

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SPIRIT LAKE MASSACRE
MARCH 8-15, 1857

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“. . . he loves his own barn better than he loves our house. Let me see some more. *The purpose you undertake is dangerous—* Why, that's certain: 'tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."—Hotspur in *King Henry IV*, Pt. I, Act II, Sc. III.

"They who forget the battles of their country will have to fight them over again."—Emerson.

I

The settlers about the Lakes on March 8, 1857, all records show, had no suspicion at all of the impending disaster. They had no knowledge of the troubles at Smithland, Correctionville, Peterson and Gillet's Grove. They, of course, were not aware of the letters to Governor Grimes relating the outrages in the places just referred to and appealing for military protection, to which I shall refer later. Inkpaduta's braves suddenly appeared among them. Dr. Harriott's unpublished letter of March 6 states that the Indians were encamped on that date at least, and may have been there on the 5th.¹ Mrs. Sharp says that the Indians appeared on March 7, namely Saturday. The two reports are not necessarily inconsistent.²

Inkpaduta's plan of operations was very simple but it clearly met the requirements of the best military maxims which he followed in many another battle with the whites when his reputation for military prowess and success reached high levels. He pitched his camp not far from the Mattock cabin, hard by the east end of the causeway between East and West Okoboji. It was a perfect disposition of his forces for effective maneu-

[This article concludes the series of studies of the Spirit Lake Massacre begun in the ANNALS OF IOWA for April, 1932, with "Dr. Isaac H. Harriott: a Victim of etc." (pp. 242-294) and for July with "The Origins of the Indian Massacre between the Okobojis" (pp. 322-382).]

¹Ante, p. 290; R. A. Smith, *History of Dickinson County*, p. 63.

²Sharp, *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre* (Edition of 1885), p. 62.

vers. He commanded the major strategic center and he thus realized the dominant Roman military maxim—*Divide et impera*—Divide and conquer. He had his white foes divided three ways. There was a mile's distance between the Gardner and Mattock cabins. He controlled the eastern terminus of the causeway, across which the members of the Red Wing group, Messrs. Carl Granger, Bertell Snyder, Joseph Harshman and Dr. Harriott would have to come should they venture to attack him. The Howe and Thatcher cabins were three miles distant up on the eastermost bend of the east shore of East Okoboji and with the smaller of the cluster of little bodies of water now called Gar Lake between his camp and an attack from the east.

In his tactics in the accomplishment of his fell purpose he was adroit and most successful, although abominable in his method and utterly without mercy—but not a whit more treacherous, merciless or ruthless than was Henry Lott in the murder of Inkpaduta's mother, brother and nephews and nieces on Bloody Run three years before. He and his braves came to the cabins with ostentatious friendly feelings asking for food or ammunition. Inkpaduta seems to have had the reputation about Fort Dodge and the northwest of being very cautious, never striking unless he felt that he had his prospective foe or victim wholly within his grasp. Thus when his braves invaded the Gardner cabin Sunday morning they sat with the family at the breakfast table, pretending friendship. Soon they began to demand ammunition and guns in a more and more arrogant, insolent, and then threatening manner. But when Dr. Harriott and Bertell Snyder entered the cabin they immediately desisted, for these two young men presented a front that made them hold their hand until things were more favorable.³ Their friendly disposition was apparently such that young Harriott could not believe that the Indians had any death-dealing designs and argued against Mr. Gardner's fears and proposal to warn the rest of the settlers. There is a tradition that Mrs. Gardner had some idealistic notions about Indians which she derived from Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* which prevented her concurring in her husband's fears and concurring with Dr. Harriott's optimistic feelings.⁴ Inkpaduta's pretenses of friendship were his

³*Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴*The Falimpsest*, Vol. IV, p. 283. The source or basis for the assertion is not given.

most effective tactics. He soon struck and struck without mercy.

The number of Indians directly or indirectly involved in the Indian depredations of the fall of 1856 and winter of 1857 culminating in the Massacre between the Okobojis has been a much disputed question. In his first official report to Governor Grimes of April 12 Major William Williams states that when he reached the state line he "learned the Indians embodied 200 or 300 strong at Spirit Lake and Big Island Groves."⁵ Later in his report he declared, "As near as I could ascertain, the Indian force was from 150 to 200 warriors."⁶ In his "Historical Sketches of Northwestern Iowa" published ten years later he says:

From all that could be ascertained the force of Indians who had combined to break up the white settlements at Spirit Lake, and on the Des Moines were in all numbering perhaps 250, posted so as to prevent any escaping. They were posted as follows: 20 tepees around Spirit Lake which allow 5 warriors to a tepee, and those who are conversant with the Sioux tepees, know that each one of them will accommodate from 8 to 10 each; 4 tepees at Big Island Grove; and at or near Springfield and Gaboo's Trading House some 17 or 20 tepees. All the Sioux of the following bands: The Red Tops, or Inkpaduta's bands, the Sissetons, and Yanktons, with no doubt stragglers from other bands.⁷

Mrs. Sharp asserts that Inkpaduta's band was variable in size: "the number of his followers varying from time to time from fifty to one hundred and fifty; as individuals of similar character, from different bands of Sioux joined or deserted him." She then names from memory eleven chiefs or braves, but does not pretend to give a complete list.⁸ Major Williams was certain that the half-breed, Gaboo, of the trading station near Springfield was in the conspiracy and states that his squaw was wearing some of Mrs. Church's clothes, who had fled from Springfield and was rescued by Major Williams' command. Mr. Doane Robinson, as we have seen, charges that Ishtaba (Sleepy Eyes) and his band was in collusion with Inkpaduta and was chargeable with a part in the conspiracy. His band was near Heron Lake.

The actual numbers involved probably cannot now be stated with any assurance. Mrs. Sharp's recollections relate obviously

⁵Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷*Iowa North West*, May 22, 1867.

⁸Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

to those with which she came in contact and Major Williams was estimating those who were probably within the probabilities as ready to help Inkpaduta if he succeeded fairly easily and the danger of swift pursuit was remote. If Inkpaduta had any large plans for driving the whites out of the upper terrain, comprehending the lake region, the head waters of the Des Moines and the Pipestone Quarries and the Vermillion, they were utterly frustrated by the prompt appearance of Captain Bee's troopers within the environs of Springfield.

It is improbable that we shall ever know definitely precisely what precipitated the attack upon the settlers in the afternoon of Sunday, March 8, 1857. The Indians left the Gardner cabin, or its immediate vicinity, about noon. But they drove off the cattle belonging to the Gardners and shot some of them. This fact indicated unmistakable malevolence. It was decided to send word to the other cabins of the dangerous signs, Harvey Luce and a Mr. Clark undertaking to give the warning. They did not return alive. About three o'clock Sunday the occupants of the Gardner cabin, awaiting their return, heard firing in the neighborhood of the Mattock cabin and realized that the worst they had been dreading was impending. Mr. Gardner proceeded to put the house in order to give the Indians a warm reception, but Mrs. Gardner, still possessed by her Christian faith or her youthful idealistic belief in the goodness of all men, believed that their hospitality to them in the morning would keep the Indians from attacking them, protested the use of firearms, saying, "If we have to die, let us die innocent of shedding blood."⁹

Writing to Charles Aldrich's *Hamilton Freeman*, some four months afterwards, Mr. Jareb Palmer, who was a resident of the Springfield settlement, and later joined Major Williams' command, gives us the only explanation of the nominal origin of the trouble precipitating the attack upon the Mattock cabin. He says:

Black Buffalo at Woods store in Springfield told them [Palmer and Morris Markham, who carried the first news of the Massacre to Springfield] that the trouble started over some hay that an Indian attempted to take without leave. The white man told him to leave the hay alone, which he refused to do. The white man struck him, then another Indian interfered, who was shot by the whites. Then the fight commenced.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

They said it was a fair battle; but that they had killed about forty whites and only lost three of their warriors.¹⁰

The story is not at all improbable. The driving off and shooting of the Gardner cattle and the hay episode suggest various interpretations. The Indians may have been seeking some pretense for "starting things." The Sioux, however, had communistic ideas of property and its use. What any one of the tribe possessed was appropriable by any one who wanted it and could take it, when not in actual use by the nominal owner. They took from each other as desire or whim prompted; and there was no reason, save danger, why they should not take from the whites whatever they might want. They were in serious need of food. The wanton destruction of the Gardner cattle, however, clearly indicated malevolence.

The attack was well planned and carried out with marked skill and with horrible completeness. There were twenty men, women and children killed on Sunday, and twelve more struck down on this side of the state line in the next five days, Mr. William Marble being the last victim, living on the midwest shore of Spirit Lake. Four women were spared and taken with the retreating band as captives—Abbie Gardner, age fourteen, Mrs. J. M. Thatcher, Mrs. Alvin Noble and Mrs. William Marble. Mrs. Noble and Mrs. Thatcher were brutally murdered while the Indians were retreating. The sorry details of the massacre on Sunday and Monday, March 8-9, 1857, by Inkpaduta's band I shall not undertake to relate as they have been sufficiently set forth in the accounts of Mrs. Sharp, and Messrs. Gue, Smith, and Teakle.

