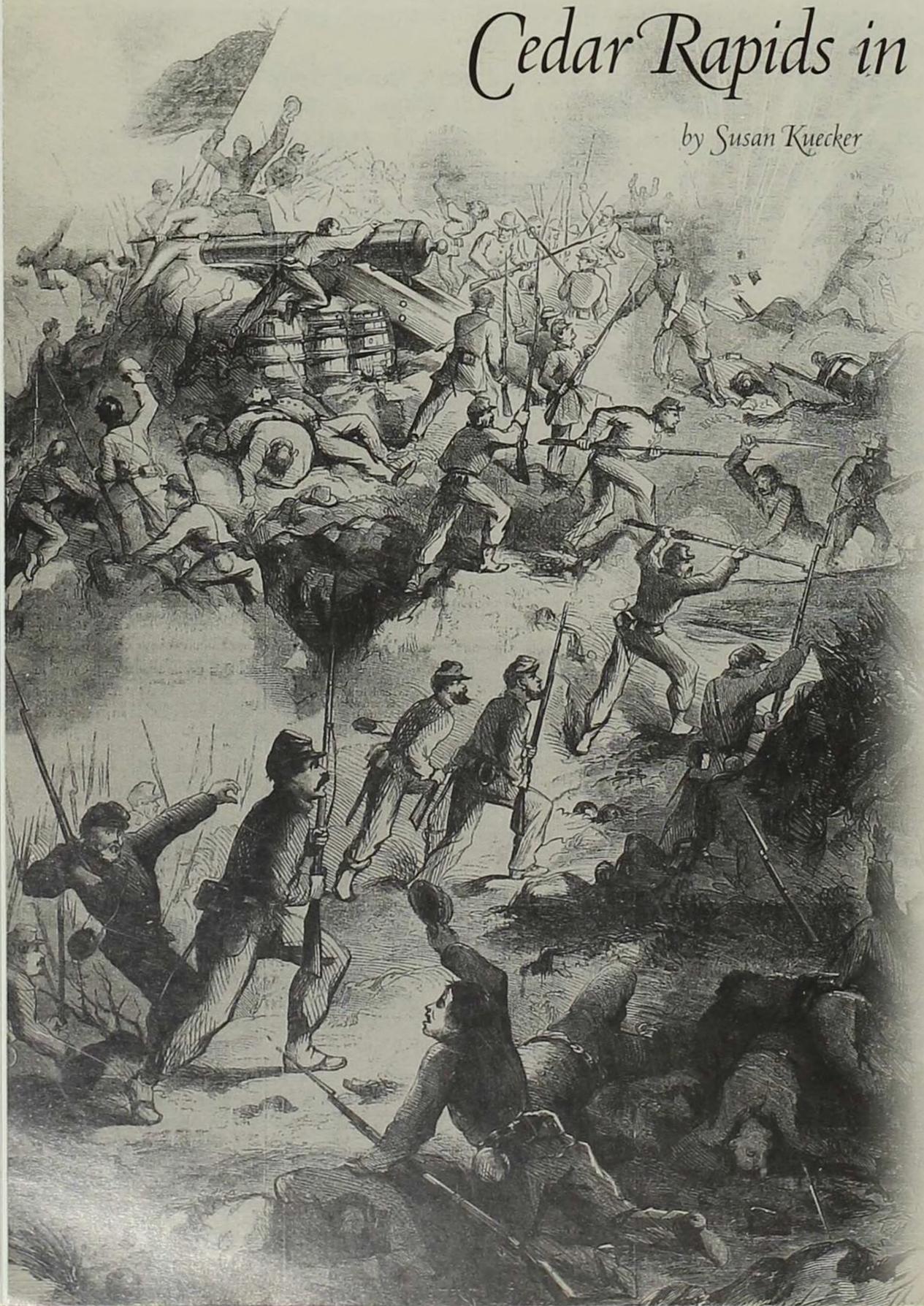


# Reverberations of the War



## Cedar Rapids in 1865

by Susan Kuecker



As the year 1865 opened, the Civil War occupied the minds of Cedar Rapids citizens and occupied the pages of its newspaper, the *Cedar Valley Times*. Although local issues stirred up editorial ire, and local businesses advertised their wares, long columns of war news dominated much of the four-page weekly. Just as the newspaper kept its readers informed of local and national events in 1865, so too does it reveal to readers today how deeply the war was etched into the local consciousness and how much it impacted local events and concerns.

