

# Prairie Vignettes

The following three vignettes appeared in *History of Marshall County, Iowa*, by Mrs. N. Sanford. Published in 1867, Sanford's book, like most 19th-century county histories, is filled with the typical laudatory profiles of leading citizens, and descriptions of early businesses and schools. Although genealogists and historians have learned to use county histories with a critical eye, some of the stories within them are just too colorful to ignore. Here, Sanford portrays Marshall County as bursting with wild game and fruit, but also with good-natured humor and sophisticated entertainment such as theatrical tableaux vivants. —The Editor

## HUNTING PARTIES

The prairie in the western portion has been noted for hunting parties, with dogs, guns, snack-baskets, and bottles of corn coffee. There is a tradition extant of one party who went to the head of Timber creek and killed seven hundred and eight [prairie] chickens. These broiled, with hot rolls, and a cup of good Java, is a dish fit for a king. No wonder our prairies present such attractions to English and other sportsmen. Last season a large party of hunters from Buffalo visited this section. They were highly pleased with their success, and as our railroad facilities are increasing, no doubt in a few years our lovely plains will receive a full share of the summer tourists who journey for health and comfort.

Mr. George Wills, with a party of five, went beyond Power's Grove and killed three hundred and eleven [prairie] chickens in one day, returning to town with their wagon loaded down with game. If this slaughtering should go on long at a time, the question is, where would the chickens be?

## BLACKBERRY HUNT

There had been rumors of fruit across the river, so Mrs. Willigrod, Mrs. Bissell and a few others started out with a team, Mr. Pratt as a driver. Mrs. Willigrod prudently put on a pair

of her husband's boots for fear of snakes. On arriving at the canoe the whole party arranged themselves with Mrs. Willigrod in the stern. They amused each other by laughing and singing, also by plashing water on Mrs. W. She, to avenge herself, threw many handfuls from the river into their faces, but just as the boat struck the opposite bank, in reaching to give them a final baptism she fell backward into the river, boots and all. The party laughed, but like the frog in the fable it came very near being the death of her, for she rose the second time before the stupefied Mr. Pratt could rescue her from the perilous situation. Coming out of the water like a drowned kitten, she was glad to make her way home without any blackberries. Mrs. Willigrod has such a vein of genial humor, one enjoys an hour of her experiences in border life.

## TAMBOS

As they were called by a Marshall lady through some inadvertence of memory. "Tambos!" "Tambos!" she repeated. "Are they good to eat?" Many had never seen tableaux and knew nothing of scenic effect, and pious people in the churches talked of the rigors of discipline if they were repeated, denouncing them as an



incipient theatre. A large fund was raised from the entertainment, and it passed off pleasantly to all concerned. An incident occurred just before the performance began. Mr. Wasson in arranging the curtains was behind them. And a light showed him full length, with his hair sticking up as if in the need of a pair of shears. "Tambos, Number 1," whispered Pete Hepburn to a lady; as the head kept bobbing from side to side like a jumping jack, the candles being in just the right position to make a really laughable scene Mr. Wasson, now one of our dignified merchants and a perfect gentleman, perhaps may have forgotten his role in the performance. ❖