

HISTORY OF JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA.

BY CAPT. F. M. IRISH, IOWA CITY.

In commencing this work, the writer finds himself beset with difficulties that would not be anticipated by those who have never undertaken a similar task. In the first place, I find that there were but few if any records kept of the events of the early settling of this county; and secondly, I find a great diversity of opinion amongst the early settlers, with whom I have conversed, in regard to dates and events thirty years ago.

This should excite no surprise, but serve to admonish us that it is high time that the histories of all the older counties in the State were written.

If any of the actors in the events recorded in the following pages should discover errors, they will attribute them to the causes above mentioned, and not to inadvertency or design.

Philip Clarke and Eli Myers were the first white men who made claims with the intention of settling within the limits of Johnson County. Those gentlemen left their homes in northern Indiana, in the Fall of 1836, and traveled on horseback through Illinois to Rock Island (then Stephenson's landing), where they met with a Mr. John Gilbert, who, learning that they sought a location, told them that he was an Indian trader upon the Iowa river, and that if they would accompany him there he would show them a country that had all the advantages they could desire. They accepted his invitation, and found Mr. G.'s trading house in what is now Pleasant Valley township, where they were hospitably entertained. Mr. G. assisted them in the selection of their claims; Mr. Myers taking the one which now constitutes the farm bearing his name, and Mr. Clarke selecting what is now known as the Morford or Birge farm.

Mr. G. then furnished them with some old harness, with which they rigged up their horses and hauled out some light logs to build the body of a "claim cabin" on their respective

tracts, and after erecting these first evidences of approaching civilization, and being assured by Mr. Gilbert that he would protect their claims until the next season, they returned home.

The season being so far advanced that the prairie grass was destroyed by fire and frost, their horses suffered severely for food; being unaccustomed to that kind of fare, Mr. Myers' horse died. Obtaining another, they reached home in safety. The next year, 1837, they returned with teams and tools, accompanied by a number of their neighbors, who selected their claims in the same vicinity. Thus it will be seen Messrs. Myers and Clarke were the real pioneers in the settlement of Johnson County.

It is due the memory of Mr. John Gilbert to say that the universal testimony of those who knew him, attributes all the noble traits that make a man. Of fine business qualifications, kind and hospitable, possessing a consummate knowledge of the Indian character and language, he rendered important service to the early settlers, and for the kindness of this gentleman and that of Mr. Wheaton Chase, they acknowledge themselves deeply indebted.

Up to this time the red man had held undisputed possession of this beautiful region. A number of Indian towns were located upon the Iowa within what are now the limits of this county; the largest of them was about two miles below Iowa City on the Clark farm, now owned by Jas. McCallester, and contained about one thousand of the Musquaka or Fox Indians, governed by Poweshiek, an Indian of fair ability and rather amiable disposition for a savage. The county of Poweshiek was named after him. The war chief of this tribe was Kish-ke-kosh, of whom nothing very favorable can be said. These natives were generally well-disposed toward their white neighbors, and save when under the influence of whiskey seldom gave any trouble. Their graveyards were near their towns, and they evinced great solicitude for the remains of their dead.

Thirty years ago bands of Indians might be seen every year leaving these towns upon their annual hunt, armed, their

ponies laden with mats for tenting, and followed by squads of squaws, whose duty was to drive the beasts, pitch the tents and cook the food when their lords had luck in the chase. And again at another season parties could be seen starting out, their ponies burdened with deer and elk skins, moccasins and ornamental work prepared in the manner peculiar to these people, bound to some trading post to exchange their commodities for food, trinkets and money. And yet again another party, consisting of squaws and children, the latter slung in baskets on either side of the pony, while the mother is perched on his back, each spring took its way by well-worn trail to their corn patches, where with heavy iron hoes they prepared the ground for planting corn and beans. Upon those three resources, the chase, trade and a rude agriculture, the Indian depended for his subsistence. And yet with all his exertion he frequently found himself destitute, although he thought he availed himself of every advantage the country was capable of presenting.

