

ANNALS OF IOWA.

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EARLY TIMES IN IOWA.

BY CHARLES NEGUS.

From a Private Diary.

WITH little experience in the world outside of a New England college, as soon as I obtained my diploma to practice law, I started for the West, and, after travelling several weeks, I stopped a short time in Knoxville, Illinois. December 3, 1840, I left Knoxville and took the stage for the West. About two o'clock in the afternoon for the first time in my life I saw the waters of the Mississippi. While our stage stopped at the hotel (in Oquawka), near the banks of this great watercourse, I walked to the water's edge and took a view of the great river, which at that time was full of floating ice, and presented a most sublime spectacle. After a short stop we proceeded down the eastern bank of this great stream to Burlington, and arrived opposite this young city about sundown, and at that time it presented to me a very pleasant and inviting appearance; for after riding all day over rough roads and through the cold air, I thought a good supper and warm bed were very desirable, and this place looked as if it might afford these comforts. I felt very anxious to

get across the river, for all around the east bank was one dismal swamp, and only one small cabin near us to shelter the company from the bitter frosts; but, to my sad disappointment, the ferryman refused to take us over on any consideration, alleging as a reason, that we must cross in a small canoe, and, on account of the ice, it was very dangerous to be on the river after dark, all of which I afterwards learned was true, but at the time I felt much vexed at the ferryman, thinking his excuses were only for the purpose of making some money out of us by keeping us all night, and I felt like crossing the river, let the dangers be what they might. After using my best efforts to get the ferryman to take us over, to no effect, I yielded to my fate and made the best of my condition I could. I went to the log cabin and called for supper and lodging, which were promptly attended to, and our host did everything in his power to make the situation of his guests comfortable. The weather was extremely cold, and our hotel, which had just been built, was only chinked and daubed on two sides, while the other part of the house was open, with nothing to shelter the inmates from the inclemency of the weather, except the rough logs, which were far enough apart to afford an easy entrance to a good sized dog.

In this humble cabin there were about thirty souls, consisting of men, women, and children, who sought a night's repose. There was a large fireplace on the side of the cabin which was not chinked and daubed, in which was piled nearly half of a cord of wood, so that we had heat and cold from the same direction. Our good hostess soon prepared supper, but the dining table was not of sufficient size to accommodate all the guests at once, so we had to eat our supper by turns. Soon after supper was over I bespoke a bed, and our lardlord allotted to a St. Louis gentleman and myself the best of the only three beds in the house. This was the first time I ever was in a promiscuous crowd of men, women, and children, strangers to one another, where all had to lodge in one room, and, although

very tired, and desirous of repose for the night, I felt a little delicacy about retiring in presence of the company, and delayed divesting myself of my wardrobe until others had set the example, when I soon found myself between the sheets. This was the first time I ever took a night's lodging in a log cabin, and I by no means felt satisfied with my surroundings; and if there ever was a homesick young man, who wished himself back on the rocky hills of New England, on that evening I was one. I went to bed but not to sleep; I lay a watchful observer of everything going on. After a little the women began to make up beds on the floor, by spreading down blankets, buffalo robes, etc.; and thus one after another camped down for a night's repose, haphazard, like so many pigs in a hog sty. When all was quiet, I sat up in my bed and took a survey of what was around me, and surely to me it was a novel sight. The floor was completely covered with sleepers, and though I felt as sad as death, I could but smile to myself at what I beheld. After satisfying my curiosity I lay down, and soon found myself dreaming.

In the morning there was another laughable scene; some were clearing away the beds, some hunting for shoes or stockings, or some other article of clothing; the men were fretting, the women scolding, and the young ones squalling, and at the door of the cabin there was an old man, a mover, who had camped near by, making a big fuss about some one stealing from his wagon a jug of whisky. This was surely an interesting scene, and one long to be remembered. Our morning's hubbub was soon put to rights, and the ill humor manifested by men, women, and children subsided, so that peace and harmony once more reigned in our little circle. The good landlady of the house prepared a breakfast for us of fresh pork, potatoes, and bread,—the best that the house afforded,—and we partook of the sumptuous meal. Then I settled my bill at a reasonable charge, and my St. Louis companion and myself, with the ferryman, seated ourselves in a log canoe, and after about

an hour's struggle through the floating cakes of ice, we landed on the Burlington side of the river, among entire strangers.

