

THE TAMA COUNTY INDIANS.

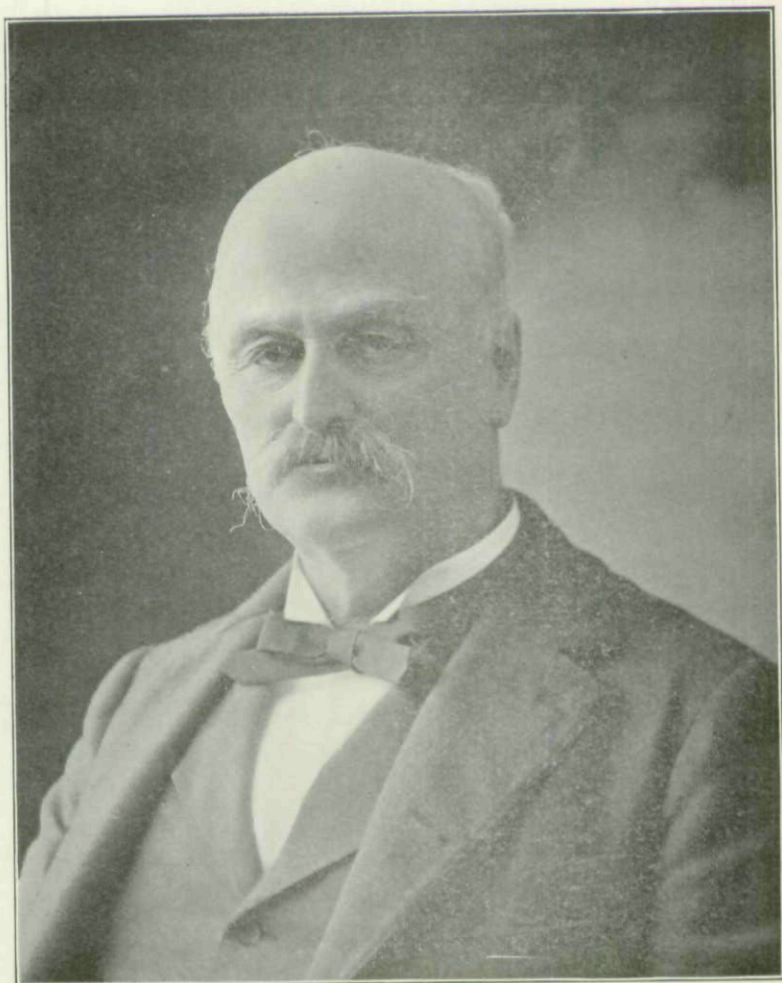
BY HON. A. D. BICKNELL.

The following article was written in August, 1898. The school mentioned opened in September of that year, and for several months the attendance was not more than three; but after a great struggle it was increased to a reasonable number, and now bids fair to so continue.

In February, 1897, and again in August, 1898, I visited the Musquakie Indian Reservation, located about four miles southwest of Toledo, Tama County, Iowa, my object being to learn what I could of the home life and social and mental status of the Indian—his progress in civilization, his hope and prospects if any he had, what had been done for him by the government, and such other facts as might show either upon the surface or be learned by inquiry on the ground.

While it is generally understood that a remnant of the Sac and Fox tribe of Indians is living on a small reservation in the very heart of Iowa, little seems to be known of this once strong, warlike and aggressive tribe. It was this people who made the name of Black Hawk a terror to the early settler; a fact that seems now almost incredible, for their children of today reverse all the notions we have absorbed from our early reading, wherein the savage virtues lend a charm to savage deeds.

Their tribal history, since they buried the hatchet in 1838, has no parallel. Briefly told, it is as follows: In 1842 they ceded their lands in Iowa to the United States, taking in payment a reservation in Kansas and an annuity. Very soon thereafter, however, certain families came back to their old haunts on the Iowa river. Others followed, so that by 1855 three hundred had returned, all of whom were fully determined to remain. As they were as harmless as children the State of Iowa, in 1856, enacted a law permitting them to remain as long as they were peaceful. The next year they made their first purchase of land, eighty acres, which has now been increased to four and a half sections, all held in



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Pioneer Settler and Teacher in Humboldt County, Iowa, Member of the Iowa House of Representatives in 1874-5.

trust for them, some by the Governor of Iowa and some by the local Indian agent. The government was strongly opposed to this Iowa scheme and tried to induce the Indians to return to their reservation by cutting off their annuities. This severe discipline was continued for more than a dozen years, and up to 1867. It failed to move a single Indian. Then, during the same year, the Secretary of the Interior peremptorily ordered them back. They flatly refused. Later in the year Congress granted them the right to receive their annuity in Iowa and recognized them as a separate tribe, and appointed an agent to look after them.