Let us change the scene, and on the very ground where those few hundred natives could scarce support life, fruitful fields invite the harvest, and cattle in countless herds are feeding. Wagon and railroads supercede the trail. And instead of the long file of ponies laden with primitive articles of barter the cars are hourly rushing past filled with the millions of surplus bushels of grain and pounds of beef and pork, produced from the same land, under the magic of Caucasian energy, that under Indian indolence bore scant crop of furs and game.

We must grant that this new order of things is productive of greater happiness than the old, but doubtless the Indian, viewing it from his stand-point, would arrive at a far different conclusion.

Our pioneers returned again in May, 1837, and commenced the improvement of the claims made the previous fall. As there were many came during this year, it is impossible to fix the exact date of each arrival. From a memorandum now before me, I am able to give the following:

May, 1837, Samuel Walker, William Wilson, S. C. Trowbridge, Henry Felkner, Pleasant Harris. June, Wm. Sturgis, Geo. W. Hawkins, John Henry, Jacob Earhart, Jno. Cane and S. B. Mulholland. August, A. D. Stephen, Samuel Bumgardner, Jonathan Harris, S. H. McCrory, and Joseph Walker. During the Autumn, there were but few arrivals, and every one was busy preparing for winter.

Nothing worthy of note occurred until the spring of 1838. Up to this time the territory west of the Mississippi was attached to Wisconsin for election and judicial purposes, and in May, 1838, the legislature of Wisconsin held its first and last session in Burlington, then the capital of that territory. During this session news was received that by act of Congress Iowa was set off from Wisconsin. On June 12th, 1838, the act organizing Iowa Territory was passed, to take effect on July 3d, following. This measure was strongly urged upon Congress by Hon. Geo. W. Jones, then a delegate from Wisconsin, and through his exertion and influence was passed.

The organic officers of Iowa were: Governor, Robt. Lucas; Secretary, W. B. Conway; Treasurer, T. Bayliss; Judges, 1st District, Charles Mason; 2d District, Joseph Williams; 3d District, T. S. Wilson. When acting together these constituted the Supreme Court of the territory. Chas. Mason, Chief Justice; Isaac Van Allen, U. S. Attorney; Francis Gehon. And thus was the new territory organized.

During the Autumn of this year Col. Sam. C. Trowbridge received from Gov. Lucas a sheriff's commission, authorizing him to organize Johnson County. In pursuance of this, Col. Trowbridge called an election on Sept. 10th, 1838, whereat were chosen three commissioners, Henry Felkner, Abner Wolcott, and Samuel Sturgis. The names of the other officers are not ascertained. Robt. Walker had a commission from Gov. Lucas which constituted him the first "justice of the peace" in and for Johnson County. The first meeting of the County Commissioners was held at Phelps' trading-house (on the Byington farm, where the building still stands.) Soon after the above date John Gilbert and Philip Clarke laid

off a town, on what is now Jos. McCallister's farm, called Napoleon, and there was located the first county seat. Quite a number of new settlers came in that season, and Judge Williams held the first court ever called in the county, in Gilbert's trading-house. The grand jury was called, charged and sworn, and the bailiff was ordered to conduct them to their room and attend their orders, when the court was informed that there was no room to take them to. The officer was ordered to take them out upon the prairie and let them transact their business there. I can say nothing of the greatness of this "grand inquest," but venture that their jury-room was as large as was ever occupied by a similar body in the county.

About this time Gov. Lucas issued his proclamation for the election of a territorial legislature. This body held its first session at Burlington, on Nov. 1st, 1838. The Council was composed of thirteen members, viz: Jesse B. Brown, President, B. F. Wallace, Secretary, Stephen Hemstead, J. Keith, Geo. Hepner, J. W. Parker, C. Whittlesy, Robt. Rolston, L. B. Hughes, Arthur Ingraham, Jos. M. Clark, E. A. M. Swazy.