After landing, I walked over the town, making close observations of everything I saw, and thought best to stop a short time at this place. I obtained boarding in the family of Levi Lloyd, and occupied a room with Mr. Avery, a member of the legislature, and Mr. Stuart, a Methodist preacher, both of whom treated me very kindly, and for whom I felt much respect. During my stay at Burlington some tragic scenes came to my knowledge, and I became acquainted with many noble, and some eccentric, characters. The first night I spent in Burlington, B., a saloon keeper, without any just provocation, shot young L., who died a few days thereafter. Gen. — who was the presiding officer of one branch of the legislature, then in session, a noble looking man, and one who wore fine clothes, for several days before the close of the session abandoned his duties as a legislator, and spent his time about the saloons, refusing to be controlled by his friends, and was seen taking a nap in a bed prepared for swine. * *

Being short of means, and having a poor prospect of immediately making anything at the law, and meeting with a chance to engage in a school near the town, I embraced the opportunity, and officiated in the office of pedagogue for about three months. During this time, though the teacher of others, I learned many interesting lessons myself; for during this time I had to board with the families of those who sent their children to school, which gave me an opportunity of becoming well acquainted with the manners and customs of Iowa. The first place at which I boarded was with an old gentleman by the name of John Pierson, one of the first settlers of Iowa, with whom I contracted to keep the school. The old gentleman, by coming to the country when it was first settled, had succeeded in getting hold of large tracts of land near Burlington, which became very valuable,—so much so that it made him one of the

wealthiest men in the country. The old gentleman's family consisted of himself and wife, two daughters, and four sons, the latter six of whom went to school to me. The old gentleman, though of a contentious and litigious disposition, almost always in law, was yet kind hearted, and if one tried to please him in his whims he was agreeable and accommodating. (He always took a great interest in my behalf.) During those three months I associated with all sorts of people, and met with all kinds of fare. At one place where I boarded the house only contained one room, and in one corner of it a flock of young poultry roosted, and not unfrequently there would be a half dozen young pigs running about the room, while occasionally a horse or cow would thrust its head into the door and give the signals it usually did when it wanted something to eat, all of which occasionally afforded very agreeable pastime, particularly when the dog was called upon to make them know their proper places. At another place where I boarded there were eight in the family, besides myself, and when there were four beds prepared for sleeping they took up nearly all the room there was in the house. But fortunately for me, they had a cot bedstead, with long legs, on which they prepared a very comfortable bed for my use, and while some of the family slept on the floor, I was exalted high over their heads in the air. This was a very kind family, and they showed me great respect, and the only fault I had to find with my lodgings was, that I had to get up at an earlier hour than I was accustomed to; for the family were early risers, and there could be nothing done about breakfast until the beds were cleared away, which caused me to abandon the downy pillow at a much earlier hour than I desired. While occupying this lofty bed I amused myself with many vain speculations, in thinking how exalted I was over those around me, and viewing the splendid mansion where I lodged. As it is apt to be the case that every rose in this life has its thorn, so in this situation I was much annoyed; for there was in the family a lusty, big, fat boy, who occu-

pied the bed beneath me, and as soon as *Somnus* seized upon his senses he would commence a snoring, which in sound was almost equal to the puffing of a steamboat, and by his snoring he frequently prevented me from enjoying my night's slumbers. But when he became too troublesome I would reach down and give him a tap on the side of the head; and in this I thought we were about equal, for if he disturbed my sleep by his snoring, I was sure to make his ears tingle with my hand.

In a manner similar to this I spent my first winter in Iowa. My school continued until the commencement of the Spring term of court, during which time I had become pretty well acquainted with the customs of Iowa, and felt myself to be a very good "Hawkeye." When my school was finished I took a tour into the back country, and attended several courts, for the purpose of selecting a permanent location. I first went to Mt. Pleasant, in Henry county, where J. C. Hall gave me an opportunity to make an argument in a slander suit, and for the first time in my life I addressed a jury. In this effort I succeeded much beyond my expectations, and was highly complimented. The suit was against a miserly old man, who had used some very vulgar expressions to and about a widow woman. In my opening remarks I used the expression that I should think from the language he had used "that he had been bred among the hogs and educated by a jackass," which expression brought down the house with applause; and for an hour's speech I not only had the strictest attention of the jury, but of all the spectators; and what was more pleasing to me than all the rest, we recovered a verdict of six hundred dollars, and Hall (who was always very kind to young lawyers, and for favors to me I shall ever be grateful) volunteered to give me fifty dollars when the money was paid, but unfortunately for me the judge granted a new trial, on account of excessive damages, so that the only compensation I got for my services was a good name. After spending about two weeks at this place I left for the county seat

