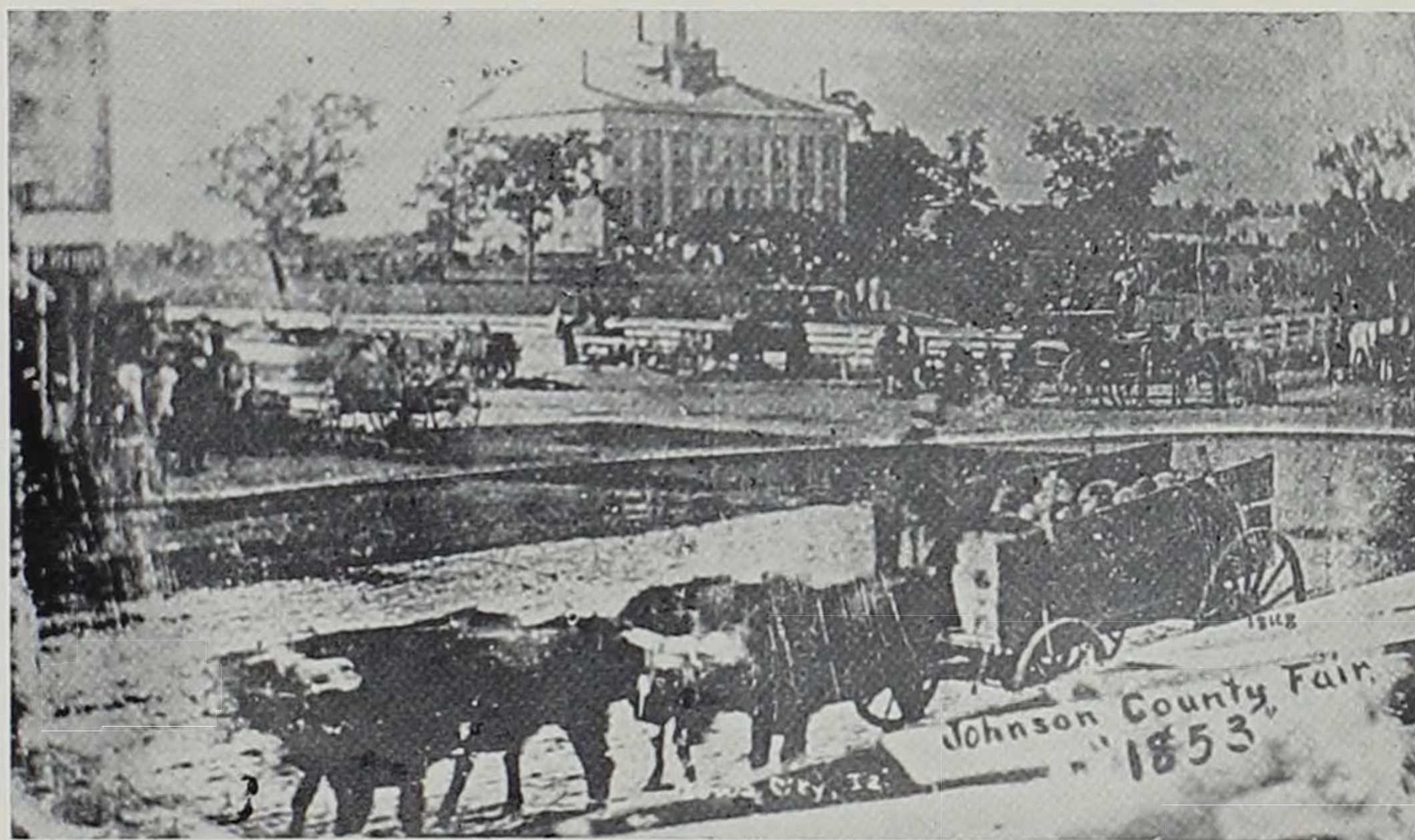


The **PALIMPSEST**



Capitol at Iowa City — Focal Point on the Old Military Road.

The Old Military Road

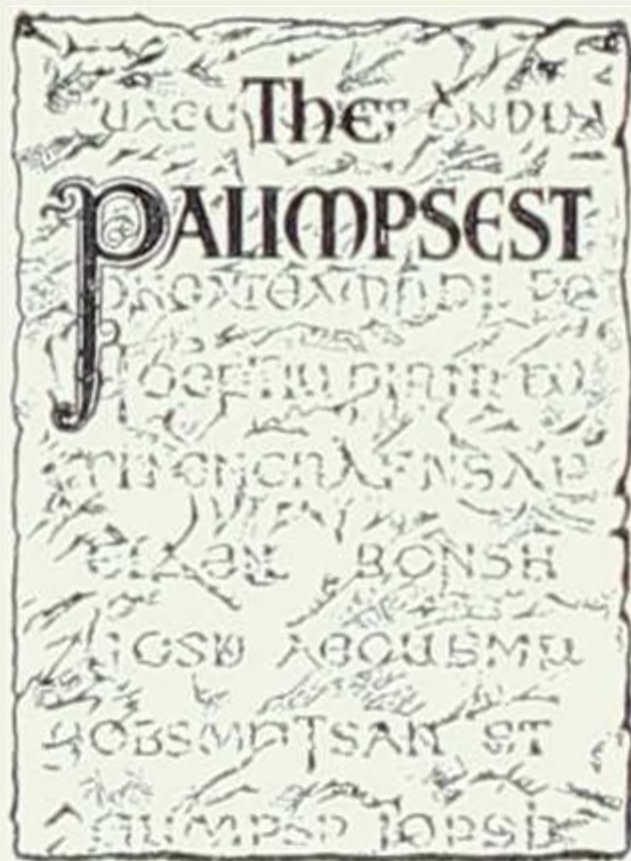
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130th Anniversary of the Old Military Road



The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Illustrations

All illustrations are from the State Historical Society of Iowa Collections.

Authors

Parish, Hansen, and Briggs are discussed in the text of this article. They appeared in the February, 1921, issue of *The Palimpsest*. William J. Petersen is Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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The Old Military Road

Trailing diagonally across the State from Dubuque to Iowa City is an old ridge road. It was laid out more than eighty years ago to connect the little mining town on the river with the new Territorial capital. The United States government was then fostering the construction of military roads on the western frontier, and in March, 1839, Congress appropriated twenty thousand dollars for such a road to begin at Dubuque and run "to such point on the northern boundary of the State of Missouri as may be best suited for its future extension by that State to the cities of Jefferson and St. Louis."

The road was ultimately extended beyond Iowa City, but to the people of the Territory of Iowa in 1839 the opportunity offered by the government meant simply access to the site of the new capital. The road from Dubuque as far as Iowa City was immediately surveyed, a United States army engineer named Tilghman directing the work. James, Lucius, and Edward Langworthy, the first two of

whom had crossed the Mississippi to the deserted diggings of Julien Dubuque in 1830, were given contracts for the construction of the road from Dubuque as far as the Cedar River. Edward Langworthy states that after the surveys were made Tilghman engaged Lyman Dillon to plow a furrow along the route to guide the contractors.