Their numbers vary but little from year to year, keeping close to the 400 mark, more or less, besides about thirty stragglers from other tribes, who have settled with them in order to escape the burdens of civilization as found on the ordinary reservation.

It has been said that these Indians returned to Iowa because of their overweening love of home and the graves of their fathers. But, unfortunately, the truth bears no such touching message. They returned because the government was teaching them, on their Kansas reservation, some of the rudiments of civilization, such as wearing clothes, raising cattle and living in houses, all of which they stubbornly resisted, and so they broke loose; and during the fifty years since then they have many times proudly boasted that they would be the last tribe in America to yield to the white man's ways. Only a small percentage of them are over fifty years of age, so it follows that the great majority were born and raised in close touch with the highest grade of civilization. Yet their manner of life, with few exceptions, is still as exactly what it was four hundred years ago as the limitations imposed by the white man will permit.

When I made my first visit the thermometer marked three degrees below zero and the wind was blowing a stiff breeze. I had a letter to W. S. Stoops, a mission teacher on the reservation, who showed me the grounds and the people,

and let me into their lives and their wickiups to my perfect satisfaction.

The first wickiup we interviewed is typical of all the rest, and the home life, the family circle, the family comforts are also without shadow of change. We made no halt as we reached the wickiup to announce our coming, but lifted the dirty fragment of a blanket that hung over the opening, ducked our heads and went in. A couple of feet from the door a fire was burning on the bare ground, the smoke of which rose straight up and escaped through an opening in the roof. On each of three sides of the fire was spread, upon the hard ground, a cast-off blanket that showed little patches of earth through its unpatched rents. Squatted upon one of these blankets, tailor fashion, were the lord of the wigwam and his buxom squaw. Opposite them were two young squaws, aged about twenty years, seated like the others, and we were motioned to assume a like attitude on the third blanket, our host observing, "Smoke eye make eye sick." The advice was good and we got down. In this manner nearly all of them sit during the entire winter day, with no work of any kind and with nothing to relieve the mind; just sit, and vacantly stare straight ahead, occasionally pushing a burnt-off stick up into the fire, and waiting till another burns off and then repeating the operation as need requires. At night they pull down the night blanket, unkink their legs, roll up and lie next to the fire, turning over often to warm the cold side and push together the embers. The winter tepee is constructed of wicker work made of the broad leaves of rushes, cut about four feet long and stitched together so that the edges just touch, and made into rolls. In building a wickiup these rolls are spread over a framework of small willow boughs, each roll being lapped over another till the enclosure is complete and the mansion is ready for its occupants. As the zero air sifted through a thousand visible openings in this wicker work, it was a little too bracing for the children who were clad only in a pair of stockings, a