of Washington county, a distance of about thirty miles. As there was no public conveyance, and having waited several days to get a private one without success, I undertook the journey on foot. I started in good spirits, thinking I would have a pleasant walk, but soon found there was not much pleasure to be derived from tramping through the mud. My feet soon became sore, and before I had walked many miles I would have been glad to be relieved from my undertaking; but as I had once started I resolved to perform the journey, and pursued my way with resolute spirits, hoping soon to get to my destination. When the sun was about an hour and a half high I entered upon the borders of a large prairie, where there was a log cabin, and everything had the appearance of being able to afford a comfortable night's lodging. I enquired the distance to Washington, and was told it was eight miles. I first cast my eye across the wide prairie and then to the lonely cabin, and was at a great loss in my own mind to know whether I had better pursue my journey or stop for the night. I finally concluded to go on, being told that I would come to another house in about four miles; I then started on my way, proposing to stop at the next house for the night. When I had travelled the four miles I found the house, but much to my disappointment it was tenantless, the occupants having apparently moved away that day. By this time the sun had hid himself behind the western horizon, the path I was to pursue was quite obscure, and the sky, about sunset, was overspread with clouds, so that I knew the moon and stars would render me no assistance in finding my way. My situation in this condition was any thing but pleasant; for I had either to take up my lodgings in the lonely cabin, without fire or supper, or pursue my journey, and I was so tired it seemed to me I could not walk another step. I again hesitated whether to stop in the cabin or pursue my journey with the hope of finding better accommodations. The thought of staying in the cabin without anything to eat or fire to warm myself was not very agreeable, so I

concluded to push my way forward, and quickened my pace as much as I could, so as to get on my way as far as possible before daylight disappeared.

I had not gone far before the clouds gathered into a storm, and it began to rain. It was so dark I could not see the beaten path, and it was with great difficulty that I could keep my way. This, to me, was not a very enviable condition to be in; and to add to the gloom of my situation, there was occasionally a vivid flash of lightning, accompanied by loud rumbling thunder; and near me, apparently following in my track, were a large number of wolves, who kept up a most hideous howling, the first music of the kind I had ever heard, and a serenade I would very willingly have dispensed with. I had travelled seemingly a score of miles since dark, and was so weary I could hardly put one foot before the other, and had almost come to the conclusion that I would have to camp in the open prairie, when my eye caught the glimpse of a light in the distance. This inspired me with new life; I renewed my diligence, and after a walk of about a mile I found myself at the county seat of Washington county. As soon as I entered the little village I sought and found the only house of entertainment in the place. This house was built of logs, and contained only three rooms, and in this building was kept a grocery, a tailor's shop, a lawyer's office, and a tavern. I entered the department which was used for a reception room; there I found a fireplace in which were a few coals of fire, but there was no light in the room, except what was reflected from the fire; beside the fireplace there was sitting a young man, with a book in his hand, apparently in deep thought, as if meditating over some grave question. When I entered the room I asked him if he was the landlord, to which he answered me very indignantly in the negative, and at the same time informed me that he was a member of the bar. I apologized to him for my ill manners in underestimating his position, upon which he was kind enough to hunt me the landlord, from whom I secured lodgings, and

called for supper. I was the only guest in the house, and received much attention; all hands were on the alert to prepare me a meal, and I give them the praise of doing for me the best their house afforded. I had not been in the room but a short time when a youngerly looking woman came in, who attracted my attention; she measured about six feet and a half from head to foot, and resembled, in her figure, a new moon,—large in the middle and tapering off at both ends, forming a section of a circle of no very large size. She in great haste drew out from the side of the room a large table, spread upon it a cloth, which, from appearances, was originally designed for the bed instead of the table, and arranged upon it a few dishes. I carefully watched every movement, and had my curiosity considerably excited by the manner in which my supper was being prepared. The next person who appeared was the landlady, who entered the room with a plate loaded with fried bacon. The appearance of the landlady was no less interesting than the girl whom I first saw. She was a woman of more than ordinary size, and in her figure directly opposite to the young lady; her head much resembled a brush heap, and from appearance one would naturally suppose she was not the owner of a comb, or for some time had been too busy to use it. She was in her stocking feet, and from the size of her understandings it was not to be supposed she had stunted the growth of her feet by the use of Chinese shoes; and from her clothes it was not to be inferred that her mind had been occupied as much about her wardrobe as the most important affair of life.

My meal was soon ready, which consisted of fried bacon, Irish potatoes, corn bread, and a cup of coffee, to which I sat down and ate a hearty supper. Soon after my supper was over the young lawyer and myself took a bed together for a night's repose; but owing to a noise which was kept up in the adjoining room, where whisky was sold, by some exhilarated persons discussing questions of theology, I felt but little inclined to sleep, and spent a good part of the

night meditating over the past and contemplating the future.

