

ANNALS OF IOWA.



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SOUTHWESTERN IOWA.-- FREMONT COUNTY.

DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL.

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FREMONT is the southwest corner county of the State. It embraces an area of 528 square miles, being 22 miles north and south by an average length of 24 miles east and west. The Missouri river forms the western boundary. The principal interior water courses are the East and West Nishnabotna rivers. These two streams form a junction about three miles south of Sidney, the county seat. There are numerous smaller streams, among which may be mentioned Mill, Honey, and Walnut creeks in the eastern part, and Wahagahbousy, Plum, and Opossum creeks in the western part. A little stream named Willow creek flows down along the base of the Mis-

souri bluffs, passing through the city of Hamburg to the Nishnabotna river. Both branches of the Nishnabotna, as well as Walnut creek, afford power for mills the greater portion of the year.

There has been some local speculation as to the origin and meaning of the name of that beautiful little river of southwestern Iowa—*Nish-na-bot-na*. The name is undoubtedly of Indian origin, as it was applied to this river by the various tribes which inhabited the region embracing southwestern Iowa from the earliest recollection of the whites. Lewis and Clark mention it in the journal of their celebrated voyage of exploration up the Missouri river, and passed its mouth July 14th, 1804. It was the name of the river long before the Pottawattamie tribe occupied this region, and therefore, is most likely to be of Dakota origin. The race of Indians known by the genuine name *Dakota* embraced a large number of tribes, including the several branches of the great Sioux nation, and the Iowas, Osages, Kansas, Missouris, Otoes, Omahas, and others. All these tribes spoke nearly the same language, which was quite distinct from that spoken by the tribes of the Algonquin family, or race, to which the Pottawattamies and the Sacs and Foxes belonged. Now, as to the meaning of the word, or name, *Nish-na-bot-na*. It is a well known fact that the Indian names have generally had their origin in some quality, characteristic, or attribute possessed by the object, or thing named. Very soon after the completion of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific railroad through to Council Bluffs, the writer met a party of chiefs from Nebraska on their way to Washington. One of the party, who acted as interpreter, could converse in English quite intelligently, and through him the writer learned some facts from the older men of the party. Among other questions asked them was as to what was the origin and meaning of the name of this river—*Nish-na-bot-na*—over which the cars were about at that time passing. Here is the explanation they gave: Once a party of Indians were going westward, and they came to a small stream which they at first thought they could not cross without a canoe, but upon further examination, they found a place

so narrow and shallow, as to be easily crossed without a boat, or canoe. They therefore applied to that stream the name *Nod-a-wa*—meaning, *crossed without a canoe*. Proceeding on westward, they arrived on the bank of another and larger river. Here the Indians were obliged to construct a boat, or canoe, in order to cross with their camp equipage. To this river they applied the name *Nish-na-bot-na*—meaning, *crossed in a canoe*; or in other words, this stream was so large as to require a canoe, or boat, for crossing it.

We return to a further description of Fremont county. It has a fair supply of native timber for all ordinary purposes. The leading varieties are oak, black walnut, hickory, hackberry, elm, ash, linn, maple, and cottonwood. The last named is found mostly along the Missouri river.

The soil of the uplands is what is sometimes called the “bluff deposit,” and indeed this enters largely into the composition of the soil of the “bottom” lands of the Missouri river. The Missouri “bottom” occupies in this county an average of almost four miles in width. The bluffs bordering this valley rise from 150 to 300 feet in height above the “bottom” land. They are broken at intervals by ravines, while a short distance back the surface becomes only sufficiently rolling for good farming lands. For grazing, and for general agriculture and horticulture, this county ranks among the best in the State.

Limestone suitable for building purposes is quarried along the base of the Missouri bluffs above Hamburg, and at other places. This stone is also manufactured into a good article of quick-lime. Bricks are made from the material of the “bluff deposit,” and are of very good quality. A thin bed of coal is exposed in the northwest corner township, being probably a continuation of the same vein which has been worked in the counties farther east. Here, however, it is not of sufficient thickness to pay for working.

HISTORICAL.

