

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF N. W. IOWA.

BY N. LEVERING, GREENWOOD, MO.

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IN the month of August, 1864, I was authorized by the provo-marshal (Thomas H. Curtis), of the sixth district of Iowa, to enroll all able-bodied men over eighteen and under forty-five years of age, preparatory to a draft that was to be made the following month. Had the small-pox or yellow fever made its appearance in the town, it would not have created greater sensation than my presence while in the discharge of my duty. I was not a little surprised to find very many who were a little too old, or not quite old enough, and many who were halt, lame, blind, and afflicted with all the diseases that human flesh was heir to. Some few, who knew their excuses would be invalid, fled the state, crossing the river into Nebraska, thinking, no doubt, that

“He that *scares* and runs away,
May live to fight another day.”

I trust they are still running. Some of them, however, found that “the race was not to the swift”—fearing they would be gobbled up if drafted, returned.

I was much amused by an affectionate mother of the “Emerald Isle,” who had a stout and healthy son of twenty-four or five summers (judging from his personal appearance). When I called at their house I was met at the door by the mother, with—“Morning to ye, and are ye after John?” “Yes,” said I. “And are ye after drafting him into the *yarmy*?” “Perhaps,” I replied. “Divil the bit will ye git him, for he is living in Nebraska, and that isn’t all, and it is as true as I am his mother, he is not but seventeen.” “He wears a stiff beard for a boy, and deceives his

appearance," I said. "Ye'r right and he is of a hairy people, but he never deseaved any body, he is an honest boy as ever had a baing." "All right," I said, "he is just the kind of a man that I want; I'll enroll him, and he can appear before the enrolling board and offer his objections." "The divil take ye and roul the life out of ye before ye shall roul me John on yer board, ye dirty baste." Here she poured forth such a volley of invectives and so rapid, that I could not even put in a demurer. She even likened me unto Josh Billings' strange bird, that "wears its wings on its head, stands on its fore feet, and kicks with its hind ones," and by relationship closely allied to a jackass. "Do not flatter me madam," I said, as she paused to catch a fresh breath. "I'll flatten ye, if ye haint after getting away with yer rouling board." I thought discretion the better part of valor, and retired in good order, amid a shower of epithets and billingsgate flung at me in good Irish style. John was enrolled but not drafted.

The draft was made in September following, at Ft. Dodge. Thomas H. Curtis was provost marshal, and president of board of enrollment, Woolsey Welles member, and Dr. Wm. R. Smith, surgeon. On the 29th of September the draft for Sioux City township, Woodbury county, was made, and among the *victims* were Squire Havlin, John Luse, C. Hamilton, W. Edwards, J. N. Field, N. Levering, and others, whose names are not now remembered. They were at once notified to report on or before the 12th day of October, at the place of rendezvous, in Ft. Dodge, or be deemed deserters, and subject to the penalty prescribed therefor by the rule and articles of war. The drafted made their appearance at the proper time, some of whom were accepted, and either went or furnished substitutes, while a few were rejected, among whom were Havlin, Hamilton, Levering, and others not now recollected. We received our certificates of exemption and returned home. One of our party was exempted by reason of arch of his feet gone. His angry passions were slow to rise, and did not get to their full

height untill he got home, one hundred and fifty miles away, when he learned that several negroes had passed an examination before the same board. "By the eternal," said he, "does Dr. Smith class me among the *web footed* or biped portion of creation, and that lower than a gentleman of African descent? Confound the Doctor, if he was here I would stand flat-footed and give him a practical illustration of my fighting qualities. I'd show him pluck, if I could not show hollow in my foot." Impositions were sometimes practiced on the enrolling board, one of which I will mention, as related to me by a member of the board.

A man (whose name I have forgotten) of stout physical frame and able-bodied, presented himself before the board for examination, and was, after a careful examination, accepted, and seemingly to his entire satisfaction, and was at once ordered to Davenport, where he was to undergo re-examination. After he arrived there, and prior to the examination, he received news from home, which caused him to yearn to return to the bosom of his family. He soon hit upon a plan to regain his liberty, which was as follows: When re-examined, he crooked his right fore-finger, and held it in that position, and was at once exempted and sent home; and the enrolling board at Ft. Dodge, who accepted him, were each fined one hundred dollars, in order to sharpen their optics, and make them more careful.

