

# ANNALS OF IOWA.

---

VOL. VIII. IOWA CITY, OCTOBER, 1870. No. 4.

---

## THE EARLY HISTORY OF IOWA.

BY CHARLES NEGUS.

(Continued from page 216.)

### A CHAPTER OF CRIME.

#### THE INDIAN GIRL HAXTA.

In 1838, while the Sioux occupied the northwest part of Iowa, and the Pawnees lived on the west bank of the Missouri, on the river, about one hundred and fifty miles above Council Bluffs, there happened an incident quite revolting to civilization.

The Pawnees have been noted as a warlike and cruel people, and had long been at variance with the Sioux, and at that time were engaged in a fierce and sanguinary war.

In the month of February of this year, the Pawnees captured a Sioux girl, about fourteen years old, named Haxta. She was taken to their village, where she was kept as a prisoner, and treated as one of their own tribe. Her situation being known to the Indian traders in that vicinity, they made efforts to purchase her liberty, that she might be restored to her parents. But these efforts proved unsuccessful. She was kept as a prisoner, and treated kindly for several months.

About the time the Indians commenced to plant their corn, the chiefs and warriors, about eighty in number, held a council, at which they determined to offer her "to the spirit of fecundity in a new corn crop, which they were about to plant." At the close of the council she was taken from her lodgings, and, accompanied by the whole council, was led from wigwam to wigwam through the whole village, at each of which she was presented with a present.

On the twenty-second of April, two days after she had been presented with these presents, she was led to the place of her sacrifice; and not until she arrived at this spot was she informed of the doom which awaited her. The place selected was between two trees, which stood about five feet apart. Three bars of wood were fastened to the trees, as a platform for her to stand upon. A fire was kindled under the bars, and supplied with dry fuel till the flames would reach the platform. Two stout warriors then raised the girl by the arms, mounted the platform, and caused her to stand directly over the flames. Two small fagots of dry wood were ignited and placed under her arm-pits; while she was thus suffering torture, the assembled population of the village stood around, at a short distance from their victim, to witness the scene.

After she had thus suffered till exhausted nature had nearly surrendered life, all the warriors, who were standing by with their bows and arrows, at a given signal, let fly their arrows, and every vital part of her body was pierced with these missiles. As soon as life was extinct, their arrows were pulled from the quivering flesh, and, while her body was still warm, her flesh was cut in small pieces from her bones, and placed in baskets.

The baskets of flesh were taken to a newly prepared corn-field; here, the principal chief first took a piece of flesh from the basket, and squeezed from it a drop of blood upon the deposited grains of corn; this example was followed by the others, till every hill had been bathed with blood, when the corn was covered with earth. And thus closed the fate of the Sioux Indian girl, Haxta.

## BILL JOHNSON.

About this time (1843), there was a man in Iowa who attracted much attention, and who was known by the name of "Bill Johnson." There had been a man in Canada who was known to the public by this name. This man had taken an active part in some of their political movements, and had carried his measures to such an extent that he was charged with treason, and to elude the grasp of the civil authorities secreted himself among the islands of the St. Lawrence. Here, with a party of his associates, for some months he managed his enterprise for political reformation, and baffled all efforts of the civil authorities to arrest him; frequently making sallies upon the shipping, which went up and down the river, to obtain his supplies.

This man and his exploits were subjects of many newspaper comments, and the people of the United States, to a great extent, sympathized with him in his political undertakings; and he was commonly styled the "Canadian patriot," or, "the hero of a thousand exploits."

An individual pretending to be the Canadian patriot, came into Iowa with a young girl, whom he represented to be his daughter, and settled in Clayton county, which, at that time, was very sparsely settled, and was attached to Dubuque county, for judicial purposes. Johnson had not been in this location very long, before, for some reason, he became very obnoxious to his neighbors; and some eight or ten white persons, accompanied by a party of Indians, went, one cold night, to his house, and he represented that they took him from his bed, forced him out of doors, and tied him to a tree, and, after giving him about fifty lashes on his bare back, ordered him and his daughter Kate to pack up their things and leave the neighborhood within two hours, and never to return again, at the peril of their lives.

