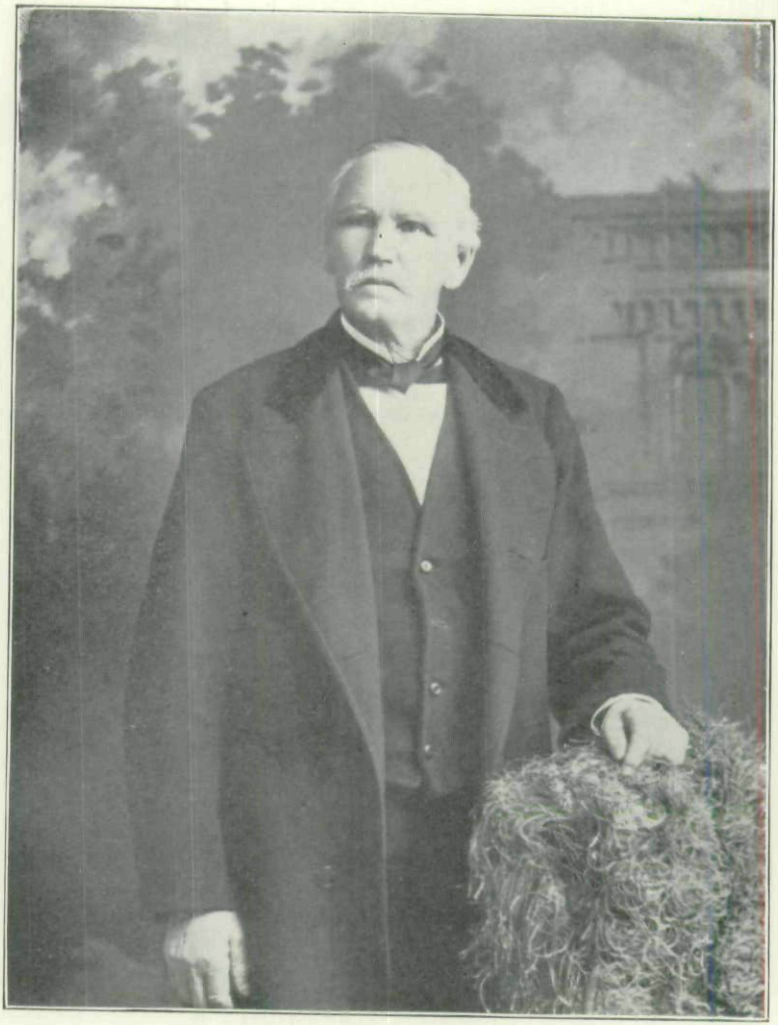

Very respectfully

Sam'l W. Durham

HON. SAMUEL W. DURHAM, OF MARION, IOWA.

Early U. S. Government Surveyor in Iowa, a pioneer settler of Linn county, and member of the Constitutional Convention of 1844.

ANOTHER CHAPTER OF PIONEER HISTORY.

BY SAMUEL W. DURHAM.

The perusal of Governor Carpenter's chapter of pioneer history, in the January ANNALS, recalled to memory some of the experiences of the writer while exploring and surveying portions of northwestern Iowa during the summer of 1855, while he was similarly engaged on the east branch of the Des Moines in Kossuth and Emmet counties. The chapter relates to the experiences of a United States deputy surveyor, and may not be interesting to the general public, but to one used to such business it is.

I was acquainted with most of the surveyors who did much work for the general government. The Surveyor General's office being located at Dubuque drew most of them there for headquarters. Among them I may mention Henry A. Wiltse, chief clerk for General G. W. Jones; —— Burt, son of the inventor of Burt's Solar Compass; James M. Marsh, who ran the correction line across the west part of the State between townships 88 and 89 to the Missouri river; Isaac N. Higbee, afterwards chief clerk in the Surveyor General's office at Yankton; John Ball, who was said to be capable of running more miles in a day and eating more beans than any one else, and was afterwards county surveyor of Black Hawk county; Alexander Anderson, who was much in demand in a large part of Iowa and Wisconsin, and who helped me out with a survey at Lake Pepin and the mouth of the Chippewa river under contract from Surveyor General Caleb H. Booth; John Everett, noted for making witness corners on the banks of small marshes and streams; William I. Anderson, the confidential friend of Surveyor General Lewis, and who was afterwards county surveyor of Dubuque county; Thomas J. Stone, who made his debut in this State as a government surveyor, afterwards county surveyor of Linn county, and later famous as a

banker in Sioux City; William J. Neely, inspector for the Surveyor General, who, when he lived here after leaving Dubuque was my nearest neighbor. The latter afterwards removed to California and died at Los Angeles.