At the October election of 1863, N. Levering was re-elected county judge of Woodbury county, George Kingsworth, sheriff, T. J. Stone, recorder, and A. Groniger, treasurer, the office of treasurer and recorder having been separated by an act of the legislature of 1862. At this election I was again commissioned, by Gov. Kirkwood, as commissioner to take the vote of all troops in northwestern Iowa, the chain of forts reaching from Sioux City up the valley of Little Sioux river to Spirit lake, and to Hester-ville, on the Des Moines river. My commission and instructions did not reach me until late Friday night, previous to the election. I at once saddled my horse and set out on the

trip, which was about one hundred and sixty miles. I rode much of the way after night, and in a cold drizzling rain, stopping at each fort to arrange matters for the election, arriving at Hesterville about sunrise on the morning of the election (Tuesday), where I was kindly received and very hospitably entertained by Capt. Ingham, commanding that post. I met here Mr. Pritchard, of Des Moines, a clerk in the office of the secretary of state, who had been sent here to muster some new recruits into the state service. Mr. P. was a very genial young man, of strict integrity and fine business capacity, but had never seen much of rustic and backwoods life. Capt. Ingham and Mr. P. accompanied me on my return as far as Ft. White, at Correctionville, on their way to Des Moines. Our young friend seemed anxious to play Nimrod, and carried with him a fine double-barrel shot-gun, with which he longed to lay low some of the beasts of the forest and fowls of the air, and especially a fat turkey. I told him that when we arrived at Ft. White he would have an opportunity of gratifying his ambition in this respect, as there were many turkeys in the timber near by. Arriving there Mr. P. soon made his desire known to Capt. White. It was then late in the evening. The Capt. was always on hand for a joke, and discovered an opening here for one. He assured Mr. P. that the woods were full of turkeys, and that he would have no difficulty in bringing down a few fat gobblers next morning. At this our young Nimrod was perfectly delighted, and at once set about loading his gun and making preparations for an early attack on turkey next morning. "Now," said the Capt., as he ushered the young hunter to his sleeping apartments, "I will wake you before it is light in the morning and send one of my men with you to show you where the turkeys roost." P. bowed and thanked the Capt. kindly, and retired to his dreamy couch, to dream only of a terrible slaughter among "turkey" the next day. Soon after the jocular Captain had cared for his guest, he was seen with lantern in hand searching among the stables for a couple of fine black gobblers,

that he had recently purchased from a settler, for his own table. They were soon captured, and calling one of his men to him, he said, "Here, I want you to take these two fellows and place them on picket duty down in the timber near the fort, and I want you up early tomorrow morning to go with ^vMr. P. to relieve them." After imparting the joke to the soldier the Captain retired, and the turkeys were posted on a limb. In the morning, before gray-eyed morn dawned in the east, a shout from Capt. ^vWhite brought our young hero up standing, with gun in hand, yawning and gaping, but eager for the fun. He followed his guide, who conducted him to the timber, where they were soon discovered by the Captain's "pickets," who hailed them with a few hasty gobbles, which was answered by a loud report from our hero's deadly missile, and down tumbled one of the pickets, while the other gobbled defiance; but he too was soon made to bite the dust. Our hero was now in ecstasy, and brim full of glory—enough for one day. Gathering up his game and with an air of triumph, he marched back to the fort, feeling as happy as if he had captured a whole tribe of red skins. "There," shouted the Captain, as Mr. P. entered the gate of the fort, "I told you that you could kill some *wild turkeys* this morning, and these are the finest that have ever been killed in this country." "As these are the first wild turkeys that I ever killed," said P., "I will take them to Ft. Des Moines and let my friends enjoy them with me." Captains White and ^vIngham, and Nimrod number two, with his trophies of success nicely stowed away in the wagon, set out for Des Moines.