In early January, details were still appearing in the *Cedar Valley Times* concerning the Union victory at Nashville and Savannah's fall to Sherman in the last half of December. Soldiers from Cedar Rapids and the rest of Linn County served in Iowa regiments involved in both actions. Although the telegraph had brought immediate



Although far from battlegrounds, Cedar Rapids stayed attuned to the Civil War for four long years (above, an 1868 map).

news, citizens still anxiously awaited the published casualty lists and more complete reports that often took longer to reach communities. Just before the New Year, the *Cedar Valley Times* had published the Adjutant General's notice of items "in his possession, for the families of killed and wounded soldiers of the 20th Iowa Regiment." For seven evenings in early January, worshippers met in the town's seven churches and prayed for loved ones serving in the army.

Meanwhile, a fierce local debate raged over President Lincoln's call in December for volunteers. The enthusiasm of the early war years had evaporated and men no longer eagerly sought to enter the army. Once a call for volunteers was issued, quotas were assigned to each state, and the state then assigned quotas to each locality. If volunteer enlistments did not meet the quota, then the draft (established in 1863) was in-

stituted. In Iowa, the only use of the draft had occurred in September of 1864, but not without incident. In Poweshiek County, two United States deputy marshals on their way to arrest draft evaders had been ambushed and murdered. Now state and local officials were determined to avoid a repeat of the September events.

Some eastern Iowa towns reportedly offered bounties as high as \$1,000 to encourage enlistment. In Linn County, the Board of Supervisors considered paying a \$300 bounty to each volunteer, and the *Cedar Valley Times* approved: "We believe that most of the Townships are in favor of giving the bounty. It will certainly be difficult if not impossible to raise all the volunteers required from the county unless an appropriation of this kind is made. . . . The action of the Board will be looked for with anxiety by all." After several lengthy meetings in January, the supervi-

sors decided against a bounty, believing that high bounties were not fair to the soldiers who had volunteered out of patriotism early in the war.

**Change, Arms!**



The Union Volunteer leaving his "Old Arms" for the "New Minnie."

The war permeated American life. This illustration and those that follow were printed onto envelopes during the war. (From the M.W. Davis Union scrapbook, comprising more than a thousand Civil War envelopes. SHSI-Iowa City)

Nevertheless, the same day that the *Times* reported the supervisors' decision, it also reported apparent draft evasion: "We learn that many persons have suddenly left . . . within the past ten days. . . . The object of their departure is apparent. They were afraid that they should be drafted and thus be compelled to help make up the quota of the County."

Evading the draft by being absent on the anticipated day of enrollment was not uncommon across the North in the second half of the war, but the *Times* had no patience for this. "They have fled like cowards and poltroons, and as such they should be treated," the newspaper scolded. Such a man "should be denied the right of suffrage, and we are not sure but what his wife, if such an apology



My only support—both boys gone to the war. I wonder if they would take me?

for a man has one, would have a substantial claim to a divorce." To officials' relief later that month, local and state quotas were met without drafting any men.

As the 1865 winter dragged on, the plight of soldiers' families also caused great concern. Wartime inflation had almost doubled prices

between 1861 and 1865, wreaking special hardship on soldiers' families, who had lost their wage earners to the war. Iowa counties had been legislatively mandated since 1863 to set up relief boards. In Cedar Rapids, the Relief Committee of the Common Council doled out a few dollars at a time to "the war widows and other needy poor" for necessities.

Noting that "thus far we have had a cold winter," the *Cedar Valley Times* issued a special call for assistance: "We propose that the City Council purchase one or two acres of woodland for the families of soldiers, and that a day be appointed for the cutting and hauling of the wood. . . . The cost of the woodland would not be great, the labor would be cheerfully and gratuitously performed and the good which would be accomplished would be immense. . . . Similar things have been done in many places,—why not in Cedar Rapids?"

