



AMBROSE A. CALL

1833-1908

Located First Home North of Fort Dodge, Iowa
With Brother Established Algona
Founder of *Algona Pioneer Press*
Authority on Pioneer Development
Operated Extensive U.S. Mail Routes
Aided Historical Department in Research

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Indians Repelled in Kossuth

By AMBROSE A. CALL¹

We are approaching the half-century milestone that marks the time since the first settlers in Kossuth county reared their cabins and contended with the savage Sioux for their possession. The old-timers, our old friends, are rapidly passing away and soon all will be gone. The history of those first trails and struggles will be irretrievably lost, unless a record of them be made before it is too late. Not only should the history of our county be written, but it should be true; our records should be kept straight, and those who know it should write it. One very much dislikes to write of himself, or of events in which he took a prominent part, but when it is desirable to keep a true history, and there is no one else to write it, possibly he may be justified in doing it himself.

Many tragic events in the early history of Kossuth county merit recounting. The scattered settlers really lived dangerously, exposed as they were to the depredations of roving bands of ruthless Indians. So great was the fear of the coming of these raids that often without resistance, families submitted to being robbed of provisions and live-

¹Coming from Iowa City in 1854, Ambrose A. Call, with his elder brother, Asa C. Call, selected the present site of Algona, Iowa, and filed their claims, there founding their homes. The year previous, the Indians had driven government surveyors from the locality. At that time there was no settlement north of Fort Dodge, forty miles distant, and none on the east nearer than Clear Lake. Mr. Call once said that at twenty-one he had no money, but did have an abundance of good health and courage. Helping to build Algona and develop Kossuth county, he became the editor of its first newspaper, later a banker and

stock, grateful that their lives were spared. As a participant in resisting one such raid, and to redeem promises to write an account of same, I undertake to record details of a disquieting event which never has been published.

Before I begin my Indian story, I wish to correct a mistake which later might be taken as true, and erroneously get into the county's history. Some friend recently sent me a publication from Belmond, Wright county, in which the daughter of one Mr. Hunt states, in a very interesting article, that her father and one Mr. Overacker, in 1853, explored the country west and made claims where both the towns of Algona and Spirit Lake now stand; that they returned, intending to hold them, but hearing of the Indian troubles around Clear Lake, and of the killing of Captain Hewett's Winnebago boy, were deterred through fear of Indians. Now, by reference to history, it will be seen that the Indian trouble mentioned occurred in July, 1854, and their return was subsequent to that event. I have on the margin of an old book this notation: "July 28th. I find upon my return two parties, named Overacker and Hunt, have during my absence marked out timber claims on Sec. 11 and 12 south of Asa's claim." I had my cabin raised at that time and was living on my claim. No one made claims in Kossuth county prior to the settlement made by my brother and myself.

During the two years prior to my coming to Kossuth county, I spent most of my time on the upper Mississippi

government mail contractor. At the time of his death he was said to own over 2,000 acres of Kossuth county land.

The original manuscript of this article is among the papers of the late Mrs. Florence Call Cowles of Des Moines, a daughter of the writer, deposited with the State Department of History and Archives by her son, John Cowles, of Minneapolis. This thrilling pioneer experience of Mr. Call, and Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell in July 1855, is typical of the stirring events of early Iowa, and constitutes a valuable historical contribution, depicting the settler's personal encounters with the Indians. Mr. Call often made public addresses, telling of the early days. In September 1904, a great jubilee celebration of the semi-centennial of the coming there of the first settlers, was held at Algona, and he appeared upon the program, including in his address the incidents herein related.—Editor.

river, around Saint Paul, Fort Snelling, and on the tributaries of the Saint Croix river; a part thereof among the Indians: Sioux and Chippeways; and I learned a great deal of the Indian sign language and quite a few words both of Chippeway and Sioux. The sign language is identically the same with all of the tribes east of the Rocky mountains, but their word language is very different. In the same tribe each individual has his own pronunciation. A buffalo is a "titonka" or "tienka" or "tetonka" as you find your Indian. "Titonka" also means a cow or ox, or most anything big; a big white man is at once saluted as "titonka wasecha"; so with an elk—he is an "humpa" or "umpa" or "impah"; a moccasin or mitten or anything leather is also called "umpah." They have no written language to hold them to a uniform pronunciation, and besides have all manner of defects in their speech, with usually a lazy grunt at the end of every word.

