

BURIED SITTING DOWN

BY DON BUCHAN, SPENCER, IOWA

The following is an historical yarn taken from Here Is Yesterday . . . ! copyright 1965 by Don Buchan. Mr. Buchan's book deals with pioneer stories of Iowa, and if you enjoy this story, copies of his book may be obtained by writing to Mr. Buchan, 919 E. 7th Street, Spencer, Iowa.

It is said that many tourists are drawn to a headstone over a grave in a little town in a southwestern state. The attraction is the epitaph which reads: WHISKEY PETE. BURIED STANDING ON HIS FEET.

Perhaps it is true. Perhaps not. But in Clay County, Iowa, there is a persistent rumor that a body in the cemetery at Peterson was buried in a sitting position.

No old account or epitaph includes this detail, but here are the known facts . . .

It was the month of January during the bitter winter of 1871 that Fred J. Tice and Andrew Palmeter halted their exhausted team in the axle-deep snow at the top of the slippery Peterson hill. The two men had staked their claims the previous August, and now, with a load of finishing lumber, doors, and windows, were enroute from Greentop, Missouri, to the site of their future homes. Palmeter had left his wife and Tice had left Mrs. Tice and three children in Missouri until their homes were snugly finished and the weather was warmer.

"This roadway is a sheet of ice," said Tice. "We don't dare try to make it without help."

Palmeter looked longingly down at the welcoming lights and the smoke rising from the chimneys of the cluster of cabins. For a moment he hesitated, beating his arms against his sides as a bird flapping its wings. Then, with an air of determination he answered, "I'll go down the hill to that sawmill

by the river and see if I can persuade someone to come up and lend a hand."

As Tice held the team, Palmeter gingerly made his way down the long slope. At the cabin by the sawmill, Gus Kirchner, a good hearted Clay County pioneer answered his knock. "Come in out of the cold," he ordered cheerfully. "This is a night to be inside by the fire. What's your trouble, neighbor?"

Palmeter explained his problem. "Yes, that's a dangerous descent as slippery as the road is tonight," Kirchner answered, "but I'll get a couple of men and we can rough-lock the hind wheels and skid your wagon down without breaking a single pane of glass."

Two men were quickly recruited and at the sight of one of them Tice uttered an exclamation of delight. "Why, Mr. Caley . . . !" he cried, "how good it is to see an old neighbor from down in Missouri!"

The vehicle was safely transported down the long hill and both Tice and Palmeter accepted Caley's invitation to spend the night with his family. There they rested for two days and then went on to the site of their cabins. They made arrangements to sleep in a nearby cabin occupied by Mr. and Mrs. A. M. Grant and their three children. They were thankful for the shelter in the one-room home, although at times the floor would be carpeted with three inches of snow in the mornings.

Sunday, March 13, dawned bright and sunny and there was some melting of the snow which covered the landscape. The men decided to leave on Monday to get needed provisions and fuel.

The following day was cloudy and a storm threatened to release its fury, but the lack of supplies made the men desperate. While Tice harnessed a team of horses, Palmeter and Grant, together with a German lad named Powdermaker and a neighboring boy named Smith, held council. It was their decision that Grant and Tice would go to Spencer for the mail, food, and if possible, a jag of firewood.

Palmeter was to have charge of two yoke of oxen and with the boys Powdermaker and Smith, go to the Little Sioux river and get a load of wood.

By the time the two parties were ready to start it was snow-

ing and the wind was whistling shrilly through the underbrush. Palmetoer's group started first and were barely out of sight when Tice and Grant decided the risk was too great.

"Come back!" they shouted, "Come back! Come back!" but their cries were drowned in the roaring wind. The two men started on their cold, dangerous journey to Spencer, although daylight had not yet broken through the black sky.

It was 10:30 when Grant and Tice reached Spencer. They stabled the team, picked up the mail, and purchased groceries. When they returned to get their team, the men in the stable refused to let them harness the horses. "It would be suicide to start out in this weather," one said. "You couldn't possibly find your cabins in this blinding storm."

"I have a compass and know how to use it," Grant stated. "I have a wife and three little ones down there out of food and wood and I've got to get through to them or they'll die."