Meanwhile, various Iowa regiments pledged several thousand dollars each to aid in the establishment of a home for soldiers' orphans. Estimates that year claimed that there were 10,000 soldiers' orphans in Iowa, and the *Times* reported that "the requests of mothers to have their children taken at the Home are numerous." Although Cedar Rapids promoted itself as an ideal location for such a home, the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home was eventually established in Farmington in southeastern Iowa that summer and then was moved to Davenport.

**T**he soldiers themselves were the focus of relief efforts by the Cedar Rapids Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society. Established in the fall of



If I cannot fight, I can feed those who do.

1861, the society had become a chapter of the larger Iowa Sanitary Commission; its cofounder Mary Ely was one of only two Iowa women to serve on the commission's 12-member Board of Control and would receive national recognition for her work. The federal government relied heavily on the thousands of women's organizations like the one in Cedar Rapids to marshal and help distribute food, clothing, and medical supplies to soldiers.

Now, as scurvy threatened the poorly fed Union Army near Nashville (including Linn County companies), the Cedar Rapids Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society asked local farmers to donate vegetables to send to the soldiers. The group was also preparing for the upcoming Chicago Sanitary Fair, scheduled for May. Sanitary fairs, which were essentially enormous bazaars, had proven to be extremely successful fund-raising tools for soldiers' relief efforts in the North. The women were making articles to sell at the Chicago fair and soliciting donations from churches,

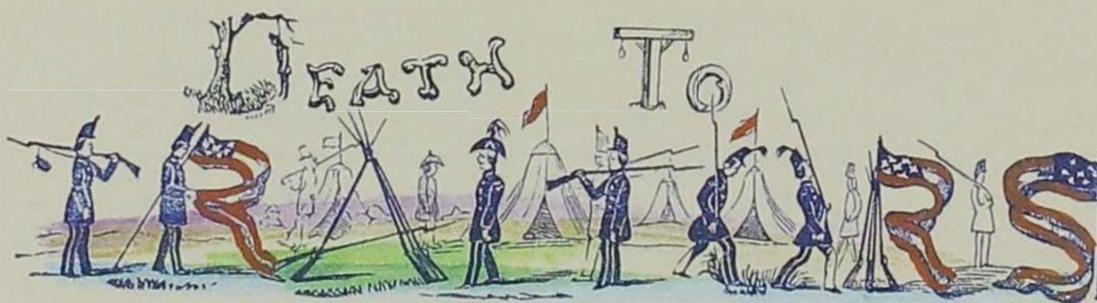
lodges, businesses, schools, and individuals. The Cedar Rapids Ladies Soldiers' Aid Society raised more than \$10,000 for soldiers' relief during the war, and the *Times* praised the group as part of the nation's "army of Florence Nightingales" whose victories "will never grow dim."

As winter turned to spring, it appeared that the war was winding down. Some citizens were reluctant to believe this, having been disappointed so many times in the past. And so much speculation had filled the newspapers, including fears that the Confederate Army would shift into a guerrilla war. Thus, when news reached Cedar Rapids of the capture of Richmond on April 3, and of Lee's surrender on April 9, great "jubilations" were held. Shopkeepers closed their doors for the day, and citizens celebrated in the evening with bonfires, fireworks, and political speeches.

Then, at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 15, this mood of celebration changed to one of intense mourning when word reached Cedar



We Mourn a Father Slain.



Rapids of President Lincoln's assassination. Stores closed again that Saturday afternoon and the following Monday, but now many were draped in black. Many citizens also donned their mourning clothes to show respect for the dead President.

"People were gathered together in knots on the principal streets," the *Cedar Valley Times* reported, "thinking and talking of nothing but the sad and terrible news." Iowa Governor William M. Stone asked Iowans to "assemble in their respective places of worship" on April 27th for "humiliation and prayer," and requested that "travel within the State, and all secular employment, be totally suspended on that day and that all public offices be draped in mourning" for 30 days.

An editorial in the *Cedar Valley Times* summed up the emotions of that roller-coaster April: "Joy and mourning has thus been strangely mingled, and while raising shouts of joy for the great victories achieved by our armies we have at the same time been called upon to mourn for the *great man* of the nation, stricken down by the bullet of an assassin, at a time . . . when the President was maturing schemes for the conciliation of the rebels. . . . Surely the past few weeks have been marked with great events and while our hearts are pained . . . yet we may be consoled by the reflection that events have recently transpired, fatal to the foe against whom

we have so long been contending."