INKPADUTAH'S BAND APPEARED

In the early part of July, 1855, there came into the settlement a large party of Sioux Indians—some forty tepees including the chief, Inkpadutah—the same party which created the panic and stampede on the headwaters of the Cedar, and came so near capturing His Excellency Governor Hempstead, the year before. Also, who in 1856, terrorized the settlers on the Little Sioux, later culminating their deviltry by the Spirit Lake massacre in March, 1857. This band of Indians came into the settlement from the west and pitched their tepees on Sec. 24, near Mark Parson's present residence.

My first intimation of their presence was rather startling. My cabin door was open. I had just eaten a bachelor's dinner and was lying down reading the *Missouri Republican*, which Levi Maxwell had brought me from Fort Dodge, when a ringing war whoop saluted my ears. I sprang to the middle of the room, seizing my gun, but was met by a big guffaw from a burly Indian who instantly stood his gun against the wall and held out his hand with a "how, how." Of course he considered it only a joke. I was not quite so

sure of it, but shook his hand and said "how." A squaw tagged along after him with a few moccasins to trade.

My rifle was a large one carrying an ounce ball, and the Indian, noticing the calibre, produced a crude ball pounded out of a bar of lead, and measured it in my gun. He asked to see one of my bullets and when he found it just fitted his shotgun he was much pleased and proposed at once "how swap for umpah." I found two pairs of moccasins which fitted me, for which I gave him ten bullets. He told me he would return with more, which he did, and I traded for enough moccasins to last me a year or more.

I inquired of my visitor how many tepees there were and he opened both hands four times, indicating forty, and then pointed the direction. After he left I visited their village, near Barney Holland's cabin. Some of the neighbors were there and they were having some contention, as the Indians had turned their ponies into Holland's patch of corn, had taken Holland's large grindstone to the center of their village and set Holland to turning it. As many as could get around it were grinding their tomahawks and knives. The perspiration was pouring from Holland's face and he seemed very tired. With the others I insisted upon their driving their ponies out of the corn, and having Holland quit turning the grindstone. We came near having an open rupture with them, as they were very surly and stubborn, but finally the squaws drove the ponies out of the corn and the bucks installed one of their own number at the stone.

STARTED PLUNDERING THE CABINS

The next day they scattered through the settlement, visiting every cabin. Some they plundered, but where they found white men in sufficient force to resist, they merely begged for something to eat. Two tepees were pitched near my brother's cabin, on the hill just west of the present powerhouse, and it was the occupants of these tepees who frightened Mrs. Call, the story of which she wrote for the reading circle in 1872, the sequel to which Mrs. Blackford wrote for the *Advance*. Of course my brother's family was in no danger from two Indians, as he had four or five hired men boarding with him all the time.

The evening of the second day Mr. Maxwell came to my cabin, seemingly somewhat alarmed, and told me that three Indians had just left his cabin; that they were sullen and saucy; had taken what they pleased; that he dared not resist them on account of his wife and children; and asked me to come down and stay with him. I had made my home for some time with Mr. Maxwell and knew him to be a courageous man, not to be frightened without cause. He had recently returned from Boonsboro with a large load of provisions and supplies which would naturally tempt the cupidity of the Indians. I promised Maxwell I would come down early in the morning; the Indians made all their raids in the daytime. Consequently, I started early without my breakfast, but found the Indians there before me, swarming inside when I arrived. There were eleven lusty young fellows, each armed with a double-barreled shotgun, cocked and loaded with ball; also tomahawk and knife. They had the house turned inside out, so to speak, when I entered.

Mrs. Maxwell had a boarder named Lyman Craw, one of those nice, peaceable men who believed it an evidence of cowardice to carry a gun or other weapon of defense; he never did. Well, I found Craw sitting in a chair, his face white as a sheet, suffering every imaginable indignity from the young bucks. They had pilfered his pockets, unbuttoned his clothes, were pulling his nose, ears and hair, and occasionally slapping him on the side of the head, nearly knocking him to the floor. He didn't dare move; he was paralyzed with fear. I said to him: "Craw, for God's sake run if you can't fight" and Maxwell told him to get out of there and make for the brush. After a short time I noticed his chair was empty, so he must have gotten out in some way.

Maxwell told me that he had but two chambers of his revolver loaded, and asked me to stand in front of him while he loaded the remainder. He stepped behind the door and I stood in front, and although his revolver was an old-fashioned Colt's, which loaded with powder and ball, he did it very quickly, without being seen.