II

The first credible report of the catastrophe between the Oko-bojis was brought to Fort Dodge by Messrs. Orlando C. Howe,¹¹ Cyrus Snyder and Robert M. Wheeler on the afternoon of Saturday, March 21, according to most accounts, and apparently late in the day. As already indicated so many and variable reports had been reaching Fort Dodge about Indian troubles, and varying considerably in their credibility, that the people were more or less dubious or hesitant about accepting them at par.¹²

¹⁰*The Hamilton Freeman*, July 30, 1857.

¹¹Orlando C. Howe was the first county judge of Dickinson County and later professor of law in the Law School of the State University of Iowa.

¹²*Ante*, p. 246. Footnote 4.

But the characters of Messrs. Howe and Wheeler and the specific nature of their reports soon convinced the inhabitants that the dreaded event had actually occurred.

A mass meeting was called at the School House for the next afternoon. Messengers were sent immediately to Border Plains, Homer and Webster City. The one foremost in pushing matters was Major William Williams whom Governörs Stephen Hempstead and James W. Grimes had each given a general commission to act for the chief executive of the state of Iowa in any emergency which might arise calling for military protection against the Indians, and, so far as practicable without specific legislative authorization, to effect plans for its organization. Major Williams acted as chairman of the meeting and Charles B. Richards as secretary. The meeting was soon convinced of the dire need of instant and decisive action by the narratives of Messrs. Howe, Snyder and Wheeler. Their statements were later consolidated into an affidavit which was forwarded to Governor James W. Grimes. The original is now in the files of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Washington, and so far as my knowledge goes is here reproduced for the first time.

THE AFFIDAVIT OF MESSRS. ORLANDO C. HOWE, CYRUS
SNYDER AND ROBERT M. WHEELOCK

On the evening of Monday, March 16th 1857 we in company with B. F. Parmenter arrived at the House of Joel Howe in the vicinity of Spirit Lakes Dickinson County Iowa. We noticed that the house had apparently been broken into. And articles of furniture Books &c thrown out and scattered around. Two of us (Howe & Wheelock) then went to the house of Milton Thatcher, about a mile and a half beyond & found that in a similar condition & then first suspected the affair to be the work of Indians. On returning to Mr. Howes, Snyder & Parmenter had noticed within the house a dead body, there was on the floor a quantity of clothing and bedding and nearly covered by it lay a dead body. We had noticed moccasin tracks several days old about the houses, and from some indications suspected that there were yet Indians in the Groves.

It being too dark to travel with any knowledge as to our direction, we remained till nearly light, and then examined what we had supposed to be a heap of corpses. On removing the body exposed, we found others under it thrown promiscuously together, some partly covered with Bed clothes others having bodies thrown upon them. We did not count the bodies lying there, but from recollection as to the position they were lying in, and from recognizing several of their persons, can positively identify seven, altho there were probably several more. We

noticed on several of the bodies wounds that were apparently the causes of their death, but made no particular examination as to most of them. A Gun barrel which from our description has since been identified, as belonging to one of the persons who were in the house probably at the time of the murders, was lying upon the bodies. The stock had been broken off at the breech, and there were other signs of a desperate resistance.

Wheelock & Howe recognized several of the bodies as being those of some of Mr. Joel Howes family. there was one child less than two years old, and other children of the family. On reaching the west fork of the Des Moines River, we found that an account of the affair at the Lakes had reached the settlement there. We ascertained that for several weeks persons had left the river for the lakes and were not again heard from, until Mr. Morris Markham had been there and returned about ten days or two weeks previously to us. His statements as repeated to us by others were that he arrived at the house of Mr Gardner, at the Lakes about sunset, and saw the dead bodies of Mrs Gardner and children & of Mrs Luce & child. They were frozen and from various appearances he thought they were murdered two or three days previously. The corpse of Mrs Luce was lying in the doorway and had been partly eaten by wolves, the others were lying out of doors. One child thrown upon a snow bank. Gardners oxen were standing near the door yoked to a sled, as tho left by him a day or two before. Markham did not go into the house but cautiously proceeded up the Lakes to the house of Mr Mattocks. here he came upon several Lodges of Indians and was in the midst of them when he first saw them. He then worked his way out undiscovered and then went further on three or four miles to Mr Joel Howes. his description of the appearance of this house was just as we found it, but he did not go in and saw no corpses.

He then went to Mr Thatchers where he had been boarding and found matters on the outside as we did, & then went inside found fire remaining on the hearth, but Thatchers wife and child were missing. He then left, camped on the prairie, by which his feet were frozen, & next day he reached the settlements.

We found Mr Thatcher on the river, he having seen Markham & heard of the captivity or destruction of his family while on his way home with provisions. Some of us are acquainted with Mr Thatcher & regard him as a man of truth and not given to exaggeration & we found his description correct wherever we went.

From the best information we have, we are sure there were about forty persons at the Lakes, from twelve to twenty have been seen dead, the others are probably either besieged, prisoners, or dead.

(signed) Orlando C. Howe
Cyrus Snyder
Rob't M. Wheelock

The foregoing was sworn to and subscribed before Charles B. Richards, acting county judge, on the 22d day of March, 1857.

The meeting decided on two undertakings without much debate—first, raising three companies, two at Fort Dodge and one at Webster City, to send to the rescue of the settlers at the Lakes; and second, to forward to Governor James W. Grimes a communication showing the grave dangers by which the north-western frontier communities were menaced, their inability to protect themselves, or to carry on for any great length of time, and to urge the chief executive to secure adequate protection.

In furtherance of the first project Messrs. Hezekiah Beecher, N. B. Morrison, E. E. Colburn, John F. Duncombe and Charles B. Richards were named a committee "to enlist volunteers, and make necessary preparation for the volunteers to start for the Spirit Lakes on Tuesday morning the 24th of March and provide them with the necessary outfit."

The three companies of thirty-two each were officered as follows: The Fort Dodge companies, Company A, Captain, Charles B. Richards; Company B, Captain, John F. Duncombe; Webster City, Company C, Captain, John C. Johnson. Major Williams, although sixty years of age, was made commander. The selection was preeminently fit. He was their commander in very truth, easily dominating the men of his command by the clarity and soundness of his judgment, the sturdiness of his character in the midst of stress, his constant concern for the welfare of his men whose exactions and trials he shared generously with them.¹³

On the same day that Major Williams' command left Fort Dodge, Tuesday, March 24, on their celebrated march to the Lakes, the leaders of the town formulated, agreed to, and signed an Address to Governor James W. Grimes, which with the affidavit of Messrs. Orlando C. Howe, Cyrus Snyder and Robert M. Wheelock, previously quoted, and a transcript of the minutes of the proceedings of the mass meeting of Saturday, March 21, was sent to the Governor at his home at Burlington, Iowa. The communication and its enclosures did not reach Governor Grimes for fifteen days because of the difficulties of transit at that time of the year.

The communication to the Governor is an interesting recital and it is reproduced entire with all signatories:

¹³*Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, Vol. II. Gov. Cyrus C. Carpenter on Major William Williams, pp. 146-160.

Fort Dodge March 24 1857

To his Excellency James W Grimes

The peace of the settlements in this vicinity have [sic] been broken and we the undersigned citizens of Ft Dodge deem it our duty to inform your excellency of the extent and perpetrators (so far as known) of the outrages hereafter described

Some 3 weeks since we were petitioned by the inhabitants on the Little Sioux for assistance to protect them from the depredations of the Indians who they stated had killed their cattle stolen their horses and fire arms and ravished their women under the most barbarous and revolting circumstances—Our people listened to their reports with incredulity although attested to in the most solemn manner under oath and by parties in whose families the worst of the aforesaid outrages had been committed—(The affidavits of these men are on file with the Justice of the Peace in this place A. M. Dawley) but no action was taken until these messengers had arrived from the scene of the difficulties when a company volunteered to go to their assistance

The extreme reluctance on the part of our citizens to act in the premises was from the almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of getting on to the Little Sioux—The trip had to be made on foot through the deep snow a distance of 75 miles and over an open prairie with provisions on their backs or on hand sleds it being impossible to get teams through on account of the depth of snow and sharp crust which would disable animals in less than one days march—But before our foot expedition was fitted out a 4th messenger arrived stating that the Indians had left the settlements on the Little Sioux en rout for Spirit lakes where there was a settlement of some 40 or 50 souls—For a few days past there has been vague wild rumors in regard to the fate of this settlement—People who went over from the Des Moines did not return again which excited the anxiety of one man who had sent his son with a hand sled for flour so far that he went in pursuit—He approached the settlement after dark and on entering a house he stumbled over a dead body and close by he saw another corpse and upon further examination He found the indians still in possession of the house—He made the best of his way back to settlement on the Des Moines camping on the open prairie and freezing his feet

The next and only authoritative information we have in regard to the fate of the people of Spirit Lakes your excellency will find in a certified copy of the affidavits of 3 men who spent one night in one of the houses with its murdered inmates and they in their turn came to us for assistance—We could no longer turn a deaf ear to the calls of our fellow citizens—A meeting was called after notifying the citizens of this and Hamilton counties the proceedings of which your excellency will find enclosed and which resulted in the organization of 3 companies of volunteers numbering 75 well armed men which started this morning under command of Maj. Williams to capture and punish the perpetrators of these outrages if they can be found and for the rescue of the

settlement on Spirit lake if any were found alive, if not to pay the last sad rites to their dead and give them a christian burial

