

Reminiscences

cago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 93-119, and T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), 324-325 describe various Radical theories of Congress' role in the United States government.

REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER BOY

PART II

by Ellison Orr

Edited with an Introduction
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The author of *Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy* was born in a log cabin on his father's farm in 1857 and grew up in the rugged hill country of northeast Iowa in Allamakee County. As a young man he taught school, was a bank clerk, and later worked as surveyor, land salesman and finally became clerk of court in Waukon, the countyseat. In 1904 Orr became a businessman, manag-

ing the telephone company for the next twenty-five years. A well known amateur naturalist, Ellison Orr joined Dr. Charles R. Keyes of the Iowa Archaeological Survey in 1934 and during the 1930s directed the major excavations of the Survey throughout the State. Although Orr was 77 years old when he joined the Survey and retired finally at the age of 83, he made a lasting contribution to scholarly research. His explorations were the first well-controlled and representative excavations made in Iowa, and his manuscript archaeological reports have been frequently cited by professional archaeol-

ogists. The Orr focus of Oneota culture was named to commemorate his work and at the age of 92 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Science from Cornell College. He died in 1951, widely respected by his friends and colleagues. His autobiography, of which this is the second and final part, only covers his boyhood years. It is an important and interesting social document giving a perspective of the pioneer way of life: the destruction of game, the difficulties of farming with a primitive technology, and finally the closeness of neighbors and social life.

5. Doings

The social activities of pioneer women consisted of "going visiting" and quiltings. At these gatherings all the doings and happenings of the neighborhood were told, commented on and speedily spread about. It was also customary for the women, as well as the men, to exchange work at threshing and butchering time, and to go to the husking bees and barn raisings.

Threshing and butchering times and the barn raisings were always events looked forward to by us boys. Even though there was plenty of hard and dirty work connected with them, there was also plenty of excitement. The dirtier we could go in to meals, which were always better than common—mashed potatoes, roast beef, sauce, pie, cake, and lots besides, and with the big girls and women hustling about and waiting on us—the better we liked it.

In the fall, after the grain was harvested and stacked, the threshing began. In order to have enough help, the farmers of a neighborhood exchanged work, and for weeks we worked in a smother of dust around the machine from early morning till dark. Father owned a machine in those days before the wheat failed, and we threshed our own and some of the neighbor's grain.

Before I was old enough to "feed" the machine I "drove horse-power," keeping five teams circling round and round all the livelong day. Some of the horses, or sometimes both in one team, learned how to shirk, and the driver had to keep the long whip swinging and his mind on the job to furnish the power needed. To be a good feeder was something all thresher men aspired to. It required skill. The bundles were

drawn off the band table, one or two at a time—sometimes we “fed” from both sides—and with a quick move of the arm, they were spread out over the feed board within reach of the all-devouring cylinder and like a flash they were gone. In the meantime another armful had been drawn and spread out, and so *ad infinitum*. The trick was to always have the cylinder taking grain spread evenly across its entire length.

Sometimes the women folks, when the setting was near the house, would come out to see the work and occasionally a venturesome one would get up beside the feeder and put through a bundle or two. But it was a dirty place, and they did not stay long. It was dangerous work, too. Sometimes the feeder would get his hand too near the 1,200 revolutions-a-minute cylinder, and a cylinder tooth would come loose and come out past his head with almost the speed of a bullet.

In the winter time, for the young folks, there were singing schools, spelling schools, parties and dances at the houses. At the spelling schools, and we attended all within half a dozen miles, we would choose sides, two of the best known spellers being selected for the leaders. Words were pronounced to each side alternately. If a word was missed, the speller was out of the game, and the word went to the other side and back and forth till spelled correctly. The side won that had a speller in the game the longest. Then all would stand up in a row and “spell down.” In this the words were pronounced to each in turn. Those who missed sat down till only one was left standing, who, after spelling a word or two right, would purposely spell one wrong. This was considered the proper thing to do. At parties they played drop the handkerchief, needle’s eye, button, button, and other games. Those in which someone had to be kissed were probably the best liked, though on the whole we were an awkward, shy bunch, with conversational ability limited quite largely to wisecracks and sayings.

After Bethel Church was built, every night for several weeks in the winter, there would be revival meetings there. Before that, meetings were held in the schoolhouses. The preachers were, without exception, men of little education and their preaching was full of set phrases and sayings,

mostly directed towards scaring their hearers into believing that they were in danger of hell fire. Hearers were urged to come forward and kneel at the mourner's bench where they were prayed over by the brethren and sisters of the church. There were different stages of the process: first, "getting under conviction," then "going forward" to the mourner's bench, followed by a belief that they were saved. In the spring those who converted were baptized in the most convenient creek, usually William's Run where the water was deep enough.

One of the phenomena attending these meetings was that of "getting the power." This seemed to be a condition analogous to that attained by the whirling Mohammedan dervishes. Those attaining it seemed to be oblivious to their surroundings and to have unusually muscular strength while it lasted. As a small boy, once, at a meeting at the Minert Schoolhouse, I saw our neighbor Waxler, who was such a good pig sticker, get into this condition. It took three or four men to hold him. Also the story went the rounds of the neighborhood that, at a meeting at a private house, one of the Snell girls, while having the power, thrust her hand into a kettle of boiling water but was not burned. Most of the better people who got religion at these meetings "stuck," but the wilder, rougher ones usually "backslid," perhaps to come forward and be converted again the next winter.

Camp meetings were held in the summer in some grove or wood where a platform and seats were erected, and those who attended during the whole meeting lived in tents which they brought. These camp meetings were conducted in the same way as the revival meetings I have been describing.

Working counter to the revival meetings were the dances at the private houses. Usually only a few persons were there from the immediate neighborhood; the dances consisted of one set of quadrilles, and if there was room, the Virginia reel. The music was furnished by old Wat Tryon or old Greely Terrill. I can see them yet perched on a chair on top of a table in a corner, sawing away on their fiddle and calling off. We thought it all great.

Every year as Easter Sunday approached, we boys would begin to hide away eggs for our Easter feast. As the hens of that day had not yet reached the marvelous laying record

of those of today, we had to be circumspect in our takings lest mother in wrath might make us bring them in. Then on Easter Sunday, with perhaps some of the neighbor boys, we would go to some pleasant place in the woods, build a fire and have a feast of eggs, boiled, fried and roasted in the coals. For once we had a surfeit.

Father was a regular subscriber for years to Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, and to the *American Agriculturalist*, the former a weekly, the latter a monthly. We also liked the *New York Ledger*, an all-story paper taken by our neighbor, Mrs. Perry, who loaned it to us.

Then we bought, read and swapped Beadle's dime novels before we found better reading and outgrew them. I can recall the titles of two of them: *Squint-eyed Bob the Bully of the Woods* and *Billy Bowlegs*. Most of them were the rankest of blood-and-thunder Indian stories. There were stories about the English highwaymen, of which *Scarlet Ned* was one. The books were paper covered, about 4 and $\frac{1}{2}$ by 6 inches in size and $\frac{3}{8}$ inches thick. We bought them for a dime; now a well-preserved copy would be worth dollars.

The Fourth of July in those early days was the one big event of the year, and after that, the circus. All the first part of the summer we boys looked forward to them; they seemed so slow in coming.

For the Fourth of July celebration, some grove near the village was selected and a platform built for the speaker and the singers. The seats for the audience were made by laying planks on logs or blocks of wood and everyone sat down on the plank seats alongside and helped themselves. The food was placed on long tables built of boards. Much spread-eagle oratory was indulged in by the speakers; veterans of the Civil War and other notables were invited to sit on the platform, a much-coveted honor.

The singers sang patriotic songs, the boys shot off firecrackers, and everyone visited and had a good time and went home happy. What the people wanted was companionship; they got enough of being by their lonesome out on the farms. All the celebrations that I can now remember were in the Harmon grove just west of town, and the Brewery grove to the southeast.