Johnson and his daughter, after being thus dealt with, started in the night, and travelled a distance of twenty-five miles, over a prairie country, when it was so cold that one of

the rioters was reported to have frozen to death; another froze his feet, and several others were more or less frost-bitten before they could get to their own homes. When Johnson and his daughter rehearsed in Dubuque the treatment they had received, and the old man representing himself to be the Canadian patriot, they elicited much sympathy in their behalf. The newspapers published their wrongs to the world, and the citizens of Dubuque interested themselves in bringing the offenders to justice. The rioters were arrested, and four of the number, by the names of Evans, Spencer, Parrish, and Rawley, were convicted, and one was sentenced to the penitentiary for two years, and the others fined two hundred dollars each.

After this transaction Johnson left Dubuque, and coming to the southern part of the territory with his daughter, he stopped and made a claim in Mahaska county. Johnson was a large, stout man, well built, bold and resolute in his manners, and his whole bearing of such a character as was calculated to inspire fear and dread in those who might chance to meet with his displeasure.

He had not been in Mahaska county long, before a young man by the name of Peck, who had made a claim near to Johnson's, became enamored with Miss Kate, and the young twain wished to be joined as husband and wife. The old man, being informed of their wishes, was violently opposed to it, and ordered Peck to stay away from his house. But Peck, not willing to give up the object of his love, watched an opportunity when the old man was away from home, took the girl, and came to Benjamin McClary's, a special friend of his, in Jefferson county, where they were married.

The old man coming home and finding his daughter gone, soon learned the cause of her absence, got on their trail, and followed in hot pursuit. The young couple had been married, and had just retired to bed, when the old man arrived at McClary's. He entered the house with a drawn pistol, ascended the ladder to the loft of the cabin, where his daughter and her spouse had gone to bed; made her get up and dress her-

self, ordered her to go down the ladder, put her on a horse, and rode away, while her husband stood by, a silent spectator, and dared not move a finger or say a word in her behalf.

Young Peck, though he showed no resistance at the time, did not, as it is presumed from the sequel, quietly brook the insult offered, or forget the injury received, in being thus deprived of his wife; for, a few evenings after Johnson returned with his daughter to his home in Mahaska county, some person, just after dark, approached his house, which was occupied only by himself and daughter, pointed a rifle through a hole in the cabin, and sent a leaden bullet through his heart, and the old man fell on the floor and died without speaking a word.

Peck was arrested for the murder, and lodged in the jail of Washington county, which then had judicial jurisdiction over all the territory west of it. He subsequently had his trial, and was acquitted, though there was little doubt in the mind of the public, that he was the murderer of this bold and daring man.

These transactions made Johnson so notorious a character in Iowa, that means were taken to ascertain if the history he had given of himself was correct; and it was satisfactorily found out that he was an impostor; a man of low repute; and not the distinguished Bill Johnson, the Canadian patriot. And, on an investigation of the circumstances attending his troubles in Clayton county, it was very evident that he and Miss Kate had perjured themselves on the trial of those charged with abusing them,—so much so, that the governor thought proper to pardon these convicts; and these individuals, upon being pardoned, immediately took measures to arrest Miss Kate for perjury. But the friends of Peck, at his request, interposed, and sent her off out of the territory in time to elude the officers of the law, and she thus escaped a legal investigation.

And thus ended the career of this man and his daughter in Iowa, much to the chagrin of those who were instrumental in

helping to convict those who, as they supposed, had inflicted a flagrant wrong upon Bill Johnson, the Canadian patriot, the celebrated hero of a thousand islands.

---

#### THE INDIAN TRADERS.

About this time, the Winnebago Indians, who lived in the norther part of Iowa, on the neutral grounds, were very troublesome. Some unprincipled whites were in the habit of selling them whiskey, and prompting them to commit depredations by stealing and robbing.