Meanwhile at Iowa City the town had been platted and the capitol building begun. A temporary tavern known as "Lean-back Hall" welcomed the travelers and tried to rival the hospitality which they had enjoyed at Tim Fanning's famous log tavern at the other end of the road. In the course of years Tim Fanning's tavern and "Lean-back Hall" have disappeared; nevertheless incentive was not lacking for two historically-minded vacationists to retrace the old road on foot in September, 1920. The writers of the articles that follow — Marcus L. Hansen and John E. Briggs — set out one autumn morning from Iowa City equipped with stout shoes and hearts, a tiny tent, an ancient map, and all the information they could gather about the old highway. Four days they walked on the way to Dubuque, their feet treading the modern thoroughfare while their minds were busy with the traces of deserted villages and the ancient secrets of living towns, with the signs of bygone traffic and the reminders of vanished spirits of the Old Military Road.

JOHN CARL PARISH

Phantoms on the Old Road

The Old Military Road! How foreign the expression to the peaceful, early autumn calm that lay over the valleys dropping away to the right and left of the ridge along which the road wound. My comrade and I had shouldered our packs at Iowa City and, setting our faces toward the northeast, had begun with ambitious strides to walk the old thoroughfare from Iowa City to Dubuque — our only motive being that furnished by the old books which told us that so the pioneers of Iowa had done. We could well believe that the road was old but why should it be called military? If in yonder groves where now one sees the red barn gables shining between the trees there arose the battlements of European fortresses, or if the deeply furrowed crossroads that mark the county lines were international boundaries where armed sentinels scanned the passports ere we proceeded, then we might declare the name appropriate. But harvest fields, many-tinted woodlands, and farmers who nod cheerily as they pass are not military, and the name is only the heritage of other years.

How fain we would escape from the past! Last season's automobile is discarded for the newer model and this year's clothes will be the derision

of next year's fashions. But geography binds us with bands that only under the most unusual circumstances are broken. Long after the mapmaker is gone the names that he sprinkled over the sheet are still written and bear mute testimony to the nature of the world in which he lived. Wall Street has no wall; Back Bay has no bay; and the Military Road is no longer military.

Yet military it once was. Soldiers planned it, surveyed it, and used it. Eastern Iowa in 1839 was the frontier; the site of the Territorial capital had just been chosen on the wild bluff that rises above the waters of the Iowa. The Mississippi River towns were full of men eager to venture forth into the wilderness, and the Indian trails on the prairies were followed by the ever-moving pioneers. That these irrepressible spirits would soon come into forcible contact with the Indians who only reluctantly had left their homes in the ceded "Forty Mile Strip" seemed inevitable, and in order that the iron hand of the government might be felt in the remotest valleys, roads were necessary whereby troops might be readily sent from the permanent posts to the scene of any disturbance. That one of these should lead from Dubuque, the commercial and military center of the Upper Mississippi, to Iowa City, the new capital, was logical; and by Act of Congress in 1839 an appropriation was made to pay for the surveying, grading, and bridging of such a thoroughfare. Yet even from

the first, the number of soldiers who passed over it was surpassed by the incoming swarm of settlers, and the military men did little more than leave their name upon their work.

And as such it is known to this day by all who dwell by its winding course. The college student who was painting the Ivanhoe Bridge laid down his brush — he was working for the county — and explained to us who pretended ignorance, that the real designation of the trail we followed was the Military Road. The gray-headed sage at Monticello who gossiped with us as we stopped to rest our weary feet at the Depot Park declaimed on the sacrilege of rerouting a few miles of the Military Road as some moderns favored; and at the Trappist Abbey, kind-hearted Brother Timothy, he of the twinkling eyes, led us down to the pasture gate and with his walking stick pointed out a cross-cut by which we might regain the Military Road. All knew of the glory that once was the old highway.

All but the reporter of that village paper into whose town we hobbled at noon. Jauntily he came out to interview these pedestrians — perhaps they were transcontinental hikers about to favor the town with a visit and the paper with a front page story. Disappointment for all. To him the Military Road meant nothing and when he heard of Iowa City — that was too common. Away he darted to the nearby poolroom where he was sure he could unearth important news.

How discouraging it was thus at the very door of publicity to have it slammed in the face! What permanent record would now be left of this so historic a jaunt? In the dust of the road we left no trail over which investigators could puzzle and students write theses. And when the voices of the two travelers were stilled, who then would take up the tale of the intrepid historians who not only essayed to write of the pioneers but to live like them as well? This thought added to the torments of legs already weary, and the brightness of our spirits faded as the September afternoon darkened over the landscape.

Misery loves company and to console ourselves as the darkness gathered from the already gloomy valleys, we conjured up, one by one, the shades of departed wanderers to accompany us — a procession of phantoms of the Old Military Road. They were travelers whose journeyings have already been forgotten: Leather Stockings who had no Cooper; black-robed priests without their Parkman; frontier Ichabods whose singing school escapades no Irving has recorded; horse-thieves who were hanged before the first dime novel was penned; all that motley band of men and women whose yellowed letters are still unread, about the foundation stones of whose cabins the roots of lofty trees are now entwined, and many indeed who never wrote a letter, who never built a cabin but who, living, created that great romance that

hovers about the wooded watercourses of Eastern Iowa, felt by everyone yet related by almost none.

Among the throng are Edmund Booth and his two companions who tell of how they passed this way long before the rivers were bridged, and when few features marked the passage across the seas of waving prairie grass. Leaving Dubuque to make a residence in the West, they bid adieu to the sordid associations of "Dirty Hollow" and to the rippling waters of Catfish Creek with its busy mill, follow the dim trail that leads to the falls of the Maquoketa where already a few cabins cluster about the charming Cascade. Here and there are wagon ruts to guide their horses' feet along the winding ridge that like a huge serpent crawls on its way to the ford over the South Fork of the Maquoketa. And now the lights streaming out between the logs of the cabin of Daniel Varvel — first resident of Monticello — betoken a supper of ham and eggs, corn dodgers and coffee, and a bed in the fragrant hay piled high in the rude barn.

Early the next morning they are off again for there are streams to be crossed, Kitty's Creek and Fawn Creek, before the site of Anamosa is reached on the banks of the Wapsipinicon River. Booth goes no further but his two companions, bound for Iowa City, continue their way over the rolling prairie that stretches on to the waters of the Cedar where the lounging inhabitants of Ivanhoe point out the route to the new town. By hard riding they

reach it before the evening of the second day and are soon, no doubt, at the tavern recounting their experiences by the way and listening perhaps to the complaints of those, less fortunate than they, who wandering from the ridge had found themselves lost in the prairie swamps or whose horses tripped over the protruding roots. Glad are they all that the road builders are already at work.

Yonder in our procession of phantoms is one driving five yoke of oxen attached to a plow. Lyman Dillon is his name, and if the story of Dillon and his furrow had not been somewhat discredited by the historical critics his would have been the most honored position in the group. For the old tradition relates that it was he who first rescued travelers from the dangers of waywardness. Employed by citizens of Iowa City, with his oxen and plow he threw a furrow almost a hundred miles long extending from the capital to Dubuque, and the wagons and riders that followed this guide beat a road by its side which was the predecessor of the Military Road. However, though the records have made mythical parts of this tradition, he claims a rôle among these characters.

Now the shade of the real maker of the road, a United States army engineer by the name of Tilghman, joins us. Under his direction the surveys were made and contracts let for the construction of bridges, the grading through the swamps,

and the ditching beside the road which cut a clean swath forty feet wide when forests or bushes were encountered.

At top speed one of Ansel Briggs' postriders dashes by; but the commerce on the road increases and saddle bags can no longer contain the correspondence of prolific scribes. The Western Stage Company puts on four-horse coaches one of which now travels along silently beside us. A Concord Coach! How little the expression means to us who can describe vehicles only in terms of cylinders. They were things of beauty in which any man would be proud to ride, and pride our fathers did not lack. "How they looked around them with a self-satisfied air as they took a seat and waited for the stage to start," declared an old observer. "How they nodded their heads and waved their hands at envious friends as the driver gathered up the reins, cracked his whip and dashed away."

It was not always ease and splendor. There came mudholes in the road in which the polish of boots was lost as passengers dismounted and struggled through with as much difficulty as the lumbering coach. Here was a river swollen by spring rains and no longer fordable, so passengers crossed the rushing waters in skiffs and under the dripping trees awaited the coming of the other stage which would discharge its load and turn back. And in winter there was the cold that

pierced the buffalo robes and the blinding snow-storms when all the drifted road was obliterated and the driver, lantern in hand, stumbled before in search of uncovered landmarks, his shouted words carried away by the swirling gale.

What a brave race these "knights of the lash" were! — but not in the eyes of all their contemporaries. Pious Sunday School teachers warned the fidgety boys to stay away from the "barns" where there was nothing but loafers, rum and stories of the road; and one mother lamented the waywardness of her prodigal son, saying, "I'd jest as soon let that boy staid in that old printin' office as to had him gone to runnin' with them stage drivers." Beneath the corduroy suit, however, was usually as generous a soul as ever crossed the western plains. Stories, indeed, he had, and whoever climbed up on the box beside him and first judiciously praised the teams, was sure to be a sharer in them; and many a half-frozen traveler got the last drop from the whiskey bottle even though the nearest tavern were ten miles away. The valley stretches of the road that once reëchoed his song now return no music but the strident notes of the klaxon, and a whirling mechanism covers the ground once trod by the flying feet of the gallant four.

But look at the passengers who gaze from the windows of this spectre carriage. That young lady, with fair face almost hidden by bonnet, rib-

bons and curls, who seems so calmly unconscious that her hoop-skirts are filling a much larger portion of the seat than the single fare entitles her to, is probably the daughter of some frontier politician coming from school in the East to be the reigning belle of the county town and break the hearts of half a score of backwoods lawyers before she discovers which one has the speediest prospect of being sent to the U.S. Congress. Those two high-hatted heads borne on broad shoulders over which capes are carelessly flung are filled with balanced sentences and classic perorations, for they are members of the Territorial legislature proceeding to the assembly at Iowa City where they hope to deliver their sentiments on the wickedness of banks and the lethargy of the Indian agents with more gusto and gesticulations than the cramped quarters of the coach allow. That solemn-visaged person whose eyes rest so dreamily upon the passing scenery would be the victim of one of the "river gangs" west of the Mississippi if they knew the riches hidden in his carpet bag, riches not his but funds which he has begged in the counting houses and parlors of the eastern cities. With them he will build a college for the sons and daughters of the pioneers — an institution from which, he hopes, will radiate an influence that will make of these prairies a Utopia. Already he sees the brick walls of the "Academy" with its trim cupola rising above the

tops of the waving trees, the paths that entwine on its campus and the white cottages that line the village streets. The college was built and is now gone. Cattle graze along the old lanes where once the daughters and sons of deacons strolled; and the surrounding acres are as far from Utopia as the rest of Iowa. Still it is fondly remembered by some gray-headed men who remain, recalling not the lessons in moral philosophy imparted within its chilly walls, but the nights in the literary society hall, the pranks played during prayers, and solemn promises whispered where the campus shadows were darkest.

Other builders are there among the spirits from the phantom world. They are the homemakers. On foot and on horseback they come, sturdy backwoodsmen who have already hewed the forests in Kentucky, Indiana and Tennessee, and wiry Yankees from the States of granite and fish. Some bring nothing but rifle, ax and stout heart; others guide beside them the oxen-drawn wagon with tow-headed boys, "hoopless" girls, and panting dogs trailing behind. Not only for Iowa are they bound; the lure of California draws many. Eight hundred teams passed over the road in the years 1851-1852 destined for the Golden State, proceeding as solitary individuals or in large parties of men and women organized and captained by old campaigners who could draw up the ranks to deliver two hundred shots in ten minutes or in

close quarters fall upon the lurking redskins and with revolvers and "Bowie" give them a "Tennessee fight." A later generation of gold hunters follows, those who seek the hidden treasures of Pike's Peak. Like the "Forty-niners," the "Fifty-niners" pass clad in all varieties of picturesque costumes as if on a gay pleasure jaunt accompanied by bands of music to shorten the dreary stretches of the westward way. Here also come the shades of those three small boys of Cascade who, inspired by the sight of the passing throngs and fired by the stories of the "Peakers" who stopped to ask for a drink, set out on foot for the Eldorado provided only with high hopes and a dozen and a half of eggs, and were overtaken by anxious friends only when the steeples of Anamosa were within sight.

More gorgeous cavalcades than these are the troops of United States dragoons who pass and repass, now hot on the trail of renegade Indians who have broken across the treaty line and are terrifying the new settlers, now returning leisurely, the manacled offenders in their midst. Here are other avengers of the law that travel quickly forward, the energetic county sheriff with his posse of farmers called from the plow and flail, scanning the muddy bottoms for traces of those thieves who with the frightened led-horses dragging behind, passed this way at midnight.

Who is this proceeding so cheerfully along with

a smile for everyone and a helping hand for the emigrant who is repairing his broken wheel or axle? He is the frontier minister who christens the cabin children, rewards the patience of the bachelor homesteader with a bride, terrifies the souls of chronic sinners with warnings of impending doom and prays over the first grave dug in the green of the new cemetery. Perhaps it is the shade of Brother Taylor, Methodist circuit rider, who shed so many tears in the pulpit, that his hearers knew him only as "Weeping Jeremiah;" or it may be the spirit of the Rev. Mr. Swerengen who never missed his fortnightly appointments in summer's heat or winter's cold, though he often ascended the platform so chilled by his struggle through the wintry road that the overcoat was discarded only after the discourse had waxed hot.