Arriving there, Mr. P. exhibited his game, and received the compliments of many friends, some of whom he invited to partake of a *wild turkey* dinner the next day, at one of the principal hotels in the city. Among the invited guests were Secretary ^vWright and other state officials, with our jocular Capt. White. At dinner his Honor, Wright, was called upon to carve the turkeys, which he did in rather a tedious manner, for which he apologized by saying that wild turkeys

were more compact than tame ones, and consequently were more difficult to carve. After the guests had fared sumptuous on turkey and other rich viands that graced the table, and showered many compliments on our worthy friend P., who felt that he had done honor to himself, while Captains White and Ingham were ready to burst—not with turkey, but with a turkish joke—as all were now in good humor, as men usually are after partaking of a good dinner, the two Captains divulged the joke, and gave vent to their pent-up laughter, in which they were joined by the crowd, to the great discomfiture of friend Pritchard, who at first regarded the *fowl* joke as an insult, but when assured that no insult was intended, and that all jokes were free among friends, he gave way to a side-splitter, and enjoyed the joke as much as any. Soon after he wrote me, saying “White has a joke on the turkeys, and will tell it on application.”

About the 10th of October, 1864, I was employed by Capt. Bagg, quartermaster of Iowa 6th cavalry, then at Sioux City, to take part of a company of Wisconsin troops and about one hundred head of horses that were ordered to St. Louis, to Cedar Falls, a distance of about two hundred miles, then the nearest point to a railroad from Sioux City, where they were to take the cars for their destination. We arrived at Cedar Falls after some detention by cold weather and snow storms. After shipping men and stock, we were ordered to return with twenty-six government teams, there loading for Sioux City, and in charge of Wagonmaster I. C. Turber.

On our return we arrived at Ft. Dodge on Saturday evening, Nov. 18th, where we camped for the night. Sabbath morning Old Boreas came howling from the northwest, followed by a snow squall, which almost persuaded us to remain in camp; but the snow storm soon passed over, and the sun shining brightly, we rolled out for Twin Lakes, a distance of about twenty-eight miles, where we expected to camp that night. Before we reached Lizard river, about six miles, another snow squall passed over. When we

reached the river we had about twenty miles to travel over an open prairie, without a house until we reached the lakes. The sun was again shining brightly, and supposing the storm over for the day, after a brief consultation with the wagon-master, it was decided that we would make the lakes that day, and that I would ride on in advance and select a camping ground and build up a good fire. As it was getting extremely cold, I started out, and when about three miles in advance of the train, the clouds in the northwest began to look quite threatening and portentous. I was soon met by a driving snow, that soon passed over; I pressed on, hoping to reach the destined camp before another should come. I had not proceeded over two miles, when the sky began to look more threatening and ominous, and Old Boreas came howling across the broad prairie like a demon, driving before him a most terrific snow storm, the thought of which causes an involuntary shudder to pass over me as I write. My heavy clothing seemed to afford but little protection to my body, as the keen winds pierced through as if searching for the flickering spark of life. I dismounted and endeavored to keep warm by walking as rapidly as I could against the strong wind, which much impeded locomotion. My horse followed close at my heels as if afraid of losing sight of me. Still hopeful that the storm would abate and that I was nearing my destination, I mounted my horse and urged him onward. The blinding snow that drifted in my face so obstructed my vision that I could not see beyond my head. Holding my head downward, which I was obliged to do in order to discern the road—thus with my head bowed like the willow to the storm, I continued my way for some time as it seemed to me, while a dreamy or drowsy sensation seemed to be taking possession of my faculties, and I could realize that I was sinking into a state of unconsciousness, and was also feeling some sensations of comfort. I was conscious that I was freezing. I thought of home and the loved ones there. While in this benumbed and semi-conscious state, I was startled as if out of sleep by the voice of

some one calling out, "My God, Colonel, you are freezing! Get down and tie your horse to the wagon, and get in with me." He took me for Col. J. A. Sawyer, of Sioux City. On stirring up and turning my head in the direction of the voice, I found myself by the side of a covered wagon, and a span of mules driven by — Clark, a member of the Iowa 6th, who had been sent out by Quartermaster Bagg, with a supply of rations, to meet us.