The first settlements by white people were made in this county as early as 1840. Among those who settled prior

to 1842 were Jacob, Daniel, and Cornelius McKissick, Augustus Borchert, Thomas Farmer, David M. English, Job Mathews, John E. Scott, T. L. Buckham, William Lovelady, and Daniel and Isaac Muntsucker. They all settled in the south part of the county, at what were known as "McKissick's Grove" and "Pleasant Grove." The next settlement was made a short distance northwest of where the town of Sidney now stands, at what was known as "Lacy's Grove." Among those who settled at an early day within the limits of what is now Fremont county, though probably not so early as some mentioned above, were the following: John Gordon, James Applegate, Dr. Daniel Lincoln, Stephen S. Cromwell, Milton Richards, George Lacy, J. J. Singleton, Thos. Greenwood, A. M. Hitchcock, and John Leaky.

Mr. Hitchcock kept a hotel, or place of public entertainment, about a mile and a half southeast of where Sidney was subsequently located. His building stood on the line, partly in what was then claimed as territory belonging to the State of Missouri, and partly on the lands then still occupied by the Pottawattamie Indians. This was the north boundary of what was known as the "Platte Purchase," and which gave to the State of Missouri some four or five of her finest northwestern counties. Up to this time the land of this southern portion of Fremont county was embraced in what was then known as Holt county, Missouri. Major Stephen Cooper, who resided near the present town of Bartlett in Fremont county, once represented Holt county in the Missouri Legislature. That part of old Holt county south of the present State line, adjoining Fremont county, is now Atchison county, Missouri. There are now living in the south part of Fremont county some who have lived in *two* States and *three* counties without changing their residence, to-wit: in the States of Missouri and Iowa, and in the counties of Holt, Atchison, and Fremont.

Fremont county was organized in 1850. Thomas Greenwood was the first elected County Judge, and was succeeded by Frederick Rector, who subsequently represented his county in the House of the Twelfth General Assembly. The first

County Treasurer and Recorder was A. H. Argyle, his successor being J. J. Singleton. The first elected Prosecuting Attorney was J. S. Jones, who was succeeded by S. E. McCracken, William Kelsey, L. Lingenfelter, and others. W. L. Burge acted as Prosecuting Attorney before Mr. Jones, but was appointed to serve temporarily.

The first District Court was held in 1850, by Judge McKay. At this term one James Sloan, a native of the Emerald Isle, presented his professional credentials, as well as his certificate of citizenship, and took his place at the bar as an attorney. Sloan became the next District Judge in that part of the State. He was a gentleman of Mormon proclivities, the disciples of Joseph Smith being at that time quite numerous in that part of Iowa, under the leadership of Orson Hyde and others, who aspired to become the successors of the Prophet. By his arbitrary rulings and general disposition, Sloan soon rendered himself exceedingly unpopular, both with the citizens and the bar. At one time, while holding court in this county, a lawyer named A. M. Brown was overruled by the Judge in some points of law which he had made. The attorney called the attention of his honor to the Code. The Judge, not very piously, ejaculated, "Go to h—l with your *cud* (Code), Mr. Brown! I carry the *cud* (Code) in my head." It was considered that such lack of judicial dignity and courtesy justly entitled the court to the rite of *baptism*. The same was about to be duly administered, and only the prompt interference of Stephen Cromwell, the Deputy Sheriff, prevented the performance of the ceremony. In short, Judge Sloan very narrowly escaped what is called, in common parlance, a *ducking*. Soon after this affair he resigned his office.

This first court in Fremont county was held in the house of A. H. Argyle, at "McKissick's Grove." This was at that time the most important point in the county. Perhaps but few of the present citizens, now of Fremont county, are aware of the fact that here was once located a prospective city called "Austin." The name and location may be seen on some of the older maps of Iowa. The following persons constituted the first grand jury: C. C. Fugate, Daniel McKis-

sick, John Cooper, Robert Watkins, Eli Slusher, Abel Roberts, David Markwood, Beverly Blair, J. Stone, Jonathan Bridges, Anthony Burns, G. A. W. Belcher, David Jones, Sen., John Leeka, Henry Holloway, John Lambert, John Beeler, and Elias Findley. The last named served as foreman.

No entries of public lands were made in the county until January, 1853. Previous to that time the settlers held their lands merely as "claims," and by pre-emption. The first entry of land was made by George E. Baker, January 3d, 1853, and on the same day Daniel Welch also made an entry. A very considerable portion of the early settlers were from Missouri and other southern States, especially in that part of the county once claimed as a part of the State of Missouri. Indeed, it is said that slaves were once held there.

Aside from the claims of the Mormons, the first minister of the gospel, who broke the bread of life to the early white settlers of Fremont county, was Rev. Wm. Rector, of the M. E. Church. About 1853 Rev. Samuel Farlow was sent by a conference of the same Church to Sidney. We do not, however, forget the fact that as early as 1848 several religious families from Oberlin, Ohio, under the leadership and patronage of Rev. John Todd, settled on the Missouri river with the purpose of establishing a college on the same principle as the one at Oberlin. The founder of this colony a few years later became the founder of Tabor College. Mr. Todd's colony met with a hostility from the other settlers which at last culminated in the burning of their school house. Their anti-slavery sentiments had rendered them unpopular. The great freshet of 1851, which inundated the "bottom" lands along the Missouri, caused the colonists to seek a location on the higher lands, where Tabor College is now located. The primary object of the founder of this colony was finally carried out by the incorporation of an educational institution, which was formally opened for students in 1857. It was placed legally on a college basis July 23d, 1866. Many hundreds of students have received instruction here, a large proportion of whom have gone out as teachers in the schools of

Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, and Kansas. The town of Tabor, where the college is located, is on the line of Fremont and Mills counties, embracing territory in both. The good founder of this institution, at first so far away on the border, has passed to his still better reward, but the labors of his lifetime continue to bless the world.

Another of the early educational institutions of the county was known as "Fremont Collegiate Institute," and was located at Sidney. In 1857 Rev. L. G. Bell, a pioneer of Presbyterianism in Iowa, the founder of many churches and several institutions of learning, erected at Sidney a building designed for use as a female seminary. For some time Mr. Bell and his son-in-law, Rev. King, conducted a school here, but it finally passed into other hands. Mr. Bell has also gone to his better reward, having accomplished in life a good pioneer work in Iowa.

Up to the time of the location of the county seat at Sidney, "McKissick's Grove" was the important point in the county, and the place where its public business was transacted. As other settlements were made, and population developed, a more central location for the county seat became desirable, and in 1851 Judge Greenwood, who held a claim near the center of the county, projected the town of Sidney. William Dewey was employed as Surveyor to lay out the town, and J. J. Singleton appointed agent to sell the lots. The latter was the first merchant in the place, in 1851. Stephen T. Cromwell bought the first lot and built the first hotel. The first dwelling house was erected by J. M. Cowles, in August, 1852. Among the earliest settlers of the place were also Augustus Borchert, A. L. Holden, A. A. Bradford, L. Lingenfelter, and J. C. Campbell. The first child born in the town was a daughter of J. M. Cowles and wife, and in honor of the new town she was named Sidney. The first death which occurred was that of a young man named Lockwood, who died of consumption in 1854.

In 1860 a fine new court house was completed in Sidney, at a cost of about \$38,000. At that time it was considered one of the finest buildings in western Iowa, and was the pride

and ornament of the town. It was erected mainly from the proceeds of the "swamp lands" of the county. In November, 1863, it met with a most unfortunate disaster. This, it will be remembered, was a time of serious apprehension, especially along the southern border of Iowa. A civil war was raging in the country, and hostile raids from Missouri into Iowa had been threatened. About nine o'clock one evening, when all seemed to be quiet, the citizens were startled by a deep, heavy sound. On looking in the direction of the court house, they beheld volumes of flame and smoke issuing from the windows. It was soon ascertained that a heavy charge of powder had been ignited within the building. All the windows and doors were blown out, and the entire upper floor and roof lifted up and thrown out of place. The walls were shattered in several places. An expense of about \$3,000 was required to repair the damages. A short time prior to this occurrence one of the merchants of the place had lost by theft from his store two and a half kegs of powder. It was supposed this was used for the purpose of destroying the court house. Who committed the deed, and the motive prompting it, we believe, yet remain a profound mystery.

Forty-three years ago (in 1840) a young German named Augustus Borchert, having wandered away from his Fatherland, finally cast his lot in what is now Fremont county, but then an uncultivated wilderness. He brought with him from St. Louis the remnant of a small stock of goods for the purpose of trading with the Indians. About the year 1857 he conceived and consummated the project of locating a town at the point where the Nishnabotna river enters the Missouri river valley. Remembering the fame of his native city on the Elba, he gave to his newly founded city on the Missouri the name Hamburg. Jacob McKissick was its first merchant and built the first business house, in 1858. The town was incorporated June 19th, 1867.

This flourishing little city of southwestern Iowa is situated on the west side of the Nishnabotna river, three or four miles above its junction with the Missouri, and ten miles from Sidney. It is near the southwest corner of the county, where

the Nishnabotna, with its beautiful and picturesque valley, breaks through the long line of bluffs which extends irregularly above and below. Nature has lavished upon this locality many of her grandest and most beautiful touches. Immediately west of the older portion of the city rises a bluff, or ridge, from the summit of which one may look over many miles of the surrounding country. This elevation towers up nearly three hundred feet above the valley in which the city stands, and from the summit looks off so abruptly on either side as to almost make one dizzy to look below either way. Up a narrow pathway, where only a footman can climb, one may ascend to a point commanding a view of portions of four States—Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas. Looking toward the west and south we see the broad Missouri with its island-groves, its bordering forest of cottonwood, with the intervening miles of rich alluvial prairie bottom lands; and beyond all, the swelling slopes and fields of Nebraska. Nearer by, almost at the base of this elevation, down through the maize fields and native meadows, like a silver thread, winds a brook known as Willow creek, the waters of which flow from springs reaching up along the base of the bluffs, some ten miles. It reminds one of the sweet music which Tennyson hears in the brook, as it chatters,—

“I come from haunts of coot and hern,
I make a sudden sally,
And sparkle out among the fern
To bicker down the valley!

With many a curve my banks I fret,
By many a field and fallow,
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.”

But we must look in another direction. Down from the northeast, meandering through a valley as fertile as any on the globe, comes the Nishnabotna river to empty its tribute, three miles below, into the more turbid waters which have traveled on their journey more than two thousand miles from the northwest. Looking over the busy little city, and beyond the valley, with its picturesque skirting of trees,

toward the east and northeast, we behold cultivated farms and comfortable homesteads. It forms a striking contrast with the scene presented to the eyes of the pioneers whose names have been mentioned in this article. With the development of this naturally splendid portion of Iowa, of course, have come railroads, lines of telegraph, and other modern improvements which contribute to the comfort and convenience of man. Of these, however, it was not the purpose of the writer to treat in this article, but rather to recall some of the earlier scenes, and record the names of the actors, many of whom have passed from the stage of life.

HADLEY D. JOHNSON.

SKETCHES OF THE EARLY HISTORY OF IOWA, NEBRASKA AND
THE RAILROADS.

From the Omaha Herald.

THE name of Hadley D. Johnson is a still familiar one to the early residents of this border. For some years he was a citizen of Omaha, and for several years before that time he held the same relation to Iowa and the neighboring town of Council Bluffs. Mr. Johnson has lived in Utah and Salt Lake for a considerable length of time, and has now gone to the remoter West, and as far away as Washington Territory, where he will cast his fortunes with the Puget's Sound region at New Nacoms. When we state that Mr. Johnson has passed the allotted age of three score and ten years, his friends here will be the more surprised to learn that he has gone so far from his old home to find a new one. Mr. Johnson was an important man in the earlier life of Iowa and Nebraska, and it may not be out of place to remind the people of the fact by giving a short sketch of his ways and work here. He came to Iowa in 1850, and to Kaneshville (C. B.) in 1851. Strongly imbued with the idea of the future Pacific railroad he was among the active men who sought the location of the initial

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