Far before us village windows begin to twinkle and as our minds turn more to supper and bed our ghostly companions become dimmer: lawyer and land agent hand in hand; pioneer doctor, dispenser of pills, expert "bleeder" and healer of man and beast; friendly neighbors on their way to a "raising;" their sons and daughters returning from a spelling bee; and all that host of plain men and women, good and bad, who compose the foundation upon which the great figures of any generation stand. This passing pageant has revealed to us a secret of the history of Iowa.

What manner of men were they who first cut

the forests and broke the sod of the Commonwealth? One person looking into the past sees in the dark ravine the evening rendezvous where about the flaring flames are gathered the ruffian gang who stole the horses and passed the bogus money, and he says the original Iowans were cut-throats and ruffians. Another sees spire after spire of school and church rising upon country lanes and village streets and he declares that the foundation stone of the State was the idealism of God-fearing men. A third sees the curling smoke that comes from the hearths of a thousand cabins and he says the State was built about the home.

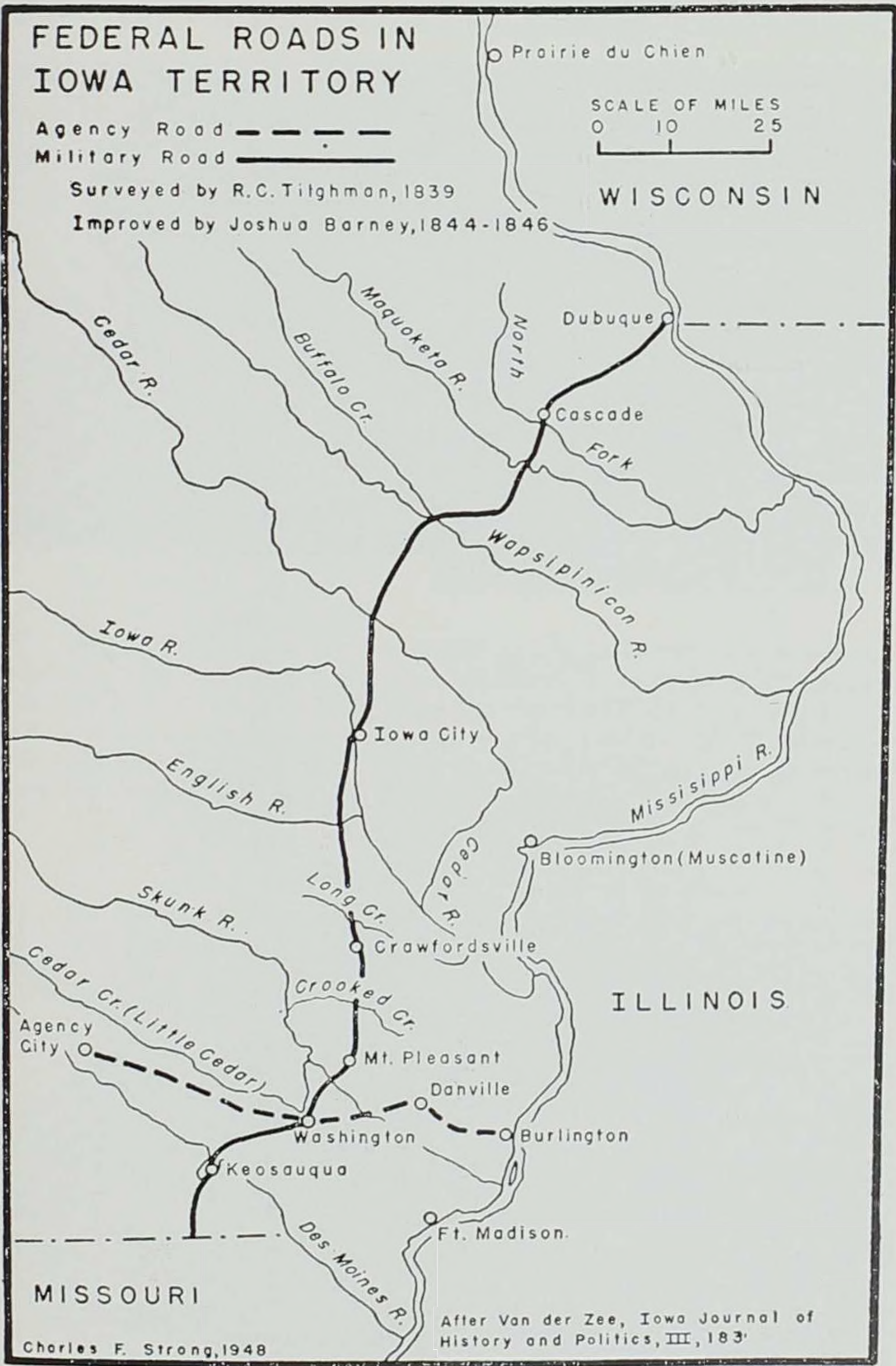
Still we must look not in the valley or on the plain or in the clearing to find the touchstone of the life of the State. Look upon the road — that great artery that poured in all the elements of weakness or strength, of lawlessness or order, of blasphemy or godliness that struggled for the mastery and whose conflict constitutes much of Iowa's story. Such a vision anyone may see who after studying the way his fathers lived will venture out upon the road to read the records that they have left.

But for us it has faded, and stretching out on the road before is a yellow shaft of light growing brighter and brighter. There is a warning signal sounded behind and we gingerly step aside as an automobile rushes by, its gay occupants shouting and laughing and singing. How like the present

generation, we muse as the dark road is retaken. How devoid of gratitude they unthinkingly pass over the highways whose roughness has been worn smooth by the painful steps of predecessors — the highways of law, of learning, of religion as well as the Old Military Road.