When I dismounted from my saddle I more fully realized my condition, and found that my feet were severely frosted. I tied my horse to the hind end of the wagon and hobbled to the front, when Clark assisted me in and wrapped two or three buffalo robes around me, when he turned his team around and started back to the Lakes, saying at the same time, "You are freezing, and I can get to the stage station at the Lakes sooner than to the settlement on the Lizard." When he had driven two miles or more he found himself bewildered in the snow, and not able to find the road. I told him to turn his team about and take the back track until we met the teams, when I would order them all back to the timber on the Lizard, where they could camp until the storm abated. This he quickly did, the mules obeying the smarting lash of their driver; we were soon flying as if upon the wings of the wind, or as fast at least as mule flesh could carry us. We were not long in coming up to the teams, which soon faced about and started for the timber on double-quick, as if dear life depended upon it, Clark leading in the race. I urged him not to drive so fast, as there was danger of injuring his team and losing my horse, that was tied to the wagon. "D—n the horse," said he, what is a horse or a dozen of them, compared with a man's life; you are freezing, and I am going to get you to a fire." On we dashed, "*ventis secundis*," when soon we hauled up in front of a house about one mile from the timber. "Hallo!" shouted my faithful friend, which in a moment brought a buxom middle-aged daughter of "Erin" to the door, who said, "And what are ye after having now?" "A

fire and shelter from the storm; I have a man here" added Clark, "who is freezing." "Brang him in" said the warm-hearted matron. My faithful companion sprang from the wagon and assisted me down; my face and beard were a perfect sheet of ice, so that I looked like a young iceberg, or an *Icelander*, at least. As I entered the door the good lady threw up her hands, and in true Hibernian style exclaimed, "*My God!* and I haven't a *drap* of *whaskey* about the house, and the ould mon not at home!" She doubtless thought whiskey the soldier's "*panacea*." I assured her that the absence of "*sod corn*" was immaterial if she could substitute a cup of warm tea. "Shure I've got the tay, and bless your soul ye shall have a cup and a good warm male wid it." While the kind-hearted lady was preparing some nourishment for me I sat near the fire, and as I warmed I felt a sickening sensation, which the warm tea and other viands corrected, and in a short time I felt much revived and quite comfortable. I remained at the house until evening, when the storm abated. I rode down to camp and found the men comfortably seated around huge crackling fires. Many of the men had frosted their feet, hands, and faces. Their wagons were covered, and when in the storm they rode in or walked behind them, and were thus protected against the wind. We remained in camp here the next day, when the day following we started for Sioux City, where, without further delay, we arrived in due time. I arrived a few hours in advance of the train, much to the surprise of many of my friends, who had but a short time previous learned from some of the passengers on the eastern stage that had passed up, that I had perished in the storm. My friend, Hon. I. Pendleton, who, on learning the news, and not knowing that I had returned, came to my house to break the sad intelligence to Mrs. L., but I had relieved him of that unpleasant duty. My feet were now so much swollen that I was unable to walk for several days without the aid of crutches. I suffer much to this day, and doubtless will until the day of my death, from the effects of that adventure in a snow storm.

Clark was a young man of noble impulses, with a generous and kind heart, always open to suffering humanity. Like other men, he had his faults, and among them was a weakness for fat pullets. On our return, while camped at Ida Grove, near Judge Morehead's house, I accidentally stumbled on Clark while in the act of picking one of the Judge's pullets. I could not reprove him, but thought of General Jackson when a favorite Colonel was reported to him as being beastly drunk. The General said, "Col. — has done good fighting enough to get drunk just when he pleases." Clark had rendered me incalculable service, and was entitled to a good fat pullet. Though I have not seen him since a short time after our return, and have lost all track of him, my heart is yet warm with gratitude towards him, and ever shall be until a grateful heart shall cease to throb. May the choicest blessings of heaven rest upon him, wherever he may be.

