



Col. J. D. Barnes and Julia Cody Goodman at their meeting in Davenport May 28, 1927, after a separation of seventy-five years.

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THE CODYS IN LE CLAIRE¹

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The history of the Cody family during their residence in the vicinity of Le Claire, Iowa, from 1840 to 1852 is an interesting excerpt from the pioneer history of the prairies, and is probably typical of thousands of other frontier narratives that have similarly gone unrecorded.

Our account begins with the removal of Isaac Cody, later distinguished as the father of Col. William F. Cody, from Cleveland, Ohio, to Cincinnati, in 1837, with the purpose of there taking up the study and practice of medicine. But there is every reason to believe that Cody, then a man of about thirty, was not suited for such a sober professional career, and it is not surprising that after one year he gave it up and decided to try his fortune in what was then the far west.

About this time there was taking place a large emigration to the Iowa Territory and a great many Clevelanders were choosing home sites along the Mississippi River in the vicinity of the two embryonic settlements, Le Claire and Parkhurst, both of which lay within the region which had been ceded to the government by the Sac Indians under Black Hawk a few years before (1832) and hence was newly opened to white settlement. So in 1839 we find Isaac Cody leaving his wife² and little girl, Martha, and journeying to Parkhurst, Iowa Territory. Here he entered claim on some land (what is now the John S. Wilson farm, one and

¹Although this article embodies material gained from a variety of sources, by far the greater portion of it is based on notes obtained during the many occasions when I have visited Col. J. D. Barnes, venerable Le Claire historian, and discussed "the old times" with him. It is a pleasure to acknowledge this great indebtedness, and to pay tribute to Col. Barnes' authority in matters historical.

²This was Isaac Cody's second wife, Mary Ann Laycock. Martha was Isaac's daughter and only child by his first wife, who had died before he moved to Cincinnati.

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one-half miles northwest of Le Claire), operated a small general store in Parkhurst, and in 1840 built the little frame house which still stands along the river road at the northern edge of Le Claire.

In 1841 Cody revisited Cincinnati, and when he returned to Iowa in the spring of 1842 he brought back with him his wife and daughter. While in the act of changing boats at St. Louis on this trip he met one Dennis Barnes, a man of about his own age, who had also left his family in Cincinnati and was on his way west to look up a location. Cody urged Barnes to try his fortune with him in Iowa, and finally persuaded him to do so. By such apparently trivial circumstances were destinies determined on the frontier.

When Cody and Barnes landed at Parkhurst the latter hastened by horseback to Dubuque and there entered claim on a quarter section adjacent to Cody's. Thus Cody and Barnes became neighbors and good friends, remaining so for many years in spite of political differences and the vicissitudes of the times.

The subsequent histories of the two families reflect the differences between their respective heads. Dennis Barnes spent the rest of his long and exceedingly useful life in the Le Claire region, and became a prominent figure in the development of this portion of Iowa, serving as first mayor of Le Claire (1854) and holding other positions of like responsibility, finally passing away in 1898 at the age of 92. His descendants have carried on in the community in the same fashion, and his now aged son, Col. J. D. Barnes, is deserving of special mention. Isaac Cody, on the other hand, represents a wholly different type of frontiersman, equally characteristic of the border and equally necessary to it; he is represented to us as quick tempered but generous, impetuous in words and actions, an ardent and vigorously outspoken antislavery man, and with the true pioneer's eagerness to try his fortunes in new ways and new country.

Obviously to such a temperament farming did not present a particularly strong appeal, and it is not difficult to find an explanation for Cody's restlessness in Iowa, or for his brief and stormy career subsequently in "bloody Kansas."

Col. Barnes tells us that Isaac Cody and his father were among the first of the immigrants in the Le Claire region who

ventured to homestead up on the prairies, and that they did so out of necessity for the reason that the first arrivals had staked out all available land in the near-by Mississippi Valley. This seems inexplicable to us at first thought, for in our times the prairie land is often the more valuable; but the early immigrants, most of whom came from the wooded eastern states, regarded the open and lonely prairies with suspicion and fear, and deliberately avoided them in favor of the river flats and bluffs, where there were no prairie fires and the blizzards were less violent, where timber and building stone were plentiful, and where steamboats passing up and down the Mississippi could keep them in touch with the world from which they had come.