DEFENDED THEIR PROPERTY

As I came out from behind the door a big young Indian, who seemed to be a leader, noticed a two-bushel bag of corn meal and started to drag it to the door. I thought the time had come to take a hand, if we intended to resist at all, so I sprung and took hold of the sack telling him to stop, but with a defiant grunt he jerked it out of my hand. At this I seized the bag with my left hand and with my right caught him under the chin. As we were standing quite near the doorway, he went out violently, clutching at the door as he went, nearly pulling it shut, and striking on the back of his head. I placed the sack up against the wall and stood beside it; Maxwell, with his revolver in his hand stood beside me.

An ominous silence came over the cabin when the Indian was "assisted" out the door, but presently one who, if not a chief, was spokesman for the crowd, pulled his tomahawk out of his belt and advanced toward me, asking me to feel the edge of it. I snatched it from him and stuck it in his belt. Again he drew it out and held it toward me, and again I snatched it from him and stuck it behind his belt. He then in a loud and menacing voice told me they would "nepo squaw and papooses" (kill the women and children). In an equally loud voice, and with some emphatic profanity—Indians mostly understand that—I told him as well as I could, that if he undertook it, we would "nepo" every damned Sioux in the cabin. He scoffed at the idea and counted two Wasecha, and opened his hands holding them high over his head many times, saying "Sioux, Sioux." In those days when the Indians wished to terrorize the whites they called themselves Sioux, but at other times they were Yanktonaas. Notwithstanding the Indian's loud talk and brave actions, he backed off and subsided when he noticed Maxwell's fingers playing nervously around the trigger of his revolver.

I think Maxwell understood what the Indian meant when he threatened to "nepo" the squaw and papooses, and Mrs. Maxwell understood a part of it, for Maxwell said that we must get Eliza and the children out if we could, but he

was afraid they would follow her. I asked him if he did not think he could get their attention away from the door by giving them something to eat, to which he replied that the day before they had boiled a mess of corn meal, pork and molasses and that he would try them on that. So he put the stove boiler on the stove, filled it half full of water, and gave them part of a bag of meal, some bacon and a jug of molasses. The young bucks at once began to build a fire and stir in the stuff, and soon got to quarreling over it, in which quarrel the others, who had been sulking, took a hand.

I told Mrs. Maxwell that when Mr. Maxwell gave the sign, to slip out, get into the woods and run for Brown's and tell John to run his horse over and tell Asa (my brother) and the boys we were having trouble at Maxwell's cabin. We watched our opportunity and when the Indians were all busy with their mush, Maxwell partly closed the door. He and I stood between it and the Indians, and Mrs. Maxwell, slipping out, got away without being noticed.

The Indians continued to quarrel and fuss over their mush, and Maxwell delayed them as much as possible. They couldn't make the fire burn well, and the water refused to boil. They set their guns up beside the door and turned their whole attention to their breakfast, occasionally one of them running and looking out of the door. After a lapse of about an hour their mush was done satisfactorily, but so hot they could not eat it. One of them looked out of the door toward the west and cried out: "Wasecha, Wasecha!" Others ran and looked out and returned in much excitement, making a rush for their guns, but they did not get them. Their probable reaction, when our reinforcement came, had been anticipated. We stood in front of the guns, with our revolvers in our hands, and ordered them back. What the result might have been had not August Zahlten and Christian Hackman appeared in the doorway that moment with their cocked guns in their hands, will never be known, but as it was, the Indians were completely cowed. These two old Prussian soldiers, Hackman and Zahlten, ran all the way from my brother's cabin to our assist-

ance, and arrived just in time. The two Browns (Robert and Alexander) and Jacob Cummins, were not far behind them.

The Indians made no attempt to secure their guns by force, but their spokesman, who had two hours before twice drawn his tomahawk from his belt, approached, and with the palms of his hands turned upward, pointed toward his gun. I threw his blanket back from his shoulders, uncovering a number of stolen articles, which he took out and reached toward me. I motioned him to lay them on the floor, thinking that I might have other uses for my hands, and he did so. He then took off his blanket to show me he had nothing more concealed, after which I gave him his gun, first removing the caps, and told him to "puckachee" which he did, making the best possible time to the brush.