During the summer, we would all at once find posters of fierce wild animals and wonderful acrobats posted on some barns or sheds: a half-dozen tumblers; two or three bareback riders; a couple of trapeze performers; a trick pony; the ring master and a clown; an elephant and cage of monkeys; but we thought it a wonderful show and could hardly wait till it came. The circus people traveled by team and wagon and once they passed our place. It was quite an event.

6. Civil War

I was too young to remember much about the Civil War, which we called the War of the Rebellion, but the people of the South were rebels and our hatred of them was venomous, and there are a few things that stand out in my memory with startling distinctness.

Charlie Marston, our neighbor's boy, was to go to war, and on a day he, with others, met at Hardin where everybody went to say good-bye and see them off. I can remember that they all had long rooster's feathers in their hats and one of them came and talked to father and mother. The Marston boy died in the South and when his father went down to bring his body home, the next younger boy, who was too small to lift the plow around the corner, did the fall plowing. Then, when Andy Patterson came home after Shiloh, where he was wounded, I remember him hobbling about with a cane in which he had made a hole to hold the "minnie ball" that they took out of his leg, and I remember seeing his wife unwrap a little package of gold coin, part of his pay which he had sent home.

From time to time, the slow news that a battle was on would reach us, and the neighbors, eager for some word, would go to the village to meet the stage and gather evenings to talk about what might be happening. Then at last the weekly papers would come with the lists of killed and wounded, and among them, perhaps, would be the name of someone that we knew. When the draft came, I can remember that father went to town one evening to learn if he were among those drawn, and how worried mother was. I also remember the flag with the black border floating from

the new Liberty Pole, that stood in the street west of the Lutheran Church, when Lincoln was assassinated.

When sister Mate was a babe in arms, mother went back east for a visit; it was the first time since her marriage. We three boys were taken along. At some point on the trip we came upon a train load of soldiers. This apparently was a junction point for the depot platform was crowded with them. Some started to carry along with them a truck load of passengers' trunks, and when mother saw her trunk going she nearly had a fit. But it came back again.

Uncle Dave Ellison was in the service for three years. He was at Vicksburg and the battles preceding it; Fort Hudson, and with Banks on the Red River expedition. After the war was over, he came west to see us and he told of seeing, on a campaign, a solid shot strike a federal cannon square on the muzzle, and how it went flying end over end through the air. And he told how, while waiting at Pleasant Hill for the oncoming victorious rebels, he laid a couple of fence rails up before him that a minute later were hit by a couple of bullets directly in front of his head. Uncle Dave also told us that after Banks got back to New Orleans, the 19th Army Corps to which he belonged was sent by sea to Washington. Grant had swung south of Richmond, and Lee, thinking to draw him off, sent Early on a raid north to threaten Washington. As it was inadequately defended by raw troops, there was great alarm till the arrival of the veterans of his corps. At the end of the war, he marched in the grand review of Grant's and Sherman's armies, a hundred thousand strong, through the streets of Washington.

It was during the campaign for Lincoln's second election that a great barbecue was held at Postville. The speeches were political and party spirit ran high. Much whiskey was drunk, and there were many fights to a finish. Men who had killed or tried to kill in the war down South did not hesitate to nearly kill their neighbors with whom they differed politically.

One of the attractions of this barbecue was an ox roasted whole on a great iron spit over a four-foot-deep pit filled with live coals, the remnant of a big fire. This ox, with an

abundance of good food, was free to all the hungry crowd, and there was coffee by the barrel. Out of all that I must have seen that day, I can remember only the roasting ox and the cook with his white apron bossing the fellows who were keeping the pit filled with coals, and he, every now and then, prodding the roast with a long sharp iron to see how it was coming along.

During the War of the Rebellion there was an Indian uprising around New Ulm in southern Minnesota, and many people were massacred. The news of the outbreak traveled over the country like wildfire, and many of our neighbors were very badly scared, though I do not remember that father was. The Laughlins packed some supplies in their lumber wagon and for days and nights kept a team harnessed ready to hitch up and run. But the Minnesota settlers resisted stoutly, and in a few weeks troops arrived from the armies in the south and chased the Indians into the Dakota country where in a series of small battles they broke up and dispersed them. After the Winnebago were removed to Minnesota and later to a reservation in Nebraska, wandering bands of them would occasionally pass through on their way back to the Upper Iowa or perhaps to some point in Wisconsin.

One summer day, such a band passed the Minert School. We were all frightened but they did not stop. They were strung out along the road for a quarter of a mile and had a few ponies, but most of them were on foot—the squaws carrying big bundles, or some of them both a papoose and a bundle. At the head, alone, marched an Indian clothed in a breechcloth and moccasins to which he had added of the white man's clothes, a plug hat and a white shirt. I can remember how the wind whipped the shirttails about.

7. Chicken, Partridge, and Quail

We had the prairie chicken the year 'round in numbers as they nested with us and seemingly did not migrate. We occasionally came across their nests in the fields. Their season for courtship was along about corn planting time. We would then be awakened in the very early morning by their booming in the nearby fields. Usually, several of them, both cocks and hens, would gather in some open place. The cocks

would thrust their heads straight out, elevate the few long feathers like small wings that covered the bare, bright orange spots on their necks, and while running a few feet, give their woo-oo-oo call.

The prairie chicken had another call something like the hoot of the Barred owl, *Strix varia*, but this was not heard nearly as much as the booming. Sometimes too, we would see the cocks fighting, but the hens made no noise and walked about seemingly quite indifferent to the antics of the males. After mating, during the nesting season and while they reared their brood, we saw but little of the prairie chicken as they kept well to cover. When the young were fully grown, we would see them in coveys about the fields, and later they gathered for the winter into large flocks, sometimes fifty or one hundred. At the approach of spring these flocks broke up and scattered.

I never hunted prairie chickens when a boy except to sneak up and take a shot at them while they sat about some feeding place. Once I shot one from a considerable distance with a Sharp's army rifle. The bird was sitting sunning itself on the top of a straw pile. That was a great shot.

In the winter, we sometimes caught prairie chickens in traps made of lath with small hanging doors that could easily be pushed inwards but not out. We placed these traps, baited with shelled corn, in places where they were likely to go for feed—near corn shocks or a straw pile. They make no more of a nest than that made by a common barnyard hen, and the eggs were a uniform brownish buff. The prairie chicken is probably now extinct as a nesting bird in Allamakee County.

The ruffed grouse, partridge we called it, was in the early days a common bird in the brush and timber-covered areas. In the spring and late fall, the drumming was one of our familiar woodsy sounds. By very careful stalking, I have succeeded in seeing birds drum a number of times, and have shot them from off their drumming logs. On certain old, usually much decayed logs they have exact spots where they drum, and in no other place. Yet I do not know how they make the sound. I could see the bird raise its wings high above its back and begin to beat them, bringing them down appar-

ently as low as the top of the log, then raising them and striking down again and so on. But after the first few beats the motion is so rapid that the eye cannot see just what is done. There is nothing but a blur of moving wings making the long roll.

We used to hunt partridges late in the fall, after the leaves had fallen, by walking slowly and cautiously along some old wood's road, watching the brush on either side of the road. This did not seem to alarm them so long as we kept moving along the road, and if we saw one and shot quickly, we seldom failed to have partridge for dinner the next day.

In the spring, partridges feed on the buds of trees, especially the poplar, and I have known them to come to the soft maple trees around the farm house, a quarter of a mile from the woods. During storms, they have a habit, as probably also has the prairie chicken, of diving into the snow and pushing along under the surface for a distance of ten or twenty feet to a spot where they remain snug and warm till after the storm. Sometimes, though, if the snow packs hard over them, they are never able to break through the crust and get out. Once, on my way to school the morning after a blizzard, I was astonished to see a partridge break out of the snow at the side of the road, almost at my feet, and fly away to the brush not far off. Examination showed that it had entered the snow as described and where it had been sitting, had pushed the snow aside, forming a very comfortable, cozy cavity. On the bottom was a quantity of droppings.

One of the first birds I knew was the quail. They were very plentiful everywhere, and the June days were filled with his piping call. He had another call than "bob-white," which may be expressed by the words "woo-rick," repeated three times, which he gave to call the flock together when scattered by some alarm. Towards evening in the fall of the year, we often heard this latter call. But a quail was good for a couple of toothsome bites, and he was so easy to get. While still a very small boy, I remember seeing one winter many bunches of quail, each hanging on the backside of our neighbor Marston's house. They were the result of the eldest son's skillful trapping.

Quail had a habit, on the approach of night or a storm, of bunching closely together, tails in and heads out, for warmth and to better escape the approach of danger. Often in storms they were drifted over so badly that they were unable to break out. We sometimes found bunches of them when the snow melted, just as starvation and the pitiless cold had left them, frozen solid. The coming of the white man, whose easy prey they were, the destruction of their nesting places on account of the breaking up of the wild lands, and the man or boy with a gun have brought them almost to the point of extinction. In the early days, there were so many that we never thought it could be different, and we shot them because they were good to eat. Once a flock bunched in one corner of the yard during a storm, and father, with a small smooth-bore gun, killed nine of them at one shot. That was a dinner for us.

Another time, when, on a gray day I was hunting rabbits weeds on the side of a wide sinkhole what I thought was a rabbit. A quick shot got instead a half dozen quails bunched there.

In the spring, we saw vast numbers of migrating ducks, geese and cranes, and what father said were swans, passing over. These latter may have been snow geese or wavies which he didn't know anything about. As there were no lakes or streams of any size nearby, the ducks didn't stop, but occasionally a flock of geese would light out in the fields. Early one spring morning a flock of sand-hill cranes came down onto a small slough on the Laughlin land about a quarter mile south of our house. Some were sitting down and others were walking about. They evidently were resting. After they were gone, I went over to the place and found lots of small greenstone and "sugar-stone" gravel in their numerous droppings.

Ducks were everywhere. The Mississippi valley was filled with flying, squawking hosts beyond counting. One hunter of my acquaintance shot seventy in one day from a blind.

8. Passenger Pigeons

We sometimes wonder what it was that destroyed the great dinosaurs and other hulking saurians of the Reptilian Age,

or how the mammoth and mastodon of the Pleistocene came to be exterminated. Though we will never know for certain the specific cause, yet speaking generally, the answer is easy. Anything that changes materially the environment of any living species, unless it has great adaptability, will work its destruction. Notwithstanding, the buffalo furnished the greater part of the food and clothing supply of the American Indian of the Great Plains; it increased to numbers almost beyond belief. But when the white man came with his gun, the buffalo in a few years was almost exterminated. A change of the conditions under which it flourished was the cause.

What can we say of the passenger pigeon of which there now remains not a single living bird. In *Ectopistes migratorius*, the flocking instinct was exceptionally strong, and all parts of the continent, from the Great Plains to the Atlantic and from the Gulf to the Great Lakes and north, were visited, now this year now that, by great armies of this bird, in numbers beyond comprehension. They were also present over the entire area in smaller scattering flocks.

Arkansas was a favorite wintering place for the passenger pigeon because of the abundant supply of mast which its forests afforded. In summer, wherever this mast, consisting principally of acorns, and in the valley of the Ohio River, of beech-nuts, was plentiful, there the immense horde went. If they did not find food in one place or if they had eaten up the supply, they went elsewhere.

In early summer, the great flocks nested where they found conditions right, often in Kentucky, Virginia, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, or Indiana, and once, at least, on the Yellow River in Iowa. In this nesting, which was five miles long, reaching from Moneek in Winneshiek County to the Mississippi River, and two miles wide, nearly every tree in which a place for a nest could be found was used. The larger trees would contain from a dozen to two dozen or more nests.

I was very young the year pigeons nested on Yellow River and remember only one incident in connection with it. We had a timber lot in the woods, a part of the nesting area, and at some time during that summer my father went

down there for a load of wood. When he came back, he brought with him a half dozen fully grown young birds that he had killed with a stick; so plentiful were they and so easy to approach.

It was the habit of the male bird to incubate while the hen was away feeding. After returning, she sat on the eggs while he took his turn at foraging for a meal. Each went out to feed at certain definite times during the day. My father told me that when a flock left the roost, the sound they made was like distant thunder and our home was over two miles from the nearest nests.

It was generally believed by father and his neighbors that the birds gleaned a large part of their food from the recently sown wheat fields of Iowa and Illinois, not only picking up all the uncovered grain but also pulling up that which had sprouted. They also frequented the oak groves feeding on the acorns. Every year, scattering pairs were common everywhere about the groves and big woods. It was the habit of these birds, when not setting on the nests, to congregate in small flocks, and in spring or during the summer it was a common sight to see some flying about. At some time, nearly every year, the big flock in its migrations would pass our way. They might be going in any direction.

When flocks of pigeons were about, someone, usually a boy, had to watch the field and shoo them off. More than once that was my job while father was at dinner. If not frightened away a flock would light down on the field and the birds would start walking across it, picking up the grain as they went. As those that were finding grain were slowed up by the process of picking it up, they soon found themselves at the rear end of the traveling flock and the grain all gone, which they remedied by flying over the other feeding birds and alighting in front, soon to be flown over in their turn by the birds in the rear. And in this manner they went across the field almost as fast as a man could walk, like boys playing leapfrog, cleaning up the newly sown grain until not a kernel was left. Pieces of bright tin on sticks and poles and scarecrows of various kinds were also used to frighten them off.

West of our farm, the wild lands were mostly covered with a young growth of jack oak and poplar among which were standing the very scattering storm and fire scarred large old seed trees. I have seen these old trees so loaded down with resting or roosting passenger pigeons that a limb would sometimes give way under the weight of them, and the tree would erupt the alarmed birds in a sort of exploding pigeon bomb.

My father would tell of how once, in the dusk of the evening, he sneaked up through the brush below, shot along an upward slanting limb, and killed nine birds at one shot with his squirrel rifle. There was one particular group of old trees near the Plum Prairie in which pigeons habitually roosted, and we used to try to get them in the groves when they were full of them; but they kept out of reach of our smooth bore rifles, and we seldom got one. Once a couple of railroad men came out from town with double barreled shot guns, and I saw one of them bring down his bird as it was flying across the road through the grove. It seemed a wonderful shot to me then.

One time when the grove on the eighty, bought from Mrs. Post and north of the new home, was filled with a noisy mob of pigeons, I saw them coming down out of the trees in a feathered stream to drink out of a little pool of clear water with a mud shore. They were all around it, as thick as they could stand, and they drank without lifting their heads as a hen does.

Perhaps nothing contributed more to exterminate the vast multitudes of the passenger pigeon than the systematic netting of them by professional pigeon catchers who followed them the year round wherever they went. The catch was sold without dressing to a buyer who traveled with them. Farmers who lived nearby were hired to haul them to the nearest railroad station where the buyer packed them in barrels or boxes, guts, feathers and all, put a chunk of ice on top of them and shipped them by express to Milwaukee or Chicago. I have seen half a wagon load of dead birds lying beside the bough house of a catcher—one day's work.

The equipment of one of these pigeon catchers consisted

of: a net twelve by twenty feet with one-inch mesh; a half-inch rope about one hundred feet long; a pigeon stool; four hub stakes; two sticks; three or four stool pigeons in a small cage; a hatchet, an extra shirt or two; and socks. They were paid for their catch by the dozen. The buyers kept well advised by telegraph of the movements of the pigeons, either where they were nesting or where feed was plentiful, and, wherever they went, there the catchers followed, spring, summer, fall, and winter, relentlessly to the end.

The catchers came with their outfit by rail to a town near where the birds were. They then scattered out into the country till they found what to them looked like good places for setting the nets, usually in some field surrounded by scattering groves. A feed bed the size of the net was first made, and some grain, obtained from a nearby farmer, was scattered over it. The net was spread over this bed, and two of the corners were fastened to two of the hub stakes driven into the ground. Then two spring poles were set in line with the opposite side of the net, fifty feet or more from the corners opposite the corners fastened to the hub stakes.

The rope was fastened to the spring poles, around one of which a bough house of leafy brush and grass had been built. The other two hub stakes were set at the length of the sticks from the first stakes set and towards the center of the net. The net was then set by pulling it over to the first hub stakes, into a sort of loose roll, and it was fastened there with the notched sticks.

One end of the sticks was butted against the hub stakes towards the center, the other end holding the rope being held down by a notch in the corner hub stakes. The whole was so arranged that a pull on the rope by the catcher in the bough house would release the net, which was thrown up by the sticks as they turned over, and pulled by the spring of the poles to which the rope was attached, and it would flop quickly over the bed, pinning down the luckless pigeons that might be feeding there.

The pigeon stool was a light stick with a shorter piece attached at right angles; the whole was fastened by a hinge to a stake to be driven into the ground. At the end opposite

the hinge was a small round hoop covered with netting to which the stool pigeon was fastened. An attached string ran from the contrivance to the bough house. It was operated by pulling the string slowly, thus lifting the end on which the stool pigeon was fastened, and then letting it drop suddenly. When the bird felt himself falling, he would flutter his wings trying to fly. This looked to his mates passing over like birds feeding, and if hungry they were quite sure to circle and come down. Sometimes they would drop down to their fate without circling.

The catcher also made use of a couple of "fliers" as decoys. These were birds whose eyelids had been fastened together with a thread or who had been blindfolded. Each was fastened to the bough house by about fifty feet of fish line. As they could not see, they would sit perfectly quiet wherever they were placed. When the catcher saw a flock approaching, he would toss these birds into the air, and, when the end of their string was reached, it would pull them down to the ground as if alighting. When we remember that hungry birds had to be frightened away from the newly sown grain fields, it is not hard to understand how easily they were decoyed.

From large flocks, sometimes enough would alight to cover the feed bed; and, when the net was thrown, they would lift it a foot or more in their efforts to escape, many getting out from under it around the edges. They were speedily killed by crushing in the back of the head with the thumb.

The pigeon's nest was a flat platform of small sticks and weeds. The one white egg laid could easily be seen through it from the ground. The usual height from the ground for scattering nesters was from ten to thirty feet; but in the big roosts, it was anywhere from six to sixty feet, and in any place on any kind of a tree where so shiftless a structure could be made to stick. Still I saw remnants of the nests of the big roost on Yellow River in the trees for perhaps half a dozen years afterwards.

I cannot remember clearly now of ever finding more than three nests. The first two, found perhaps the same year, were about fifteen feet up in second growth jack oak trees,

in the scrubby grove west of where the new house was afterwards built. The last one found was about ten feet from the ground in a small burr oak in the then wild and unfrequented valley of Williams Run and on the NE NW of Sec. 18, T 96, R 6 west, Franklin Township. This was after the pigeons had become extremely rare and was a surprise to me. My recollection is that I had not even seen one of these birds for several years before. I cannot now give the year. It may have been the last nest built by a wild passenger pigeon, and I robbed it, taking the egg for my collection.

Mr. Whitbecker, who was deputy auditor at the same time that I was clerk of court, and who was raised in Lansing, told me that when the big flight up the Mississippi River valley encountered strong head winds, the pigeons flew very close to the ground, dipping into the lateral valleys and rising to clear the bluffs. The boys, and men too, would station themselves in the small brush just at the top of the hill and with long cane fish poles would thrash into the flocks as they passed closely over their heads, rising out of the valley. He said that when the flight was on, everyone had pigeon pie.

9. Collecting

Anton Staadt was the younger son of a German baron, who displeased his father by marrying a waitress and was forced to come to America where he nearly starved to death trying to farm. As he had a college education and was an apothecary, he started a little drug store in Postville where he did well. His oldest boy had been a schoolmate of mine when he lived on the farm, and I used to go to the store to see him. Once he showed me a number of end-blown bird's eggs which he had strung on a string like beads, and had stretched across the front window of the store.

Of course I got the bug and had to begin a collection of my own, which grew through the years till I had sets of the eggs of nearly every bird that nested in Allamakee County, a large percentage of which are no longer found there. In this collection, there were more than half a dozen sets of both the great horned owl and the red-tailed hawk.

The prairie horned lark was very abundant also. We would find its nests from the time of beginning work in the

fields up to the time of the second corn plowing when we would find the nests sunk in the ground beside the corn hills. Once, on my way to town, I found one over on the old fair grounds and marked it with a stick. A day or two later there came a "sugar snow," a fall of two or three inches. Passing that way the morning after the storm, I found the nest entirely covered with snow except a small breathing hole. The sitting bird was keeping the eggs warm and made the snow scatter as she flew off.

Along the edges of the sloughs and sparingly over the higher ground were the young second-growth seedlings of the older trees. This tract of wild land was the natural home of the kingbird, the brown thrasher, and the northern shrike. How the thrashers of that day could sing, and how many of them there were! The kingbirds were as numerous, but they only chattered and scolded. Each kingbird was boss of his own particular territory. We were always interested in their battles with the red-tails that happened to pass over their bailiwick. The hawk never put up any fight but seemed to be principally interested in getting away from his tormentors.

Occasionally, we would find a chewink's nest hidden in the hazel brush. These birds were then far more plentiful than now, and their pleasing notes were part of the spring orchestra offering. Rarely, a blue jay, robin or shrike would select one of the scraggy burr oaks for its nesting place. A shrike was always in evidence near his nest. If we saw one frequenting some certain place, we knew that its nest was not far off. The blue jay was more furtive, and neither it nor the robin made any fuss unless we went very close and hung about its home. Any of these open place tree-nests were easy to find, and we found plenty of them.

The first catbird's nest I found was in a cluster of plum brush. The owners of the nest were making a great outcry, and on looking into the matter, I caught a rascally bluejay in the very act of sucking one of their eggs. When he saw me, he made off, leaving at least one of the eggs untouched; I remember how pleased I was with the beautiful green-blue egg that I then saw for the first time.

A few scattering burr oak trees were near our pasture gate and on a horizontal limb of one of them I found a wood pewee's nest; cradled on a limb, lichen covered, and lined with the softest down. This nest, excepting for that of the ruby-throated hummingbird, was the most elegant and beautiful bit of bird architecture in our woods or fields.

In the fork of a young sugar maple, in the big Hart Woods north of Postville, I found the delicate nest of a near relative of the pewee, the least flycatcher. This was one of the very rarest of our birds.

Though the meadow lark and the bobolink were very common, their nests were exceedingly hard to find. So far as I can now recollect, I have but one nest of each to my credit.

While I was at work in the field over near the railroad one spring day a meadow lark flew over with some nest material in her beak. I marked her down, and found in the stubble an almost completed nest. Later I was able to collect the eggs. I think I found other nests at other times, but the recollection of the places of finding has faded from my memory.

On the Laughlin land across the Postville road was a wide grassy slough, wet but not swampy. This was always a great hangout for the bobolinks. Several pairs of them nested there every summer. Often I hunted long for their nests, but only once succeeded in finding one by almost stepping on the setting bird. Just a few blades of grass were laid around a slight hollow in the ground with four heavily spotted eggs therein.

One afternoon, when I was thirteen or fourteen years old, while dragging in the field northeast of the old log house site, I saw a red-tailed hawk fly over carrying a stick in her talons. That, I concluded, meant a nest. Noting the direction that she flew, we easily located the nest a couple of Sundays later, a half-mile away in an old red oak beside the line fence between the Minert and Marston farms. It was easy climbing, and there were eggs in, that, my first nest of the red-tailed hawk. I cannot now remember whether or not I collected the set, but I know that the eggs were the first I had ever seen. They were not the last, either, for in

the years that followed I climbed many a tree, often at the peril of life or limb, and robbed many a nest.

I must plead that I knew no better. To every farmer, any hawk was an outlaw to be killed on sight, and to destroy a nest was a creditable act. Too late came the slowly accepted knowledge that we were exterminating our friends. Then there were perhaps twenty nesting pairs in every township. Now, in 1931, I do not know of a single occupied nest in the county. But the red-tail was not a chicken thief. Only once did I ever have unquestionable evidence of one killing a barnyard fowl and that was when I saw one swoop down and attempt to carry off a half-grown Plymouth Rock that had wandered far afield out west of the barn.

The Cooper's hawk was the fellow that did the stealing, or rather the highwayman act, for he would sweep in around the barn or the trees, strike and be off with the small chicken before the farmer's wife could say scat. Perhaps, in an hour, he would come in from the other side. And the slow red-tail got the blame and he was easy to shoot. The Cooper's Hawk built a nest of its own usually in the top of a red oak in any grove, after the leaves were out, making it hard to find, but the red-tail's nest, high up in some large, old, and often solitary tree, advertised its location to all the world. For this reason, I was able to collect fewer sets of the Cooper's hawk than of the red-tail. The former was not a close sitter. When one found the nest, she was usually gone—slipped away when she heard you coming. And when you saw the nest, you were apt to think, "Oh! it's just a last year's nest. Nothing doing."

The great horned owl also nested in the groves around about our home, using last year's hawk or squirrel nest, never building one itself. These birds commenced laying early, the first of all our birds. Once, in early February, I found a set of two, the usual number laid, in a big bunch of leaves that a squirrel had gathered into the forks of an old elm that stood a few rods from the rise of Yellow River. Of the eggs of *Bubo virginianus* I collected perhaps twenty sets, and with few exceptions each climb to get them afforded a thrill.

We also had the long-eared owl that for its nest appropriated one built the year before by an industrious squirrel, usually in a young red oak and from fifteen to forty feet from the ground. My first nest of this bird was well towards the top of a thirty-foot-high, easily climbed, young red oak in one of the McDonald groves on the farm of that name, southeast beyond the Laughlin farm. In it was a set of five white eggs. If my memory is not at fault, the last one was in the same kind of a tree over southwest of the Foote lot but only fifteen feet up.

The long tramp, miles away in the bracing air of the early spring; the finding of a nest, and the dangerous climb; the taking of the large beautiful eggs and the lunch by some spring of clear cold water were to me a pleasure, the memory of which will be with me for life when I conjure up the days of my collecting eggs of our birds of prey.

One rainy day about corn planting time, I noticed three or four scattered birds working slowly over the bare field south of the barn. They would sit quite still, fly for a short distance, and light again, evidently feeding on some sort of insect that they found on the ground. They seemed to be rather sluggish; to me they acted as if they were cold, and I remember feeling sorry for them. I was seeing for the first time the scarlet tanager with his gorgeous plumage and was duly excited over it. This was probably about 1865. On subsequent years I again saw this bird of the woods hunting in the open fields, but always in the spring. On a horizontal limb of a scraggly oak, at fifteen feet above the ground, I remember finding my first nest, not much better built than that of the mourning dove, and through it I could see and count the set of beautiful greenish speckled eggs. For several years afterwards, these birds were common about the groves and my bird notes say that I found other nests, on one day finding four. Gradually they became less and less common until they are now far too rare for a bird as beautiful as they.

A near and showy bird was the rose-breasted grosbeak, the fellow that helped us to pick the Colorado potato bug and also the green peas in the garden. Occasionally we found

their frail nests in a honeysuckle or other similar high bush. They were never very common, but we still have a few of them with us every summer.

In the southeast corner of the barnyard, there stood a large and ancient post in which a great cavity had been drilled out at some time by a yellowhammer that apparently liked work for work's sake. For years, now a woodpecker, now a bluebird, would select this for its nesting place, but usually they came to grief. The place was too public for that day and age when every boy had a collection of birds' eggs.

10. Beginning in Archaeology

I think that it was in the fall of 1878 that I consented to fill out the Republican ticket by being a candidate for the office of superintendent of schools. The Democratic majority was over 1,000, and I came within thirty-odd votes of defeating my opponent. This I accounted pretty good, especially as I had had the time of my life seeing "Old Allamakee." That was long before the days of the auto, and I drove a fine team and buggy which father donated towards the campaign along with a roll of bills.

Part of one trip was down the valley of the Upper Iowa, from New Galena to New Albin. On this drive, I collected fragments of prehistoric pottery, grinding stones and mortars, enough to fill the back end of my buggy. Every house where I stopped had some of the pottery, which I now believe I was more interested in collecting than I was in advancing my political fortunes. This was the beginning of my interest in archaeology and of my collection of well over a thousand pieces, which I have this year (1933) donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa. How far I have come since then.

A few years later, my old friend, Wilbur Dresser, who, though a much older man, was my companion on many a long tramp, came out to the farm one evening and told me that the people on the Iowa River were finding many Indian graves containing relics. He offered to go up and dig if I would grubstake him, and we would divide the plunder that he might get evenly between us. He said that he had all the time there was but no money, and that he knew that I had

no time but might have a little money. So we struck a bargain. He bummed a ride all the way there and back. He admitted, and I always suspected, that he had also bummed his grub. But he got what he went after.

He dug some dozen graves, and, as I remember it, found something in every one. For my share, I got a fine pot, a pipe, a finely wrought spearhead and some other things that I have now forgotten. This amber-colored spearhead was made of chalcedony found near the west boundary line of North Dakota.

The enjoyment that my old friend got out of that trip was worth to me all the money I put into it. He had secured permission to dig a group of rocked-over graves that he had found on the small low terrace under the head of a bluff called the Elephant, and had excavated two of them, from one of which he got a fine pot, when the owner stopped him. Shortly after, Dr. Ratcliffe came along and, without permission, opened the next one, in which he found the "Dragon Pipe," the finest of that type known in the world.

A large part of my collection has been acquired by purchase of local material. I have collected very little outside of northeastern Iowa, and have dug very little. Most of my



work has been the surveying, mapping and describing of mound groups, camp sites and rock shelters. From the mouth of the Turkey River, north to the Iowa-Minnesota state line and along the Upper Iowa, I have visited and surveyed every known earthwork or group of mounds.

11. Hunting Animals

Game was plentiful in the newly settled country, yet few of the settlers could be called hunters. It is true that most of them, at one time or another, shot their deer, the most common and most desired game, but many did not. They came quite largely from states farther east where there was little game and they knew nothing about the habits of the wild animals or the ways to get them; and besides, they were very busy getting out material for houses and shelters for their stock, clearing and breaking up the wild land, splitting rails and making rail fences, planting and harvesting their crops, and doing the innumerable things that were necessary to be done where the only things already there were the soil, the timber, and the grass.

My uncle John acquired knowledge of their ways and became a noted slayer of the deer, his favorite hunting grounds being the rough lands along Bloody Run Creek. My father never killed a deer and, if I remember right, he never even shot at one. Most of the time he had no gun—could not afford to buy one. When he finally got his first one, it was a squirrel rifle of a bore so small that I doubt if he could have killed a deer if he had had a chance. But he often saw them some distance off. In the fall, he would see sometimes as many as a dozen in a herd.

One winter, I do not know whether it was before or after my father came into the country, there came a rain that froze as it fell on the three or four feet of snow already on the ground, making a hard crust that would bear the weight of a wolf, dog, or man while a deer's hoofs would cut through. It did not take the settlers long to find this out, and with axes and clubs they went after the deer in their "yards." A deer yard is a labyrinth of paths made in the deep snow by the deer in places where there is much brush and consequently good browsing. It is needless to say that venison

was plentiful with the settlers that winter. It is a wonder, though, that they and the wolves did not exterminate the deer that "winter of the crust."

Yet, notwithstanding the slaughter, the deer were fairly plentiful for years after. But the settlers got more and more numerous, and the deer got less and less so till sometime in the late 90s the last one in the county was shot by Abner Caton, a Yellow River hunter who had accounted for many of them.

Wolves were then plentiful and often, of nights, gave us a rendering of canine grand opera. There was something mighty scary about the sudden opening of these musicals, and though I listened to them many, many times, I never quite got over that creepy, hair-raising sensation when the first notes shattered the quiet evening air. The performance was almost always a solo, but it was hard to believe that it was not a whole pack. Occasionally, when the soloist got through, another wolf in another place would answer.

Once, when about ten years old, I was sent on an errand over to Jimmy Whalen's who lived in the old Half Way House. In order to get to Jimmy's I had to follow an old road which ran along the north side of the grove. As I rounded a sharp curve just before crossing the small slough, I came very suddenly face to face with a wolf. On each side, the thick hazel brush grew close to the wagon tracks, and only a couple of rods separated us when we came in sight of each other. It would be hard to say which of us was the worse scared. I know I gave a yell and turned and ran—very fast. I don't know what the wolf did, as I did not take time to see. However, I did not go very far before my courage returned and I stopped and went back. As his tracks in the light snow showed, the wolf had turned at right angles and had run with prodigious leaps away south through the grove.

Once, years later, I shot a wolf with the deer rifle. A party of a dozen or more of us were out ring-hunting them. A line had been quietly stretched across a brush-covered point of five to ten acres running out south from the Yellow River timber with a grassy slough running around it like the letter U. Four of us had stationed ourselves in hiding

in the hazel brush along the other side of this slough opposite the point through which the drive was to be made. We knew that in March wolves liked to "lie up" during the day in such small brush with small sunny openings where the snow had melted off and where they were well concealed. If we formed our ring of men about the brush patch quietly, any wolf that might be in hiding there would probably lie quiet till he was surrounded. Then the men on that part of the line next to the big woods would begin to yell and make a great noise, moving towards the slough. It wouldn't take Mr. Wolf long to make up his mind that that was no place for him and start to move out towards the slough where a few of the best shots were waiting for him. Sometimes he would try to dash or sneak through the driving line and sometimes he succeeded, though the men usually got him.

This time, when I first saw him, he was coming down the hill, jumping over or around the small brush and hazel clumps, certainly in one big hurry and very scared. When he reached the slough, he turned down it, but just as he turned my bullet went through his neck, and he rolled over just like a running rabbit when he is shot. I got the pelt, and we divided the \$5.00 bounty among us.

Sometimes in the fall, young wolves of the season would become very bold, attacking and carrying away young lambs from the open fields in the daytime. Once a young wolf picked up a half-grown lamb in the field just west of the barn. My father, who was loading up manure just out of sight behind a shed, seeing the wolf running, ran after him with the pitchfork. But before he could get near enough to use it, the lamb, which was not hurt much, was dropped and the wolf made his getaway.

Though many times I hunted wolves with a gun, put out poison and set up traps for them, I have with certainty but two to my credit: one shot as described above and one poisoned.

Though not so plentiful as in pioneer days, wolves are still quite common in the county. For the year 1923, bounty was paid on twenty-eight old ones and forty-seven cubs. The particular species we have here is probably *Canis latrans*,

the prairie wolf.

Once one pleasant day towards spring, a neighbor came along in his bobsled and asked father, who was in the barnyard, why he didn't go down the road and get the wolf over in his stubble field. Of course, we all got excited, and I got the rifle; we all piled into the neighbor's sleigh, and back down the road we went. For two or three hours we followed that wolf about the fields, he going through the fences, and we having to go around through gates, but he always kept just out of range. Several times I wanted father to let me take the gun and try for him, but he wouldn't trust me; he was afraid I'd miss.

Finally, we came within easy range, and the wolf stopped invitingly broadside to us. Father jumped out, and resting his gun across the corner of the sleigh, blazed away at the unconcerned beast, and scored a perfect miss. Across the years, I can still hear our loud, long laugh at father's discomfiture as the wolf trotted unconcernedly away. He went off to the north and I followed him on foot, finally getting a long-range shot at him running, but of course I missed. I had run him out of some red oak brush over on the Marston farm.

Across the road, in the Laughlin field to the east, a wide-spreading burr oak stood for many years. Early one morning in the fall, on coming out of the door, I noticed a wolf snooping about near this tree. Stepping back into the house, I got my Springfield army rifle that shot a bullet almost as big as my thumb. The distance was about sixty rods and the first one kicked up the dust within a few feet of Mr. Wolf who started off in a hurry. Before he disappeared over the hill I had fired six times. Each time I came close enough to make him let out another link in his speed, till as he went over the hill he was leaving just a crack in the air. It was fun for me, but I think the wolf considered it serious.

The wildcat was common in the rougher parts of the county. A couple of rods in front of the door of the new house into which we moved from the first one of logs stood a burr oak tree, partly dead. One night, Tige, a pugnacious big brute of a dog we then owned, treed something which was

making a great fuss. Father with the gun and we small boys with a tin lantern rushed out to help. A wildcat jumped out of the tree, hitting the ground running, and was off.

Every once in a while, some neighbor would report seeing a cat, but for the most part they kept well out of sight. When I was around fifteen years old, one Sunday, Mr. and Mrs. Silas Perry, who had bought the Marston farm and were living on it, asked me to go with them to a baptizing over on the Yellow River, at a deep pool a mile east of where it crosses the Winneshiek-Allamakee county line. For a mile or more of the way, we followed a timber road through the heavy primeval woods along the river bottom. On our way back, through an opening in the underbrush, I saw for an instant, back in the gloom of the woods, a wildcat standing broadside to on an old log, watching us as we passed.

In still later years, when out coon hunting one night north of Lybrand, the dogs treed a cat in a small oak. We came rushing up, men with lanterns and dogs that could see better without, and gathered in close around the tree, supposing we had a coon. But Mr. Wildcat didn't like the outlook and sprang out of the treetop clear beyond dogs and men, hit the ground running, and was off to safety, to the chagrin of both dogs and men for we failed to tree him again.

Unlike the wolf, the wildcat couldn't stand civilization, and soon he became very scarce. For years, a large family of them denned in the cliffs on the east side of Yellow River about a half mile up the river from the Old Stone House. On sunny days during the winter, they would come out of the crevices and holes and lie out in the snug and warm openings among the hazel and small red oak brush. If alarmed, they would run back over the precipice and down into their dens.

Harvey Clark, knowing of this habit, would quietly go to a place where he could see them as they went over and then send his old hound out into the brush. If any were out, the old dog would soon stir them up; and if one, in running for home, came within range of Harvey's gun, he was a "gone cat." I saw Harvey Clark in Postville, about 1894, with three wild cats in his sleigh box which he had shot the day before.

Eventually he got them all.

Once a black bear possessed with the wanderlust came down out of the Wisconsin woods into the neighborhood. It was the signal for every man and boy who had a gun, and all the dogs, to gather for the hunt. For two days they followed him before he went the way of foolish bears and was gathered in by the hunters. It was said that in the final close-up he mauled the dogs well.

On Yellow River is the Black Bridge and a few rods south of it is the Evergreen Schoolhouse, and running south from that is a little valley through which the road runs. In a small field, in a pocket made by the water that cut out the valley, is a little isolated rocky hill which Uncle Jim Ewing used to point out as the place where the last "bar" in the county was killed.

But of all the eerie things of those days the panther, or "painter," was most to be feared. Once in a while, a report would spread around the neighborhood that one had been heard screaming somewhere down in the Yellow River timber, and then the women and children, and some of the men, would stay indoors after dark till the scare was over. I never heard of one being seen.

Down the brook, about a half-mile north of the pioneer home, an earth embankment, eight or ten inches high and four or five feet wide, extended across the perfectly flat bottom land. Father showed it to me and said it was an old beaver dam, and I believe he was right for before they were exterminated by the trappers who preceded the pioneers, beaver were said to have been plentiful, and there was always plenty of water in the spring-fed brook and, without doubt, plenty of poplar trees along the brookside.