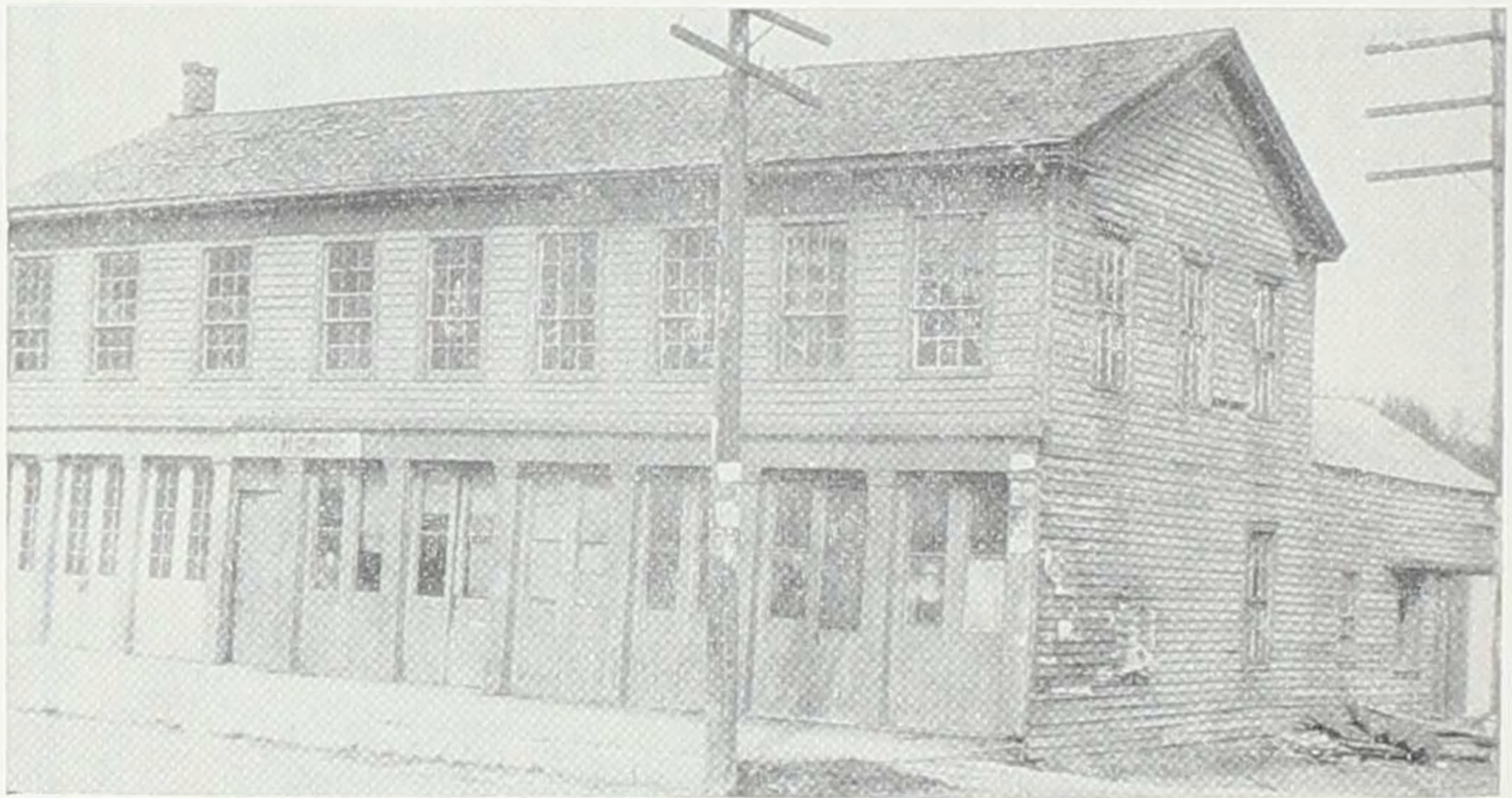
Again there is the piercing warning in the rear. Again we jump to right and left, but too late to escape the stifling cloud of dust that fills the air so lately peopled by the shades of the wanderers of yesterday. Gone now are the bits of our homely philosophy. The law against unlighted motor vehicles should be enforced, we angrily declare, and having wiped the dust from our faces we shake our fists at the departing tumult and with husky throats consign these travelers to a darker oblivion than has ever befallen any of their fore-runners on the Old Military Road.

MARCUS L. HANSEN

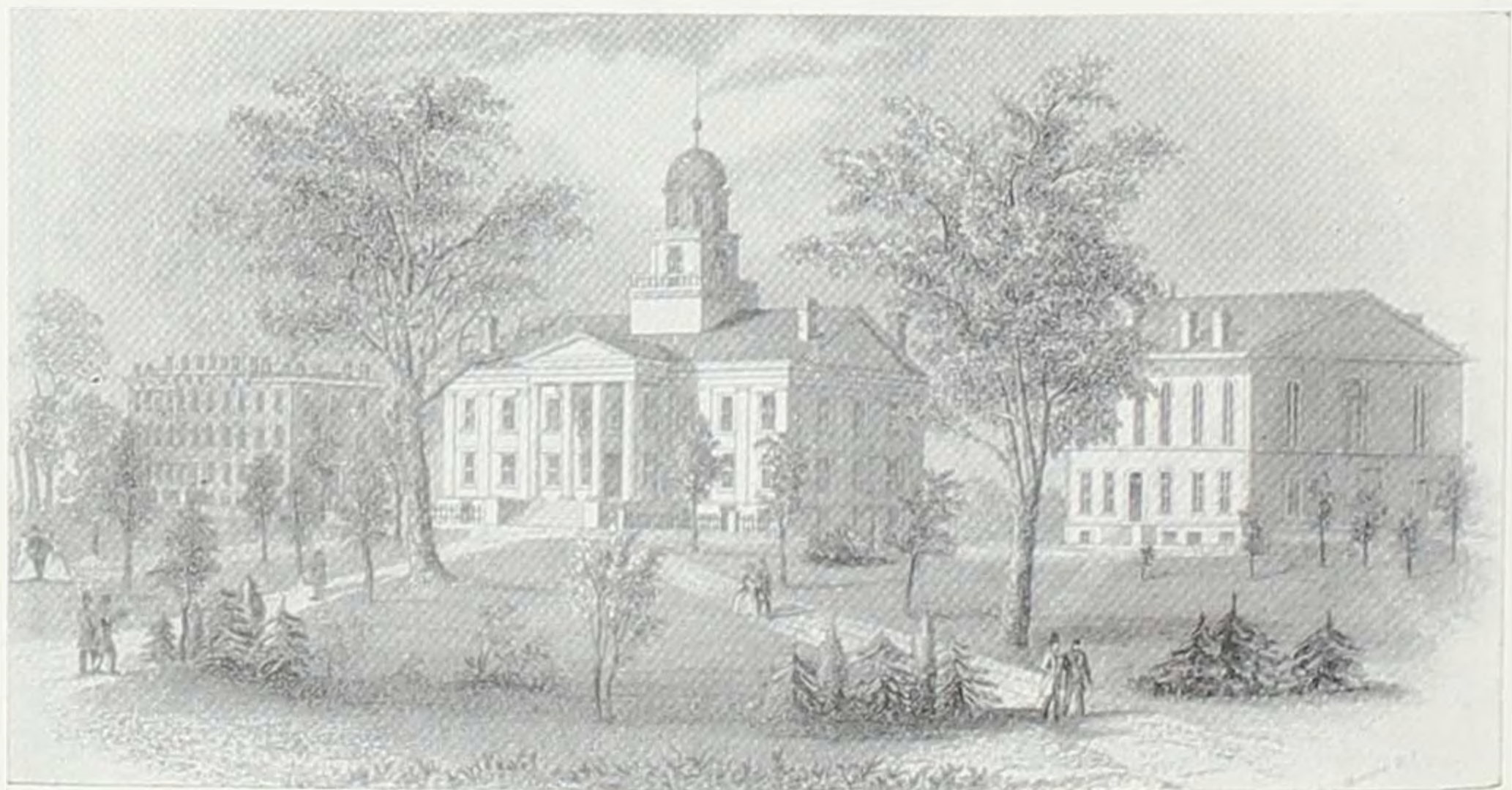


Federal roads in Iowa Territory are pictured in this map which appeared in the *Iowa Journal of History*, January, 1949.

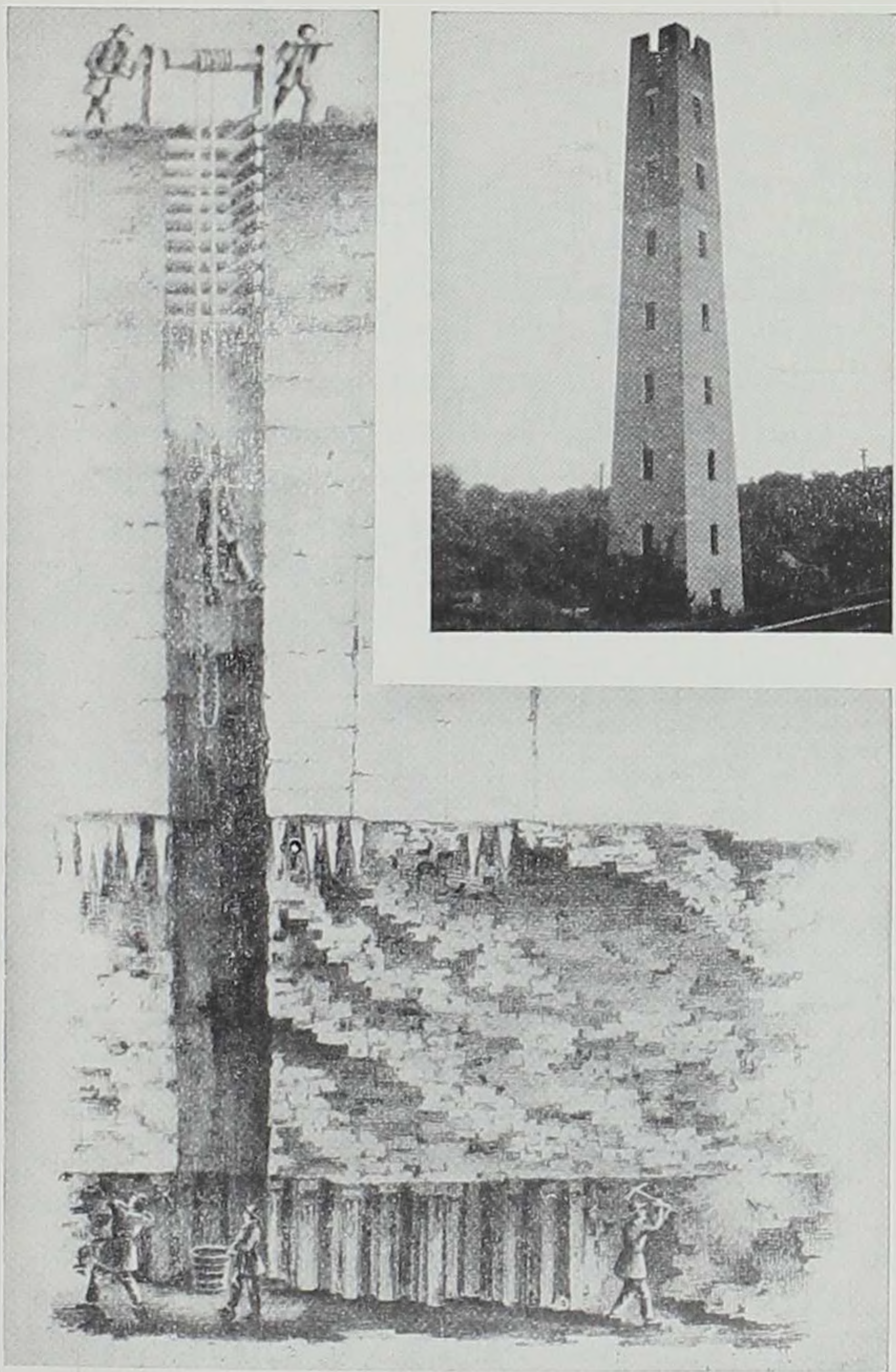
OLD MILITARY ROAD LINKED DUBUQUE LEAD MINES



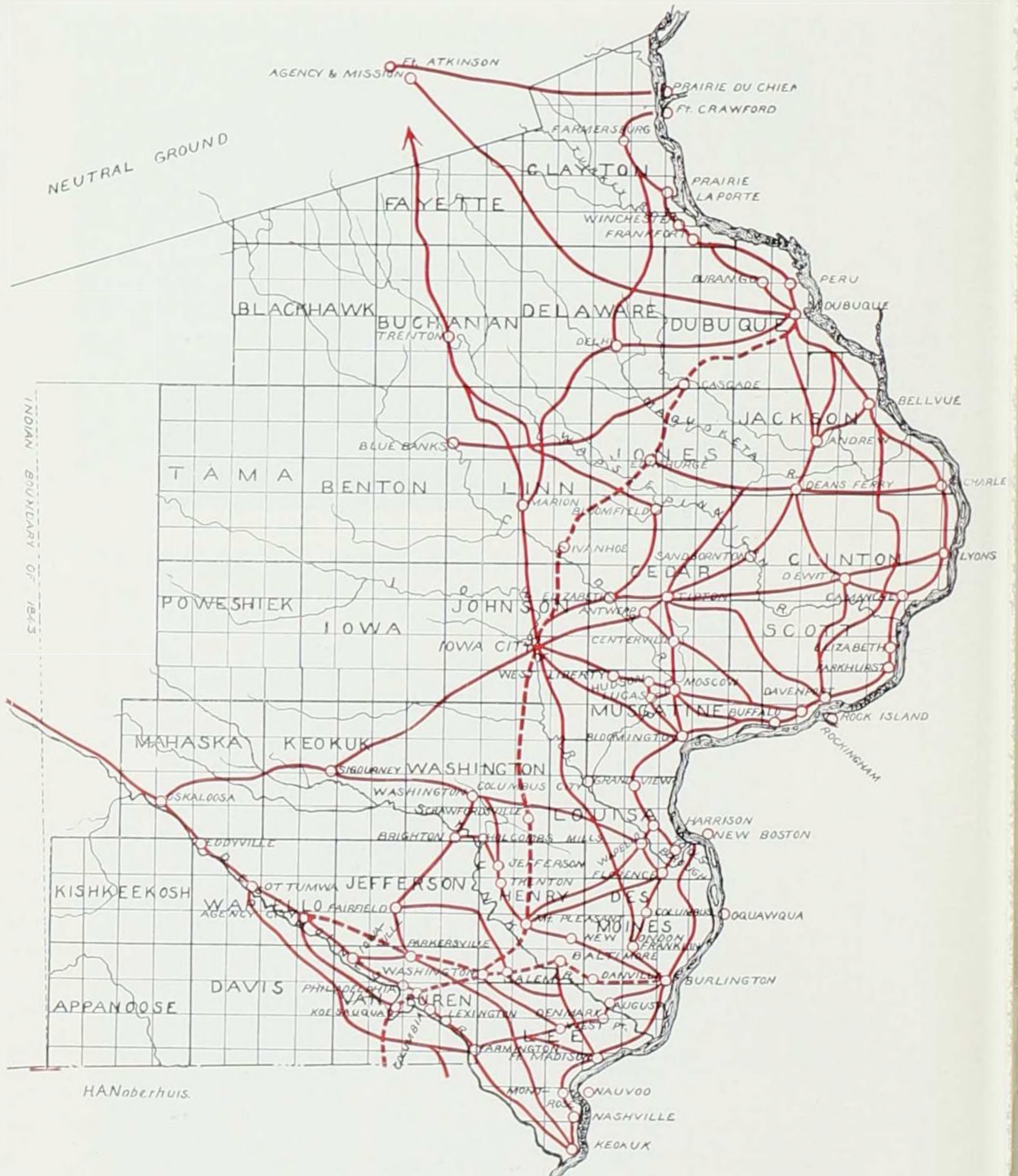
The Cornerstone of the Capitol at Iowa City was laid on July 4, 1840. The Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa met in the Butler Building (above) in Iowa City in 1841. The following year it met for the first time in the newly constructed Capitol (below) in Iowa City, and continued to meet in it until the removal of the capital to Des Moines in 1857. In addition to the Legislative Assembly, it housed the Executive Branch of Government and the Territorial Supreme Court.