We fear our little band of pioneers will meet with stubborn resistance—There are rumors of outbreaks on the St Peters or Minnesota River—All communication is cut off from Ft Ridgely. Scouts from the upper Des Moines have endeavored to penetrate through with out success. Whatever may be the future intention of the savages they have taken advantage of deep snows and High waters to strike a blow upon our defenceless frontiers which is calculated to do serious and lasting injury to our portion of the state unless promptly met and overcome

The expedition now under way had to be made on foot through snow and water accompanied by ox teams to carry provisions and Baggage as the country north of us is so sparsely settled and poorly provisioned that our men were obliged to fit out the commissary department for the entire trip from this place, thinking it not prudent to depend upon the upper country for any supplies whatever—This drain upon our storehouses will be felt in this community as we have no surplus on hand crops having failed in this section for the last 2 years and provisions of all kinds have to be brought from below to supply this town and the whole country north and northwest of us—Hence your Excellency will at once see our utter inability to sustain any prolonged operations in the field or to give that prompt protection which the situation of our frontier demands

We submit these facts and affidavits to your excellency for your consideration leaving the rest to the report of Major Williams who we are confident will do all that can be done to investigate the matter and bring it before you at the earliest date—We are most

Resp'y

Your Ob't Ser'ts

N. B. Morrison	Charles A. Sherman
Hezekiah Beecher	Thos Sargent
William S. Meservey	L. M. Olcott
Geo Gregory	Geo T Noble
John M Parker	Jarvis T Howe
Wm H Merritt	C. Hagard Vincent
Jno Garaghty	Martin Strong Jr
E. Elliott Colburn	Wm. H. Plumb
Fred Booth	Thos. N. Skinner
Wm W. White	H Burkholder
Sam'l Rees	G V P Patterson

Upon receipt of the aforementioned communication with accompanying documents Governor Grimes immediately addressed a letter to President James Buchanan enclosing all three documents for his information. Governor Grimes' letter follows:

Executive Office, Iowa
Burlington 8th April 1857

Sir

I have the honor to enclose herein papers just reced. from Fort Dodge in this State, in relation to outrages perpetrated upon citizens of this state, residing in that vicinity, by Indians.

The Indians complained of are predatory bands of Sioux, belonging to the region north west of us, and who molest our extreme western settlements, more or less, every winter. They seem to have become more desperate than ever before and according to the statements enclosed, have already perpetrated several atrocious murders.

The characters of several of the citizens whose names are attached to the enclosed statement of facts are well known to me, and I am prepared to vouch for the substantial accuracy of their representations.

I have been unwilling to call upon the militia of this state to enter the field until the facts shall be laid before you and the protection of the Federal Government invoked.

Trusting that prompt & efficient steps will be taken by you to protect the infant settlements on the western border of our state and to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to punishment. I have the honor to subscribe myself

Your obdt. servt.

James W. Grimes

To His Excellency

James Buchanan

President of the United States.¹⁴

Governor Grimes' letter to President Buchanan produces a somewhat mixed impression. He enjoyed a reputation for forthrightness and decisiveness of opinion and explicit action. But that letter does not suggest such. It leaves one uncertain. The first impression is that he did not quite realize the serious character of the attack on the settlements at the Lakes although the specific allegations of Messrs. Howe, Snyder and Wheelock strike one as sufficiently realistic to satisfy the most exacting stickler for a bill of particulars. Again, while he knew several of the signers of the Fort Dodge address sufficiently to make him willing "to vouch for the substantial accuracy of their representations" Governor Grimes' letter is cool to the point of chilliness in calling the President's attention to the urgency of the need of action. Finally his frank assertion of his unwilling-

¹⁴It was my coming upon Gov. Grimes' letter to Pres. Buchanan in the Governor's Letter Book that led to the discovery of the affidavit of Messrs. Howe, Snyder and Wheeler and the Address of the citizens of Fort Dodge to the Governor. I am indebted to the courtesy of Hon. C. J. Rhoades, Indian Commissioner, and Curator Harlan for the photostat copies of the aforementioned documents accompanying Gov. Grimes' letter to Pres. Buchanan.

ness to call out and send the militia against the Indians until the President had had a chance to act first suggests a diplomatic "feeler" or equivocation. Moreover, it was rather inconsistent with his appointment of Major Williams to the office of his military aid in the northwestern counties and to act for him in just such circumstances—precisely as he, Major Williams, was then doing at the head of his marching volunteers. Major Williams was in fact acting under what were quasi "standing orders." The horrible bill of particulars which had come to him—and which he deemed sufficient to stir the President into action—should, it seems to me, have aroused the Governor of Iowa to the same degree of energetic action which the first news of the disaster at the Lakes produced in the lawmakers and Governor Samuel Medary of Minnesota Territory, to which I shall refer later.¹⁵

President Buchanan referred Governor Grimes' letter and enclosures to Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, who at once asked Commissioner of Indian Affairs J. W. Denver to report. In a reply under date of April 21 Mr. Denver said that his department already had a report from Agent Flandrau and Superintendent Huebschmann, notifying him of the reported massacre and of their plan to send a military troop to the region in danger and to punish the offenders. But he hesitated to indicate more than tentative opinions or plans until his office had more detailed information. He suggested that the Secretary of War be asked to investigate the need of military measures on that frontier.¹⁶ Whether Governor Grimes received any direct acknowledgment of his letter to President Buchanan I am unable to state. There is nothing discoverable in the archives of the state so to indicate.

III

The extraordinary experiences of the members of the Spirit Lakes Expedition, if we are to appreciate them in all their seriousness and variety, must be viewed more or less in relation

¹⁵Gov. Grimes may have been in the same state of general doubt as to what to believe that he was when he wrote to Secretary of State George W. McCleary under Feb. 14, 1855, when he said: "I am beset with petitions for the removal of the Indians. I am constantly receiving all kinds of letters on the subject and I am wholly at a loss to know how much credit to give any of them. I have about made up my mind to disbelieve them all."—Gov. Grimes' Letter Book in Archives Division, Hist., Memo. and Art Dept. of Iowa.

¹⁶Commissioner of Indian Affairs J. W. Denver to Secretary J. Thompson. Original in office of the Commissioner at Washington. Photostat copy in Historical Department.

to those undergone by the national troops which were stationed at Fort Ridgely and ordered to the relief of the stricken settlements.

Upon receipt of authentic information about the attack upon the settlements on or near Spirit Lake Agent Charles E. Flaudrau of the Lower Sioux Agency located on the Yellow Medicine instantly informed Colonel E. B. Alexander in command at Fort Ridgely and on the morning of Thursday, March 18, he and Captain Barnard E. Bee with Company D of the Tenth U. S. Infantry were on their way to the relief of the terror-stricken survivors of the massacre. Their experiences were appalling; snow lay deep on the ground with heavy drifts, with intermittent warm and freezing winds making progress both very slow and wearisome; ". . . wading through deep drifts; cutting through them with spade and shovel; extricating mules and sleighs from sloughs, or dragging the latter up steep hills or over bare spaces of prairie; the men wet from morning till night, and sleeping on the snow. Such," reported Captain Bee, "were the obstacles I encountered while still on the beaten track. . . . From this point (Slocum's farm) to the Des Moines was an unbroken waste of snow."¹⁷

The story of Major Williams' command in the expedition for the relief of the survivors of Inkpaduta's attack upon the settlement between the Okobojis is one that the citizens of Iowa in these peaceful days, as they approach the centenary of the state's beginnings, should consider carefully and ponder well. We live in piping times of peace when men and women and the youth seem to be heedless, reckless, and contemptuous of or indifferent to the stern lessons of the past; and, as one of the notable members of the Expedition who risked his all, Gov. Cyrus C. Carpenter, said to his fellow citizens thirty years later, quoting the injunction of the Sage of Concord—"They who forget the battles of their country will have to fight them over again."¹⁸

From the moment the Expedition left its rendezvous at Fort Dodge until its storm-wracked members (save two, frozen to death) returned three weeks later, its narrative is a story to

¹⁷Capt. Barnard E. Bee to Lt. H. E. Maynardier, adjutant, April 9, 1857.—Senate Exec. Doc's 1st Sec., 35th Con., No. 20, p. 352.

¹⁸ANNALS OF IOWA, Third Series, Vol. III, p. 491.

make one proud of Iowa's pioneers and her citizens and emigrant sons and daughters exult in their descent from such sturdy sires. Facing the cold cutting blasts of the winter's winds, driving forward towards dangers which they could not either foresee or measure, going to the aid of fellow mortals, for the most part, strangers to them, those pioneers, men unknown, unheralded, and unsung, showed a willingness to endure, and put forth effort and displayed such an energy in sacrifices for their companions, even when Nature's ruthless forces had beaten them to the ground, that it requires the facile, flashing pen of a Xenophon adequately to relate. The most casual study of their stout characters and fine conduct in the sudden crisis which they faced will convince commoner and cynic alike that they were made of the stuff of which strong states are made. To their uttermost they fulfilled Wordsworth's prerequisite of human liberty under law:

High sacrifice and labour without pause
even to the death.