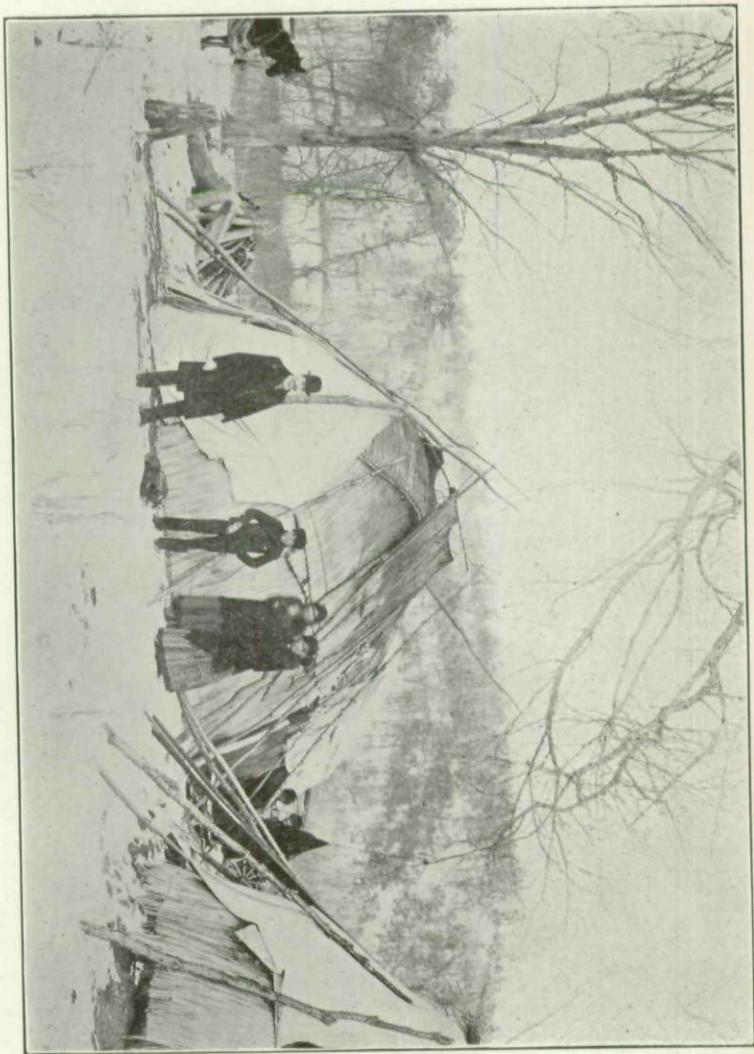
breech-clout and a shirt, but it acted like a charm in purifying the air and in lifting the smoke out of the room. In no wickiup was there any furniture visible except the three blankets named, and a kettle or spit, and there was no place to hide anything except behind the night blanket, which was invariably pinned flat against the wall, with no bulging spot for hidden goods. I did not see them eat, and it was a mystery where the larder was, but I was credibly informed that on the ground behind the up-pinned blanket would be found a little flour and some lard, and that almost their only winter diet, for old and young, sick and well, is a raised flour cake, fried in grease with dried sweet corn. This is occasionally varied with a dainty feast at times, when some unlucky dog strays amongst them and is weak enough to yield to their caresses. There was, until quite lately, another festive chance that was daily and carefully watched for. Two great railroads bisect the reservation, and every day carry hundreds of cattle and hogs across their grounds. If a hog became suffocated or a steer got sick or crippled, a feast of fat things followed in quick order, not quite so delicate and "tony," perhaps, as the dog feasts, but often, it is said, the aroma was far-reaching and powerful. But this practice is now abandoned, through fear of the criminal law.

Living thus, in a single room, not larger on an average than 8x12 feet, all ages and both sexes, within touch both night and day, even the most advanced and best dressed woman wearing nothing but a skirt, a dress, a blanket, and a pair of stockings and moccasins, the great mass of the tribe having no ambition above the satisfaction of the simplest animal wants, crushed in spirit and without the power of self-control, except where the fear of the white man inspires it, we should not look for a high grade of morals among these people, and especially where temptation is strongest.

Marriage, as the term is generally understood, is wholly unknown amongst them. Their marriage is simply a mating, and when the quasi husband sees fit, he does as did Cato and

Mark Antony in the days of glorious Rome. He says "Go!" and she that was his goeth, and he taketh unto himself another dusky bride, who has perhaps herself just been bidden depart; or peradventure, his heart still clings to his first espoused, and yet goes out unto another. In such case there is no grass widow, both are happy in his confidence and affection, for, as in the days of the psalmist, David, so on the reservation there are no murmurs on account of divided manly love. But few of the younger braves are now living with their first wives. One young buck not yet twenty years old, was pointed out to me, who is now living with his third squaw, and he does not look like a very enterprising fellow either. Another husky fellow, one of the most trusty and enterprising of them all, is happy in the love and confidence of three gentle mates, all living peacefully in a single room, with their flock of little children. On the theory that there is no evil without a mixture of good, it may be said to the credit of this system that there is no despair when a squaw is taken by the wrong buck or vice versa. Time and a pony will make all things even. There is no bleeding and breaking of the heart. The pistol, the knife, the poisonous cup, the blighted maiden, the lorn old bachelor, the ninety-day divorce court, the destructive judgment for alienated affections, or alimony, all these and many kindred and dire calamities they know not of.