WITH NEW CAPITOL AT IOWA CITY



Hundreds of miners had begun operations in the Dubuque lead mining area by 1839, the year the survey of the Old Military Road began. In this same year David Dale Owen began his survey of the lead mines of the Upper Mississippi. The picture is from his Report printed in 1844. The picture of the Dubuque Shot Tower was taken by William J. Petersen.



The more important Iowa Territorial roads are shown on this map. Dotted lines represent military roads. See *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, April, 1905.

Along the Old Military Road

During the four days that Marc and I walked over the Old Military Road from Iowa City to Dubuque probably no less than twenty sympathetic people invited us to ride in their motor cars. Hundreds went by in a cloud of dust with never a sidelong glance. Of those who deigned to stop, some rode in magnificent touring cars and some in one-seated Fords; some were kind-hearted farmers on an errand to town, some were professional tourists, and once near the end of a thirty-mile stretch three jolly girls insisted that our company would be ever so pleasant. Not once did we condescend to accept, and never did the good Samaritans fail to wonder at our stupidity.

So as we trudged along we were many a time compelled to explain to ourselves such a ridiculous method of traveling. In the first place, we reasoned, it would be fun to discover if the Representatives who walked to the Territorial capital earned their three dollars for every twenty miles traveled. We decided they did. Another excuse that we tried to accept was that walking afforded the very best physical exercise — and we were on a vacation.

But the principal justification was our desire to

compare the old road as we found it with the one that used to exist. To be sure the route is almost identical, but the landscape has changed and so has the traffic. In order to visualize pioneer scenes one needs to go slowly, while halts and repose are essential if one is to sense the romance of primitive travel and of the picturesque people who have passed that way, of legends that may have been true, and of villages long since forgotten.

At one end of the trail stands the Old Stone Capitol: it was in the process of erection when the road was first built. Of the many who enter the old building there are only a few who are reminded by the well-worn steps, that they tread a pathway of the founders of this Commonwealth. Governors, congressmen, judges, presidents, far-sighted lawmakers, rough-shod pioneers, and travelers from the ends of the earth have climbed those steps and worn away the solid rock. These hallowed stones, mute evidence of that pageant of the past, are what make the place a shrine. To mount those steps, forgetting the lapse of time, and to walk in imagination with the notable personages of long ago in the presence of the things they saw is to be thrilled by the lives they lived.

On the road to Dubuque it is a little more than a four-hour walk from the Old Stone Capitol to the Cedar River where only a small summer shack marks the site of the once flourishing village of Ivanhoe, Iowa. Before the road was surveyed a

venturesome trader named William H. Merritt, who pitched his tent on the bank of the river was so deeply impressed by the "beautiful scenery" and the stillness that "seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere," that all through his life the village that later developed was held in tender remembrance.

Anson Cowles laid out the town at the intersection of river and highway. It is said that keel boats were built at this point for the shipment of grain down stream in the spring, but Cowles' visions were not of a commercial metropolis. He planned to establish a great university to be governed by rules of his own devising. One-half of the plat, when the land became valuable, he proposed to donate as a permanent foundation. Not far from the campus was to be a large park where he would assemble all kinds of birds and beasts that inhabited Iowa, and teach them to dwell in harmony. His large and magnificent residence was to be by the side of the road where he could entertain strangers and point out the places of interest. In the garb of an Indian chieftain he was to ride in a curious equipage — a chariot built on a marvelous plan, drawn by six elk in trappings of beaded buckskin, each elk to be ridden by an Indian in full native costume. But all of this mental frostwork was dissolved by an untimely death, and nothing is left but tradition to tell of the foibles and virtues of Anson Cowles.

Not all of the Ivanhoe residents were imbued with such lofty ambitions but some of them won recognition in other ways. One of the earliest physicians in Linn County was Dr. Sam Grafton who hung out his shingle in Ivanhoe. George Greene was both lawyer and schoolmaster there before he was sent to the legislature and nearly a decade before he became judge of the State Supreme Court.

Wherever the famous old thoroughfare of earlier years intersected a river there a village was founded. Every one of those pioneer settlements is now a prosperous city — with the single exception of Ivanhoe. For some unaccountable reason this crossing was never a popular place. The principal settlers either died or moved to Mount Vernon, Cedar Rapids, or Marion. The timber along the Red Cedar River, as the stream was then called, was a refuge for horse thieves and dealers in counterfeit money. To this day the grandsons of pioneer settlers speak in awed tones of the Ivanhoe ruffians' rendezvous. But now every vestige of the village is gone. Not one among thousands who traverse the old road ever heard of the village of Ivanhoe and if inquiry were made perhaps few could explain why the Ivanhoe Bridge was so named.

The three other river towns have survived — Anamosa, Monticello, Cascade. There were only four or five settlers at the Buffalo Fork of the

Wapsipinicon River when the Old Military Road was surveyed. The following year Thomas Cox was engaged to lay out a town to be named Dartmouth. The place was later called Lexington, but when the county seat was transferred from the village of Newport the name Anamosa was adopted.

A story is told of three Indians — a Winnebago chief, his squaw, and their beautiful daughter — who came one day to the village of Dartmouth. They attracted attention on account of their cheerful demeanor, easy dignity, and look of intelligence. The name of the chief was Nasinus and his daughter was called Anamosa. They made such a pleasant impression and the name of the girl seemed so proper that the town was named in her honor. It is said that she afterward fell in love with a young engineer and rather than marry the Indian her father had chosen she ended her life by jumping from a ledge at High Bluff.