Often, as a boy, I walked the length of this old dam trying meanwhile to visualize the pond it held back and the houses with their mysterious occupants. Sometime along in the early 80s a pair of beavers suddenly appeared on Yellow River and were caught by one of the Ewings. They were the very last.

Once during the noon hour at school, Billy Patterson, one of the "big boys," said to me, "Let's go and get a rabbit,"

to which I quickly assented. He got the axe from the wood pile, and we went out into the brush and timber back of the schoolhouse and soon found a hollow tree, perhaps ten inches in diameter with a hole into the cavity near the ground. Thrusting his arm into the hollow, Billy said, "I've got one," and pulled out by the hind legs a cottontail that immediately began to scream—a noise something like the squawking of wild ducks but much shriller.

This was a new way of hunting, and we soon became quite expert in keeping down the rabbit population that way. A dog, any kind, to find and chase the rabbits when they went into such handy trees, and an axe to cut them out if they were up in the cavity beyond reach made inexpensive sport.

When I was perhaps sixteen years old, I acquired a much-prized book, *The Trapper's Guide*. From it I learned many things about traps and how to set and bait them. Some things the book described, I already knew, as for instance the figure four for setting under a box so that when the bait, which was on the spindle of the figure that ran back under the box, was disturbed, the affair would fall to pieces, down would come the box, and Brer Rabbit would be caught under it. But, on the whole, it was a mine of information for a boy living where there were wild things to be trapped.

From it I first learned about the mink, what he was like, where to find and how to catch him. Studying this book aroused in me a great desire to be a trapper, and I resolved to begin at home on the mink, and soon got together the money necessary to buy a couple of Newhouse traps. So little did I know about my game that when, for the first time I went scouting along the willow-lined spring brook below the old beaver dam, I was quite convinced that some tracks, probably of a small muskrat, were what I was looking for. But then I came upon the real track of a mink that had gone splashing along in the shallow stream, sometimes diving under the frozen-over places and sometimes jumping along over them. I set my two traps together in a narrow open place, and when I came again, I had my fur. That winter and succeeding ones I made a catch of from half a dozen to

a dozen.

Occasionally, even to this day, a piece of an elk horn is washed out of some ditch or creek bank. Over on the Judge Williams' Farm, six miles south of Postville, buffalo skulls were washed out by a ditch which cut its way backward up a swampy slough. In other neighborhood sloughs, where deep ditches were cut in a similar way down through the bog to the clay beneath, teeth and fragments of the bones of the mastodon were washed out.

These were all the remains of animals that once roamed the prairies that I knew. Weakened by old age or starvation, they had bogged down, and bits of their bones were preserved from decay by the water of the marsh. But they lived before my time, and I knew them only by their scanty remains and the books. Sometimes our "spring poor" cattle would bog down in the same way; then we would hitch a log chain around their necks and, with a team at the other end, yank them out.

Of the smaller animals of the fields that I first came to know, the first perhaps was the striped gopher or thirteen-lined spermophile. This was an extremely abundant little burrow animal everywhere on the prairies and in the cultivated fields, and it was my first game. As the little fellow did considerable damage to young corn just out of the ground, we were encouraged to kill him on sight if we could. Father scattered poisoned corn about the fields especially for his benefit and got many that way. We had ways of our own to get them.

On our approach, gophers would dive into their holes; but their curiosity was so great that if we did not make too much fuss, they would in a minute pop their heads out to see what was going on. In the meantime, we had placed a loop at the end of a twenty-foot string around the hole. Of course one would run his head through this loop, then on the ground at the other end of the string, we gave a yank and we had him. Other times we would place a small steel trap set upside down over the hole, and when he thrust his head out against the pan he met a quick end. Sometimes we drowned them out by carrying water with our dinner pails

and pouring it down the holes. Usually Mr. Gopher wasn't long in struggling out into the open air. Later, when we were old enough to be trusted with a gun, we would lie in wait and shoot their heads off when they popped them up.

There was also a gray gopher, a larger, chunkier fellow with a shorter tail. This gopher was not common and, unlike his striped relative that persists in abundance today, he was soon exterminated.

The woodchuck, too, was an early acquaintance. My first introduction to him was a funny one. We boys — there were three of us, and I, the oldest, was probably not yet eight years old — had gone of a Sunday down to the back field of the Marston farm when we spied, lying in a crotch about ten feet up a tree, a big woodchuck. Not knowing the animal, we concluded that it was a wildcat, and while Frank, the youngest of us, and I drew off a little distance to keep watch, Darias, the second brother, ran home for reinforcements.

Shortly, here came father and Uncle Dave running and out of breath with a rifle. Uncle Dave was a veteran just home at the end of the Civil War and to us a very great hero. How they laughed when they saw our wildcat. We never made that mistake again.

The road we traveled to the Minert School ran through the middle of the quarter section of heavy Minert-Laughlin timber, and, except just north of our home, there were scattering groves along the rest of the way. At about halfway was an old stub, the remains of what had once been a fine old oak. At the foot of it I once saw a weasel and a gray squirrel in a fight to the finish. The squirrel was getting the worst of it and was about all in. I tried to frighten the weasel away, but he came back again and no doubt finished the job and killed and ate the squirrel.

12. The Railroad

The McGregor Western Railroad was completed to Postville in August, 1864. For the most part, the grading was done by Irish laborers, many of whom were married and had families. A man would take a subcontract to excavate so many yards of cut, would build a board shanty on the right-of-way, and would move his family in. His equipment was a pick, a shovel, and a wheelbarrow. Often he would

hire an unmarried man to help, usually one who had reached middle age, having worked all his life at railroading. A few ambitious ones had acquired teams, scrapers and dump wagons, and these contracted for such portions as were part fill. Most of the dirt required to make the fills was hauled on the dump board wagons from the cuts at either end.

The ties and rails were distributed with flatcars pushed by locomotives to near the point where they were to be used, and then by mules. To house and board the men who laid the track, shanties were built on flatcars run onto sidings that were built at intervals along the track as the work advanced.

When the track was laid as far as McMaster's crossing, one-half mile east of Postville, a passenger train was run up there from McGregor, and the lumbering, yellow stages, hung on straps and hauled by four or six horses, came there to connect with it. The first train arrived during the noon hour while father and Jimmy were taking their noon nap under one of the burr oaks in the yard. The long blast of the whistle, over half a mile away, sounded so loud that it frightened us boys who were playing about and who had never heard one before, and wakened father and Jimmy, who had not heard one for years. Then mother, who remembered, came out and told us that it was the first train to Postville.

A few days later, under strict admonitions from mother not to go near the train, I was at the crossing to see it arrive. Most of our neighbors had never seen one before, and they came from far and near to see the wonderful locomotives. These were small wood-burning engines, and each had its name painted under the cab windows. Twenty of the freight cars of that day, loaded with wheat, were a train load. Often they would get stuck on the hill two miles east of town and have to wait for the next train, which would detach its engine and help them over the top.

To supply the locomotives with fuel, thousands of cords of wood were hauled from the Yellow River timber every winter and piled along the railroad right-of-way. From Monona to beyond Postville was an almost continuous

woodyard in which saws were at work all summer. The saws left the wood in piles all over the right-of-way. Men with big wheelbarrows wheeled it out and ranked it up close to the track. That was John Ward's and Tom Kimmett's job for years afterwards.

Passing trains needing wood would stop at any convenient place and wood-up. All the train crew would help to pitch chunks into the tender till it was full. Sometimes we boys, when working the fields alongside, would go over and help, or if we were not working, would go over help wood-up, and get a ride to town. The train crews of those days were surely a hard-boiled lot.

When the country was first settled, there was a normal snowfall of a strong two feet as it lay in the woods after the settling caused by thaws. Sometimes there were big January thaws which reduced that somewhat. When we went into the woods for logs, a felled tree would usually about bury itself in the snow. Because of the obstruction to the free movement of their feet, it was not uncommon to have the laboring horses choke down when loading the logs with a rolling hitch, or when pulling the loaded sled out to where there was a broken track.

