

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

OLD BUCKINGHAM IN TAMA COUNTY

There are in Iowa many abandoned towns whose histories would be both interesting and romantic. The following correspondence tells the story of one of them, and how its history comes to be given in the ANNALS:

YALE UNIVERSITY
THE DIVINITY SCHOOL

May 11, 1926

Prof. B. W. Bacon
1105 Edwards Hall
State Secretary of Iowa.
Dear Sir:

New Haven, Connecticut

My grandfather was William A. Buckingham, governor of Connecticut, 1858-66, and United States senator in 1869 until his death in 1875. Among the eulogies pronounced after his death in the United States Senate is one by a Mr. Wilson, representative from Iowa, which contains the following statement (abbreviated): About 1850-55 a colony of settlers from Norwich, Connecticut, took up land in central Iowa, and named the congressional township and village "Buckingham" after the Governor. He contributed liberally to the building of the first school, and built the church "from basement to spire, which is only rivalled in beauty of design by the landscape it graces."

Upon the death of my mother, Mrs. Eliza Buckingham Aiken of Norwich, only surviving child of the Governor, in 1924, we had many memorials of her father which we were interested to place appropriately, and naturally thought of this village and church.

However, on looking at a map and gazetteer of Iowa we found no mention of such a place, and the "Congregational Yearbook" lists no such church. I shall be gratified if you can give me any information about it.

Very truly yours,

ELIZA BUCKINGHAM BACON.
(Mrs. B. W. Bacon.)

HISTORICAL, MEMORIAL AND ART
DEPARTMENT OF IOWA

Des Moines, September 8, 1926.

Mr. Elmer E. Taylor,
Traer, Iowa.

My dear Mr. Taylor:

A few weeks ago a granddaughter of the late U. S. Senator Buckingham of Connecticut wrote to us making inquiry concerning the village and township of Buckingham, which she says were named for her grandfather. We have examined the "Tama County History" and find verification in it of her statement as to the naming of the village. On consulting an old map of the county, we find that the village was located about two miles northwest of Traer on the line between Perry and Buckingham townships.

On considering this matter with Mr. Harlan he asked me to write to you and ask if you would be kind enough to give us information about the old village. We gather from the county history that the post office there was discontinued in 1873. We presume the town was moved away soon after the coming of the C. & N. W. Railway. Are we right in that supposition? Are there any residences or buildings still standing there? Is the old church of which the history speaks still standing? Any further information concerning this town and church which you think would be of interest we should be glad to have.

Sincerely yours,

D. C. MOTT.

DCM/AMS

THE TRAER STAR-CLIPPER

Established in 1878

Ella C. Taylor, Associate Editor
Traer, Iowa

Nov. 8, 1926.

Mr. D. C. Mott,
Des Moines, Iowa.

Dear Mr. Mott:

I wish first to apologize for the delay in replying to your letter of inquiry concerning the village of Old Buckingham. In some way, the letter was mislaid on Mr. Taylor's desk and only recently came to light, and he has asked me to reply to your inquiries for him.

The old village of Buckingham, which was named for Governor Buckingham of Connecticut, was abandoned in 1873 on account of the building of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railroad. The settlers at Buckingham tried to get the railroad through their settlement but failed and the town site of Traer was located as the proper place for a depot, etc. Naturally, a town followed the railroad and the business men in Buckingham recognized the futility of attempting to do further

business there. The railroad was completed in 1873 and by 1874 many of the store buildings had been moved to Traer. Most of the citizens moved here also and both the Methodist and Congregational churches were moved to Traer. There are probably not more than three or four of the old buildings now left that were there at that time.

Governor Buckingham became interested in this little settlement through his acquaintance with the Connell family who came here in 1853, or thereabouts, some of whose descendants are still living in Traer. A son of Margaret Connell lives on the old Wood homestead in Buckingham now. Margaret Connell married Jonas Wood, who came west at the same time. The original house has been torn down, however, to make way for a modern farm home.

Governor Buckingham's first gift to the Buckingham settlement, I think, was in the spring of 1856. The settlers felt the great need for a schoolhouse and planned to build a structure twenty feet square and twelve feet high. Through correspondence with the Connell family, Governor Buckingham knew of this movement and he wrote back suggesting that the building be made longer so that it could be used for religious services as well, and said that if his suggestions were favored, he would be glad to help financially. Accordingly, he donated \$100 and the building was made twelve feet longer and served this double purpose for fourteen years. In 1870 a new two-story building was erected containing four rooms and four teachers were employed for several years. Later, however, this was given up and now the children attend school in Traer, being driven back and forth in school busses. The building stands, the lower story being used as a dwelling, but is in a state of decay.