The House was composed of W. H. Wallace, Speaker, Jos. T. Fales, Clerk, Wm. Patterson, James Brierly, A. B. Porter, Thos. Blair, Levi Thornton, Jabez Birchard, H. Nowlin, H. Taylor, G. S. Bailey, Jos. W. Grimes, Geo. H. Beeler, S. C. Hostross, C. Swann, C. J. Price, Sam. Parker, G. Temple, John Frierson, R. G. Roberts, A. Bunkeson, Jos. Hall, W. G. Coop, Van B. Delashmutt, N. T. Toole, Laurel Summers and Thos. Cox.

These gentlemen each represented a different one of the older States, and each had his predilections in favor of the laws he was accustomed to. It is a matter of no surprise therefore, that there should have been sharp differences of opinion and lengthy and warm debates. I have heard it characterized as a stormy session. There was a wide difference of opinion between the legislative and executive branches of the government, as to the powers and jurisdiction of each, the governor claiming the right to participate in

either branch as a member. These differences were finally reconciled, the legislature carrying the day.

The location of a permanent seat of government for the territory, was a question that absorbed the attention and influence of the different points desiring it, and consumed the time of the legislature. The governor was in favor of a point central north and south, and his views being adopted by a majority, Robt. Ralston, of Des Moines, John Ronalds, of Louisa, and C. Swann, of Dubuque Counties, were chosen commissioners, and instructed to locate the capital in Johnson County on the Iowa river. This was done in early May, 1839, and their acts recorded and sworn to, at Napoleon, then the county seat, before Robt. Walker, the first justice. This location was made in pursuance of an act of Congress which donated a section of land to the territory upon which to erect a seat of government, and which also gave \$20,000 to be used in erecting buildings. C. Swann was chosen by his colleagues as acting commissioner to carry out the congressional and territorial enactments. Mr. S. employed Col. Thos. Cox as principal, and Gen. Jno. Frierson as assistant surveyor, and L. Jackson as draughtsman. These with a corps came on to the ground the latter part of June, 1839, to survey the present site of Iowa City, which then was a perfect wilderness. Upon the high ground at the north side of the city was a heavy growth of timber, as was the south part. Between was a dense growth of hazel brush and scrub oaks.

The work of clearing this away was prosecuted as far as the site of the capitol, by July 4, 1839, and then was celebrated, for the first time in this region, the anniversary of our independence. There gathered, on that occasion, a goodly number of ladies and gentlemen, many of whom had ridden fifteen or twenty miles to participate in the festivities. The scene presented was of great interest to one unaccustomed to the warm-hearted friendship always to be found existing between settlers of a new country. Their salutations were interspersed with attempts to tell where they lived. It would be: "Do you know a grove on such a stream? Well, we live in

that." Or, "We're on a stream over the river they call 'Old Man's Creek.'" Locations ascertained by these dubious landmarks, visits would be arranged, and so society began to organize. By the time each had been introduced to everybody, the tables were ready with "a feast of fat things," which had been prepared by Mr. Jonathan Harris, at his place four miles below the city, and brought here on wagons, and the zest with which the provender was attacked was a high compliment to the skill of Mr. and Mrs. H. When the ladies had retired from the table, and the necessary arrangements had been made, such as providing water and things to mix with it, Col. Cox, president of the day, announced the toasts, regular and volunteer, each one of which was received with as clear a gush of patriotic fervor as ever trembled in Independence Hall. The toasts and the afternoon over, those who wished to dance repaired to Mr. Harris', where substantial puncheon floors and the inspiring notes of a fiddle "put life and mettle in their heels."