There were then none of the storms that we afterwards came to know as blizzards. Though I cannot give the year, I well remember the first of these fierce storms. Early in the morning father had gone to mill, a trip that took all day. There was nothing unusual about the weather that morning to indicate a change, but about noon it began to blow out of the northwest. By mid afternoon, the storm was so terrific that at times we could scarcely see the barn ten rods away, and it was getting much colder. Frightened, mother had us bring in a big supply of wood and get the stock into the stable and sheds and feed them. We were all worried about father. We had never seen such a storm and we were afraid that he would not be able to get home and might be frozen to death. But towards evening he came. He said that the track was filled with snow, but that, with his light load, the team wallowed through.

Of much of my life my memory is a blank. Only here

and there is something remembered, sometimes of moment, sometimes trivial. I have typed these memories as they came to me — and they have not always been told the best, nor always was the best grammar used or, I suspect, the best spelling. But it must now stand as it is. Perhaps when I, like these incidents of my life of which I have told, am but a memory, my children or children's children may read what I have written of things which they can never see or know except as they know them through these pages. I trust that they may, in reading, glimpse something of the wild beauty of that new country, and back of the hardships and toil of pioneer life, catch something of the spirit, the neighborliness and the simplicity of those who lived it.

Waukon, Iowa, March 22, 1933.

Ellison Orr.

A Note On Sources

The autobiography of Ellison Orr required substantial editing prior to publication and the original version is at Effigy Mounds National Monument, McGregor, Iowa. Gary Mattlock, Park Archaeologist, made it available to me. The editorial changes are described in the Foreword to the first installment. In the course of editing the manuscript I was aided by J. N. Young, Claudine Harris, and finally by Kenneth McCaffrey who is Assistant Director of the University of Iowa Publications.

The Life of Ellison Orr

The most recent article on the author of the autobiography is "The Many Lives of Ellison Orr", *The Iowan Magazine*, 1969, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 37-40 and 50-51. Written by two friends of Orr, Henry P. Field and Iduna B. Field, it discusses his work, is illustrated with photographs, and gives excerpts from the *Reminiscences*. In the *Foreword* I have discussed the work of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, and three publications by Charles R. Keyes discuss Ellison Orr's contribution to it. In "Antiquities of the Upper Iowa," *The Palimpsest*, vol. 15, no. 10, pp. 321-356, Keyes provides an interesting description of field excavations with Orr and the crew. A more general, but brief sketch of Orr's work during the 1930s is contained in "An Outline of Iowa Archaeology", *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 1941, vol. 48,

pp. 91-98; see particularly pp. 94-95. In the same journal Keyes published an obituary "Ellison Orr 1857-1951," vol. 58, 1951, pp. 58-59; written very shortly before Keyes himself died. Another obituary was written by Henry P. Field and it is "Ellison Orr 1857-1951," appearing in the *Journal of the Iowa Archaeological Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 11-13, 1951. Other interests are described by Keyes in the article "Ellison Orr: Naturalist, Archaeologist, Citizen," *Iowa Bird Life*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 25-28, 1945. In *Men of Ancient Iowa*, Iowa State University Press, 1964, I described some of Orr's work and the second edition, now in preparation, contains a more systematic presentation of his contribution. A discussion of his work and later archaeological studies derived from it appears in my introduction "Evaluation and Index" which precedes his ten volumes of archaeological reports. This appears in "Iowa Archaeological Reports 1934-1939" by Ellison Orr, Society for American Archaeology, *Archives of Archaeology*, no. 20, microcards, University of Wisconsin Press, 1963.

Publications of Ellison Orr

Except for newspaper articles, all of Ellison Orr's publications appeared in just two journals, *Iowa Bird Life*, an amateur association, and in the *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, a professional scientific society. Articles in the *Proceedings* include "Exposures of Iowan and Kansan (?) Drift, East of the Usually Accepted Boundary Line of the Driftless Area", 1907, vol. 14, pp. 231-236, "Mounds and Mound Explorations in Northeastern Iowa", 1913, vol. 20, pp. 257-260, "Indian Pottery of the Oneota or Upper Iowa River Valley in Northeastern Iowa", 1917, vol. 24, pp. 43-46, "The New Albin Inscribed Tablet", 1922, vol. 29, pp. 49-52, "An Apparently Very Old Prehistoric Camp Site", 1927, vol. 34, pp. 225-230, and "The Rock Shelters of Allamakee County, Iowa, A Preliminary Survey", 1931, vol. 38, pp. 185-194. As these publications indicate, he was actively engaged in surveys and making observations prior to his employment with the Iowa Archaeological Survey in 1934. Unfortunately once he was employed as a professional he ceased active publication. Orr did very little excavation until 1934, and these subse-

quent explorations were not recorded in print except in the brief, informative, but usually anecdotal summaries by Keyes. The major discoveries upon which Orr's reputation as an archaeologist rested, remained in manuscript, consulted by his colleagues but not adequately prepared for press.

Manuscripts by Ellison Orr

Orr prepared ten volumes of archaeological reports illustrated with photographs, sketches, and diagrams. These were made available to scholars some three decades later in the microcard edition of the *Archives of Archaeology* series, Society for American Archaeology. These original reports are referred to as Orr 1963, the year being the date of issue in the *Archives* series. The actual date of individual entries usually spanned the years 1934-1939, but he frequently incorporated sections of his writings which were written many years earlier going back to 1903. In the years following the active fieldwork of the 1930s Orr organized a second set of manuscripts. The original ten volumes, compiled as the work progressed, frequently contained information about a single site scattered through several volumes. Orr himself recognized the difficulty of using his reports and began to reorganize them as topical and regional units. The Mill Creek and Glenwood culture excavations in western Iowa were reasonably well separated in his volumes 8 and 10, but the numerous surveys and excavations in his home territory of northeastern Iowa presented substantial organizational problems. The second set of five manuscripts by Orr incompletely regrouped his earlier field reports. One manuscript brought together his notes on Oneota culture sites and artifacts of the Upper Iowa River area, and a second discussed his excavations at the Oneota village sites. A third described petroglyphs, and a fourth, rock shelter excavations. The fifth in the series described mound excavations along the Upper Iowa River.

These five archaeological manuscripts, completed in the late 1940s when Orr was over ninety years of age, contain little new information, and there are a number of discrepancies with his earlier reports in the *Archives* series. A number of the discrepancies are errors of fact, such as

the township and section location of the sites. They do aid in bringing together his material despite their flaws.

In addition to these fifteen volumes of archaeological reports just described there are four others. *Sundry Historical Sketches* and *Reminiscences* are not archaeological, and a third manuscript describes some of his Mississippi River trips. There is also a volume entitled *Specimen Catalogue and Notes* which pertains to his private collection of artifacts eventually given to the State Historical Society in Iowa City. He was a prolific writer, literally as well as figuratively voluminous. A closer look shows that these nineteen volumes are repetitious, and contain contradictions and trivia. Self-taught as a scholar, his collected writings show considerable strengths as well as weaknesses. His work was very good for the time that he did it, in part because of his insights, and previous training as a surveyor. There is a great deal of grain among the chaff. But to appraise his contribution it must be remembered that his excavations were made at a time when academically trained archaeologists were virtually non-existent in this country. Three and a half decades later we can appreciate the priority of his discoveries within the limitations of his period. The transition from amateur collector to professional archaeologist is now almost impossible to make because of the much greater background in required skills, training, and theoretical and factual knowledge.

Subsequent authors restudying the prehistoric cultures within the State obtained much of their basic data from his earlier studies, recasting their conclusions within the changing framework of American archaeology. Within the past five years new and substantial excavations have made even his data increasingly obsolete. This fact should not be surprising for it is a typical pattern in the development of any science. What is surprising is that it took archaeologists working in the State so long to get new collections of data needed to supercede the work of Ellison Orr. I should imagine that in the long term his most permanent contribution will prove to be *Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy*.

Marshall McKusick

State Archaeologist of Iowa

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