Some citizens of Cedar Rapids believed that high Confederate officials, including Confederate President Jefferson Davis, had conspired to kill Lincoln. This belief was widespread in the North because only a few days had separated Lee's surrender and Lincoln's death. Accordingly, many called for harsh treatment of anyone suspected of being a Southern



The Jeff. Davis' "Neck-tie."

sympathizer. In Cedar Rapids, it appears that Masonic lodge members had advocated giving aid to needy Masons in the South, and were now accused by some of sympathizing with the Confederacy.

While the prospects of peace between the North and the South were important to Cedar Rapids

officials, they were also concerned with keeping the peace on the local level. Throughout the winter and early spring, there had been complaints about a recent increase in crime, and the *Cedar Valley Times*, a Republican paper, had directly linked it to alcohol consumption. "The primary and almost the sole cause of the disgraceful occurrences which have taken place in our city is the drinking of alcoholic beverages," the newspaper charged. "Can we expect peace and good conduct in a place of 3,000 inhabitants which supports not less than 19 liquor establishments and several houses of ill-fame?" Finally in May, the city marshal led a series of raids against liquor establishments, but the growing Czech population protested the raids, believing that they discriminated against them.

The end of the war now allowed several long-delayed projects to proceed. Beginning in June, a series of meetings was held to discuss various railroad proposals. City leaders knew that good railroad connections were essential for transporting goods to market and attracting new industry. Citizens in other parts of Linn County also wanted easy access to railroad connections. Although the railroad had reached Cedar Rapids in 1859, the war had slowed further development.

Other transportation improvements were also needed. In July, for the third time in less than ten years, the main bridge across the Cedar River in Cedar Rapids had collapsed, this time as a herd of 40 cattle crossed it. Many wanted a free bridge, but city officials said the city couldn't afford it. Citizens

used ferries to cross the river while a second toll bridge was built.

That summer, Cedar Rapids graded downtown streets for the first time. Business owners installed awnings on their buildings, repaired or added sidewalks, and planted trees in the downtown. Even though nearby Marion was the county seat, Cedar Rapids was Linn County's center of trade. Most of the outlying towns in the county had only a handful of businesses, whereas Cedar Rapids had dozens (including an ice cream parlor). Perhaps the most unusual enterprise in Cedar Rapids was the Cedar Rapids Oil and Mineral Co., which spent the summer unsuccessfully drilling for oil along the Cedar River.

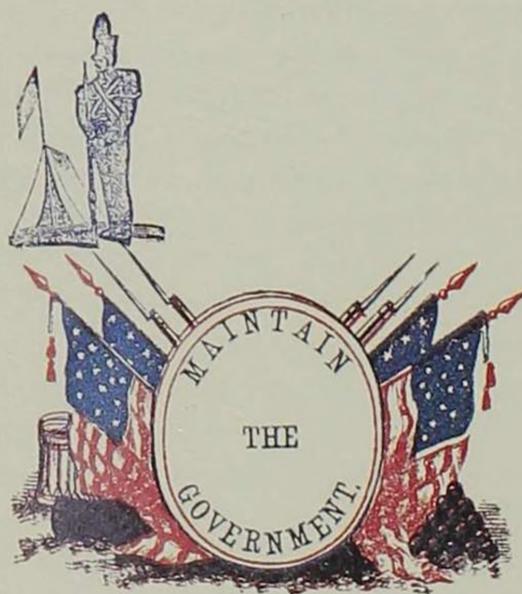
In July, a minor controversy erupted when the *Cedar Valley Times* published a list of citizens who had paid the federal income

the list also made it obvious that some fairly prominent people had not paid much tax.

"We make no comments upon the returns made by different persons," the *Times* remarked. "The list is before our readers and they are at liberty to make such deductions and conclusions as may seem to them warranted by the facts and figures."

Yet a half-year earlier, when the *Times* first publicly contemplated publishing such a list, it had observed that this "would shame some men and cause them to cease defrauding the Government and their fellow-citizens. There are men who are reputed wealthy in Cedar Rapids who pay less income taxes than others who are known to be comparatively poor."

