

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLIV

ISSUED IN JUNE 1963

No. 6

Copyright 1963 by the State Historical Society of Iowa



The Birthday of the Territory

On the Fourth of July in 1838 the Territory of Iowa was born. Throughout the Black Hawk Purchase the pioneers had made preparations to celebrate on that memorable Wednesday both the birth of their Territory and the sixty-second anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Formal exercises dignified the observance of the holiday at Dubuque, Burlington, Fort Madison, West Point, and Denmark, and similar celebrations were probably held in other places between Keokuk and Fort Snelling.

Long before the eventful day, patriotic citizens gathered to appoint committees on arrangements, to choose officers of the day, and to plan a banquet with appropriate toasts. A bad storm caused some delay in the preparations at Dubuque, but the importance of the occasion was not overlooked. "The Anniversary of our National Independence, and the birthday of that Territory in which are our adopted homes," declared the *Iowa News*, "should

enliven us to action, and make us act with a spirit of patriotism."

The observance of the Fourth of July was an important social event in the life of the frontier. It afforded an opportunity for the pioneers to get together and discuss the weather, the prospects for good crops, and the coming land sales. Politicians could display their patriotism and oratorical prowess. Community behavior was an index to the character of the people and the times. The speeches and toasts at the banquets gave composite expression to the hopes and fears, the opinions and prejudices of the pioneers.

Drenching rain early in the morning of July 4th prevented many "country friends" from attending the Dubuque celebration. It was not until 1:30 in the afternoon that the procession marched to the Catholic Church where Stephen Hempstead read the Declaration of Independence and James Churchman delivered the Oration. After singing several national songs, the procession reformed and marched to an arbor where 150 persons partook of a "substantial repast".

After dinner thirteen scheduled toasts were drunk amid enthusiastic applause. "The Day We Celebrate" was greeted by the band blaring Hail Columbia. Appropriate music followed each toast: thus Washington's Grand March was

played for "The Heroes and Sages of the Revolution"; Independence March accompanied "The Declaration of Independence"; and the Star Spangled Banner greeted the tribute to the American flag. The stirring strains of Yankee Doodle acclaimed the modest toast, "*The People* — The fountain of truth, whence flows the stream of political honesty".

The last four regular toasts dealt with matters closer to hearth and home. "The new Territory of Iowa" was accompanied by a timely sentiment: "May the high-toned honor and patriotism of her citizens command the highest respect abroad and cherish the most social feeling at home." Having been closely associated with Wisconsin, the citizens of Dubuque did not forget to toast "Our Sister Territory". A political barb can be detected in the toast to "The Press", for its attendant sentiment, "Free, fearless, and independent — watchful sentinels were a few base webs removed", was apparently aimed at partisan editors. The thirteenth toast honored "The Fair of Iowa — May they all be bless'd with matrimonial felicity; kind, warm hearted souls, God bless them." As the band bravely struck up Haste to the Wedding, a lump must have formed in the throat of many a lonely bachelor, for women were scarcest in the mineral region.

The first in a series of seventeen volunteer toasts was proposed by Dr. Stephen Langworthy to the new Territory "just rising in the political horizon of the west." Patrick Quigley quaffed his sentiments to the national Democratic Administration which, in his opinion, received its support from "honest industry" and was destined to "gloriously triumph in 1840, over Bank monopolists, chartered swindlers, speculating legislators, and judicial knaves." Next followed a toast to the town of Dubuque. The bitter animosity of Dubuque Irishmen for England was reflected in three toasts, and Dennis O'Shea, in proposing the name of "Iowa — The beautiful and fertile land of my adoption", could not forget "Old Erin — The land of my nativity." The Panic of 1837 was not forgotten by Chauncey Swan who hoped the pioneer would "have a head to plan, a heart to persevere, and an arm to bring him out" of economic adversity. Five drinks later Swan proposed a toast to "The Mercantile Aristocracy of Du Buque — May they never triumph over the working Democracy of Miners."

Burlington celebrated the birthday of the Territory in a "handsome style". James W. Grimes read the Declaration of Independence, David Rorer delivered the Oration, and Charles Mason served as Marshal. Judge David Irvin presided

at the "sumptuous repast" prepared by Mrs. Parrott of the Wisconsin Hotel. After the cloth had been removed and the ladies had retired, Cyrus S. Jacobs addressed the meeting. Eighteen regular toasts were proposed, each followed by music appropriate to the sentiment. The first eleven toasts commemorated the Fourth of July, George Washington, the Union, the President of the United States, the American flag, the Federal Government, the Chief Executive, the Congress of the United States, the Supreme Court, the Navy, and the Army. The remainder of the program was concerned with subjects nearer to the pioneers of 1838: Wisconsin Territory, Governor Henry Dodge, the Mississippi River, the town of Burlington, the squatters in the Black Hawk Purchase, and the fairer sex. When a toast was given to the "Territory of Iowa", the band struck up *She Is All My Fancy Painted Her*.

Twenty-eight volunteer toasts followed, three-fourths of which related to local affairs. Sickness prevented John B. Newhall from appearing, but his toast to Washington, Franklin, and Warren was read and warmly applauded. Six other toasts dealt with the national scene. Eight pioneers rose to honor the newly-born Territory of Iowa. John Lorton hoped the Territory would "bloom like the rose"; R. Cook declared her "present prospects

indicate her future greatness"; and Joseph Newhall felt that the "unrivalled beauty and expanding charms" of "Uncle Sam's youngest daughter" gave promise that she would be "the first to be united in the band of our glorious confederation." J. H. McKenny slyly toasted the "Fair of Iowa" who, unlike the Territories of Iowa and Wisconsin, seemed "better satisfied with union".

