

## AN EARLY IOWA FLAG

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By L. G. AND R. R. ROBERTS

Britt, Iowa

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In the recording of events fifty or more years after they transpire, inaccuracies will creep in. In the following history of an early Iowa flag the writers have tried to be as accurate as possible, most of the material being as given them by their mother in her stories of the early settlement of Irving, Iowa. And to lead up to the event of the making of the flag it will be necessary to give some of the history of the first settlers of the community.

In the early fifties Levi Marsh and some others came from Massachusetts. Mr. Marsh took up a homestead in the southeast part of Tama County, just east of Salt Creek and about six miles north of the Iowa River. His land came up to the county line between Tama and Benton counties. Other settlers were taking up the surrounding lands rapidly. It was then necessary to haul their supplies from Iowa City overland by oxen and horse teams. An attempt was made to ascend Iowa River by flatboat. This attempt was tried but once. The boat did succeed in getting as far as Prairie Creek, which lies east of Belle Plaine, as nearly as we are able to determine, and near where the settlement of Koszta is located. One hardy pioneer then took a rowboat and started on up the river. He went as far west as where Belle Plaine now is, then started north in the creek that empties into the Iowa river at that point. When about seven miles up this stream he met trouble and his boat was capsized and sunk. Among his supplies was a barrel of salt, which of course was lost, but the creek kept the name of "Salt" and is now known on all maps as Salt Creek.

As the settlers became more numerous, and many were pushing on to the west and the north, Mr. Marsh decided to start a general store. He erected a building large for the day—some forty feet wide by eighty long—and two stories high. This was added to in a short time and later another addition was put on, the building finally being about one hundred fifty feet in length. Here all the goods needed by the settlers could be procured.

A Methodist church was erected and a school, and this became a real community center. This takes us up to 1860, when rumors of war were current, and while several other places of business were planned by resident settlers and others who had land holdings near, nothing much was done at that time. Finally the war started and the community wished a large flag and a place to fly it.

The first mention of a flag, as we have heard the story over and over again, was at a religious meeting on a Sunday in 1861. It must have been talked over by some of the settlers previously, as we are told that at this time the patrons of the church met at the Levi Marsh home after church, decided to go to the woods a few rods distant, have a dinner and decide on a flag. The minister, we are told, did not sanction a business meeting on Sunday, but as he was riding some fifteen miles out to hold services in the afternoon, he stated he would dismiss the incident and would do his part in any way to help in making the flag. The unanimous verdict of the gathering was that a flag must be procured. But there was no one who could even suggest where one of proper size could be purchased, so it was decided to make a flag. Mr. Marsh was given authority to purchase red, white and blue "fast" bunting, a sufficient amount so that a flag 12x40 feet could be made. He informed the meeting that the nearest place he was sure of getting the goods was at Worcester, Massachusetts, and it would take at least three months to arrive. This being satisfactory to all, the next question was to secure a flagpole.

Three or four men were chosen for this work, the writer's father, then a young man, being one of the boys to assist in spotting a tree that would make a section of the pole at least twenty-five feet in length and eighteen inches at the butt end, preferably of oak. This was a greater task than might be supposed. While there was much timber adjoining the settlement, it was difficult to find a tree that was large enough and free enough of large limbs. But one was located, felled, and then cut with adz and broadax to a nearly perfect octagon. Another length of twenty-five feet was then secured, which was much smaller and was hewn round. After these were completed the question of where to erect the "liberty" pole came up. Opinion was divided.

The little village lay in both Tama and Benton counties. The

general store and tavern was in Tama; the school, schoolhouse and blacksmith shop in Benton. Settlers were almost evenly divided. The Benton county faction laid out a town common or public square, of size about a town block and a half. Here the troops enlisting for service were drilling and here they would raise the "liberty" pole. But the Tama county citizens had the pole and would not listen to its being raised on the town common. A second schoolhouse was erected, this one in Tama County. Here the flag was to be flown on the new pole. But legal proceedings were started and the school building could not be completed.

In the meantime the goods for the flag arrived at Iowa City and was sent to Irving by a party going that way. And upon its arrival another meeting of the ladies of the community was called. Their decision was that all who could sew well should assist in putting the red and white stripes together. Those who were not skilled in needlework were to cook a big dinner for the workers.

We are told it was a gala day for the community, one settler and his family coming from near where Blairsburg now stands and another from near Iowa Falls. The thirty-six stars on the blue field were to be worked, one each, by married women. And this was to be done at another meeting two weeks hence. In the meantime one of the chosen women died and another decided she was too poor with the needle to do this work, so the writers' mother, Laura Loutzenheiser, a girl of sixteen, who had come from Canton, Ohio, in 1860, and was to be married that autumn to a physician, Dr. W. P. Forsyth, of the village, was chosen to sew on a star. The completion of the flag was also made a gala occasion, and every settler for many miles who could possibly be there was on hand. Even the Indians of the neighborhood turned out in force, though unbidden, and almost caused a panic among the cooks when they arrived early and demanded they be "fed" at once. By heroic effort and much extra work they were fed up until they were satisfied to retire to the timber on Salt Creek bottom and sleep off their feed. Their only complaint was that the whites would not serve them whisky.