Nothing aside from the monotonous roll call and daily drill occurred that winter, until the night of the 26th of January, when about twelve o'clock the report of a gun was heard at the foot of Douglass street. As this was not an unusual occurrence, it did not attract much attention. The facts were revealed the next morning about eight o'clock, when the lifeless body of a soldier, J. H. Noland, company E, 6th Iowa, was found near the corner of Douglass and Front streets. On examination it was found that he had received a deadly gun-shot wound in the upper part of the abdomen, which must have terminated his existence in a very few minutes. In tracing the blood, it was found to lead to the door of a chicken coop belonging to the "Wasegan" House, kept by H. A. Fuller. In the coop was found a double-barrel shot-gun, so arranged that attempting to force an entrance into the premises, the gun would be discharged. Hence the supposed fatal wound of the deceased. An inquest was held when the following verdict was rendered by the Jury, viz: "That the deceased came to his death by a gun-shot wound, received from a gun, the trigger

of which was pulled by himself, near the Wasegan House stable."

The deceased left an almost helpless wife and two small children to mourn his tragic end. Mr. Fuller was at once suspicioned of having placed the gun in the building aforesaid. Threats of violence, accompanied by hostile demonstrations, were made against the life and property of Fuller, who, fearing that he might fall into the hands of a mob, went to R. McEhany's livery stable, where he procured a horse and buggy, and started down the river. Col. Pattee (who then commanded this military post, Gen. Sully being absent), being informed of the fact, ordered a file of soldiers to follow him and bring him back for trial. They overtook him about seven miles from town, and brought him back. Fuller waived an examination, and gave bonds in two thousand dollars for his appearance at the April term of court. The prompt action on the part of Col. Pattee soon allayed all apprehensions of danger to Fuller or his property. Mr. Fuller had been much annoyed by thieves, having lost about two hundred dollars in fat pigs, turkeys, and chickens. He resorted to every device and means to protect them that he could think of, without taking life, all of which proved abortive. He became desperate, and resorted to the means above stated, which proved effectual. When court sat Fuller's case came up before the grand Jury, who, after a short consultation dismissed it, as there was no proof that he placed the gun in the position it was when found. This in a measure put a stop to this kind of thieving.

About this time there were many charges made against Capt. Bagg, quartermaster, and other officers in high rank, for swindling the government in the letting of fat contracts in the quartermaster's department. The *Sioux City Journal*, a staunch and reliable journal, now one of the leading papers of the northwest, then edited by Mahlon Gore, came out in a long array of charges against Quartermaster Bagg, charging him with sharing largely with J. W. Bosler, a notorious sharper in fat contracts. Friend

Gore cried aloud and spared not, and seemed determined to sew up the Baggs. He closed his list of charges against different officers by saying, "We have now fairly started out in the task of letting daylight in upon the infernal schemes of these men. We propose to follow them up until the tale is unravelled, or until our wind is shut off. If we fail in having these men brought to justice, we will at least use our best endeavors to prevent them from securing promotion from the hands of the government which they never lost an opportunity to rob. None need feel agrieved if they have been passed by. We are on the trail, and will endeavor to do them justice." Gore was game, and meant business, and was the cause of ousting some of the swindlers. Capt. Baggs, if we remember rightly, was soon after superceded by Capt. Dwight, a most worthy gentleman and officer. One of the charges specified by the *Journal*, was the letting of a contract for forty-five thousand bushels of corn; J. W. Bosler putting in a bid at three dollars and fifty cents per bushel, and John H. Charles, a good and reliable man, three dollars per bushel, and offering security to the amount of one half million dollars, for the faithful performance of the contract; but it was awarded to Bosler, who furnished the corn through sub-contractors, at two dollars per bushel, leaving the handsome and clear profit of sixty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, a portion of which was alleged to have gone into the *government's Baggs*.

We remember of seeing, about this time, in an eastern democratic journal a correspondence from Sioux City, after alluding to the exposures, appealed as follows: "Let them shout their love of country, which is like the Devil's for a Christian.

"Let shoddies delight to bark and bite,
For God has made them so;
But Democrats, you are too wise
To clout and bung each other's eyes."

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