Later in the year 1842 Cody and his family left the homestead for a time and went to Walnut Grove, twelve miles to the northwest, where Cody hired out to "break prairie" for Col. W. F. Brackenridge, a leader in the opening up of eastern Iowa. It was in this year, and probably while the family was in Walnut Grove, that Samuel, the oldest son in the family and the first child by Cody's second wife, was born.

The Cody family was found in 1843 back on the old homestead again, northwest of Le Claire. Here they remained for seven years, and here all the rest of the Cody children were born except Charles, the youngest, who was born in 1853, the year following the removal of the family to Kansas. Those born at the Le Claire homestead were Julia³ (1843), William (1845), Eliza (1847), Helen (1849), and May (1851). It is said that Mrs. Cody was an ardent admirer of Queen Victoria and emulated her in many rather astonishing particulars: witness the size of her family and the regularity with which her children made their arrival.

Since the second son of the family, William, was destined to

³Julia Cody Goodman, the last survivor of this family, passed away recently, on October 26, 1928, at the age of eighty-five, while visiting her youngest son in Honolulu. Her body was cremated and the ashes brought back to America, being placed beside those of her husband in the cemetery at North Platte, Nebraska, on November 14. In May and June, 1927, the year prior to her death, Mrs. Goodman revisited Le Claire for the first time since 1852, seventy-five years before, when as a girl of nine she had left for frontier Kansas as described in the present narrative. The reunion of Mrs. Goodman and Col. Barnes in Davenport on the morning of May 28 was an occasion of unusual interest which the writer will not soon forget. Once neighbors and favorite playmates, they had not seen each other for three-quarters of a century; and now at eighty-four their paths crossed once more. Mrs. Goodman spent many days in and around Le Claire, revisiting familiar haunts, looking up the few of her old neighbors still living, and being feted on every hand by the younger generation.

later fame, we pause for a moment before the account of his birth as it has been published in several sources and re-told in Le Claire on many occasions. The naive account has something of a Biblical ring to it:

"The circumstances of William's birth were related by old Aunty Zebly, the wife of Eleazar Parkhurst, and Mrs. Dennis Barnes, and as they were present on the occasion the particulars are supposed to be correct. It occurred on the night of February 26, 1845, and when Mrs. Cody was informed that her newly born was a son, she immediately replied that his name should be William Frederick."

The house on the Le Claire homestead in which "Buffalo Bill" and the other Cody children were born was razed some time about the close of the Civil War, and no illustration of it has



The old Cody home, still standing, at Le Claire. Built in 1840 by Isaac Cody, father of William F. Cody.

come down to us. From descriptions given many years later by William and Julia Cody and by Joe Barnes we know that it was like any other homesteader's cabin of the time—built of logs and frame, chiefly the latter, and resting on a foundation of limestone blocks obtained at near-by outcrops in the valley.

We have no record of any important events in the annals of the Codys during the years of residence on the homestead other

than the periodic arrival of the new baby, the further improvement of the land, and the addition by purchase of forty acres of land adjacent to the original quarter section. The circumstances of the family during the period were probably much the same as they were in the early '50's, of which time Col. Cody wrote in his *Autobiography*, "My father, Isaac, and mother, Mary Ann, were honest folks, but their possessions comprehended scarcely anything more than good characters and eight children."

We should perhaps mention that in April, 1843, Dennis Barnes, too, returned to Ohio as Cody had before him, and when a year later, on April 10th, he landed at the Le Claire wharf, he had with him his wife and two boys, new neighbors for the Codys.