Some of the younger members of the tribe have progressed beyond the wickiup and live in board houses. On my winter visit I called on the best sample of this kind, one James Poweshiek. He had a one-story house about 12x20 feet, with a stovepipe running through the roof. Before the door stood a good lumber wagon. At the barn was a small haystack, and a crib of about 200 bushels of corn, and several chickens basked in the lee and sunny side of the haystack. Inside the house, a sleeping platform four feet wide and two feet high with fouseled blankets and other things, extended across one end and one side of the room. A soft coal heater



MISHUKAKIE HOUSES — "WICKIUPS,"
Winter scene on the Indian Reservation near Tama, Iowa.

and a wood cook stove roared away in the vain effort to keep up with the incoming cold. A little girl stood at a table actually washing dishes. Two young bucks were lying on the platform, with their feet lopping over upon the floor. The scrawniest and most wrinkled squaw in America, sat Indian style, on the platform, clad in a calico dress, crooning and repeating a wild lament of eight syllables. At the end of each chant she parted her pliable and thin lips from her hard shut mouth and gave us a full view of a perfect set of teeth even back to and including the molars. James' wife was neither a beauty nor overly tidy, but she easily led any other "lady in red" that I saw that day. All wore moccasins, and Mrs. James had on her reddest blanket. Here we had chairs to sit upon. This was the last place I visited, and after the wickiup, it seemed palatial. James raised ten acres of corn that year, besides some potatoes. I speak thus fully of James, because at that time he was at the extreme "top notch" of progress, and he shows what is possible.

When I saw these people in the summer, they had all left the little wickiup in the timber, and most of them were clustered on the bare bottom lands of the Iowa River, with no bush to prevent the free play of sun and breeze. The summer house is built of rough boards and bark and covered with two or three lengths of the wicker-work that had served for the sides of the winter wickiup. These sheds are much larger than the wickiup, being about 16x20 feet, I should think, all in one room, with a platform on each side of the room, which is used for a "catch-all," as well as for a lounging place by day and a sleeping place at night. These summer-houses are no better furnished than the wickiup described above. There is the same sitting and staring into vacancy, with nothing to do. Occasionally a squaw is seen engaged in dyeing bull-rushes for use in the weaving of mats. Just outside of the shed, and attached to it, crotches have been erected, crossed by poles and all covered with branches in leaf, under which the ever-weary Indian sprawls on a platform and catches the breeze and the shade.

I drove all over the reservation with Prof. G. W. Nellis, the superintendent of the government school, and with Mr. D. S. Hindegardner, who devotes his entire time to the assistance and instruction of the Indians as to farming and methods of thrift.

A great advance has been made on all lines during the last few years, especially during the current year. More ground is under cultivation than ever before, and there is a demand for a large increase of breaking for next year's business. By the rules of the tribe, any member may select such ground as he sees fit and put in his crop, and he will not be disturbed.

I found my old friend James Poweshiek on the tiptop of the first stack he had ever built. He had built himself out of reach of his ladder, and he was puzzled; but he made the descent safely at last. This year James raises sixteen acres of wheat, ten acres of corn, and fifteen acres of oats. Every year he increases his acreage. Several others are doing nearly as well, and one has passed him in the race. There are a little over two hundred acres in crops this year,—not a large fraction of 3,000 acres; but the hope lies in the nerve shown in thus defying the prejudices of the fathers and wise men of the tribe, all of whom are religiously set against any advancement. Two binders were bought this harvest by several joining funds for a single machine. These machines were run wholly by Indians, and the harvest was finished without accident or repairs.

But Sam Lincoln has vaulted ahead and so defied all Indian traditions that he very nearly jumped out of the tribe. He built himself a neat frame dwelling, with a brick chimney, and plastered the inside; set up a cook stove and furnished the house, even to curtains for the windows. No such infidelity to the religion of his people had ever been dared before. Sam had the biggest moral battle on his hands that was ever waged on the reservation. Often he wavered. Sometimes he felt that he must yield to his friends and give



MUSQUARIE SQUAW AND PAPOOSE.

up the fight. But he finally staggered through, and is now the sole and proud owner among 400 people, of a house with plastered walls, a brick chimney and curtains at the windows! And I am glad to note that his dusky bride is the neatest and most comely squaw that I saw on the occasion of my visit.

Still another long step ahead was made last November in the appointment by the government agent of three Indian policemen, whose duty it is, among other things, to look out for white sharks who would prey upon the weakness of the Indian, especially gamblers and "bootleggers." Every Indian is a gambler and a natural toper. No effort is made to stop gambling among the Indians, because if one should lose all he has to another of the tribe, the communal feeling is so strong that the loser would still be fed and clad, and perhaps he would stalk in and squat at the fire of the very one who had fleeced him.