At this place I spent several days, and was solicited by many of the citizens to make it my home; but as soon as I had become sufficiently rested and recovered from the soreness of my previous walk, I started again on foot for the town of Fairfield, a distance of about twenty-five miles, and a journey which took me the best part of two days to perform. There had been heavy rains, which had swollen the streams so that it was difficult to cross them. I came to Skunk river and found it out of its banks; there was a ferry established at this point, but on the north side of the river, opposite to where the ferry was kept, there was a slough, through which, in high water, a deep current passed, and this cut me off from access to the ferry, and I was told there was no chance to get to the place of crossing the main channel. The house where I got this information was the only one in the vicinity. This being the only place where I could stop, and the people not possessing a very inviting appearance, I determined to cross the river if possible. I went back to the river, walked up along the bank of the slough until I discovered a tree which had been undermined by the current, and lodged against another tree on the opposite bank; I climbed up one and down the other, and thus safely got to the other side of the slough. I went down to where the ferry was kept, but the ferryman, not supposing any one could get to the ferry, was not there, and I could not find any one to bring the boat over for me to cross the river. It had now got to be nearly sundown, and I began to think I was in a fair way to take up a night's lodging upon the island; I walked up and down the bank of the river, hallooing at the top of my voice, endeavoring to attract the attention of some one, but all in vain. At last I discovered a canoe, made out of a log, run up on the dry ground, and hid in a clump of brush; upon making this discovery I immediately pushed the canoe into the water and paddled across the river. I then pursued my

journey to a place called Brighton, where there were three or four houses. My appearance at this place attracted much attention, for I think every living soul rushed to the doors or windows, and eagerly watched me until I had got far in the distance. At one of these houses were about a dozen flaxen-haired young ones who rushed from the house and advanced near to me, apparently very anxious to get a fair view of my person. I stopped a short distance south of this place, and staid all night with a Mr. Heart, who was keeping bachelor's hall, and a very worthy and agreeable man; from him I received a hearty welcome, and spent a very pleasant night. The next day I pursued my journey to Fairfield, and got there a few days before the sitting of the spring term of court.

The first day I was at the place an old Indian with his family camped near the town, on his return from his winter's hunt somewhere in the settlement. The old man, with some of his family, came up to the town for the purpose of trading some peltries for provisions; while the Indians were endeavoring to trade a man by the name of Powers took up a switch, and for some cause, I could not tell what, gave one of the young Indians several severe blows. Some of those present took up the matter in behalf of the Indians, others against them, and the result was a general row; but the old Indian, though apparently very angry at the mistreatment of his boy, acted with more discretion than the whites, for he quietly took his party and returned to his camp. On the following Sunday evening the town was full of lawyers, litigants, and witnesses, for the purpose of attending court the ensuing week. The court lasted nearly a week, and there were a large number of persons present every day, some for business purposes, and others to satisfy their curiosity.

During the week there were several horse races, and more fights, one of which is noticeable. There was a horse race got up in which, by betting or otherwise, a large number of persons became interested; and after the race

was run a disagreement arose as to which horse won, and loud and boistrous words were used by the parties to one another. They retired to the grocery to try to settle the dispute, and harmonize the difficulty by the aid of whisky; but this, instead of soothing the angry passions, added fuel to the flames, and a general fight ensued. The grocery keeper, with the assistance of a few of his friends, turned the combatants out of doors, locked up his store, and secreted himself. As they came out of the door the foremost ones tumbled down and the others fell upon them, and there were some eight or ten men squabbling together, clawing one another. One man, extricating himself from the engagement, sprang to his feet and drew a large bowie knife, and was about to stab one of the combatants, when another man struck his arm with a heavy cane and knocked the knife out of his hand. The excitement drew nearly everybody but the judge from the court house, and entirely suspended the business of the court, and there was a general rush from all parts of the town to the scene of action. Prominent among the crowd, was to be seen an old man by the name of Elijah^v Chartian, who held the office of justice of the peace, and had seen his three score years and ten, commanding the peace. The fight was quelled without any serious injury to the combatants and the crowd dispersed.