A Congregational church was formed in the settlement in 1856. At first they met at the homes of the members and had no regular pastor. Later they hired a pastor and changed their meeting place to the various schoolhouses, sometimes in Buckingham, in West Union or in the Clark district. This accommodated the members who lived far apart. Finally in 1866 the membership had grown to the point where they dared to think of a church building and a site was chosen in Old Buckingham. Rev. B. Roberts was the pastor. He hauled most of the lumber from Waterloo himself and did much of the work on the building. June 19, 1867, the church was dedicated, President Magoun of Grinnell College preaching the sermon. The church cost \$4,000, one half of which was contributed by Governor Buckingham and the other half by the people in the vicinity. The Governor also gave the carpet and the Bible. Miss Ripley, a sister of Mrs. Buckingham, gave the communion set, which is in existence today, and the church was called Ripley chapel in her honor.

The town of Traer having been started, in the summer of 1874 the members voted to move their building from Buckingham to Traer. The building was taken down, moved to Traer and rebuilt. In June, 1875,

it was rededicated. A prosperous church was built up here and with the growth of the town a larger church was needed. The money was raised and a plan approved in the winter of 1900. The first Sunday in April very touching farewell services were held in the old church and on Monday they began tearing it down. In the spring of 1901 the new church was dedicated, a handsome brick structure costing nearly \$25,000. Since then a fine brick parsonage has been built, making a church property of perhaps \$35,000 in value. It is called the Ripley Congregational church to perpetuate the name. When the Chicago & North Western Railway came through Traer, a little town was started five miles from here northeast and was called Buckingham to perpetuate the name of the old town and the man who did so much for the early settlers.

I think this is about all concerning the settlement that would be of interest to the descendants of the family. They can be assured that the name of Buckingham will always be remembered in this locality.

Very truly,

ELLA C. TAYLOR.

244 Edwards Street, New Haven, Conn., Nov. 21, 1926.

Mr. E. R. Harlan.

Dear Sir:

Your letter enclosing Mrs. Taylor's story of Buckingham has been received and contents noted. We are grateful for the account of the town, to which we had planned to give, if possible, an object of interest connected with my grandfather, but as the original town has disappeared, we feel that there is nothing further to be done. I will forward your letter to my brother, who is the only surviving grandson of Gov. Buckingham.

Sincerely yours,

ELIZA BUCKINGHAM BACON.

(Mrs. Benj. W. Bacon.)

The following concerning the recent reopening of the school at Old Buckingham appeared in the *Traer Star-Clipper* of January 7, 1927:

OLD BUCKINGHAM SCHOOL

School opened in Old Buckingham schoolhouse last Monday after having been closed many years. The enrollment is eleven. Miss Luella Hulme is the teacher. (From the *Star-Clipper* of December 24, 1926.)

The Old Buckingham schoolhouse is one of the few remaining landmarks of early days in north Tama before the birth of Traer. There is a wealth of interesting historical memories associated with this old structure. The Independent school district of Buckingham was formed in 1868, and the two-story building that remains today was erected in

1870. It was for many years regarded as one of the finest school buildings in the county. John Frazee of Toledo, who afterward gained success as an educator, was the first principal. It was under Mr. Frazee that the practice of holding school nine months in the year was started. Up to that time the young children of north Tama went to school during the summer. The older boys and girls attended during the winter months only. They were needed on the farms during the other seasons.

Two schools were built in Buckingham Township before the two-story structure at Old Buckingham was erected. There was a school for those living in the east end of the township and another for those of the west end. The large building in Old Buckingham village took the place of the first schoolhouse built in north Tama, which was in 1856. Miss Rachel Wood had taught a school in a little cabin just over the line in Perry Township in 1854.

The first school building in north Tama was at first planned to be twenty feet square, twelve feet in height, but when Governor Buckingham of Connecticut, for whom the township and village were named, heard of the plan from some of his personal friends who were early settlers here he persuaded the people to make it larger—thirty-two feet in length—so that the building could be used for church services and community gatherings as well as for school purposes. As an act of greater persuasion, the governor sent a gift of \$100 to the cause, and the building was erected according to his suggestions. Henry Daniel was the contractor and builder, and Miss Jane Noble the first teacher. For fourteen years the building was used as a house of worship by all the church denominations represented in the settlement, without the least friction or ill feeling.

There were many other uses made of the building. The early settlers, both fathers and mothers, held public debates in the schoolhouse. Later came the lyceums, singing schools and community programs. On these programs the residents were nearly always the performers, although occasionally some newcomer or visitor would take part.

Two boys who were afterward elected governor of the state of Iowa practiced their first flights of oratory in the Old Buckingham schoolhouse. They were Buren R. Sherman and Leslie M. Shaw. They had come to north Tama to work on farms. Governor Shaw came into national prominence in later years by serving as secretary of the treasury in the national cabinet.