In contrast to the Dubuque toasts on Ireland and the lead miners, the citizens of Burlington rose five times to honor the farmers. G. W. Kelly described the sturdy sons of the soil as "brave and meritorious"; Reuben Chance praised their "industrious, enterprising and patriotic" nature and trusted they would "ever look out for snakes". W. W. Chapman saw Iowa farmers "united in defence of their homes", while G. W. Willhite expressed a similar thought when he proposed, "May union prevail, in time of land sale." Israel Robertson struck a prophetic note when he declared: "Iowa Farmers — If poor in purse, rich in spirit — the bone and sinew of the Territory, and powerful in the political field." John R. Woods trusted that the farmers of Iowa would "live to see this our delightful country, made by their hardships and dangers, the brightest star that graces the flag of our confederacy."

In Fort Madison the citizens met in Jacob Cut-

ler's new building at the ringing of the bell to celebrate Independence Day. Henry Eno read the Declaration of Independence and Philip Viele delivered the Oration before a large and attentive audience. "It was a chaste piece of composition," the Fort Madison *Patriot* declared, "containing a brief historical sketch of the settlement and progress of this country — the character of the founders of the republic — their zeal and perseverance in establishing institutions of learning and religion — and an urgent appeal to the citizens of IOWA to imitate the example of such fathers".

At three o'clock a large number sat down to dinner in an arbor, prepared for the occasion on the bank of the Mississippi. Chief Black Hawk was present, "decently clothed in citizen's dress." After the cloth was removed and the ladies had retired, thirteen formal toasts were drunk, mostly in cold water. Nine hearty cheers broke forth upon the reading of the fifth toast: "Iowa, this day taking its rank as a Territory. Soon may its star shine bright on the azure of our National Banner." Next came a toast to the Constitution — "framed by our Sires, their sons will sustain it."

Personal and local sentiments were usually more warmly applauded than those referring to the nation. Thus, a toast to the "hardy, brave, generous and hospitable" pioneers evoked nine

lusty cheers whereas the Army and Navy elicited only three. As the customary climax, the final prepared toast was to the ladies — “the prettiest flowers that bloom on our beautiful prairies”. When the program reached the informal phase, James G. Edwards volunteered a toast to “Our Illustrious Guest, Black Hawk”, whereupon the old chief responded in person, saying he was glad to eat with his white friends and to be at peace, though he could not forget that he was once a great warrior.

Six hundred friends of “civil and religious liberty” gathered at West Point in Lee County to celebrate Independence Day. The American flag was hoisted before sunrise and “continued to wave beautifully and triumphantly throughout the day.” At noon a large procession formed and marched to a grove where the public exercises began with prayer by the Reverend A. Ewing, who served as chaplain of the day. The Declaration of Independence was then read, after which Eli Stoddard “pronounced the Oration” in an “elegant manner” which gave “universal satisfaction” to all, many saying it surpassed anything “ever heard from the lips of any orator”.

A “sumptuous dinner” was served gratuitously, after which the cloth was removed and the usual thirteen scheduled toasts delivered. Twelve vol-

unbeer toasts were also drunk — including one to liberty-loving Kentuckians everywhere. Many a bachelor responded enthusiastically to a toast which expressed hope that the girls of West Point would “continue to grow in virtue and intelligence as fast as they grow in size and beauty.” A correspondent to the Fort Madison *Patriot* was “happy to state that the moderation and propriety which characterized the proceedings of the day and all who partook in its festivities, were unequaled by that of any celebration of the kind we ever before witnessed. Such was the veneration in which the day was observed, that it might reflect honor upon any community of free and enlightened citizens.”

A visitor at Denmark reported that the residents of that Congregational community, believing that their liberties were “more endangered by the use of intoxicating drink than all foreign enemies”, had determined to celebrate the Fourth of July by suppressing the liquor traffic. After Asa Turner had opened the meeting with prayer and read the Declaration of Independence, J. P. Stewart of Burlington delivered an address on the evils of intemperance, after which “the total pledge was read, to which fifty-three gave their names and a teetotal temperance society was organized”.

Eighty persons sat down to a table “spread

with the bounties of Providence" and served in an "admirable style". After dinner several toasts were volunteered and drunk in cold water. No doubt that arch-enemy of liquor, James G. Edwards, was glad to learn that at the Denmark celebration there was "no need of brandy and wine to aid the tongue or mind on such an occasion." After the temperance society was formed, other abstainers signed the pledge, making "in this infant settlement, eighty-five, who taste not, touch not, handle not, the accursed thing."

Such were the festivities which marked the birth of the Territory on July 4, 1838. There were no firecrackers, no traffic jams, no baseball games. If some people went fishing or raced horses or danced, those methods of celebration were not mentioned in the newspapers. There was, however, a general feeling of reverence for the founding fathers and gratitude for the institutions that they had established. The observance of the day was also characterized by an abiding self-confidence among the pioneers in their own ability as architects and builders of a mighty commonwealth west of the Mississippi. The Fourth of July a hundred years ago was cherished as the occasion for sober contemplation of great political achievements and a splendid destiny.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN