

ANNALS OF IOWA.

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No. 3.

EARLY TIMES IN IOWA.

BY CHARLES NEGUS.

From a Private Diary.

[Continued from page 96.]

THE country around the town of Fairfield was in the possession of the Indians until the 25th of October, 1838.

In the spring of 1841, when the writer of these lines came to Fairfield, the population of the town was one hundred and ten, and of the county two thousand seven hundred and eighty. The boudary line of the Indian country was only eight miles west of the town; and there was scarcely a day that the red men were not in the place. At that time there was a small, two-story, frame building erected by the county, for a court house; but not a church or school house in the whole county. There were two taverns, three stores, and two drinking saloons; but all business was conducted on a small scale. Most of the inhabitants were those accustomed to frontier life; unpolished in

their manners, but possessed of kind feelings and noble and generous hearts. Everybody was on an equality, kind and hospitable to each other; which, with the scenes of a new country, made the time pass off rather pleasantly.

Immediately after the whites were permitted to take possession of this locality, Henry B. Natson made a claim to the public lands upon which the town of Fairfield was laid out. Natson being a single man, the first winter kept bachelor's hall, spending most of his evenings solitary and alone, with no neighbors nearer than five or six miles. Natson for several years was a prominent man in the county, kind-hearted and of a generous turn; but he moved to another place and was forgotten.

Immediately after the town was located, William Huston came to the place with a stock of goods, and for some time he was the sole merchant and land-lord in the town, and the post master for all the country west of Henry county. Huston brought with him a young man by the name of Thomas H. Gray, who, for a while, acted as his clerk, but afterwards studied the legal profession — was the first law student in the county, and was admitted to the bar in 1841. He was possessed of easy and agreeable manners, well calculated to suit himself to whatever company he might chance to meet, and was generally beloved and respected by all who knew him. He professed to be an infidel in his religious doctrine, and to believe that death was an eternal sleep, and when man closed his earthly career that was the end of him. He was fond of discussing his religious notions, and was apparently sincere in what he advocated, though he was not obtrusive in his views, and willing to concede to others the right to their religious sentiments. In his politics he was a whig; but, in those days, the democrats had the ascendancy. He was several times a candidate for office, and always run ahead of his party vote, but never was elected. He was possessed of a keen, active mind, but had rather delicate physical functions, and his constitution could not endure hardships. As soon as he

commenced practicing ^{as} a lawyer he got business, and was successful with his cases, and but few young men rose faster, or stood higher in his profession, than Gray did at his age.

In the early days of Iowa, it was the custom of most of the lawyers of talent to travel and attend all the courts of their district. In the spring of 1848, Gray and myself started around the district. At that time all who travelled our district were young men, full of sport, and, when not occupied in business, ready to engage in anything for amusement. This spring their hilarities were carried to an unusual extent, and, in some instances, whisky was used to an immoderate degree.

Gray had a large amount of business, and worked hard for his clients; was up at late hours, and frequently had little or no sleep during the night. This was more than his constitution could bear; the result was, he came home with impaired health, and was soon brought to a sick-bed, from which he never got up. Gray had no relations in the west, but he had many friends who attended to his wants, and he suffered for nothing that could be done for him. The disease continued its ravages upon his system, until the physicians regarded his case critical, and he became conscious he might not get well. I was sitting by his bed-side, to attend to his wants, no one else in the room, when Gray fastened his eyes, glassy from the near approach of death, with a steady and fixed gaze upon me, expressive of deep thought and intense feeling, with an earnestness that was unpleasant, and to avert the gaze, I got up and walked about the room—but this did not avert his piercing stare, but made it more intent. I returned to my seat and said: "Tom, is there anything I can do for you?" when, with a low, shrill voice, with a death-rattle in his throat, he replied: "You are a picture of health. Oh! that I were as well as you are! I must die!" These words were spoken with a tone and emphasis that sent a thrill through my heart, and, before I was aware, the big tears were trick-

ling down my cheek. A few hours after he closed his earthly career—he was no more. Gray was young; with health, he had bright prospects in the future; life was dear to him; he hated to die. But he had the fortitude of a philosopher of age; he met his fate with firmness; he died with composure, and showed to the last that he believed in the doctrine that he had professed—that death was an eternal sleep. The extensive acquaintance and popularity of Gray, brought many from a distance to attend his funeral, and drew together the largest collection of people that had ever been assembled in the town; and probably it has been the lot of but few persons, in the early settlement of Iowa, to be followed to the grave by as many real mourners as followed Thomas H. Gray. A few years after his death, at an old settlers' celebration, by voluntary subscription, there were enough means contributed to erect a suitable monument over his remains, which points out the grave of the first individual who was a student of law in Jefferson county.

There had, for a long time, been reports through the newspapers, of some wonderful developments of what was called spiritual rappings, in Rochester, New York; but these reports were generally regarded as some legerdemain, and they attracted no particular attention in this part of the country, until the spring of 1852, when it was ascertained that there were persons in Jefferson county, able to produce those phenomena, and in various parts of the country there were exhibitions of moving chairs, turning tables, and producing certain noises which resembled low raps. The living pretended to call up the spirits of their departed friends, and hold conversations with them, thereby learning their conditions in the spirit world. These performances puzzled the most intelligent to satisfactorily account for the phenomena produced, and the most skeptical were forced to admit that there were some things about these manifestations that they did not understand. Universalists and atheists engaged in these developments, and held, what

they supposed, conversations with their departed friends, in which they made inquiries about future punishment, and some received such manifestations as led them to doubt their long-cherished faiths, and professed to be converted to a religious belief. For a while the occupation of clergymen seemed to be a useless calling, for the people were being rapidly converted by the admonitions of the spirits. These conversations were carried on through the application of different means, but mostly by raps and writing mediums. On one occasion I witnessed a performance, which made a deep sensation, and called forth many remarks. At this performance the conversation was had through a writing medium, who was a little girl about ten years old, that had recently come to the place, and said to be illiterate and unable to write unless under a mesmeric influence. She was seated at a table, with pen, ink, and paper, and, after being mesmerised, many questions were propounded to her which were generally answered by "yes" or "no," written in a tolerably fair hand-writing. The girl, when she wrote the answers, did it very quickly and without looking to see how she guided her pen, and her hand, so far as she was concerned, apparently moved involuntarily. Several spirits were called up, and a great many questions propounded to them, which were generally answered satisfactorily. At last a lady friend—at whose house Thomas H. Gray died—proposed to call up his spirit. Several efforts were made before it could be got to answer, and when it did, there seemed to be a reluctancy about engaging in conversation. It would answer a few questions, and then there would be no response, and it apparently felt disposed to get away and avoid an interview with his old friends. This rather increased the desire to continue the conversation. The lady friend, after making many inquiries, asked if there was any place of punishment for the wicked, in the spirit world, which was answered in the affirmative. The question was then asked, if he was happy; and the medium, much excited, instead of writing an answer, threw the

pen in a most spiteful manner clear across the room. This exhibition, connected with his known belief while living, filled the spectators, who had assembled in quite large numbers, with amazement, and for a time broke up the performance.

The first lawyer who settled in Fairfield was Colonel A. He was a man of much more than ordinary ability, energetic and ambitious of notoriety and fame. For several years he was clerk of the commissioners' court, post master, and colonel of the militia of the county, which, in those days, had their regular drills. The only obstacle to his having become one of the most prominent men in the west, was, that he was inclined to be reckless in his habits. He was industrious, naturally a good manager, and succeeded in accumulating means, and built the first frame house ever erected in Fairfield, which was a building about twenty by thirty feet on the ground, and a story and a half high. His wife was a very interesting and intelligent woman, much attached to her family, and had much influence over her husband, to whom he was fondly devoted, and was guided by her counsel. They had four most interesting children, who, though left orphans when the oldest was only about fourteen years old, and mostly had to shift for themselves, grew up to be useful citizens.

During the summer of 1842 there were a great many thunder-storms, and the lightning several times struck within the limits of the town. There was a severe storm came up one evening, just about sun set. The rain poured down in torrents, and the heavens were almost constantly vivid by a continued succession of flashes of lightning, while peal after peal of rumbling thunder shook the earth. The cloud had nearly passed over, and the fury of the storm somewhat abated; I was standing in the door of my boarding house a short distance from A.'s, watching the troubled elements, when there came a thunderbolt that made everything tremble, and the whole heavens appeared as one sheet of fire, which almost bewildered me. As soon

as I recovered from the shock, the first thing that attracted my attention, was loud screams at the house of Colonel A. I hastened to the house, where my ears were filled with the most frightful wails. I called for Mr. and Mrs. A., but received no answer. The light had been put out; the children were so much frightened that they could not give any information as to what had happened, or tell where a light could be found so that I could ascertain myself. I ran back to my boarding house, and procured a lantern. By the time I had got back, several of the neighbors had assembled, and it was ascertained that the house had been struck by lightning, and we commenced an examination to ascertain the extent of the injuries. The plastering was nearly all torn off, and the partition in the inside of the house shivered into splinters. The house was a story and a half in height, and joists had been nailed on about half way up the rafters, and a room finished off for beds. The joists and plastering had all been knocked off together by the shock, and beneath the rubbish were Mrs. A. and two small children, so pressed down by the weight that they could not have got out without help, had they received no injury. The children were first relieved, having received no serious injury; but, when the rubbish was removed from Mrs. A., she was found to be a corpse—a horrid sight to behold. Mr. A. was at the post office, and not at the house. Mrs. A., with three of the children, was at home; the two youngest she had taken up-stairs, and was in the act of putting them to bed when the thunderbolt came. She was standing near by where a sword was hanging. The lightning came down a rafter till it reached the sword, then descended the sword till it came opposite her head; when it tore a hole through the scabbard; left the sword; struck her on the side of the head, and descended the whole length of her body. The hair on one side of her head was mostly burned off, the balance disheveled in every direction; her face was turned black, and her clothes torn into fragments. The falling timbers had cut a large

gash in her forehead, and, from the blow she had received or the effect of the lightning, the blood was running from her ears, nose, and mouth.

Mrs. A. was taken down-stairs and laid on a bed, and the children dressed, and the house was being put in order, when Mr. A., having been informed that his residence had been struck with lightning, came hurriedly into the house. He cast a hasty glance about the room, then stepped into the apartment where the corpse lay. When his eye met the ghastly form of his wife, he stood like a marble monument, with a fixed gaze on her corpse. Apparently for minutes everything was in breathless silence. Then he exclaimed: "My God! is this a dream? or do I behold a reality?" At this moment the big tears were seen trickling down the cheeks of every bystander.

That night this was a sad house. Colonel A. walked the yard the whole night without having anything to say to any one unless spoken to.

This providential act was a crushing blow to Colonel A., and a downward turning-point in the affairs of his life; from this time on, everything went wrong. Though he shared largely in the sympathies of his acquaintances, he had no relations in the west, to give him consolation in his grief.

He was devotedly fond of his children, and they being young, he could not bear the thought of separating them. They were not old enough to take care of the house, and, at that time, it was very difficult to find a person suitable for such a task. These circumstances seemed to compel him to seek a house-keeper. He sought the hand of a beautiful and intelligent lady, and a few months after the sad calamity he was married again.

But the second wife did not fill the place of the first. She had not the power to restrain and control his actions, and hold him in check, as did the first companion of his bosom. It was rather an unhappy union; instead of checking his habits of recklessness, they rapidly increased upon him—so much so that they seriously affected his financial

affairs. He lost his position as clerk, and necessity seemed to compel him to give up the post office; his professional business left him, and his income became very limited. To make a living for his family, he traded off his homestead for a tavern-stand, and commenced keeping public house.

He had not been very long engaged in his new calling till disease siezed hold of him, and he was brought to a sick bed. The disease affected his brain; the mind lost its reason, and he became a mad-man, a raving maniac; he imagined that the fiends of the lower regions were after him, and he suffered every imaginable torment. His moanings and wailings were awful; so much so that it was extremely unpleasant to be in his presence, and hardly any one visited his room unless as a matter of necessity or charity; and he died with no one present but his wife; who, from his first sickness to the last, faithfully discharged her duties as an affectionate companion.

Such were the sensations which had been produced during his sickness, that no one seemed willing to go to his room to care for his body; and it remained an undue time before being removed from the dying bed. This being known, myself, with another individual, went to the apartment; removed the body from the dying couch, and dressed it in the habiliments of the grave.

As he lay upon the cooling board, fear, dread, and horror, with all their piercing pangs, were depicted in his countenance. It was anything else than the noble, frank, energetic face of Colonel A., in his days of health and prosperity.

At the time of performing these services I was unwell, and a few days after was forced to take a sick bed, and for weeks life and death were in the scales, and it was hard to tell which was going to poise the balance. But at last the disease gave way, and the physical faculties began to regain their vigor, with a prospect of a speedy return to health. One night, feeling quite comfortable, I had a bed prepared on the sofa, and, at an early hour, laid down for a

night's repose. My bed feeling comfortable, I thought I had the prospect of a good night's rest; and I had not been long in my bed until my eyes were closed in refreshing slumber, and, supposing me asleep, all retired for the night. I enjoyed my bed on the sofa until about mid-night, when I felt an uneasiness about my head; my pulse became quick; my throat dry; my tongue parched and swollen, and every part of my body was suffering the most excruciating pains; my fever had returned with a ten-fold fierceness; I called my wife, and soon all the inmates of the house were at my side. The doctor was sent for, and was soon present, and, after an examination, asked what I had eaten for supper. Being told that I had had some baked apples, he remarked that I would pay dear for my imprudence. He gave me some medicine, but it did me no good. I grew worse; my pains became excruciating; morning came, and I was no better; a council of physicians was called; they all examined me, and gave me more medicine—but all their efforts did not in the least abate the fever, or assuage the pains. My physician closely watched over me for four and twenty hours, with no favorable result; when I was told that if I had any arrangements to make, about my earthly affairs, I had better be about it.

I sent for an old friend, and began to give directions; but before I got through, my tongue became so swollen, and my throat so parched with fever, that I could not speak, and I was not able to finish my directions; though I was perfectly conscious of what was going on about me, and knew everything that was said to or about me.

My extremities became cold, and I felt a cold, clammy sweat start from my forehead; my respiration became difficult, and it appeared as though the whole functions of the body had ceased to perform their offices. I heard the doctor say I was dying; my wife came to my bedside; fixed her eyes with a steady gaze upon me for a moment, and then gave a shriek that made me shudder. I thought of my wife and my child; I made a desperate effort to resist

the ravages of the disease which had fastened upon me — but all to no avail. I could not move a muscle; my breath seemed to refuse to enter my lungs; I felt as though a mountain's weight was pressing me on every side; I gasped to catch my breath — but in vain, and, as soon as I ceased to breathe, the spirit, with a bound, left the body, and the two had no more to do with each other.

Now every pain ceased, and I felt like a person let out of confinement. I went a short distance from the body; stopped, and looked back upon it with much interest. My eyes were not closed, and they seemed to be watching with earnestness those in the room. I felt a great interest in, and a great love for, the tenement I formerly occupied, as much or more than the child does for his paternal home.

I resolved to stand by and see what would be done with it. I saw my friends close its eyes; wrap it in the winding-sheet, and lay it in the coffin.

At the funeral a large number of persons attended. The parson pronounced the funeral sermon with much solemnity; many shed tears; the coffin was then taken to the burying-ground, and deposited in the grave. The respect shown to my remains gave me pleasure.

The grave which had been prepared was near Colonel A's. When I saw this I felt regret; the scenes of his last moments came up before me. When the coffin was lowered to its last resting place, my wife, who had been weeping most bitterly, now shrieked in wild despair, and fell senseless beside the grave. My only child, then about a year old, seemed to be sensible that he was an orphan.

When I had seen this I gave a deep sigh, and involuntarily uttered: "Poor woman; thy fate is a hard one, in the world of thy sojourning!" I stood pondering over the situation of my wife and child; all my thoughts were absorbed in their welfare, when I was aroused by one sent to me as a messenger, and was told that I had nothing to do with the things of the other world, and bade me walk around and see my present situation.

I now turned my attention to the world of spirits. I saw around me innumerable numbers, some of whom I knew. Every one appeared happy, free from pain, and nothing to irritate their feelings. I moved at will; I had only to wish to be at a place, and, as quick as thought, I was there; and this without the least exertion on my part. I desired to see the Father and the Son. No sooner had the wish passed through my mind than I was in their presence.

Here I was disappointed in my expectations. I had thought I would see the Father clothed in splendid attire, seated on a throne of the most costly material, and that there would be around Him four-and-twenty elders and innumerable hosts of angels, clothed in white raiment. But I saw nothing of this here. The Father stood without anything around Him, as if standing in the air, nothing to attract the attention except His person, which was very large—His body and limbs represented, in shape and appearance, those of Washington (Washington was present), though His head and features were different. He had the largest head, and most expansive forehead I had ever seen, and His countenance looked as if the great fountain of power, knowledge, love, and mercy were there.

I stood and looked with wonder and amazement, at the perfections before which I stood. The Son had every appearance of the Father, except being smaller in stature. I looked around to see the architect of the spirit world; I saw no walls built of precious stone; no gates of pearl, no streets paved with gold; nothing which indicated splendor or costly array—but I felt as though I was taking my repose in some hot summer day, under some cool, refreshing arbor, where the gentle zephyrs were blowing sweet odors from fragrant flowers, with no care or anxiety to perplex the mind.