The details of the intolerable sufferings and heroic work of the members of the Relief Expedition would have been almost lost in the mists of variable and vanishing memories but for the foresight and public spirit of Charles Aldrich, founder of *The Hamilton Freeman* of Webster City, later founder of the Aldrich Collections, and of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa and the first editor of this, the Third Series of the ANNALS OF IOWA. In the columns of *The Freeman* in 1857 he began gathering memorabilia of the Massacre and the Relief Expedition. Thirty years later, it was his genius and pen that inspired the movement which concluded in the emplacement of a memorial tablet in the Court House of Hamilton County on August 12, 1887, celebrating the heroic services of the members of Company C, composed of citizens of Webster City and environs. Again it was Charles Aldrich's forward-moving spirit that aroused and focused public interest in securing the enactment by Iowa's General Assembly of the law of April 4, 1894, providing for the erection of a monument to commemorate the lives of the victims of the tragedy on the shores of Mde-Mini-Wakan and the heroic services of the members of Major Williams' command in their efforts to rescue the sur-

vivors.¹⁹ In these pages he brought together the notable addresses, articles and correspondence containing the recollections of such participants in the Expedition as Governor Cyrus C. Carpenter, Captains Chas. B. Richards and John F. Duncombe, Lieutenants John N. Maxwell and Frank R. Mason, Sergeant Harris Hoover and Messrs. W. K. Laughlin and Michael Sweeney.²⁰

Colonel George W. Crossley of Webster City and Dr. Thomas Teakle have each given us effective summaries of the frightful experiences of the members of Major Williams' command, and I shall not essay a minute account of the Iliad of their woes. But in these rapid days when furnace heated houses, apartments and club rooms and fast-moving motor cars and trucks and vacuum cleaners are producing habits of thought that seem to be making for languor and cynicism among the youth of the land, it may not be amiss to recall and to focus attention on some of those soul-trying experiences on that heart-breaking march to the shores of the Okobojis and the almost fatal sufferings of the men on their return. Even the minutia of what the members of the three companies each and all more or less endured are luminous of the fine morale and finer humanity which controlled throughout the grilling trials that tested their souls.

IV

If we are to sense the real differences in the sufferings of the troopers under Captain Bee's command with those endured by the men in Major Williams' command we must appreciate several ground facts:

First, unlike Captain Bee's soldiers, Major Williams' men were not drilled, disciplined troops, prepared for any sort of strenuous experiences. They were utterly unprepared for such an undertaking. Second, in the rush of the three days when they were assembled and organized they could neither design nor stock an adequate commissariat, for obviously they lacked that prime necessity, a foreseeing, forehanded quartermaster who anticipates the many variable needs and sees to it that the supplies are in stock and available; and thus they started on their march ill-equipped with clothes, boots or shoes and insufficient food. Third, Major Williams' command got under way when marching

¹⁹Teakle, *The Spirit Lake Massacre*, p. 263-4.

²⁰ANNALS OF IOWA, Third Series, Vol. III, pp. 481-553; V. pp. 14-26.

conditions were almost at their maximum worst. The winter of 1856-1857 was one of extraordinary severity and March and April of 1857 displayed more than usual violent variability in the temperature, the winds, and kinds of precipitation of moisture, which facts enhanced the difficulties of the march intolerably. The snows of that winter had covered the prairies, uplands and valleys from one to two feet in depth and in the gullies and ravines through which the companies had to make their way many times they found the snow from six to twelve feet deep. Warm winds produced mists and rains and the rapid melting of the snow which flooded the creeks and rivers and made the low-lying prairies continuous swamps through which passage taxed their strength to the uttermost. But within forty-eight hours they might be pushing their way against furious blast of lashing winds with the temperature down below thirty degrees.

A few items from the records left us will show what dire exactions and distress the officers and men alike endured. The first I present is an extract from Governor Carpenter's address at the unveiling of the tablet to the memory of the work of the Company C of Webster City on August 12, 1887. Although suffering from snow-blindness, and returning home to Fort Dodge, young Carpenter joined the Expedition about twelve miles south of Medium Lake in Palo Alto County; and thereupon faced about, with Captain Richards' Company started towards the Okobjis. Of that first day's march he says:

During the remainder of the day we toiled along the road back to the Irish colony [near Medium Lake]. In doing so we marched over a route along which no team had been able to pass for weeks. Every foot of the way was covered with snow, and in places, where there was a depression in the surface of the prairie, or an elevation like a bluff or a knoll, were drifts which seemed fathomless. At such points we would resort to various expedients to get the team and the few horses in the command across the drifts. Sometimes all the men in the command would form in two files, about the distance apart of two wagon tracks, and would march and countermarch back and forth over the snow, until paths were trodden sufficiently hard to bear up the team and horses. Again we would shovel a channel where the drift was so shallow and short as to render this expedient practicable; and then at other times we would hitch our long rope to the wagon, and by sheer force of muscle and numbers pull it through the drift, and throwing the animals upon their sides, pull them, one by one, across the drifts;

and each day's march, until we had crossed Cylinder Creek upon our return, was but a constant repetition of these expedients.²¹

The second night he was with the company it camped near Mud Lake in Clay County, some twelve miles west and four miles north of Medium Lake and there he witnessed the serious concern of the officers for the welfare of their men. He says:

Many of the men were so exhausted that on coming into camp they threw themselves upon their blankets and were determined to sleep without a mouthful of food; and the picture is before me until this day, of Captain Charles B. Richards and Lieutenant F. A. Stratton, of our company, with two or three of the men, cutting wood, punching the fire, and baking pancakes, until long after midnight; and as they would get enough baked for a meal they would waken some tired and hungry man and give him his supper; and the exercises in Company A were but a sample of what was in progress in each of the companies.²²

Captain Duncombe had an harrowing experience which gave him a remarkable demonstration of the devotion and loyalty of two of his company, Lieutenant Maxwell and Mr. R. U. Wheelock. When he left Fort Dodge he was suffering acutely from intense pain in his neck and ear. For two nights he slept but little. At the close of the second day, which was one continuous nerve racking struggle, Captain Duncombe was faint from utter exhaustion due to lack of both sleep and food and the incessant pain he suffered. Mr. Wheelock had a vial of medicine he had brought from Fort Dodge to prevent cold and gave it to Captain Duncombe. It proved to be compounded of laudanum. The consequences I will let Captain Duncombe relate:

Within two minutes from the time I took this medicine I was seriously affected, on account of the weakened condition of my system from lack of food. I bit my lips until they bled to keep up, supposing that I was becoming exhausted and not thinking of the medicine I had taken, but I was compelled to surrender. I could not stand alone nor take a single step, and would instantly fall asleep unless violently shaken. I urged Lieutenant Maxwell and Mr. Wheelock to leave me and try to save themselves, as they were too much exhausted to have any possible chance of getting me to the timber. The night was cold and we had not even a blanket for protection and I could see no hope for myself. In my dazed condition I distinctly remember thinking that my time had come. But Lieutenant Maxwell and R. U. Wheelock were made of material that would never permit a companion when helpless to cross the dark river alone, and they would consent to nothing of the kind. To

²¹*Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 482-483.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 483.

their manly, courageous and self-sacrificing spirit I undoubtedly owe my life.

Lieutenant Maxwell started to walk, but too much exhausted he lay down on the crust of that cruel snow and rolled over and over that two miles, to a cabin in the grove, suffering injuries from which he never fully recovered. Wheelock kept himself from freezing by his violent efforts to keep me awake, refusing to leave me for a moment and faithfully staying by me for hours until help came. At the cabin Maxwell found the old pioneer, Jeremiah Evans, and William Church, and these two men followed back the tracks he had made to where Wheelock had remained with me, busily engaged in keeping me from that sleep that knows no waking.

By almost superhuman efforts these two brave men dragged me to the cabin, and my faithful protector, Wheelock, walking, falling and plunging along, sometimes lying down and rolling on the crust of the snow, succeeded in making the cabin about the same time, late in the night.

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Here several men became faint-hearted from exhaustion and suffering, to which most of them were unaccustomed, and refused to continue the march.

One brave man whose courage had been tested in the Mexican War and who was the third soldier to enter the Mexican fort when Cherubusco was stormed, declared that it was suicidal to continue the march, that it would result in the destruction of the entire command, and refused to go farther.

But this was not the spirit of the officers and of nearly all of the men. They had started to rescue the survivors of the Spirit Lake settlement, if any were left, to bury the dead, and if possible to overtake the Indians, and nothing but absolute impossibility could induce them to give up their purpose.²³

Near Estherville, directly east of the Okobojis, the members of the Expedition encountered by happy chance the refugees from Springfield, Minnesota, Mrs. William L. Church, her sister, Miss Drusilla Swanger, and Messrs. Thomas and Carver, the latter two each seriously wounded. They had begun to notice Indian signs and Major Williams issued strict orders for the scouts and outflankers to refrain from all use of firearms, save of course in case of an attack. It was assumed by him and the

²³Address on "The Spirit Lake Relief Expedition of 1857" in *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers Association*, 1898, pp. 43-44 (reprinted in *ANNALS op. cit.*, p. 498-99). Captain Duncombe had another recollection that he never could forget of the devotion of the men of his company to his personal welfare. After his recital of the frightful experiences at Cylinder Creek he records:

"Thomas Callighan, a powerful big-hearted Irishman of my company, whenever we reached a stream, would throw me over his shoulder as easily as if I had been a child, and carry me over in spite of my protests against his doing so." *Ibid.*, p. 46.

entire command that the Indians would naturally be in pursuit of the refugees. The scouts were about four miles in advance. Captain Duncombe was midway between them and the main column. Suddenly he heard firing. Supposing that Indians were the cause he dashed forward on his horse to take his part in the fray, but imagine his astonishment to discover that the shooting was at beavers instead of Indians, the men seeing fresh meat, and forgetting the Major's stern orders. Knowing the anxiety that would prevail with the main body Captain Duncombe immediately went back to report. What happened I let him tell:

Major Williams gave me a severe reprimand for needlessly exposing my life. If this reprimand could have been taken by a phonograph, and the picture of the scene with a kodak, it would have been more amusing than I thought it was at the time. Some things he said to me seemed comical. He was at the boiling point with rage, and those who ever knew him will understand what that implies. I remember, after saying a few severe things to me in a loud, angry tone of voice, he demanded, "Did you expect to whip all the damned Indians yourself?" I received my reprimand in silence and two years after took my revenge by marrying his daughter.²⁴

All accounts concur in stating that Major Williams was a real commander in the true military sense, martinet in his exactions and insistence upon the observance of the rules that make for discipline and the best interests of the whole command, which is the sum and substance of all true discipline.