Perhaps the commercial enterprise that changed the most because of the Civil War was banking. As federally chartered banks began to appear in Cedar Rapids, the *Times* had weighed in on the issue in February. While acknowledging that "we have always looked with pride upon the State Bank of Iowa, not simply because it was an Iowa institution, but because it was a sound, reliable institution," the newspaper also reasoned that "we now have a better currency than that of the State Bank, to-wit: that of the National Banks." "The National currency [the greenback] will pay taxes, buy revenue and postage stamps, and is a legal tender for all forms of indebtedness. . . . Give us the money which is current everywhere in preference to that which is at par only in the State in which we happen to reside. . . . Because we have a good banking system is no reason why we should refuse to have a better one. . . . Some of the Branches of the State Bank have been wisely converted into Na-



tax, one of many taxes added in the 1860s to help finance the war. (By 1865, the tax had risen to 5 percent on incomes of \$600-5,000, 7 1/2 percent on \$5,000-10,000, and 10 percent on incomes above \$10,000.) The newspaper justified its action by stating that such lists had been published all over the North. By revealing who had paid the tax,

tional Banks and others are on the eve of doing so. We trust that the wisdom of the change will soon be apparent to all."

The biggest local events of summer 1865 involved the long-awaited return of soldiers. After a Grand Review in late May in Washington, D.C., the Union had begun mustering out its regiments. As each Linn County regiment returned home, the newspaper published a brief history recounting its glorious deeds. Yet an editorial on June 22 reported, "We find that the



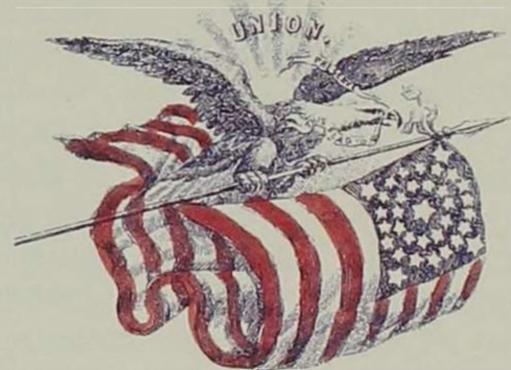
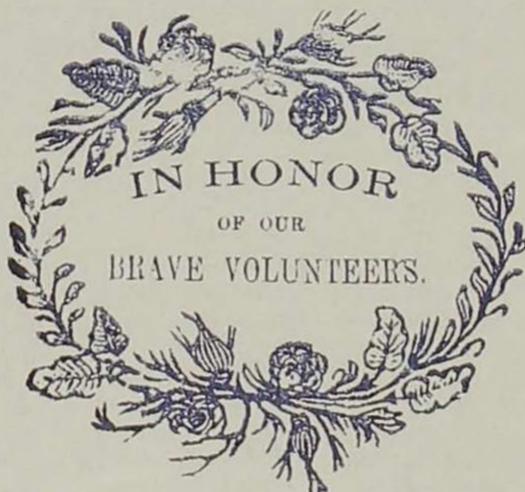
THREE CHEERS FOR  
THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE.

soldiers in different parts of the country are complaining in many instances of the cold reception with which they have met when they returned home. We have seen mention of this in Chicago papers, and heard it from soldiers who stopped in Davenport. . . . These men who went out from us have well borne their share of the work which the Union armies had to do. They have endured hardship, privations and sufferings. . . . Now they are coming home . . . the least that we can do, is to give them a warm reception, and demonstrate to them that we appreciate the services which they have rendered us."

As the Fourth of July ap-

proached, the citizens of Cedar Rapids had something special to celebrate for the first time in years, yet city leaders made no special arrangements until they found out that their rival, Marion, had elaborate plans to celebrate the holiday and welcome the soldiers home. Unwilling to be outdone by their rival, Cedar Rapids citizens met in mid-June to form committees and make arrangements. But on the 28th, the committee announced it was too late to arrange a band and fireworks, and that a celebration would have to wait until late summer. The next day, however, yet another meeting was held; a band and fireworks had been obtained after all. In the end, the Cedar Rapids July 4th celebration was complete with a procession, speeches and toasts, a war dance by Pottawattamie Indians camped nearby, and fireworks.

