

THE WOODBRIDGE SELL;

A CHAPTER FROM THE UNPUBLISHED HISTORY OF
CEDAR COUNTY.

BY WM. H. TUTHILL.

About six miles west of Tipton, on one of the roads running toward Iowa City, may be found a post office bearing the euphonious name of Woodbridge, snugly nestled in a pleasant neighborhood composed of some half a dozen or more thriving farmers, who, desirous of mail facilities, had, during the Polk administration, procured the establishment of the office, and secured the appointment of Mr. Henry Bagley (an ardent and devoted whig) as postmaster, there being, strange as it may seem in our degenerate days, no competing aspirants for the situation, although perhaps the emoluments of the office, estimated at something less than twenty-five dollars per annum, might be considered a good and sufficient reason why the "Nasbys" of that day were not more numerous.

The duties of the incumbent were performed to the entire satisfaction of the mail patrons thereabout, and "all was quiet" at Woodbridge. Time rolled on; and in the mutations of our political history, General Zachary Taylor succeeded James K. Polk, and had complimented the young and thrifty state of Iowa by appointing our old friend Fitz Henry Warren, Esq., assistant postmaster general, when the removal of democratic incumbents and substitution of whig officials became the order of the day.

This procedure, although only practically carrying out the Jacksonian policy, was looked upon as a gross outrage by the losing party, if the indignant comments and denunciations of the democratic newspapers of the day are to be considered competent evidence, and amongst them the fierce vernacular diatribes of the Jackson County Democrat, or "Threshing Machine," as it was sometimes facetiously entitled, then edited

by J. B. Dorr, Esq., were prominent in intensity and bitterness, pouring with unsparing violence on the hapless head of Fitz Henry the full volume of its inky fulminations.

Now, it so happened that just at this particular juncture, our Woodbridge P. M. being about to remove from the neighborhood, it became necessary to obtain a successor, but upon enquiry, not a single whig could be found willing to fill the vacancy, and only after much solicitation, an honest, staid and quiet farmer by the name of Asa Haskin, who, by the way, was a faithful democrat, consented to receive the important trust. Whereupon the writer was called upon to make a proper statement to the department of the merits of the case, which being done, the resignation of Henry Bagley was received, the appointment of Asa Haskin made in due form of law, and the new appointee immediately entered upon the discharge of his duties with the unanimous concurrence of all the inhabitants of the settlement.

It was, perhaps, wicked to sell an editor, but the opportunity was so tempting that the sin was overlooked, and a communication concocted, purporting to be from a citizen of Woodbridge, addressed to the editor of the Jackson County Democrat, headed in large letters, "ANOTHER OUTRAGE!" and stating that "the citizens of our usually quiet place have this day received the intelligence that we have lost our worthy and efficient postmaster, Henry Bagley, Esq., and that Asa Haskin has been appointed in his place. No fault has ever been charged, nor could any be found against Bagley. He was not only popular as an officer, but highly esteemed as a citizen, and the question may well be asked, why should he be displaced for such a man as Haskin? Please, Mr. Editor, give this due publicity, as another of the high-handed and tyrannical acts of the despot now in power." To this missive a P. S. was added, that the writer did not append his name, and would mail it at Tipton, as he wished to avoid any suspicion from the new P. M.

The communication was intended, and did, convey to the editor a very different meaning from its literal reading, and as

anticipated, the article itself not only appeared in the next issue of the paper, but was accompanied by a half column of indignant editorial, denouncing the oppressive and outrageous act, and in good hearty saxon expletives abusing Fitz Henry Warren for removing such an excellent and worthy man as Bagley, and appointing in his stead so degraded a specimen of humanity as Haskin, and that this despotic exercise of power for party purposes, precisely similar to other flagrant acts already noted, would sink the perpetrator and his party to the lowest depths of infamy.

The *sell* was complete, and the *expose* duly appeared in the Iowa City Republican, in the shape of a communication from Tipton, calling attention to the fiery article in the Democrat, and stating that the editor must have been grievously imposed upon, as the simple facts were that Bagley, who was an uncompromising whig, had resigned, and the terribly abused second assistant postmaster general had appointed Haskin, a very worthy man, although a democrat, to fill the vacancy, and suggesting the strong probability that many of the other cases so savagely denounced might prove equally free from censure if the facts were known.

To this *expose* the "Threshing Machine" maintained a dignified silence. It was doubtless a sore subject, but enquiries were instituted to ascertain the author of the *hoax*, and the manuscript forwarded to Tipton to ascertain by comparison of handwriting, the identity of the audacious joker. This proved a lamentable failure, for the author having anticipated such action, had only forwarded a *copy*, written by a person whose penmanship would not be recognized.

The *denouement* occurred many years afterward. The war of the rebellion had broken out, and the editor nobly withdrawing from political strife, volunteered to battle for the Union, and became known as one of the patriotic and gallant officers of whom Iowa may well be proud, when at a casual meeting, the writer gave Col. Dorr the whole history of the occurrence, and both had a hearty laugh over the Woodbridge Sell.

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