Pushing his command forward by forced marches Major Williams reached the state line on Wednesday, April 1, and some place between the Granger cabin located near the Des Moines River, and Springfield he learned from a national trooper that five days previous the Indians had fled, having learned of the near presence of Captain Bee's troopers, that Captain Bee had not pursued them, Inkpaduta's band, any distance, and that he had not come down any farther than to the Marble cabin on the west side of Spirit Lake, buried Mr. Marble, and then had returned to Fort Ridgely.

The information threw Major Williams and his men into no little confusion. Major Williams had two definite objectives in view—the first was the rescue of the survivors, if any there might be, if perchance he could arrive in time; and second, to pursue the Indians and give them a lesson that would abolish

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 44.

the menace of future attacks. The exhaustion of the men by their forced marching in the face of such adverse conditions, the exhaustion of their commissariat, and the ill prospects thereof, and the word that the settlers between the Okobojis had been completely wiped out constrained their decision to return. Their action was taken with some sharp criticism of the conduct of the forces under Captain Bee, concerning which more later.

As he had learned that Captain Bee had made no effort to go to the lower settlement Major Williams realized that the murdered settlers should be given a decent burial. He called for volunteers and on April 2 he detailed twenty-three men, twelve from Company A, five each from B and C, under Captain J. C. Johnson and Lieutenant J. N. Maxwell "to proceed twelve miles to the lake and reconnoiter that district, and if no Indians were discovered, to inter the dead as an act of humanity."²⁵ The other two companies were to begin the return march and to await Company C at the Irish settlement on Medium Lake.

The volunteers for that "Burial Detail," as one historian has designated it,²⁶ displayed again in superb fashion the stern stuff out of which heroes and true patriots is compounded. They stepped forward, willing, when death from exhaustion, freezing, or simple starvation, dogged their waking hours, to plunge further into the Dread Unknown, to face death either at the hands of ruthless skulking foes who would show no mercy, or slow death from battling with the merciless elements then at their worst behavior, their proffered service tendered primarily for the simple purpose of giving their murdered countrymen, strangers almost all to them, the last honored rites of earth. They did not have the coercive intimate concern of the Grecian maid, Antigone, for her brother, denied such rites by the state's stern decree. Nor were they constrained, by what Masefield expresses in some telling lines:

Loathing Terror,
To leave the dead,
So alone, so wretched.

The hearts and minds of those volunteers were constrained, we may presume, rather by a fine humanity—concern for the feelings and memories of the families, relatives and friends of the

²⁵Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²⁶Teakle, *op. cit.*, Chap. XXIV, pp. 192-205.

stricken victims, lying prone and stark in the snow next the shores of the Okobojis. If such services for one's fellows was not Idealism incarnate, what better does the records of the World's saints and heroes contain for us?

V

The vicissitudes of the members of the Relief Expedition were frightful on their march up the valley of the Des Moines River, which they had to cross and recross nearly twenty times; but their experiences on their return from the lake region were awful, and we may well marvel that any of them survived. It may be futile to try to determine whether the companies under Major Williams suffered greater and more harrowing experiences than did the company under Captain Johnson on their return march down the valley, for each endured about all that the stoutest souls could possibly encounter and bear up under. But a summary, or rather a few illustrative incidents should not be forgotten for they are luminous of what our common citizenry can do in the storm and stress that anon try men's souls.

The sufferings of the men on the return march were in many respects more painful than they endured in the outset. They had first faced cold winds and bucked snow in the main steadily; but on their return home they pushed forward between mists, rain, and melting snows and then plunged into a horrible blizzard with the temperature sixty degrees below freezing point. The members of each division suffered more acutely because of the condition of their footwear. By the return march their boots or shoes were either so worn as to be next to worthless, or marching through the melting snows, fording creeks, sloughs, and streams, they had shrunk so that they pinched the feet so painfully that the men either slit them so that the toes or foot was exposed, or if they took them off at night they could not put them on again when they resumed their march in the morning. Several men had to encase their feet and legs in strips of blanket.

The separated companies were to rendezvous at the Irish colony, now Emmetsburg, the county seat of Palo Alto County. The weather, as they separated, was mild and pleasant. Major Williams' companies reached the Irish colony but did not tarry long because the settlement was short of food and so large a proportion of the Expedition's supplies had been given the Burial

Detail of the Spirit Lake detachment that it was decided to proceed onward toward Fort Dodge. The next day began with warm winds and clouds, and rains were soon pouring down in a steady stream. As they approached Cylinder Creek the men found themselves wading through one, two, and three feet of water and that, too, when the creek was distant more than a quarter of a mile. The column reached the crossing point about two o'clock in the afternoon. It was impossible for them to ford it. About the same time the winds suddenly changed. The mercury began to go down rapidly. Soon the men were in the midst of a terrific blizzard. The situation was critical in the extreme. They could not go back; and the half mile of surging waters in front of them seemed almost impassable.

At this juncture Captains Richards and Duncombe demonstrated the fine fibre and the stern stuff of which their characters were made. Instead of ordering their men to undergo the discomforts and dangers in determining whether a safe passage was feasible, risking health and limb and facing imminent death, they stood forth and with two sturdy companions, Solon Mason and Guernsey Smith, made a daring effort to effectuate the crossing of the two companies. A wagon box was converted into a makeshift boat. With the captains bailing and steering, and the assistants pushing, they slowly made progress against the roaring current, only to have the improvised boat sink just as they reached the thither side of Cylinder Creek, making futile their heartbreaking efforts to insure a safe passage for their men.

They made their way to Shippey's Point two to three miles distant, which they reached about nine o'clock, where they were fed and got themselves dry in the course of the night's long vigil. The next day they tried twice to effect their major purpose, returning to the creek, first in the morning and again in the afternoon—but they could not discover the camp of the men amidst the whirling snows. One of their associates, Solon Mason, collapsed from exhaustion and had to be carried back to the Shippey cabin. Meantime two other members of the command, Harris Hoover and A. K. Tullis, by a long circuitous journey had forded the Cylinder and come down the west side and joined them Saturday night, April 4. A few excerpts from Mr. Hoover's diary or journal will indicate their anxiety and their efforts for their companions across the Cylinder:

Sunday morning, April 5. We returned to the creek to look for our companions, but as there were no signs of life, the conviction was forced upon us that our fears were realized, and that they were all frozen to death. The stream was by this time frozen over except the channel, about fifty feet wide, in which the ice was partially formed, but not sufficiently solid to walk upon. The captains deserve praise for their noble efforts in behalf of their men. They worked for two hours in the severe cold, attempting to crawl over the ice to reach the opposite shore, but notwithstanding their warm hearts the intense cold overcame them and they were obliged to abandon the attempt. Returning to the Shippey cabin another night of horrible suspense was passed. Comparatively comfortable as we were, the condition of our comrades haunted us like a grim spectre. We could not imagine how it was possible for them to survive the horrors of such another night, while our utter inability to relieve them added poignancy to our grief.

Monday, April 6. We again proceeded to Cylinder Creek and found the ice strong enough to carry a horse. Crossing over we were overjoyed to find all our companions alive. They were piled up like so many flour bags in the most approved style, under a frail tent, constructed of a wagon cover, partially banked up with snow which served to check the fierce wind and saved them from freezing to death. Now they crossed the creek on the ice (the formation of which they had patiently waited), after lying in this position over forty hours, without food or fire, on the open prairie, with the mercury at 32° below zero.²⁷

VI

The experiences of the Burial Detail in several respects were more harrowing than those endured by Major Williams' immediate command. The sights they came upon on the shores of the Okobojis—the wanton destruction of property, the hideous butchery and mutilation of women and children—left horrible memories. After giving the bodies of the thirty or more victims a hurried burial they hastened their departure for their homes, eighty miles or more to the southeast, leaving on the morning of April 4. A difference of opinion, albeit a friendly one, as to the better course to take led to the separation of two of the company from the main body, with fatal results to Captain Johnson and Wm. E. Burkholder who, while not very far from their company, got blinded, benumbed, their feet frozen, they sank in the snow, and eleven years afterwards their mortal remains were found. The experiences of the men under Lieutenant Maxwell approached the utmost limits of human endurance. His account contains many passages that enthrall the imagination:

²⁷The Hamilton Freeman, August 27, 1857—reprinted with slight changes in ANNALS OF IOWA, Third Series, Vol. V, p. 24.