RECOVERED STOLEN ARTICLES

The next to approach was the sullen fellow who had just missed getting the bag of meal. He also was made to take off his blanket and pile his stolen articles on the floor, after which he took to the woods as soon as an opportunity was given him. Each, in turn, did the same. Maxwell missed nothing from the house, their mess of pottage being left untouched. It was the first time I ever had known an Indian who did not want to eat.

Soon after the last Indian was gone, W. G. Clark came to the cabin with his long rifle on his shoulder. He was known to be an old frontiersman and fighter, (a brother of Mrs. Hackman who recently wrote an interesting article concerning the very first settlers, published in the *Advance*.) Clark told us the Indians had pitched their tepees near his cabin, and he came over to talk with us concerning the advisability of trying to drive them away. We thought the time opportune. Eleven young braves, probably the flower of the band, had been completely cowed—it might be said whipped. Figuratively, we had them on the run and we decided to start at once.

Taking their trail across the river at the Indian ford and through the timber to near the Mann homestead, we found their village. It fell to my lot to be spokesman. The chief's

tepee stood near the center, and was a very large one. We walked rapidly to it and went in without ceremony. The chief was a large man, past middle age, who seemed to be lame, having one foot bandaged with rags. I accosted him roughly, and seizing his tent, gave it a hard jerk to give emphasis to my words and show him what I wanted, telling him to "puckachee." He seemed very much frightened, but after a moment's hesitation, explained that a part of his young men had gone after elk, pointing in a southeasterly direction, and would not be back until after dark; that the next morning at sunrise they would pull down the tepees and "puckachee Dakota." He made a circular motion with his arm showing that he would go around the settlement, thence north and thence west. He watched us with considerable interest while we discussed his proposition, and seemed relieved when I nodded my head in assent and took his hand. He then went outside and in a loud voice ordered the squaws to gather wood and brush and make racks on which to jerk their meat. He seemed to take it for granted the hunters would get game, which they did, bringing in several elk, as we learned by Clark and Cummins, who saw them return. They worked all night stripping and curing their elk venison. Before daylight they began tearing down their tepees, and by the time the sun was a half-hour high, their village had disappeared. They took the route indicated by Inkpadutah, keeping clear of the settlement, crossing the river below the mouth of Buffalo Fork and then went west.

But few eyes were closed in sleep the night before their departure, and their every move was watched; but great as was our anxiety, we did not fully realize our danger, or the real danger the settlement had passed through. Of course Mr. Maxwell and I knew we had passed through a terrible ordeal, and those who came to our relief knew they had taken their lives in their hands by doing so. What must have been Mrs. Maxwell's feelings, after hearing the threat of the leader to murder herself and babes, with eleven against two to carry out his threat, mothers can imagine.

As stated, we sent John Brown to tell my brother Asa and

the boys of our trouble, but they were looking after their cattle, and knew nothing of the event until it was over. The only persons who came from his place were Zahlten and Hackman, the others coming from Mr. Brown's; but we had enough help, so the sequel proved. We also had enough to frighten old Inkpadutah into promising, without hesitation, every demand made of him. Those composing our party were: August Zahlten, Christian Hackman, Jacob Cummins, Alexander Brown, Robert Brown, W. G. Clark, Levi Maxwell, and myself.

The old cabin, which is still on the Fry place just a mile east of Alexander Brown's, is where the trouble occurred. Mrs. Maxwell ran all the way to Brown's carrying her little eighteen-months-old boy, her little girl, seven years old, running beside her. John Brown, a younger brother of Alexander, and the courier who ran his horse to my brother's cabin for help, has passed over the dark river into the unknown, as have a number of others of those who participated with us. Christian Hackman and W. G. Clark are also dead. Jacob Cummins and Robert Brown have passed out of sight. Levi Maxwell was alive a short time since, and living in the southern part of this state. August Zahlten, Alexander Brown and myself only remain here.

The people of our settlement did not fully realize the imminent danger through which they passed. Moreover, they did not know what bloodthirsty, villainous murderers these Indians were. Inkpadutah had not established his reputation as the fiend incarnate that a year later proved him to be. This was the first time, and the only time, he and his band were ever successfully resisted. Inkpadutah was a brother of Sidominadotah, usually known as Chief Two fingers, who, with his family, was killed by the Indian trader Lott in January or February, 1854, and thrust under the ice in Bloody Run which empties in the Des Moines river in Humboldt county near Livermore. Upon the death of Sidominadotah the mantle of authority fell on the shoulders of his brother, Inkpadutah.

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