There was an innumerable number of spirits coming to, and departing from the Father, as if bringing and carrying messages. These I took to be angels, but they had no wings; they appeared like the other spirits—except

they were smaller; had thin faces with long, sharp pointed noses and very large, piercing eyes.

I asked myself "Is this heaven? If so, how different from what I had expected." I could hardly persuade myself this was the final home of the faithful. But here was the Father and the Son; and here I saw my own father and mother, whom I believed had gone to heaven, and if this was not the place they would not have been here. Though things did not appear as I had expected, my happiness was complete.

After looking around, I sat down and was pondering over what I had seen, and my mind was absorbed in deep thought, when a messenger came to me, and told me that the Father wanted to see me; to go with him. I arose and followed, and, when I had come to him, I was told that my wife had prayed earnestly that I might be restored to her; that, if I chose to return to the earth, and put on mortality, He would answer the prayer, and I might go and take care of my wife and child.

On receiving this permission I started on my way to unite soul and body. Though I did this cheerfully, on account of my wife and child; yet, had it not been for them, I would have never returned to the earth.

I came to the grave-yard, and entered into the tenement of clay, and, as soon as the spirit entered the body, the heart began to palpitate, and the lungs inhaled air. The grave opened; the coffin burst, and I was again standing on the earth, a living man.

At first I could not think this real, but I looked around me; there was the open grave, the empty coffin, and I was robed in my grave-clothes. I became satisfied this was real; that I had been permitted to return in answer to the prayer of my wife.

It was now the month of November; the weather cold, and the wind piercing, and, as I had nothing on but my grave-clothes, I was cold and shivering; I immediately started for my house.

It was early in the evening, a beautiful moon-light night, but everything appeared dreary, and not interesting, compared with the place from whence I had come. I felt that I had returned on an errand of mercy — but that it would have been better for my wife and child to have come to me, than for me to return to them.

As I approached my house I thought it would frighten my wife to first appear in her presence in my grave-clothes. I went to the back part of the house; entered the room where my clothes were kept, and dressed myself in the usual manner, and was all prepared to enter the apartment of my wife, except putting on my cravat. I went to the looking-glass to adjust that, when, to my astonishment and grief, I discovered that, in entering the body, I had made a mistake, and, instead of having my own body, my spirit had become united with that of Colonel A., and that in the face was depicted all the fear, dread, and horror which it had when the body was consigned to the grave. When I discovered this, I threw myself into an arm-chair and wept most bitterly. Never was I before in such agony of mind!

My weeping awakened my wife from her slumber, and she got up to see what was the matter, and while I was sitting in my chair, my face bathed in tears, in the deepest distress, some one shook me by the shoulder and inquired what was the matter? I looked up, and my wife stood by my side, with a candle in her hand. She wiped the tears from my face; I cast my eyes on the clock, and found that it was four o'clock in the morning, and I found I was lying on the sofa where I had gone to bed the evening before, and became conscious that the imagined scenes I had experienced, were all a dream. But the impression of reality was so fixed upon my mind, that I could not be satisfied that my spirit was in my own body, until I had a looking-glass brought, and saw for myself that I still wore my own countenance—and then I became satisfied that the fancied experience of the past few hours was all imagination. Still it made such an impression on my feelings that I gave spe-

cial directions, if I should not survive, that my body should not be buried near the grave of this unfortunate man.

At this writing, over a quarter of a century has passed since the occurrence of that night; but still those fancied scenes are vividly impressed upon my mind, and no incident in my whole life has made such a lasting impression on my feelings as those of that night.

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY.

BY D. C. BLOOMER.

No. 4.

[Continued from page 142.]

IN January, 1857, an act was passed by the general assembly, amending the charter of the city of Council Bluffs, which greatly enlarged the boundaries of the corporation, and the powers of the city council. The limits of the city were made to embrace a territory about four miles square, and extending westward to the Missouri river. A recorder's court was established, with exclusive jurisdiction over all offences arising under the city ordinances, and with the same jurisdiction in all other cases as justices of the peace, within the corporate limits. The city was divided into five wards, in each of which two aldermen are elected for two years—their terms of office expiring in alternate years.

At the first election held under the new charter, on the 9th day of March, 1857, the whole number of votes cast was three hundred and eighty-nine, and the following officers were chosen:—

Mayor—J. S. Hooton.

Recorder—Frank Street.

Treasurer—S. H. Craig.

Assessor—S. N. Porterfield.

City Marshal—H. J. Barnes.

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