In the forenoon it was quite warm, melting the snow. . . . We were obliged to wade sloughs waist deep, or go miles around. . . . We were wet to the shoulders, and while in this fearful condition the wind changed. About four o'clock a blizzard was fairly upon us. In a short time our clothes were frozen stiff. Many of us cut holes in our boots to let the water out, and several pulled their boots off and were unable to get them on again. . . . Those who happened to be with Laughlin and myself stopped on a piece of dry ground . . . determined to remain near it all night. . . . We marched back and forth all night long. When a comrade would fall others would help him to his feet, encourage and force him to keep moving as the only hope, for no living being could survive an hour in such a storm without hard exercise.²⁸

The sufferings of many of the men under the immediate guidance of Second Lieutenant Frank R. Mason of Company C of Webster City, got within the dark shadows of death. His recollections give us a vivid picture of the acute mental and physical distress of the sufferers. Several men became mentally deranged because of their physical exhaustion from cold and lack of proper food. They had to be safeguarded against themselves, carried by their companions, and cared for as if they were sick children. Lieutenant Mason was with the men held for two days on the Cylinder Creek by the blizzard. When the sun gave them clear skies and hope on the morning of Monday, April 6, Lieutenant Mason and M. W. Howland determined to see if a crossing was feasible.

We staggered to our frozen feet and arm in arm hobbled towards the stream. All eyes were upon us as we went out upon the ice. We began to feel encouraged but when we neared the center of the creek we found a space of open water, about thirty feet wide and very deep. We had resolved, however, never to return to that camp again, and looking up the stream we saw a clump of willows and went up to them. Here we found that ice had floated down, lodged against the willows and frozen there, thus forming a complete bridge. After passing the channel we signaled back, when a truly joyous shout went up from those poor half insane boys. I will here state that there was not a man among our number—about 80—who had strength enough to reach the opposite shore. . . . the trouble seemed to be weakness and shortness of breath. Every man's mouth was wide open, his tongue hanging out, and in some instances blood running from nose or mouth. Shippey's cabin . . . was two and a half miles southeast of the creek. . . . Major Williams met us with great tears streaming down his furrowed cheeks. . . .

. . . It was decided to disband, separate into small squads, and strike out for the nearest settlement. . . . I was detailed to pilot our Webster

²⁸ANNALS OF IOWA, Third Series, Vol. III, p. 530.

City men across the prairie to that point about eighteen miles from us. . . . Immediately after starting, our friend Hathway took the back track. When we were about half a mile from him I went back to where he stood and putting my hand upon his shoulder urged him to come with us, but his eyes fairly flashed fire as he resolutely refused. I signaled for help and John Gates came to my assistance—a tower of strength and manliness, a man who never flinched from the performance of duty. We approached Hathway, the fire had disappeared from his eyes, and he fell into our willing arms nearly helpless. John and I carried him almost every rod of the way by taking turns. Occasionally he would arouse from his stupor, at such times we would cross our hands together, forming a seat for him, but when he was too weak to sit erect we would take him in our arms or on our backs.²⁹

Lieutenant Mason then relates his tactics in creating delusions among his companions as to the distance or nearness of some timber towards which they were heading, wherein or nearby he said was a cabin, in his efforts to renew their courage and energize their hopes, and the bitter denunciation to which he was for a time subjected when they finally reached the timber and no cabin was within sight. In utter exhaustion and despair about 11 o'clock at night the men lay down for what would have been their last long sleep but for a happy strange turn of Fate. They had been slumbering for nearly an hour when Lieutenant Mason heard a woman's voice—he thought he was dreaming at first—but a clear, bell-like voice brought him suddenly to a keen consciousness that an angel was speaking out of the darkness to him and help was at hand, and the cabin he had told his companions about but could not find, was actually nearby on the north. As soon as he could get his dazed faculties together he inquired if food and shelter could be given two of the men who had given out two hours before, Messrs. Hathway and Gates, and the reply came back in the Quaker phrasing: "We will do what we can for thee," and in their dire need Mr. and Mrs. Collins proved to be Friends.³⁰ Thirty years after Mrs. Sarah W. Collins gave the public her recollections of her experiences that cold night:

. . . I have many times thought over the events of that night and told them to my children; how husband and I, after having stayed later than usual at a neighbor's, started for home, he with our first babe in his arms, and kept along the beaten path in the snow. All at

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 535-536.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 536.

once the outline of dark objects appeared before us. They were not moving and we heard no noise. I at first thought we might be upon a company of Indians! We were too near to retreat, and true to our inclinations we stepped forward to meet what might be danger and trouble. I then heard groans of distress and I thought sobs. All fear was gone in a moment, and I hastened to know who could be at that time of night in so deplorable a condition. We had a lantern, and as the light shone upon the place my pity was truly stirred. There, with the snow crushed beneath them, were eight men; some sitting, some reclining, and others lying flat upon their backs! I need not say how gladly we ministered to their wants. . . . We count it all joy that we were enabled to take part (though a humble one) in that heroic task. I think your memory served you well, friend Mason, as to the "bill of fare" set before you on the night and morning in question. I remember the biscuits well. . . . they were so poor, and there was no extra grease for shortening. But I have no doubt my biscuits beat the mush you made with flour and water, if you did boil it for two long hours. Our flour and molasses ought to have been good as they were hauled all the way from Muscatine [180 miles as the crow flies] by an ox-team the fall previous, and flour was selling that spring for from eleven to fourteen dollars per barrel.³¹

The dramatic and the heroic in life are usually closely associated with its minutia and the prosaic. Lieutenant Mason and his associates probably thought more of those biscuits and the cheer of the Collins home than they did of the heroic character of their amazing experiences of the previous three weeks.

Major Williams' concern for the fate of the Burial Detail was such that despite his age he went back from Cylinder Creek to the Irish settlement to learn of their fate and to aid in their march, if in dire need. Happily all of the scattered groups were within short ranges of their homes. Lieutenant Mason and his hard pressed companions reached Webster City on April 8 and 9; and Major Williams and his contingent got to Fort Dodge on April 10 and 11. On Sunday, April 12, Major Williams sent off his official report to Governor Grimes of the organization and efforts and experiences of the Relief Expedition. Among other items which he mentioned were: "We have fourteen men badly frozen, and two lost, Captain Johnson of Webster City and Mr. Burkholder of this place, both frozen to death in a snowstorm. . . . So severe was the weather that . . . three or four of them had lost their minds, and knew no one."

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 549.

VII

We do not have a correct or complete appreciation of the Relief Expedition if we record merely the acts of courage and daring of its members, or the fine examples of self-sacrifice for their stricken or endangered companions. They had some experiences which gave them a close-up view of the pathetic, the petty and the sordid.

On the morning of their fifth day out, April 28, Saturday, eight men faint-hearted from exhaustion and suffering, decided to return to their homes. It is interesting that in all of the published personal recollections of the expedition that have come under my eye, each and all refrain from mentioning their names. Mr. Hoover, however, dips his pen in some acidulated ink as he reflected upon their conduct.³²

When Major Williams' command reached the state line, two lone settlers who lived within the danger zone gave them a very frosty reception, refusing them common consideration that lacked ordinary humanity, let alone common prudence. Captain Richards, thirty years afterward, refers to the incident in sharp terms and records the name of the major one, saying that they exhibited "the most inhospitable spirit of any pioneers it has ever been my fortune to meet."³³

At the Irish colony on their return the settlers refused to allow the company under Captain Richards to have a beef animal, although the men of the two companies had not had a substantial meal for ten days. The settlers refused even when the officers and men offered to pay, and to give their joint obligation that payment would be made, and with pitchforks and guns in battle array they stood ready to prevent appropriation of the animal. But Captain Richards nevertheless ordered Lieutenant Stratton with a squad of men to commandeer the steer; and the embattled settlers retired without bloodshed and the famished men had their first feast.³⁴

Lieutenant Mason tells with bitter cynical comment that after crawling on their hands and knees for nearly two miles they reached a house at 10 o'clock at night; they were given lodging and fed and charged therefor and the next morning the owner of

³²*Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 18.

³³*Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 514.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 517.

the place hauled the eight men twelve miles to Webster City and demanded \$14.50 for doing so. The contrast between the treatment received at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Collins and at the last produced so much heat in the local atmosphere that the man and his family who charged the stricken soldiers so exactingly for his aid soon concluded it best "to leave the country."³⁵

The essentials and the premises of life's real dramas, our literary folks inform us, are found in contrasts. We appreciate light against darkness, mountain peaks by the valleys, the fine and generous when they stand forth among the penurious and petty.

VIII

It is not easy to appraise events as to their relative importance or significance when we are either immediately a part thereof or when we stand apart and view them from a distance in space or time. Events, like things, are major or minor according to circumstances. If they relate to our community or commonwealth we are prone to overemphasize in appraisal of importance. Comparisons of the vasty sort are more or less futile. But there is an appreciable difference between a gentle breeze and a roaring cyclone. The Indian Massacre between the Okobojis on March 8-9, 1857, has a rare distinction and the Relief Expedition was notable and its story should hold the attention of Iowa's sons and daughters who care aught for their commonwealth and have any pride in the character of their pioneers. Two distinguished citizens of Fort Dodge, and both members of Major Williams' command, have recorded their mature judgments and they may appropriately become the common opinion.