While under the influence of whiskey, some of the tribe murdered Messrs. Tegardner and Atwood, traders in the Indian country, and severely wounded the son of the former gentleman. These murders were committed at their trading house, which the Indians set on fire, and the house and the dead bodies were burned to ashes.

Some of the Indians supposed to have been engaged in these murders were taken prisoners, brought to Dúbuque, and lodged in jail. They remained in prison a long while before they were brought to trial, and, while confined, one of them, named Wah-con-chaw-kaw (big Indian), killed one of his companions, and when interrogated why he did it, the only answer was, that "so great a liar ought not to live." The others had their trial and were all acquitted; but Wau-con-chaw-kaw was convicted, and sentenced to the penitentiary for life.

While waiting for a trial, some of the Indians escaped from the jail, and after being absent some time, very unexpectedly to everybody, came back. The reason of their return was, probably, because their comrades would not receive them as belonging to their nation till they had answered to the penalties of their crime, or been honorably acquitted, supposing, if they protected them, that their nation would be held responsible for their crimes.

## COFMAN.

In the spring and summer of 1845, the west seemed to be infested with a band of desperadoes and reckless characters, and the public mind was almost daily startled by the report of horse-stealing, robbery, or some bloody crime.

A young man in Washington county, by the name of McCally, ran away with a man's wife by the name of Cofman, who, being left with several small children, and not knowing how to better his condition, made pursuit, overtook the run-aways, and brought his wife back. McCally soon returned to the neighborhood, and sought interviews with Mrs. Cofman, much to the annoyance of her husband. One Sunday evening, Cofman and his wife started to pay a visit to one of their neighbors; their course led them to pass by a cornfield, and Cofman was carrying a child in his arms. McCally (as was supposed), in a collusion with Mrs. Cofman, had secreted himself in the cornfield with a loaded rifle, and as the couple were passing his place of concealment, shot Cofman dead on the spot, the ball just missing the child.

## MILLER AND LIECY.

On the 25th of April, 1845, John Miller, with his son-in-law, by the name of Liecy, with their families, emigrated from Ohio, and stopped in Lee county, where they offered to pay cash for a good farm; and, from this circumstance, it was soon reported through the neighborhood that he had a large amount of money.

Miller, Liecy, and another man were the only male inmates of the house. On the night of the tenth of May, the family, as usual, retired to bed for the night. About twelve o'clock at night they were aroused from their slumbers by three men entering the house with a dark lantern, and demanding their money. The old man and his son-in-law, not being disposed to quietly give up their money, did not readily comply with their demands, but undertook to drive the robbers from their house, while the third man, being frightened, hid himself under the bedclothes.

There was a desperate struggle between the robbers and the old man and his son-in-law. Miller was stabbed in the heart, and immediately breathed his last. Liecy, being first shot with a pistol, and then receiving several deep gashes upon the head and back from a bowie-knife, fell helpless on the floor. The assassins, being disheartened at the bold resistance with which they had been received, and, probably, fearing that the disturbance which they had made might raise the neighbors, made a hasty retreat without securing their booty.

The news of this bloody tragedy spread rapidly through the settlement, and the whole neighborhood became alarmed for their own safety. Every imaginable effort was made to discover the perpetrators, but for a long while, nothing could be ascertained which threw any light upon the dark transaction.

A cup was found near the house, which was supposed to belong to one of the murderers, which he had probably dropped in his hurry to get away from the scene of carnage.

A man by the name of Edward Bonny, who resided at Montrose, and well calculated for finding out dark deeds, having heard of the cup, undertook to ascertain the owner, and by strategem, and a series of maneuvering, he found the owner of the cup, and became satisfied that two young men by the name of William and Stephen Hodges, and a Thomas Brown, who resided at Nauvoo, must be the men who had committed the murder.

Brown made his escape; but the two Hodges were arrested and taken before Liecy, who was still living, though he died soon after from his wounds, and they were identified by him as being two of the men who entered the house.

The district court of Lee county, at this time, was in session, and the Hodges were indicted and arraigned for trial, but they succeeded in delaying their sentence for a few weeks, by taking a change of venue from that county to Des Moines county. They were tried at Burlington, found guilty, and, on the fifteenth of July, publicly executed; they being the first persons who ever suffered capital punishment in the southern part of Iowa.

## COL. GEORGE DAVENPORT.

On the fourth of July, 1845, on Rock Island, opposite Davenport, there was a most daring murder committed on the person of Col. George Davenport.

Col. Davenport, an Englishman by birth, was born in 1783. In his younger days he followed the sea, and as a sailor, came to New York in 1804. While his vessel lay at New York, in attempting to save a fellow-sailor from a watery grave, he broke his leg, which rendered him unfit for duty, and he was left at that city in the hospital.

Soon after recovering from this accident he entered into the United States service as a soldier, and was appointed a sergeant. In the spring of 1806, his regiment was ordered to the west, and put under the command of Gen. Wilkinson. He served as a soldier in the army of the United States for ten years. After he was discharged, he went into the employment of Col. William Morrison, of Kentucky, a government contractor, as his agent for furnishing the troops with provisions.

In the spring of 1816, he came up the Mississippi with a body of United States troops, under the command of Col. Lawrence. They came up to the mouth of Rock river, where they stopped and made an examination for a suitable place to build a fort, and selected the lower end of Rock Island as the most suitable point. The troops landed on the Island the 10th of May, 1816, and as soon as their encampment was completed, Davenport "employed the soldiers to cut logs and build a store house for the provisions." "This was the first building" ever erected on the island. The soldiers immediately went to work to build a fortification, which was called Fort <sup>V</sup>Armstrong.

Soon after arriving at Rock Island, Davenport commenced trading with the Indians, and did a very extensive and profitable business.

In 1825 there was a post office established at Rock Island, the first one in this section of the country, and Davenport was

appointed postmaster. In the fall of 1826 he quit trading with the Indians in his private capacity, and became a member of the American Fur Company, and had "the management of the trade from the mouth of the Iowa river up to Turkey river."

In the Blackhawk war Davenport took an active part, and was appointed by the governor of Illinois "acting quartermaster general, with the rank of colonel."

After the close of the Blackhawk war he built on Rock Island, on the bank of the Mississippi, a fine residence, which he occupied till his death.

In 1834, Rock Island county was organized, and he was elected one of the county commissioners.

In 1835, he, with six other individuals, purchased from Antoine LeClaire seven-eighths of the "section of land opposite Rock Island," given to LeClaire by the Sacs and Foxes, in the treaty of 1832, and laid out a town which was called Davenport, as a token of respect for the first settler of this section of the country.

At the treaty of 1842, when the Sacs and Foxes sold all their lands in Iowa, Davenport was present, and rendered Gov. Chambers great service in effecting this purchase. Soon after this treaty, the Indians moving west, Davenport withdrew from the Fur Company and gave up the Indian trade, in which he had been engaged over twenty years. As an Indian trader, he had acquired wealth, and became extensively known and highly respected in the west.

On the fourth of July, there was a celebration on the Illinois side of the river, to which all the family had gone, and left the old man at home to take care of the house. It was generally supposed he kept a considerable amount of money about him, which attracted the attention of the desperadoes of the west, and a party of them laid their plans to get his money in their possession. After the family had gone the old man sat down in his parlor, and was engaged in reading a newspaper. Hearing some noise at the well, he arose to ascertain what occasioned it. As he advanced toward the door which

opened the way to the well, it was suddenly opened, and three men stood before him. Before a word was spoken, the foremost one discharged a pistol at him, and the ball passed through the left thigh. As he turned to get his cane to defend himself, the three men rushed upon him, threw him upon the floor, blindfolded him, and tied his arms and legs with hickory bark, so that he was helpless. In this condition they dragged him through the hall, and up stairs to a closet, where was kept an iron safe. The robbers, not knowing how to open it themselves, compelled him to unlock it, and appropriated to their own use all the money it contained. But not getting as much money as they expected, and thinking that there was more about the premises, they then put him on a bed and demanded of him to show them where his other money was kept. The old man pointed to a drawer in a dressing-bureau. The robbers, in their haste, opened the wrong drawer, and not finding any money, renewed their assaults upon his person, and carried them to such an extent that he fainted, and became senseless. They revived him by dashing cold water in his face, and as soon as he became sensible, they again demanded of him to tell them where his money was kept. He again pointed to the drawer; but the robbers again opened the wrong drawer, and finding no money, they renewed their assaults, and choked him till he again fainted. They again attempted to revive him, and threatened, if he did not tell them where his money was kept they would set fire to the house, and leave him in his helpless condition to perish in the flames. The robbers, discovering that their victim was unable to answer their inquiries, now took their leave, taking with them between seven and eight hundred dollars in money, a gold watch and chain, a double-barreled shot gun, and a pistol, leaving the venerable old pioneer tied, so that he could not help himself, and nearly exhausted from their abuse.

He was first discovered in this condition by a Mr. Cole, who, with two others, had been out on a fishing excursion, and returning home in a skiff, passed down the river near the

island, and when opposite to the house they heard the cry of murder. They immediately landed and went to the house. On entering the door, they found the floor besmeared with blood, and heard a cry for help, coming from up stairs. Cole immediately ascended the stairs and made his way to the room from which the cry came, and here he found the old man in a most perilous condition; he released him from the hickory bark bands, leaving him in the charge of his two companions, gave an alarm, and, as quickly as possible, procured medical aid. The physician and his friends rendered all the assistance they could to restore his strength and alleviate his sufferings, and so far succeeded in relieving him that he was enabled to give a minute account of the whole transaction; but he had received so much injury that his physical strength gave away, and he expired between nine and ten o'clock that evening.

The murdering of so prominent a man as Col. Davenport caused a great deal of feeling through the whole west, and great anxiety was felt to find out the perpetrators of this bloody deed. A reward of fifteen hundred dollars was offered by the family for the arrest of the murderers, and the whole community became interested, and were on the look-out and trying to ferret out the assassins, that they might be brought to justice. But days and weeks passed off, and not the slightest information could be obtained of those concerned in the robbery. The success of Edward Bonny in detecting the murderers of Miller and Liecy, in Lee county, and bringing the Hodges to punishment, had given him quite a distinguished character for such undertakings, and the friends of Col. Davenport applied to him for aid. Bonny undertook the task, and by representing himself as a man of dark deeds, got into the confidence of the desperadoes, and after several months' exertions in laying plans and maneuvering, ascertained that the persons who entered the house were generally known by the names of William Fox, Robert Birch, and John Long, and that another man by the name of Aaron Long, was on the outside, standing sentinel, while the others did the work.

inside of the house. He also ascertained that a man by the name of John Baxter, who had been living in the family of Col. Davenport, gave the other parties the information of the money, and how to obtain it. He also learned that a man by the name of Granville Young, and several others were accessories to the robbery. These parties were arrested and lodged in prison; Baxter, repenting of his acts, informed on the others. The two Longs and Young were executed; Fox and Birch broke prison and got away; Baxter was sentenced to be hung, but his sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life; while some others were sent to the penitentiary for a shorter time.

The arrest and conviction of some of the prominent ones of the desperadoes deterred others, so that the community were somewhat relieved from such depredations.

---

### SCENE IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF IOWA.

---

BY ELIPHALET PRICE.

---

#### The Conquest of Sodom.

Situated near the northern boundary of the county of Clayton, and within a mile of the village of Monona, may still be seen the ruins of the once populous and flourishing village of Sodom, whose foundation was inaugurated in the year of our Lord that witnessed the locating of the Indian agency upon the head waters of Turkey river—in 1840. Its contiguousness to the Indian lands, at that time, contributed not a little to the origin of a variety of opinions as to the future object and intent of the inhabitants. The more sagacious portion of the community, skilled in foretelling future events, declared that Sodom was designed as an extensive manufacturing town, which prophetic

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.