Hon. G. Jaqua, who was one of the most learned men in north Tama for many years, who served on the county board of supervisors for ten years and who represented Tama County two terms in the Iowa General Assembly, was the teacher of the Old Buckingham school several terms, and also served as school director. Mr. Jaqua later became an agricultural editor. He and "Tama Jim" Wilson were among the first men in Iowa to realize the importance of proper newspaper publicity and discussion to agricultural problems and methods, and as a result of the

efforts of these men the *Star-Clipper* for many years was among the few newspapers in the state that had a farm page as a regular weekly feature.

Mr. Jaqua came to north Tama in 1856, and during his first winter here was pressed into service as teacher of the Old Buckingham school. He and his wife had been teachers in an academy in Ohio. He had fifty pupils here, many of them coming from a distance of several miles. Among his first pupils were "Tama Jim" Wilson, Miss Flora Wilson, who is yet living in Waterloo, and Mrs. Samuel Reid.

When the Bunker boys, notorious horse thieves of Buchanan county, who operated over a large territory in the state, were lynched in the timber west of the present site of Traer in the late fifties, one of the first big news events that put north Tama County in the public eye throughout the state, the bodies, found hanging to trees by three men of the settlement two or three days after, were cut down and brought to the old schoolhouse in Buckingham village. Mr. Jaqua was teacher of the school at that time. He had to dismiss school. The news of the hanging spread rapidly throughout the settlement, and the village was crowded all day. The coroner at Toledo was notified and an inquest held. The schoolhouse was packed. Steve Klingaman, who operated a sawmill near the present site of the George Knoop property in west Traer, and who was involved in the lynching of the Bunkers, was summoned before the coroner's jury, of which G. Jaqua was a member. According to Mr. Jaqua, who once related the story to the writer, Klingaman was badly frightened and would not talk. The jury returned a verdict that Klingaman assisted in the hanging. Following the inquest, Klingaman was taken to Iowa City for trial. The bodies of the Bunker brothers were buried in the potter's field of Old Buckingham cemetery. John Thomas, a cabinet maker of the village, made the coffins, and Josh Wood and Horace Hartshorn dug the graves. Klingaman was placed under \$5,000 bond, and in order to secure a bondsman he deeded his property to his brother Hiram, and brother-in-law, Peter Nungesser. Getting his liberty on bond, he left the country and was never heard from again. It is supposed he went to California, where he had made his "stake" before coming to Perry Township. The two officers who were involved in the lynching, named Seaman and Small, were indicted by a Tama County grand jury. The sheriff went to Polk County and arrested them, but the story is that they were taken from him by a mob and were never brought to trial.

Another early teacher of the Old Buckingham school was Esther Wilbur, who after several years of teaching became the wife of "Tama Jim" Wilson and the mother of a large family.

The Old Buckingham schoolhouse was the scene of many interesting public meetings in early days, usually consisting of political speeches and debates. One of the first political addresses ever delivered in north Tama by a speaker of national reputation was in the schoolhouse at

Buckingham by James Harlan, distinguished United States senator from Iowa, who afterward became a member of the cabinet of President Lincoln. There were also held a number of debates from time to time by rival candidates for Congress and for the state legislature.

The schoolhouse was the scene of patriotic meetings at the outbreak of the Civil War. It was at Old Buckingham that a north Tama company was organized for war service by W. H. Stivers of Toledo, which became a part of the Fourteenth Iowa Infantry and saw its first active service in the battle of Fort Donelson, later being engaged at Shiloh, Vicksburg, and the disastrous Red River campaign under Banks. The regiment was mustered out November 16, 1864. Many of the north Tama soldiers lost their lives in the South.

Soon after the fall of Fort Sumpter in 1861 a military company was formed in north Tama which drilled at Old Buckingham and West Union. At the first call for volunteers several boys enlisted in nearby cities. The first war meeting in the north end of the county was in September, 1861, at the Buckingham schoolhouse. Nearly every man in the settlement was there. Speeches were made by Captain Stivers, Mr. Connell, J. T. Ames and others. There was no wild cheering or applause, but rather a serious deliberation upon the momentous war question. John Gaston, Peter Wilson and B. F. Thomas signed the muster roll that night. Next day they were joined by John McKune, John R. Felter and others. A week later the company was called together to Toledo, and the trip to the county seat was made in farm wagons. After a dinner served by the church ladies and after the final parting with friends, the journey by wagon was continued to Marengo, the nearest railroad station. The company entrained there for Davenport, where the Fourteenth Iowa regiment was mobilized.

Tama County with less than 800 men fit for war service, sent nearly 400 to fight for the Union, and north Tama, with scarcely 150 men of military age, sent 80. And while the boys were with the colors the women of the settlement helped with the work at the plow, reaper and threshing machine.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME "CHARITON"

Inquiry is frequently made concerning the origin of the name "Chariton." In 1804 when the Lewis and Clark expedition went up the Missouri River and passed the mouths of the Chariton rivers they noted the name in the diary they kept descriptive of their trip. In the "History of the Expedition of Lewis and Clark" by Elliott Coues, the original diary is published and

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