Sam Lincoln, James Poweshiek and John Canoe are the three braves whose stock of "sand" caused them to be selected for this thankless office. They are perfectly faithful to their trust, and two white men now languish in jail, who dared to sell whisky to the Indians.

Formerly it was the custom of the tribe to make frequent and long excursions for the purpose of hunting and fishing. But the game laws and the barbed wire fences have entirely cut off these industries, and the mind has been forced to seek other and more civilizing occupations. In fact, the pony herd is each year growing smaller in numbers and larger individually. The Indian on horseback is fast disappearing, and he makes his short journeys either on foot or in a lumber wagon. I saw only two Indians riding ponies on the whole reservation, and they were boys. They paddle no canoe on the Iowa River, though it flows through their reservation, is dammed below, and furnishes a fine pond of still water. Thus one by one conditions change that affect the young and tend to lead them to a better life.

Much can be said in a negative way to the moral credit

of these people. Mr. Hindegardner says that during a residence of forty years in close touch with them, he does not believe he ever lost by their theft. They do not quarrel, even among themselves. What little trouble they have is settled by their chief and a council of ten wise old men, unless it is a question in which figures play a part. There have been only two murders among them since their return to Iowa. The first victim was a visiting Pawnee, and the religion of their fathers demanded that this hated foe should not be suffered to live, and they were true to the religion so inherited. The other victim was a lascivious squaw, who fell at the hand of an injured female whose mate had been lured by the wicked wiles of the murdered girl.

A Presbyterian mission was established on the agency about 1885 and has done much good work, not largely in conversions to the true faith, but in industrial instruction and in teaching the younger women and girls in the care of children, in obstetrics, in cookery and in some measure personal cleanliness and dress reform.

Before the mission began its work the regulation outfit for a well dressed squaw was a narrow strip of cloth, a belt, a pair of moccasins, a little red ochre and a blanket. The skirt, the dress, with occasionally a pair of stockings now worn by the dashing belle and proud matron have all been adopted through the persistent efforts of the devoted ladies at this mission. Some few families have made perceptible advancement and live in board houses with a floor and a shingle roof and sport a rude barn for the pony. Some raise a few potatoes and store them in the white man's cellar. But filth is everywhere present, and soap and water must fight a great battle before large results can be expected.

Magic and the squaw doctor still monopolize the care of the sick. I have seen little children who suffered from various diseases clad only in moccasins, leggins and shirt, crying, shivering, and neglected, in a zero air. I have seen such neglect of the aged as would touch a hard heart anywhere

outside of an Indian wigwam. At my August visit, in one of these shed homes there were four occupants. Like the other homes, it had no openings but the two doors and the smoke-hole in the roof, and it was quite dark. On one of the platforms squatted a fifty year old buck and his squaw. He smoked; she sat and did nothing. At the other end of their platform, half-reclining and wriggling in pain, was a very old and stone-blind Indian, who evidently suffered from a variety of parasites. Blind and suffering as he was, he seemed to sense our presence. He quit his wriggling and scratching, adjusted his breech-clout, jerked up his leggins, sat erect and faced forward, pulled his blanket about him, rolled his sightless eyeballs to a dead rest, and sat ready for inspection. On the bare dirt floor, by the side of some dead embers, sat the blind man's squaw, apparently dead to every surrounding except the vermin that covered her. With both hands she clawed her thick and leathery skin wherever she could reach, and extended her work with a brand from the embers. Thus these two unfortunates pass the days and the years of their old age, without love or care to lighten the weight of their infirmities.

In another wigwam, rolled in a blanket and lying on the ground, was a sixteen year old girl, so sick that she was almost white. I asked the old squaw who squatted near by, who doctored the child. "Me doctor, me doctor," she replied. When the government school starts in September it will have a resident physician whose duties will extend over the reservation as well as the school.

The government has maintained a school on the reservation for the last dozen years, but it was discontinued last year. It was under the ban of all the old men of the tribe, so that where there should have been an attendance of at least a hundred, only ten to twenty put in an appearance. The children are apt in all things that appeal to the eye and the ear—the two organs that have been specially trained for a hundred generations back to the exclusion of the others.

Whenever continued application or abstract thought is required they are decidedly "not in it." Mathematics is a stumbling block to them. But in writing, drawing, reading and singing they learn rapidly.