Matthew Teneick's was the first family that located in Iowa City. He took possession of a cabin that stood on the present site of Mr. Hobart's residence. Having brought along a herd of cattle and a bountiful supply of provisions, the commissioners and surveyors boarded with him while laying off the town. There were now but four cabins in the city, one occupied by Geo. T. Andrews and family. The first regularly built house was erected by Mr. Teneick, on the corner of Iowa Avenue and Dubuque St. It was of solid hewn timber, quite roomy and two stories high. It was burned down some years since, after having been occupied as residence, tavern and boarding-house for some twenty years. The first frame house was built by Wesley Jones on the present site of the Powell block, south of University Square, in which was stored and sold the first stock of goods ever brought to the city.

The surveys being sufficiently advanced, the commissioners gave notice that the first sale of lots would take place August 18th, 1839. This notice being published in eastern papers, attracted the attention and presence of many capitalists, who

began arriving upon the ground some days previous to the sale. The most prominent of these gentlemen seeking investments were Maj. Gannoc, of Cincinnati, Gov. Shay, of Kentucky, and Wm. Bostwick, of Harrisburg, Pa. The reader may inquire how this crowd of speculators found food and lodging in a place so recently composed from the wilderness? Let me assure you they found accommodations most ample. Amongst them was an establishment known as "Lean-back Hall," which was built in a few days and contained bar, dining and lodging rooms and kitchen. The bed-room contained one bed, which accommodated thirty-six men, and was a regular couch at that on a regulation bedstead. The above number has reposed in it many a night and no complaint was ever entered against it.

At the sale property went off briskly at high prices. Three days were consumed by it and the proceeds amounted to \$15,000.

The first brick, a small one story building, was erected by Mr. Bostwick, on Clinton Street north of the Avenue. It was burned in 1867. Mr. B. bought some twenty lots, and his selections have all proved valuable business points.

Early in October, 1839, the second sale of lots took place, the proceeds of which amounted to \$30,000. Immigrants now began to pour in daily, many of them living in tents until cabins could be built. The fame of the new capital of the new territory had spread through the East, and many came expecting to see a city that would rival the metropolitan centers of the older States.

Walter Butler and his family came about this time, and he commenced the erection of a frame building for a hotel and, by great exertion, got it enclosed before the severe winter came on. This was the first regular hotel in Iowa City, and its generous host and kindly accommodations are treasured warmly amongst the reminiscences of many a pioneer who sojourned here through the cold winter of 1839-40. This hotel was on the corner of Clinton and Washington Sts., a few doors north of Sanxay's Corner.

Much discussion has been had as to who was the first settler of Iowa City proper; this is esteemed an important question, and the writer is unable to settle it as he was not the first one there. Dr. Henry Murray was the first physician, both in the city and county. Wm. L. Gilbert was the first lawyer, and shortly after coming here formed a co-partnership with Wm. C. Reagan. Samuel H. McCrary was the first post master, and Mr. Fenee, of the M. E. Church, preached the first sermon, and A. T. McElwaine sang the first hymn at public worship, Henry Usher was the first blacksmith.

The approach of the winter of 1839-40 was viewed with much apprehension and anxiety, as provisions were scarce and high. How the necessities of the winter were provided for, its storms breasted, and its trials met, I hope to tell in the next ANNALS.

A SCENE OF THE BORDER.

BY ELIPHALET PRICE.

During the Summer of 1827, soon after the war-cloud of difficulties with the Winnebago Indians had been adjusted by a visit of the chiefs to Washington, accompanied by Gen. Cass, a Sioux Indian, while hunting upon the Iowa shore near the mouth of Paint Creek, shot and scalped a Winnebago, believing him to be the murderer of his brother, but who proved not to be the murderer, but the brother of "Big Wave," a chief of the Winnebagoes.

The band of this chieftain, together with others of the nation, numbering about two thousand, becoming indignant at this act, immediately assembled at Fort Crawford, and demanded of Col. Taylor, (afterwards President Taylor,) the procurement and surrender of the murderer. The officers of the Fort apprehensive that new difficulties might arise with this factious tribe if their demand was disregarded, concluded to make an effort to obtain the murderer. Accordingly an officer was dispatched to demand him of the Sioux nation, who immediately gave him up and he was brought down the river

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