In the spring of 1849 the belated news reached Le Claire that the year before, gold had been discovered in California. In this peaceful community as in many another the story had the effect of an exploded bomb. The information was brought to Le Claire via steamboat, and we can picture with what increasing excitement Isaac Cody devoured the accounts of gold discovery and of overland expeditions that filled the St. Louis newspapers. As we might expect, it was he who first caught the fever and by degrees transmitted it to the more cautious Dennis Barnes, who afterwards held that "it was all Isaac's fault!" Eventually the lure proved irresistible for both, and, preparatory to casting their lots for better or worse in the Gold Rush, they disposed of their farms and sold everything that they could not pack into prairie schooners for the long journey.

Cody, Barnes, and one George "Lucy" Long, a bachelor of dubious reputation, struck up a three-fold alliance for the great adventure; and each of the partners provided a prairie schooner and two yoke of oxen to pull it. The plan determined upon was to leave early in the spring of the next year, 1850, as soon as the grass on the prairies would be high enough to support the cattle, to journey to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and there to unite with a caravan bound overland for California under escort of a company of dragoons commanded by Captain George Dodge of Port Byron, Illinois. Cody and his two partners invested a large portion of their funds in supplies of bacon, canned goods,

crackers, and other necessities for the trip, all of which were purchased by Captain Dodge (who was then navigating the upper Mississippi) at St. Louis and sent on up the Missouri River to Fort Leavenworth, there to await the arrival of the wagons.

The spring of '50 came round. "But," reads the record, "when the time came to start and the oxen were standing under their yokes ready to be hitched to the wagons, news came of terrible Indian atrocities, coupled with the sad fate which attended the Donner party."⁴ These ill tidings sounded with ominous ring in the ears of this handful of emigrants, and it is not to be wondered that they paused to reconsider the advisability of exposing themselves and their small children to such dangers. "Lucy" Long flatly demurred and refused to leave the safety of Le Claire. According to Col. Barnes, his father and Isaac Cody would still have set out for the Eldorado and abandoned the project only with utmost reluctance and out of necessity because they could persuade no one else to buy out Long's equipment and they themselves were too poor to do so. Thus the caravan never left the town limits of Le Claire! We can understand how Col. Barnes is often led to wonder, "If we had gone—what then?" But who can answer such a question?

The collapse of the California air castle placed the two families in a predicament that was decidedly embarrassing and critical. Their implements and farms had been sold to provide funds for the trip, and the goods sent on to Fort Leavenworth were beyond recovery. Eventually Isaac Cody took up temporary residence for the summer months in the frame house in Parkhurst which he had built ten years previously; and Dennis Barnes settled in Le Claire.

That summer Isaac Cody found employment driving a passenger stage on the Davenport-Le Claire portion of what was intended to become a stage line extending as far as Dubuque but which failed before the line was completed. This occupation must have been one quite to Cody's liking, for he was passionately fond of horses. It is said that he could make the run from the Le Claire House at Davenport to Parkhurst, a distance of about

⁴History of Le Claire Township, by Col. J. D. Barnes, in *Atlas of Scott County, Iowa*. Davenport, Iowa, 1905, page 132.

fourteen miles, in one hour and five minutes. This must have been perilously near the speed limit for those times. We wonder what Isaac Cody's reaction would be could he come to life and see the fine concrete road which now links Davenport and Le Claire, and witness the constant stream of traffic which flows over the path where, seventy-eight years ago, his high stage rattled and bumped through mud and ruts in the thrillingly fast time of one hour and five minutes!

Though literally and figuratively it was true that for Isaac Cody and his wife the lines had not always fallen in pleasant places, life for the children was carefree enough if we are to take as evidence this brief picture from the Le Claire days which appears in Col. Cody's *Autobiography*:

"At Le Claire I was sent to a school where, by diligence and fairly good conduct I managed to familiarize myself with the alphabet, but further progress was arrested by a suddenly developed love for skiff riding on the Mississippi, which occupied so much of my time thereafter that really I found no convenient opportunity for further attendance at school, though neither my father nor my mother had the slightest idea of my new found, self-imposed, employment, much to my satisfaction let me add. When I was thrown in the society of other boys I was not slow to follow their example, and I take to myself no special credit for my conduct as a town boy; for, like the majority I foraged among neighboring orchards and melon patches, rode horses when I was able to catch them grazing on the commons. I would not like to admit any greater crimes, though anything may be implied in the confession that I was quite as bad, though no worse, than the ordinary everyday boy who goes barefoot, wears a brimless hat, one suspender, and a mischievous smile."