A county-wide celebration was also planned for Thursday, September 7. Committees were organized and extensive arrangements were made for a parade, a 40-foot floral "triumphal arch" over Iowa Avenue (now First Avenue), and other festivities. Officials asked several women from each township to volunteer to help cook and serve a free dinner for the soldiers. And if gossip was true, \$1,000 or more had been spent on fireworks.



Unfortunately on the day of the celebration, a steady down-pour ruined the floral arch and canceled outside activities. Nevertheless, more than 400 soldiers attended the dinner, and the ball was a success, even though it was moved indoors to cramped quarters.

State and local politics were heating up as the October elections approached. Months earlier, at the Republican convention in Des Moines, Davenport editor Edward Russell and Congressman Hiram Price had pushed their fellow delegates into a last-minute addition to a plank for black suffrage. The convention had just passed a less emphatic resolution, but Russell's addition from the floor called for the word "white" to be stricken from the article on suffrage in Iowa's Constitution, thus explicitly extending the right to vote to African-American males. Even among Republicans, the plank was controversial.

Democrats made opposition to this plank their major campaign issue. They pointed to such prominent Republicans as General Jacob Cox of Ohio, who advocated colonizing blacks in the South and withholding the vote until the former slaves were deemed ready. Because of identification of the

Democratic Party with the Confederacy, the party called instead for a "nonpartisan" convention and ran its "Soldiers" ticket, in an attempt to appeal to more voters. For governor, the party nominated Colonel Thomas H. Benton Jr., a former Democrat and state superintendent of public instruction. Benton campaigned in Cedar Rapids but



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was not warmly received, according to reports in the Republican *Cedar Valley Times*. Meanwhile the paper appealed to veterans to "do what you can to have the word 'white' erased from the Constitution of Iowa; because it is unjust, a slander on the good sense of the people and on the progress of the age."

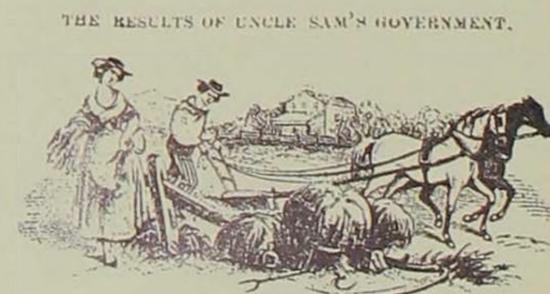
That October, local voters returned Republican candidates to office by large majorities, and Republicans won easily in the rest of the state as well, as they had since the party's formation in 1856. (Iowa's constitution was amended in 1868 to extend suffrage to black males.)

As fall turned to winter, war-related news continued to appear in the newspaper—reports of pardoned rebels, histories of Iowa regiments, fears that Southern capitalists and freed slaves would progress no farther than a feudal system, details of reconstruction policy, warnings about bounty claim

agents swindling returning soldiers, accounts of a 100-gun salute in Nashville on the one-year anniversary of the battle.

Thanksgiving was celebrated that year on the first Thursday in December. This was only the third year in a row that a national day of Thanksgiving had been declared by the president. Governor Stone called for a day of thanksgiving and prayer, and requested that "secular employment be suspended," and that the "widows and orphans of the patriot dead who gave their lives that liberty and the Union might be inseparable, be remembered."

The year 1865 ended much more quietly than it had begun. Townspeople were relieved that a terrible war that had caused much turmoil and grief was finally over. They hoped that peace would now bring continued growth and prosperity. In an end-of-the-year summary, the *Cedar Valley Times* editorial of December 28 concluded:



PEACE, PLENTY AND PROSPERITY.

"The year of 1865 has been marked by two results of momentous interest to the world. . . . First we have the suppression of the Great Slaveholder's Rebellion, and second the legal abolition of slavery itself. Truly the old year which is just expiring has been one of great results to the people of this Continent . . . and those results have been for the best interest of the human race."

Just as it had for four long years, the Civil War still hovered in the hearts and minds of Cedar Rapids citizens. ❖

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#### NOTE ON SOURCES

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