Captain John F. Duncombe became one of the foremost of Iowa's public men. He was an attorney of distinction and had he not become allied with the Democratic party in pre-Civil War days with which he ever affiliated, he would have risen fast and high in public preference in this state. He was a cool, searching critic of men and measures. He never indulged in gush, nor tawdry flag waving. Addressing the Pioneer Lawmakers in Des Moines in February, 1898, he said concerning the Spirit Lake Expedition and its sufferings:

"No trained veterans, thoroughly equipped and armed, ever did duty more willingly, more cheerfully, or more faithfully.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 537.

"Few of the men were accustomed to hardships. None of them were fully prepared for what they had to endure. Not a man shirked his duty.

* * *

"I have doubts whether any body of men for the same length of time, on any march, ever suffered greater hardships, more constant exposure, more severe bodily labor, than those who composed the Spirit Lake Expedition."³⁶

Another solid judgment is given us by Cyrus C. Carpenter. He left the Union Army with the rank of colonel; he served Iowa for four years as governor (1869-1873); later as one of her first railroad commissioners, and finally as a member of Congress for two terms (1879-1883). Addressing his comrades of the Relief Expedition, thirty years afterwards, on August 12, 1887, at the unveiling of the memorial tablet to their members of Company C in the County House at Webster City, Governor Carpenter said:

Since that experience on Cylinder Creek, I have marched with armies engaged in actual war. During three and a half years' service, the army with which I was connected, marched from Cairo to Chattanooga, from Chattanooga to Atlanta, from Atlanta to the Sea, and from the Sea through the Carolinas to Richmond. These campaigns were made under southern suns and in the cold rains and not infrequent snow storms of southern winters. The marches were sometimes continued without intermission three or four days and nights in succession, with only an occasional halt to give the weary, foot-sore soldier a chance to boil a cup of coffee. But I never in those weary years experienced a conflict with the elements that could be compared with the two nights and one day on Cylinder Creek.³⁷

The youth of Greece were not allowed to grow up without becoming familiar with Xenophon's *Anabasis*—the great classic relating the grilling experiences and sufferings of the celebrated Ten Thousand Greek soldiers, suddenly caught amidst adverse Fates in their famous retreat from the lower Euphrates to the Euxine, thence to the Bosphorus, and thence to their homeland in Attica. In all the centuries since Xenophon's enthralling narrative has inspired the students in the colleges and universities of all nations in Europe and the United States wherein the "humanities" controlled curricula. Therein they read of perfect

³⁶Proc. Pioneer Lawmakers Associ., 1898, pp. 43, 46.

³⁷ANNALS, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 487.

discipline, of superb leadership, of implicit trust of the rank and file in their chief, of constant concern of the chief for the welfare of his men, of a wonderful concurrence of minds and effort in a common cause in which "each for all and all for each" was achieved without friction or fuss, without ostentation or dramatics, and merit in men and dominance in leadership were perceived clearly, and frankly acclaimed spontaneously—when all men were democrats in deed and thought and instinctively followed the aristocrats of superior worth, and the monarch in merit was looked to as guide and friend and governor—all to one good end.

The youth of Iowa may well study the experiences of the members of the Spirit Lake Expedition, the characters and conduct of the rank and file in their daily routine, in their relations with their superiors, in their devotion to their humblest duties, in their trust in their officers and in the fine devotion of their officers to the best welfare of their men. If such earnest patriotism can become the inspiration and norm of the youth of the state, anxiety as to the future of the commonwealth will soon cease from troubling.

IX

Major Williams' report to Governor James W. Grimes, containing his official account of the organization and progress of the Relief Expedition, was dated April 12, 1857. It was penned in some haste, as he clearly appreciated.³⁸ Further, it is clear that some of its paragraphs were composed in a state of some embitterment. I refer to his adverse comments upon the course of Captain Barnard E. Bee, in command of Company D of the Tenth U. S. Infantry, that was ordered to the relief of the settlers at the Lakes by Colonel Alexander at Fort Ridgely. Captain Bee's troopers proceeded but little farther than Springfield. A small detail under Lieutenant Alexander Murray went as far as the Marble cabin on the west side of Spirit Lake—a mile or so below the state line—and then returned to their rendezvous at Springfield. From one of the troopers Major Williams learned further that pursuit of Inkpaduta's band had not proceeded farther than Heron Lake and Captain Bee and his troopers would return to Fort Ridgely. As already indicated

³⁸See concluding paragraph of Report, Sharp, *History of Spirit Lake Massacre*, 1898, p. 121.

what appeared strange non-action to the men of Major Williams' command, aroused considerable indignation and produced no little animadversion. This feeling was reflected in Major Williams' report to Governor Grimes.

He states that Inkpaduta's band was enabled to escape Captain Bee's troopers because two traders, Wood and Gaboo, at Springfield had warned the Indians of their approach. Major Williams asserts that had the company from Fort Ridgely not been sent out, his command could have caught the Indians.³⁹ We may doubt the probability of his succeeding, for Inkpaduta had twenty to thirty horses and Major Williams did not have more than eight or nine available. Inkpaduta was fairly well stocked with provisions, and the supplies of Major Williams' men were steadily lessening, and their marching strength was declining with equal pace.

Major Williams' adverse comments were so severe and sweeping that some excerpts from his report are given below in order that comparison and consideration of their justice may be clearly dealt with:

The conduct of the troops from Fort Ridgely is hard to be accounted for. On Thursday, the 26th of March, the Indians attacked Springfield and neighborhood. The citizens defended themselves as well as they could. . . . On Friday, in the afternoon, the troops from Fort Ridgely arrived, all well mounted on mules. Those troops lay at Springfield all day Saturday. . . . Their officers counseled with the half-breed, Gaboo, . . . whose squaw . . . was at the time wearing the shawl of Mrs. Church, with other articles taken from the citizens. Said officers lay over from Friday evening till Sunday morning without pursuing or making any effort to overtake the Indians. . . .

On Sunday morning he, the commanding officer, set out on their trail, and followed them half the day, finding their camp fires, overtaking three or four straggling squaws, let them go. . . . When he could not have been over half a day's march from them he stopped and returned the same evening (Sunday) to Springfield. When he ordered the men to return, they expressed a wish to follow on, and said that they would put up with half rations if he would allow it. His reply was that he had no orders to follow them.

* * *

It is certain such troops, or rather such officers, will afford no protection to our troubled frontier settlers. Think of his conduct! his men, all well mounted, turning back when he was not a half day's march off

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 116.

them [Indians]; they loaded down with plunder, and horses and mules, and carrying off with them four respectable women as prisoners. The Indians were known to have twenty-five or thirty head of horses, and eight or ten mules, taken from the settlers.⁴⁰

In a public letter, dated April 18, written for his neighbors and the friends of the members of the Relief Expedition in Fort Dodge and Webster County, published in the *Sentinel*, giving in much more personal detail than in his official report to the Governor, Major Williams again dwelt upon what he deemed the sorry delinquency of Captain Bee. The matter had waxed greatly as he thought of the work of the expedition and he urged that it was so serious that a court of inquiry should be ordered by the national authorities to make a thorough investigation as to the facts and report as to the facts and those in default. He said: ". . . his attempt at pursuit and failure to prosecute his march, subjects his conduct to the severest censure, the more so especially when it is alleged his troops were anxious for the pursuit."⁴¹

Knowing, as we now do, the heroic efforts of Major Williams' command and the horrible sufferings of his men we can understand his harsh reflections upon the reported conduct of Captain Bee. He penned his report before the frost was out of his fingers and he still heard the cries and moans of the stricken men of his companies. Justice, however, calls for a more charitable conclusion. Captain Bee, while possibly subject to some adverse comment, did not act heedlessly or indifferently.

All the records extant are to the effect that Major Williams depended chiefly, if not wholly, upon the report of the solitary trooper his command met at the state line. He did not continue to Springfield and canvass the situation with Captain Bee or any of his lieutenants. He had to depend either on the hasty, partial statements of that trooper or on vagrant rumors. The trooper could not have known anything about the causes for the non-pursuit of Inkpaduta after Sunday, March 29, and we may suspect that the alleged astonishment of the men at Captain Bee's order to retreat, or return to Springfield, and their alleged offer to continue in pursuit on "half rations" were the products of fertile rumor or hasty inferences from the resentment of the

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

⁴¹*Fort Dodge Sentinel*, April 23, 1857.

men of the Iowa contingent. Further, we may doubt whether in the national army the men of the rank and file were then given to telling their superior officers—West Pointers—what their duty was in directing the movements of the troop.

On the surface of things one fact seems strange. Captain Bee sent a detail to the Lakes to reconnoiter and it proceeded no farther than the west mid-shore of Spirit Lake, and discovered the Marble cabin and the wreckage perpetrated by the Indians. When Captain Bee reached Springfield he secured sufficient proof of the truth of the report Morris Markham had brought from the Okobojis, for the first day his men helped to bury the dead in the vicinity of Springfield. It seems strange that he did not give Lieutenant Murray whom he sent to the Lakes orders to proceed to the Okobojis to discover any possible survivors. Markham had actually seen the destruction and desolation in the Gardner and Howe cabins and saw the Indians sitting in war council among their tepees near the causeway this side the Mattock cabin and his report had started the relief column from Fort Ridgely. He must have given descriptions of the wholesale character of the Massacre between the Okobojis—and the turning back from the Marble cabin is inexplicable on ordinary grounds, if Lieutenant Murray had been fully advised of Markham's report.