In the fall of 1850 the Codys moved again, this time to Long Grove, three miles southwest of Walnut Grove, and here Isaac again found employment breaking prairie for Col. Brackenridge. Col. Barnes has many reminiscences of the occasions when Col. Brackenridge and Isaac Cody came to Le Claire during 1850 and 1851 to pay friendly or professional calls to his father's notary public office.

It was in 1851 during the Long Grove sojourn that tragedy

cast its shadow across the Cody threshold. Samuel, ten years of age and, it is written, "the pride of his parents," was killed by a vicious unbroken colt which he attempted to ride out after the cattle. No one was witness to the accident, the crushed body of the boy being found after a search. Sam Cody lies buried in the Long Grove Cemetery under a stone erected many years later, in the '80's, by his brother William.⁵ This tragedy left William, then six, as the oldest son of the family. It was only six years later that a second tragedy, the untimely death of Isaac, left the Cody household fatherless; and William at twelve years of age became, perforce, the "man" of the family.

The westward urge in the heart of Isaac Cody was not quenched by the experiences of 1850, and by 1852 he had definitely reached a decision of far-reaching consequences—to emigrate to the Kansas border. Doubtless there were many factors which induced Isaac to make the change. It is known that his wife was unhappy at Long Grove since the death of Samuel, and was anxious to leave. The move had long been urged by Elijah Cody, brother of Isaac, who lived at Weston, Missouri, not far from the Kansas line. In addition it is clear that a life as an Iowa farmer was neither an easy one for Cody nor one much to his taste. Times were hard and money so scarce that the necessities of life could commonly be secured only by barter. Nor could Cody increase the slender income wrung from the farm by working on the river, as did many of his neighbors, including Dennis Barnes, who shipped out as steamboat mate during seasons that were otherwise non-lucrative.

This time the plans of Isaac Cody did not fall through. In April, 1852, he again made ready to emigrate, and, pending the coming of favorable weather, he moved his family down to Le Claire to stay with his friends, the Barneses. Col. Barnes, at the time in his tenth year, tells us that his chum, Billy Cody, was then a dark handsome boy, taller than himself though two years younger, who had inherited all of his father's fondness for riding horses and caring for them, and who could at this age handle a team as well as a full-grown man.

By June the grass was up on the prairies, and without further

⁵Col. Barnes states that the grave stone which marks Samuel Cody's resting place in the Long Grove Cemetery is erroneously dated 1854 instead of 1851.

ado Isaac packed his belongings into a buckboard; Mrs. Cody with May, still a baby in arms, and the excited youngsters, climbed into the hack that was to carry them so far; goodbys were said; and the Codys set out down the river road, Isaac driving the buckboard and Billy the hack. The momentous step had been taken, Le Claire was left behind. Isaac Cody was again pioneering.

At Davenport the little procession left the valley and struck out across the prairies, then "a great stretch of uninhabited wilderness" reaching all the way from the Mississippi River to the Missouri. Having followed the Codys thus far, to the close of the Le Claire chapter, we leave them—trailing westward into new country, eagerly confronting the future, one that was destined to be more eventful and more charged with fortunes both good and bad, than their imaginations in their most daring flights could possibly have anticipated.

A CURT TAX NOTICE

I have been dunning every person within the limits of the city corporation for the last two or three months for their taxes, until I have got heartily tired. I will indulge until next Monday week, after which time I will proceed to collect. It is not my wish to distress any individual for the purpose of coercing payment—but our streets need improving; and I must collect, or be censured for not having discharged my duties as an officer. As well as collecting the tax already assessed, I will be compelled to levy and collect a poll tax. Those concerned will please be prepared.

JOHN H. GARRIGUES,
Collector City Tax.

Burlington, August 18, 1838.

—*Iowa Territorial Gazette*, Burlington, I. T., August 25, 1838.
(In the Newspaper Division of the Historical, Memorial and Art Department of Iowa.)

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