My work in Northwestern Iowa, west of Cerro Gordo and Hancock counties, embraced the west fourth of Buena Vista county, the east half of Cherokee and parts of Ida and O'Brien counties, under contract from Surveyor General Warner Lewis. I started for the work the latter part of May, stopping at Fort Dodge to buy supplies of William Greene and A. M. Dawley, and of Maj. Williams, paying *seven* dollars per hundred for flour, *one* dollar a bushel for corn, $1.75 for spades, and other things in proportion. We crossed the Des Moines river at Fort Dodge and ascended the Lizzard Fork. We camped at the head of Twin Lakes in Calhoun county. Here we met some hunters returning from Wall Lake in Sac county. They had several young elk fawns and a cow to give milk for them. During the night a heavy May storm of thunder and lightning, rain and wind, continued for several hours. The hunters, who were sleeping in their wagons, got afraid that the iron about the wagon would attract the lightning. They left it and crowded in with us for safety. After while our tent cords gave way and let it down on and over us. We could not set it up again in such a storm, so we laid there till daylight, when we crawled out as bedraggled and uncomfortable a set as ever I saw—with a chilling northwest wind blowing over our quarters.

We crossed the Raccoon Fork of the Des Moines at Leonard and Joel Austin's, who, with William Legorgue and their families, were the only settlers I saw in that part of Sac county. From there we made the first wagon trail towards Sioux City. Four horses, two wagons and all the footmen made it plain, and we cut down the bank in steep places. When we came back in August, our trail had become a plain wagon road, and a county seat had been located near Austin's, and surveyed by John F. Duncombe, as the stakes and a tall flag pole showed, having been done on the

Fourth of July. The district was a very fine one for surveying, having no marshes and but little timber or brush, so that with two companies we got along very fast and very nicely, too. We all had good health and no accidents, except that one of my men was bitten by a rattle-snake and I was knocked down in a thunder-storm by lightning. Sometimes to insure uniformity in course and length of lines, I departed from the usual custom and ran a line through the center of the township, and adjusted the differences proportionately on a straight line throughout the six miles. Once during a blinding, drenching rain storm, I took refuge in General Smith's tent on the south bank of Storm Lake and shared his hospitality over night. He was a Dubuque surveyor and a very courteous gentleman. He had the next contract east of mine, embracing Storm Lake and the central part of Buena Vista county. I also visited Capt. John Parker, another Dubuquer, in his camp on the Little Sioux river. He was a very fine old gentleman, much trusted at the Surveyor General's office. He was engaged in running the township lines upon which I was closing my sub-divisions.

There was not then a white settler in Buena Vista, Cherokee or O'Brien counties. We met one trapper on Maple river or creek, like Daniel Boone, away from his fellows. Our men gave him the name of the Hairy Man. He was the only white man we saw in the district and I fancied that he looked like De Foe's Robinson Crusoe. We saw a great many elk and Indians, and caught one young elk and three deer fawns, some of which I brought home to Marion. We witnessed and participated in a chase and slaughter of a noble elk buck, from which the slayer, a finely mounted Kansas Sioux as he called himself, furnished us as much fresh venison as we could use in the warm weather. As to the chase, when the elk began to show evident signs of exhaustion, after a long run, the hunter made a rapid flank movement around a small hill which caused the animal to slacken his speed, so that both got to the end of the hill at once, when the hunter sprang off his horse and letting him stand

free, raised his rifle and fired as soon as it got to a level with his eye. It was a disabling shot but did not bring the elk down. The hunter very deliberately reloaded his rifle and mounted his waiting steed, and we all continued the chase till he got another shot which was effective. Then the two hunters went to work skinning and cutting up the carcass, and they were just as neat about it as trained butchers.

We saw another party of them catching beaver out of their subterranean dens, using a hook fastened to a long handle. We did not desire to partake of any of the meat. They ate any animal from an elk down to badgers. A kind of wild potatoe grew on the prairie which they dug with a wooden bar or pole, like a crow-bar. They cooked and ate it as we do potatoes.