Captain Bee, however, was not quite so indifferent or so inert as Major Williams believed. His official report to his superiors gives substantial reasons for a more charitable judgment respecting his course. His report was penned April 9—three days before Major Williams' was dated. Therein we learn that when his company reached Springfield it had made a march of 140 miles under the grilling conditions already cited, and the men were "jaded and foot-sore." Further, he was "destitute of provisions" for an extended pursuit of Inkpaduta. Major Williams asserts in effect that the national troopers were mounted on mules. His belief appears contrary to fact for Captain Bee states: "I had no saddles for my mules and that only thirteen of that number could be ridden—all these things induced me to return, mortified and disappointed to my camp." He then adds, "On the morning following my march to Heron Lake I despatched Lieutenant Murray with a command to Spirit Lake to scout for Indians, gather the facts, and bury the dead, should

any such be found, while I took the party down the settlements with similar objects in view."⁴²

It seems to me that Major Williams would have revised his opinion had he known all of the facts just set forth, at least he would have conceded that Captain Bee was not free to do as he would have liked to do in face of the circumstances. With provisions seriously and steadily lessening, and 140 miles from his base of supplies, it would have been foolhardy for him to have plunged forward in pursuit of the wily Inkpaduta. Further, it is obvious that he was chagrined at his non-success in capturing Inkpaduta. Finally, so far as his orders went he expected Lieutenant Murray to circle the Okobojis and bury the massacred settlers. Why they were not carried out must remain probably inexplicable.

The intervening years have brought out sundry other facts in mitigation of Major Williams' adverse report. His severe comments upon Captain Bee struck full in the face another notable associate of the Captain of the Tenth U. S. Infantry, namely Charles E. Flandrau, agent for the Sioux, who accompanied Captain Bee and his troopers from Fort Ridgely on their grilling march to Springfield, who a short time afterwards was appointed judge of Minnesota's Territorial Court. Continuing on the State Supreme Court until 1864, the harsh criticisms that were current in Iowa for years not only hit but burnt him. With a manly generous concern for his companion, Captain Bee, Judge Flandrau in a notable address before the Minnesota Historical Society at St. Paul December 8, 1879, entitled "The Inkpaduta Massacre of 1857" set forth some of the facts not known prior thereto outside a small circle. Some of the important disclosures are presented in the following paragraphs:

The country between the Minnesota River at Ridgely and Spirit Lake was, at that day, an utter wilderness without an inhabitant. In fact none of us knew where Spirit Lake was except that it lay about due south of the fort, at a distance of from 100 to 125 miles. . . .

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We started on March 19th at about 1 o'clock, at first intending to go directly across the country; but we soon decided that course to be utterly impossible as the mules could not draw the wagon through the deep snow. It became apparent that our only hope of reaching the lake

⁴²Capt. Bee to Lt. Maynardier, *op. cit.*, Footnote No. 181.

was to follow the road down by the way of New Ulm to Mankato, and trust to look for a road up the Watonwan in the direction of the lake. . . . The first days of the march was appalling. The men were wet nearly up to their waist with the deep and melting snow, and utterly weary before they had gone ten miles. Captain Bee was a South Carolinian and though a veteran had seen most of his service in Mexico and the South. Mr. Murray, his lieutenant, was a gallant young fellow, but had not seen much service. Neither of them had ever made a snow camp before; and when we had dug out a place for our first camp, and were making futile efforts to dry our clothes before turning in for the night I felt that the trip was hopeless. So much time had elapsed since the murders were committed, and so much more would be necessarily consumed before the troops could possibly reach the lake, that I felt assured that no good could result from going on. So I told Captain Bee that if he wanted to return I would furnish him with a written opinion of two of the most experienced voyageurs on the frontier that the march was impossible of accomplishment with the inappropriate outfit with which the troops were furnished. It was then that the stern sense of duty which animates the true soldier exhibited itself in these soldiers. The captain agreed with me that the chances of accomplishing any good by going on were very small, but he read his orders, and said, in answer to my suggestion, "My orders are to go to Spirit Lake and do what I can. It is not for me to interpret my orders, but to obey them. I shall go on until it becomes physically impossible to proceed further. It will then be time to turn back"; and go on he did. We followed the trail up the Watonwan until we found the teams that had made it stuck in a snow drift, and for the remaining forty or fifty miles the troops marched ahead of the mules, and broke the road for them, relieving the front rank every fifteen or twenty minutes. . . .

When the lake was reached the Indians were gone. A careful examination was made of their camp and fires by the guides who pronounced them three or four days old. Their trail led to the west. A pursuit was made by a portion of the command, partly mounted on mules, and partly on foot; but it was soon abandoned on the declaration of the guides that the Indians were, by the signs, several days in advance. The dead were buried, a guard was established under Lieutenant Murray with twenty-four men, and Captain Bee with the balance returned to the Fort.⁴³

At first glance it appears that the demonstration of Captain Bee's troopers was not equal to the tremendous push of Major Williams' command. But close comparison hardly justifies adverse findings. Captain Bee's men had pushed or pulled their mules and supplies, and themselves and wagons, going and returning, more than 300 miles. Major Williams' three companies

⁴³*Collections of Minnesota Historical Society*, Vol. III, pp. 390-92.

marched between 160 and 180 miles. Captain Bee's advanced with the wind and fought it returning; and Major Williams bucked snow and wind going and drifted with it returning, when they suffered more acutely, probably, than the national troopers. Captain Bee's reasons for returning from Heron Lake without further attempt to capture Inkpaduta were precisely the same as those which controlled Major Williams—the exhaustion of the men, the steadily shrinking supplies, and the obvious futility of pursuit of Inkpaduta against such adverse weather and traveling conditions, and the wily Sioux many miles and many days ahead in their flight through a country with which they were familiar, and a trackless wilderness to his pursuers. Agent Flandrau's advice to Captain Bee confirmed years later by the Judge's cooler judgment of later years would have been the finding of a court of inquiry had it been ordered.

Among the distinguished guests present at the dedication of the Spirit Lake Monument erected by the state of Iowa in front of the Gardner cabin on July 23, 1895, was Judge Charles E. Flandrau. In his address, which was the chief event of the occasion, Judge Flandrau took notice of the public criticisms of Captain Bee's course. He informed the public that neither the civil nor the military authorities were indifferent about the pursuit of Inkpaduta; but they realized that an aggressive pursuit would have endangered the lives of the four women held captive by him. Mrs. Marble when returned told him that she and Abbie Gardner would have been killed had the soldiers come within shooting range of the Indians.⁴⁴ Another fact materially altered the face of things he mentioned:

It has been often asked why the government never did anything to punish these marauding savages. The answer is plain. Colonel Alexander and myself had a well matured plan to attack Inkpaduta the instant we learned of the fate of the captive women. We had five companies of the Tenth Infantry at our disposal, and could easily have destroyed his entire band; but unfortunately, just before we were ready to move on the enemy, the whole regiment was ordered to Fort Bridger, in Utah, to aid General Albert Sidney Johnson's command in the suppression of the anticipated Mormon outbreak, and before any available troops came to our frontier to replace them, Inkpaduta and his people had passed out of recollection.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Sharp, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁴⁵Smith, *History of Dickinson County*, p. 578.

Judge Flandrau's testimony and generous defense of Captain Bee compels, it seems to me, a reversal of the harsh judgment of Iowa's pioneers upon his conduct of his expedition to the relief of the victims of Inkpaduta's attack upon the settlement between the Okobojis. Major Williams' severe arraignment, while perfectly natural, was not well founded. Captain Bee's character and career create no adverse presumption. He was a veteran of the Mexican War. He will always have a conspicuous place in the annals of the Civil War between the states. He was made a brigadier general at the outset of that war by Jefferson Davis. In the First Battle of Manassas his First Brigade was being beaten back by the Federals. Riding among them striving to get them to resist he pointed back to General Thomas Jackson's five regiments holding a hill in full view and cried out: "Look! There is Jackson standing like a stone wall. Rally behind the Virginians." General Bee's words became a rallying cry; General Jackson henceforth had his famous sobriquet by which the world now knows him; and the impending defeat was turned into a victory. General Bee lost his life at the head of his troops in the famous First Battle of Bull Run.⁴⁶ Major Williams had no reason for doubting the courage and soldierly qualities of Captain Barnard E. Bee in his unsuccessful effort to capture Inkpaduta and his murderous band of outlaw Sioux. Nature, circumstances and humanity stood athwart his success.

(To be concluded.)

⁴⁶See H. A. White, *Stonewall Jackson* (American Crisis Biographies), pp. 87-88; T. J. Arnold, *Early Life and Letters of Thomas J. Jackson*, pp. 110-11, 122.

THE RICH LEAD MINES OF IOWA

Upwards of forty new lead mines have been opened in the mining regions upon the upper Mississippi during the last winter. The mineral lands of Iowa and Wisconsin are supposed to be more productive of this metal than the whole of Europe, with the exception of Great Britain.—*Iowa Morning Star*, Keokuk, Iowa Territory, April 24, 1845. (In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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