The millwright, with a small pocket knife, cut the large rope cable which attached the chain to the raft. This had to be done, lying face downward, with the head and shoulders under water. We then came up to the boats, and the raft was attached. We returned to the east side of the river, by the same route we went over, happy in the rescue of our relatives and townsmen, who had been in peril from ten in the morning until dark—so dark we could not have seen the faces of our delighted friends on the shore had they not burned torches.

There was hardly a wink of sleep in our little village that night, because of the general rejoicing over the rescue. Here and there, some person, more thoughtful than the majority, gave a passing thought to the dam, and expressed the hope that it would not go out; but the strain of anxiety was passed. In face of the great danger escaped, the possibility seemed of little consequence.

When morning came, we again gathered to make the crib, and sink it above the old dam, as had before been

planned. This was successfully accomplished, and was the means of saving the new dam; but it has ever since been my opinion, that the new dam was saved by one self-sacrificing woman. After we had secured the crib, we found the stone we had wouldn't more than half sink it. There was no heavier stone to be had for some distance. This woman came forward and said, "Take the stone we have ready for our new home. The last load is on the ground—and paid for."

She ended her speech in tears. She had worked hard to earn the money for the material, and giving it up meant another cold winter and no home provided for her or her family. We used the stone; but, be it told, to the credit of Cedar Rapids' first settlers, that stone was replaced, and a snug little home was put up for this generous woman before the snow flew that fall.

LINNIE HAGUEWOOD, the blind, deaf and dumb girl, in whose interest a meeting was held in the Webster City Universalist Church a number of years ago, is now at Pasadena, California. She has completed her education and is now able to make her own living. The entire State of Iowa has been interested in this unfortunate girl, and the legislature made several appropriations to aid her education. Born without eye sight and devoid of hearing, her future was indeed gloomy. While Linnie was in Iowa she was cared for at the college of the blind, but her school education was completed at the institution at Gary, South Dakota. Miss Dora Donald, her teacher, was constantly with her, both in this State and in South Dakota. Miss Haguewood is now engaged in stereotyping books for the use of the blind.—*Webster City Freeman-Tribune, May 3, 1904.*

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