The government has just erected an industrial school building, a mile west of Toledo, on the beautiful bench of a hill, in the middle of a seventy-acre plat of ground. The main building is eighty by a hundred and sixty feet, two stories high besides the basement, and will accommodate seventy-five pupils, who will be fed, lodged, clothed and instructed free of charge. The boys will be instructed not only in books, but in farming, stock-raising, fruit culture and plain trades, such as harness-making, shoemaking, painting and carpentering; while the girls will be taught every art that tends to make a thrifty housekeeper, including sewing, mending, knitting, the manufacture of all their own clothes and all linen goods used about the building. There will be special teachers for each trade. Everything about the building is first class, including light by gas, water supplied by the city water works and a steam plant for heat, gymnasium and play room, where "white games" will be played. There are no bowls in the wash rooms and no tubs in the bath rooms. The faucet runs open in the wash room, and the needle bath showers the bather as he stands under it, thus in both cases avoiding the second use of the water, so dangerous in the case of the skin-diseased Indian. There is also a laundry building twenty by thirty-eight feet and two stories high, a barn thirty-five by fifty-five feet, three stories high, a work shop and other suitable buildings.

It is hoped that this school will start the children aright and so restrain them through the years that after another generation they will avoid most of the barbarisms of their parents and develop into as good citizens as James Poweshiek, Sam Lincoln and John Canoe, above named. But whether there will be one or fifty children in attendance, no one can guess. Attendance is optional, and the rash parent



PUSH-E-TO-NEKE-QUA.
Chief of the Musquakie Indians.

who thus gives up his child, must defy his own parents and all the wise men of his tribe, and worse than all else, he becomes a hated infidel; and an Indian hates an infidel as thoroughly as does his Christian brother. They do not take kindly to the mysteries of the Christian religion, but cling to the medicine man, the religious dance and much other savage nonsense, with a sublime tenacity that cannot be ignored by those who would help them.

One feature of their religion seems to be a prohibition of the attendance of girls at this school. During the thirty or more years of the fertility of their women, they are believed to be under an evil spell during the monthly visitation, and at such times, whether in the heat of summer or the cold of winter, they are religiously and cruelly banished to a little six by eight tepee near the family hut, there to remain in solitude till recovery restores them to the world again. During this mournful period most fearful consequences are said to befall any man or boy who is touched by such a woman or who receives food prepared by her hand. The saddest, the most wickedly cruel thing I saw on the grounds was this frequent little dungeon. Some were simply leafy brush so leaned together as to give enough space below for lying down. One built of old cloth had just been vacated, and the flap at the side was thrown back and showed the whole interior with its furniture and conveniences. A little straw on the ground and an empty lunch basket were all it contained. To avoid this terrible superstition, it has been determined to have only male cooks for the school. But the further objection is raised that this being a mixed school and both sexes dining in the same hall, the sacrilege will there be perpetuated every day and by wholesale. There is no use in becoming disgusted with this deep seated religious conviction. It is as real and sacred to the religion of the Indian as are the mystic tenets of the Christian church to its faithful followers.

Lack of space forbids extended comment on the manner

in which the most of their annuity of about forty-five dollars per capita is trifled away; their fishing; their trapping of mink and musk rats; their athletic sports; the uniform color of the tribe, which shows little admixture of white blood; their lack of stock, except ponies and perhaps fifty hogs and ten head of cattle; the bead work and other ornamental work of the women; the jewelers among the men; their peculiar and careful method of burial; their absolute trust in the white man, who, through years of opportunity, has never deceived them; their two kinds of dances, one exclusively religious and sacred to the faithful alone, the other with an open door to the white man as well as the red, and which is devoted to all available excesses; their great chief, Push-e-to-ne-qua, and his struggle to hold his office; their annual thanksgiving, the great corn dance festival; and many other things which it is necessary to study and understand, if we would lift these unfortunate children of the forest up and out of their low estate.

HUMBOLDT, IOWA, AUGUST 12, 1898.

WELL DONE IOWA.—Messrs. H. W. Moore & Co. of this place have within the last two months slaughtered upwards of two hundred and twenty-five thousand pounds of beef, and within the last four weeks upwards of one thousand hogs. They have shipped by steamboats over four hundred barrels of beef, pork, tallow, etc., and loaded at our wharf two large flat boats. Nearly all the beef was shipped on their own account; about 800 of the hogs on account of other purchasers. They have also shipped a large amount of hides, lard, etc. Within the last two weeks, since hog-killing commenced, they have employed at their establishment more than thirty hands. Pretty well for a new country.—*Burlington Hawk-Eye, Nov. 19, 1840.*

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