The war had started. The first battle was fought and the news had filtered in; the whole community decided that the flag must be

flown at once, even though their flagpole controversy was not settled. So a rope was stretched across the county line from a house in Benton to a house in Tama and the flag was flung to the breeze. All parties who had been at war over the flagpole counseled together, patched up their differences, and the town common was made the place for raising the "liberty" pole. An impressive ceremony marked the raising and the blessing of the Almighty petitioned by the village pastor. From this flagpole the flag was raised at sunrise and lowered at sunset until the end of the Civil War.

After this the flag was flown only on July 4th. When Memorial Day was originated it was also flown on that date. Becoming frail with age, it was flown only on very special occasions. At the opening and close of the Spanish-American War it was unfurled to the breezes. Again at the opening of the World War and when the first contingent from Irving community left for the front it was flown. Its last public appearance was at Belle Plaine, Iowa, when the Victory Loan and Red Cross drives were on, it being loaned for these occasions to help in decorating headquarters.

Upon the death of Mrs. J. O. Roberts in June, 1923, the flag (which had been in her keeping for forty years) was taken over by the eldest son, Louis G. Roberts, of Britt, Iowa, it being understood that he would turn it over to the State Historical Department with as much of its history as possible. As is often the case, much history was buried with the remains of his mother, and it has taken nearly four years to locate people who could revive his memory and give something authentic for a record. A part of the list of the women who helped make the flag is lost. There is none now living who knows much of the history of the flag. Those known to have helped in the making are:

Synthia Ann Parks.	Laura Loutzenheiser.	Minerva Pearson.
Minerva Blair.	Eardine Prill.	Mary Rugi.
Frances Blair.	Ella Waite.	Malinda Felker.
Lyda Ann Linsy.	Hattie Royce.	Emma Marsh.

We will complete this bit of history with a little more about the village of Irving.

After the war the town flourished for a time. A quite large

store building was erected with the upper story fitted for a town hall, other store buildings were put up, a shoe shop built where boots and shoes were made from the hides tanned by the settlers; a cooper shop was in operation, barrels and tubs being made quite extensively; before this a gristmill had been built on Salt Creek, where flour was ground and distributed for miles around. A broom factory was built and farmers started in to raising broom corn extensively; a brickyard was started, flourished for a time, was abandoned and again started when the writers of this article were small boys, L. G. putting in one season working in the yard. An institution of learning, the existence of which we doubt is known by many, flourished for some years. It was called the Irving Institute, and as we remember it some forty years ago it was a very popular place. The building was of brick, two stories high and basement. The basement rooms were fitted for cooking and dining rooms and a part of the upper story for sleeping quarters for students. In this school the higher branches of education were taught. From what we can learn the courses were quite similar to our present day high schools, even some of the foreign languages being taught. But higher mathematics, music, and the sciences seemed to be the main studies. In the late eighties the school was closed for lack of patronage. The building stood for several years—well into the twentieth century—but was finally torn down. The large campus was turned over to pasture land and a son of Levi Marsh (F. L. Marsh, now of Ames, Iowa) owned a part of it for a long time. We doubt if there is even a photograph of this early school where higher education could be gotten by the children of the settlers of Iowa.

An elder sister of the writers and her husband attended this school. They now reside at Walker, Iowa. F. L. Marsh, now residing at Ames, was one of its graduates.

The Northwestern railroad when built passed four miles south of the village of Irving. Belle Plaine was started and soon took much of the trade. Later the Milwaukee went through five miles to the north and Elberon was started, again reducing the trade territory. Stores in Irving were closed and either torn down or moved away. The mill ground feed for stock for several years but was forced to close when the I. & M. division of the Northwestern was built from Belle Plaine to Mason City in 1901. The

railroad right of way cut the mill almost in two and it was torn down. The last time the writers visited the scene the old stone burrs and a few wooden cogwheels were lying in the grass by the railway fence, mute evidence of an industry that once was essential to the lives of people in that vicinity.

A few rods south of the old mill site an open green in the timber shows where a burial place has been. A couple of marble slabs lay in the grass and a few scattered pieces are trodden upon by livestock as they graze in summer. On one stone we read the inscription, "Robert Arbutnot, died May 8, 1856, aged 46 years." Early settlers, but apparently nothing known of their history. There are other Arbutnots known now residing in other states, and we are told that Asbury Arbutnot is now a rich ranchman of the United States of Columbia in South America, but none claim interest in these forgotten graves.

Britt, Iowa, May 6, 1926.

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#### SIGNIFICATION IN 1854 OF IOWA AND OTHER INDIAN NAMES

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Mr. LeClaire of Davenport, so long the Indian interpreter of the government, at a late interview gave the following interpretation of several Indian names:

"Iowa"—means literally, "Here is the place." Driven, as were the Iowas and Sacs from Wisconsin and Illinois beyond the Mississippi, they exclaimed, "Here is the place" for us to live unmolested; and so it measurably proved for many years. This etymology differs somewhat from the signification given by Senator Dodge, which is "None such," as well as from that of Washington Irving, or some romantic writer, who represents an Indian on a high Illinois bluff, overlooking Iowa, "Iowa, beautiful, beautiful." The idea conveyed by Mr. LeClaire is that of a place of retreat, or a happy refuge from enemies.

"Keokuk"—means the "Watchful fox," Keokuk being a Fox Indian, or "He that goes everywhere." So that it will be well to keep a sharp lookout for the Foxes down at the "Gate City of

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