The townspeople shook their heads and made dire predictions, but Tice and Grant harnessed the team and battled their way south to the creek. There they found a load of firewood, cut and stacked and loaded about half of it onto their wagon. As they trudged on, from time to time the horses would flounder and go down and the men would have to shovel them out and urge them on again.

Tice handled the team so Grant could give all his attention to charting their course with the aid of his compass. Finally he called a halt. "We're far enough south. We should have come to the cabins by now," Grant said. "Something's wrong."

The men halted to get their breath and suddenly Grant's attention was drawn to some tiny twigs protruding up through the blanket of snow. He dug the snow away with his mitted hands and then shouted with relief.

"Here's the government survey stake! This is the corner of the section line. As I make it we're only a half a mile west of our cabins."

When they arrived at the Grant home, they were downcast to learn that the expedition with the ox teams had not returned. A lighted lamp was placed in a window and Tice went out and expended all his powder in an effort to draw the lost party's attention to the light in the window.

The little party remained in the cabin until Wednesday evening. The storm was abating, having roared for three days and two nights. The men then took food and matches and started out in search of the wood-gathering party. They trudged east two and a half miles to what was then called the Quaker settlement. They found no trace of the missing men and continued east to the river. The wind freshened again and they were forced to accept shelter with a family on Willow Creek. The two men slept on the floor in front of the fireplace and in the morning took up the search.

They had traveled but an hour when both yoke of oxen were sighted in a clump of willows on the Little Sioux bottom land. The animals had milled in a circle, causing the deep snow to melt. Then as it had frozen it formed an icy wall three feet in height, holding the beasts imprisoned. All the willows had been eaten as far as the oxen could reach.

The two then followed footprints leading northwest. At about three o'clock they found the body of young Powdermaker. He had become exhausted, it appeared, and had stretched out on the snow and slept his life away. Other tracks led to the sled loaded with firewood near a plum grove on Plum Creek. Signs revealed that Palmeto had led and sometimes carried young Powdermaker. When the older man was forced to turn his attention to the oxen, the boy had drifted away, it appeared, and wandered to the spot where his body had been found.

Grant and Tice continued to search. Presently they saw a stranger on horseback on the east bank of the river. He was searching for livestock that had strayed during the storm. "Up on the bank above you," he called, pointing to an object above them.

The men clambered up and found the body of Palmeto. The place where Palmeto's body was found was about a mile from the Evans Jones homestead four miles east of Spencer, and Jones' log cabin was a familiar landmark for many years. Later Jones' three sons, J. E., A. T., and H. E. recalled that seven travelers had found shelter in their cabin during the storm.

Because they had been close friends, Tice insisted on

bringing the body of Palmeto to Spencer in spite of the difficulty. A school house was used as a morgue and a Spencer man who had a supply of seasoned walnut fashioned a coffin.

Two yoke of oxen were necessary to break a road through back to Peterson. Tice followed in a light rig and the body of Andrew Palmeto was buried there.

The Grant family exerted every effort to get Tice to stay with his homestead and bring his wife and children up from Missouri as he had planned. However, Tice had seen too many hardships and would not bring his family into the country where he had lost his close friend. He returned to Greentop, Missouri, where he spent the rest of his life.

The body of the Smith boy was not found until April when it was given proper burial under the primitive conditions that existed in those early days.

And the rumor still persists that the body of Andrew Palmeto, frozen in a sitting position, could not be straightened out so his coffin was fashioned to accommodate the fixed sitting position of the frozen body.

THE LEGEND OF LOVER'S LEAP

Sacred to the Indian was the wooded bluffs one mile east of Colfax, Iowa, where the beautiful princess Fawn Eyes and her pale face lover once met. The following story, revised from the Colfax Tribune, July 15, 1915, describes the tragic legend of two young lovers.

Once upon a time a hunter with rifle in hand was crossing the dense woods to the east of what would eventually be Colfax, the city of healing waters. Great oaks and lindens towered heavenward in all their provincial beauty. Wild deer, turkey and myriads of chattering squirrels lived peacefully here, seldom startled by the white man's rifle.

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