The lawyers returned to the court house and went on with their business. The court was engaged in trying a slander suit which had attracted much attention, and the court house soon became crowded with spectators; just as the court had got fairly engaged in business, and the attention of the crowd had been drawn to the proceedings of the trial, there was heard a stir in the back part of the house, near the door; then there was noticed a giving way of the spectators, and the old justice approaching with a bowie knife in his hand. The old man had naturally a fierce visage, and his nerves were affected with age and disease so that his head was constantly in a tremulous motion, which,

to a stranger, gave him the appearance of being angry. The old man slowly advanced, and the crowd continued to give way; as he moved along every eye was upon him, and not a word was spoken by any one. The whole house was in a breathless suspense, and every person seemed to be expecting that the old justice was about to vent his wrath upon some one, and half expecting that he might be the sought for victim. The old man made his way directly to the judge's bench, and ascended the steps; the judge (Charles Mason) eyed first the old man's fierce countenance, and then the knife, and quickly arose from his chair and stepped back. The justice raised up his arm, with the knife in his hand. The judge had retired to the back part of the stand, and could not easily go farther; the color left his face, and he stood watching the old man as if every moment expecting a stab from the knife. At this critical period, the old justice broke the silence by exclaiming, "Judge, here is a knife I took from those fighters, and I thought I would bring it to you to take care of." The judge's countenance immediately changed from white to crimson, and the whole house from a breathless silence to a roar of laughter, at which the old justice seemed to be as much confused and surprised at this sudden change in the bearing of the judge and spectators as they had been at his conduct. The old man soon left the court room, and the judge went on with the business of the court.

A few weeks after I came to Fairfield, Governor Chambers, who had recently come to the territory, went to the agency of the Sac and Fox Indians, to visit those Indians, and most of the male citizens of the place went up to the agency to witness the interview; when an incident happened which, being in a strange land, far from friends, made a deep impression upon my mind. Three Irishmen who, with a team, had been into the Indian territory (the boundary line of which was then within eight miles of Fairfield) to look at the country, on their way back camped within about two miles of the place (on the south side of the

Cedar) for the night. One of the party started for the creek with the horses, to water them, while the other two remained at the wagon to kindle a fire and cook supper. The man with the horses not returning as soon as expected, the others went in search of him, but it had become dark, and they could not find their companion or the horses, and returned to the camp and gave up the search until morning. In the morning they traced the horses to the bank of the creek, and discovered them on the opposite side. Where the horses went into the creek the water was very deep, and they came to the conclusion that their companion had attempted to ride into the water, and was thrown from his horse and drowned. They immediately alarmed the neighborhood, and there was a general hunt for the missing man. They dragged the bottom of the creek with grappling hooks, and about the middle of the day fished up his body. The corpse was brought to town and deposited in the court house, for the purpose of holding a coroner's inquest on the body. It was a wet, drizzling day, such as was calculated to depress the feelings, and make one feel sad. The corpse was a horrid sight to behold. In the forehead there was a deep gash, and the blood was running from the mouth, ears, and nose. At first it was thought there had been some foul play on the part of his companions; but, on examination of the body, there was found around it a belt containing a large amount of gold, and from this fact, and other testimony, the jury came to the conclusion that he attempted to ride into the creek to water his horses, and there being a steep bank and deep water, he was thrown off and came in contact with the horses' feet, and was first stunned and then drowned. The coroner's inquest lasted until late, and it was quite dark before the body was permitted to be moved. It had begun to decompose, and was very offensive, so much so that it was difficult to get any person to help perform the funeral ceremonies. The corpse was put in a rude coffin, without shifting the clothes, and then deposited in a wagon and taken to the burying ground. Myself and two other

citizens of the place, through the rain, by the light of a lantern, performed the ceremony of depositing the remains of the stranger in the silent grave — no one being present except ourselves and his two traveling companions. There was no hoary-headed father to weep over the death of a beloved son, to whom he was looking for aid and support, when age had rendered him helpless and dependent; no mother to mourn the loss of a departed child; no brother or sister to mingle a sympathizing tear. But in the darkness and stillness of the night, in the drizzling rain, by the dim light of the lantern, by ourselves alone, we gently lowered the body down into its narrow abode, closing the earth over the rude coffin, and left the stranger to repose in the silent grave until the morning of the resurrection.

This manner of a final disposal of a stranger, who, from his appearance, in the land of his birth, had friends and influence, much affected my spirits, and I retired to my lodgings with a sad heart.

HISTORY OF MUSCATINE.

BY SUEL FOSTER, MUSCATINE, IOWA.

EARLY TITLES OF LAND.

BEFORE Iowa became a territory, in 1838, this part of the country was called the "Blackhawk Purchase," it having been purchased of the Sac and Fox Indians by treaty, at the close of the Blackhawk War (in 1832), Blackhawk being chief of these united tribes. The "Blackhawk Purchase" was a strip of country along the Mississippi river, fifty to eighty miles wide, and extending from the state of Missouri to Prairie du Chien, or a little above. One point in the country of the "Blackhawk Purchase" was

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