One day while we were constructing a section corner, we saw a company of Sioux approaching us on a full run in single file. They never slackened their speed till they were almost on us. Then they dismounted, letting their horses go loose. They wanted to interview us and were anxious to find out what we were doing, and about our teepee, whiskey, etc. When that was over they all crowded around the surveying instrument with guns in hand. The magnetic attraction kept the needle vibrating, which interested them but delayed our work. I pointed towards the place of the North Star and told them our course was that way. At last my axman took hold of a gun and shoved it away, whereupon the owner raised it and made a hostile demonstration, but upon being assured that no insult was intended, became pacified. Then we started our line and they rode off.

Wahcoota, a Minnesota Sioux, visited our camp. He was very pacific, but some of his young squaws, in a playful mood, plagued our two young camp-keepers considerably.

I will give one day's experience with the Dakota Sioux, as more noticable than others. We were camped at the great bend of the Little Sioux, near the mouth of Waterman Creek, and wishing to communicate with Capt. Parker, I left camp accompanied by Dr. Joseph Winans, my Assistant Surveyor, late of Center Point. When about four or five miles out,

near the line of Clay and O'Brien counties, we saw a long line of Sioux in the distance, moving westward towards the Big Sioux river, in single file, which at first I thought to be Parker's Company. As soon as they sighted us, they changed their course and the whole body, men, women, children and dogs, came towards us just as fast as their horses could be urged, or the footmen run—the light-mounted ones reaching us ahead of the footmen and squaws, with their ponies drawing the teepee poles lashed to their sides. As soon as they came up, they dismounted and paying no more attention to their horses, exchanged the usual salutation of "How, How." This proved to be Inkpadutah with about one hundred of his immediate band, the same no doubt that Gov. Carpenter had met a few days before at Armstrong's Grove. They had always held supreme dominion over these vast prairies. They wanted to hold a pow-wow, and urged me to get off of my horse and sit down in the grass. But not feeling in a diplomatic mood, and my knowledge of their language being confined to but few words, I declined, feeling a little suspicious, too, that one of them might jump on my horse and ride off. They wanted to know who we were, and our business, where the teepee was, if we had whiskey, tobacco, &c. On my part, I inquired if they had seen any surveying companies, but gave them an evasive answer as to where my camp was. I found them more willing to ask than to impart information. Much of our talk was by signs. When the conference was over and I was about starting, the Chief selected two of his footmen to go with us. He had them discharge their rifles before leaving. I set off in a different direction from the right course, but the fellows kept right up with us, in fact they could have outrun our jaded horses. When we reached the camp, the cook had a first-rate Sunday dinner ready, consisting of Sioux river fish, salt pork and beans, hot biscuits and molasses, dried apple sauce and coffee. My Indian guests had a cordial invitation to dine with us. After that I took special pains to let them know we had no whiskey. There was a jug of molasses setting in the back part of the tent, and I saw one of them kept eyeing

that. To dispel any doubt he might have on that point, I took up the jug and went to hold it to his nose to smell of. He threw back his head and opened his mouth to take down the whiskey. I stuck my finger in the molasses and showed him "no whiskey." They could all say "whiskey." That was the last I saw of that band, but it seems that two years later they turned up at Spirit Lake.

Since that time, northwestern Iowa has wonderfully changed. The Sioux Indians have gone, and comfortable farm houses stand in place of the teepees. The wild animals have disappeared and lowing herds of cattle have stamped out the wild grass. The hunter is displaced by the plowman. The report of the deadly rifle is succeeded by the clanging dinner bell, calling weary laborers to bountiful repasts. The solitude of the unbroken prairies is broken by the noise of the reaper and threshing machine. The single narrow trail of the buffalo and Sioux Indian is replaced by the wagon-road and railway; and the dome and steeples of a magnificent State Institution, for the mentally unfortunate, loom above the hills of the Little Sioux river.

But one who trod the first paths and set the first land-marks, can scarcely repress a sigh at remembrance of the grandeur and sublimity of the scenery when viewed in its native solitude.

The blue haze in the distance beyond the river, settling around the groves and other guiding points, obscured and mystified their distant forms and gave a charming solemnity to the view. So is the hoped-for final state beyond, covered behind a hazy veil which no one has lifted.

Truly did the poet sing of "the charms," seen by sages in the face of "solitude," and of a life "with a chosen band" in a frontier land, as against one who "loved to roam o'er the bright sea foam."

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