There is an air of romance and beauty in the Wapsipinicon Valley and the earliest settlers wrote to their friends of the charm of the hills. It was raining the day that we entered the valley but in spite of the inclement weather the glimpses we caught of turreted walls of clean gleaming limestone, the primeval forest that seemed to close in on the highway, and the vistas that opened down enchanting ravines, all contributed to a feeling of complete fascination.

The surroundings lend credence to the old legend concerning the name of the river. Long ago when the red men roamed over Iowa a beautiful Indian maiden named Wapsie lived with her father on the bank of the river. In another tribe two days away toward the setting sun there dwelt a Sioux warrior named Pinicon. Now it came to pass that Pinicon fell in love with the beautiful Wapsie and Fleet Foot, his rival, determined to kill him. One day when the two lovers were canoeing the jealous Fleet Foot watched from the shore. Talking, laughing, and entirely unconscious of danger, Wapsie at some word from Pinicon put her hand to his lips. Like a flash an arrow flew from a thicket and pierced the heart of the unfortunate Pinicon. Wapsie sprang to his side and in doing so overturned the canoe. Together, the water closed over them — Wapsie-Pinicon. Their voices can still be heard in the rippling stream that bears their names.

On an autumn day three years before the Old Military Road was established, Daniel Varvel, a valiant native of Kentucky, came to the mouth of Kitty Creek on the South Fork of the Maquoketa River. The view that greeted his eyes was surpassingly beautiful: then and there he decided to build his new home. Jack Frost had already painted the well-wooded hillsides with gorgeous splashes of crimson and yellow and brown. Over the hills the fertile prairie extended beyond the

horizon. No homeseeker had appeared there before, no axe had disturbed the wild solitude, no plowshare had ripped through the sod.

For years the Varvel log cabin was a landmark in Jones County. The wayfaring traveler stopped there for the night, it served as headquarters for the men who laid out the old road, the mail that came once a week was thrown off there. One by one other cabins were built in the neighborhood. A two-story hotel about twenty feet square was erected. The settlement grew and came to be called Monticello.

The traveler who now visits the flourishing city can scarcely imagine such humble beginnings. Gone long ago are the trails of the Indian and the smoke of his wigwam; gone too are the primitive methods of travel and with them, perhaps, the spirit of fine hospitality. Instead there are well-arranged boulevards and industrious factories, the sight of an airplane is a common occurrence, and neighbors are no longer acquainted.

A little cascade in the north branch of the Maquoketa River was a natural allurements for millers. As early as 1844 two pairs of burrs made of limestone were busily grinding "very superior flour." Within a few years Cascade was a prosperous village. While the stagecoach stopped for an hour at Steel's Tavern the enterprising young real estate dealers boomed corner lots to the agents of eastern investors. What a glorious future for a

town, they said, where the power from a waterfall nine feet in height was available! To this day at least one lot is owned by the heirs of those early speculators. But alas, more than water is needed to make a great city. No railroad came to Cascade and when the stages stopped running the bright prospects were ended.

Transportation is the magic that produces great cities. In the days of prairie schooners and stagecoaches the road from the port of Dubuque to the capital of Iowa was a main traveled highway of commerce. When the weather was fair in the fall of the year huge wagons were loaded with grain and hauled to the market. Slowly, ever so slowly, the big horses or oxen pulled their creaking and cumbersome load along the old road. Returning they brought household supplies for the winter. The passenger traffic was carried in fine Concord coaches or in "jerkies." Gracefully poised on the strong leather trusses the stagecoach dashed by the slow freighter and, enveloped in dust with the team at full gallop, drew up at the tavern with much grinding of hickory-shod brakes. The doctors and preachers rode horseback.

As towns are established in the wake of a newly-built railway, so the pioneer settlers took claims adjoining the Old Military Road. The most desirable places were squatted on first, so that instead of homesteads at regular intervals along the whole distance, several families lived in one

neighborhood miles away from another such settlement. Through the efforts of George Wallace Jones or Augustus C. Dodge mail routes were established and the cabin of some prominent settler was selected for a post office. Then someone would begin selling dry goods and groceries, a blacksmith would come to shoe horses, a school would be opened, and a church organized.

The village of Pamaho affords a typical instance. Four miles to the south from the Wapsipinicon River on the crest of a hill, a site for a town was selected. For a number of years the people who lived in the three or four cabins called the place of their residence Pamaho. On account of the pleasant location the name was changed to Fairview. In the fifties the town began growing and though handicapped by possessing no water power the rich agricultural region promised steady development.

But the builders of railroads neglected Fairview and the promise was never fulfilled. Without transportation the village has died. Many houses that border the road are deserted and almost all are in sad need of repair. The lawns have been seeded to ragweeds and dandelions. Cornfields overrun the old gardens. Here and there an old house has been left to decay: with the window panes broken, the clapboards awry, and the roof fallen in, its appearance is well-nigh sepulchral.

The silence that broods over the village seems

to indicate plainly that the people have all gone away. Throughout the whole settlement not a person is stirring. No busy housewife is hanging out clothes or sweeping the porch, no gardener looks up from his hoeing, no loafer is sauntering storeward, no children scamper hither and thither, and even the pigs and the chickens keep out of sight. Long years have elapsed since the side streets resounded with clattering hoofs and the rattle of buggy wheels. Those wheels are now mounted on posts at the street intersections where they serve the convenience of the rural mail carrier. The post office that was maintained for sixty-four years has been discontinued for nearly two decades.

No one would imagine that the church is in use: the tall grass in the yard is untrampled and the windows have a vacant expression. The schoolhouse, which at one time was no doubt a model, now seems to be outgrown and deserted. The bustle of business in the "Fairview Store" is a thing of the past. The board awning that once shaded the windows is falling away and its function is performed by numerous cobwebs. Not even a garage is maintained in the village. As the curious traveler now seeks the lost site of Bowen's Prairie and Ivanhoe, so before long Fairview will be gone.

It was noon on the fourth day of our pilgrimage. For eighty-five miles we had followed the path of

the famous old furrow. Only the route is the same, we were thinking. The landscape, the methods of travel, the habits of living — all are changed and little remains of the past. Then away to the left far over the hilltops we caught a glimpse of the gleaming slate roof of New Melleray Abbey. All is changed, were we saying? Ah, no! Within yonder walls men are living to-day by the old sixth-century rule of Saint Benedict.

Ten miles from Dubuque over a macadamized stretch of the Old Military Road and two miles through a beautiful forest that has been set apart for a State game preserve, these pious monks live in seclusion. Afar from the turmoil and strife of modern life they quietly read the *Lives of the Saints* and follow the customs that have prevailed in all Trappist Abbeys.

In summer and winter, fair weather or foul, they arise from their straw ticks at two o'clock in the morning and spend two hours in prayer. Then an hour and a half is devoted to mass before breakfast. They work in their fields until nearly noon, then they sleep until two. An hour is allotted for dinner. The rest of the day is consumed in deep meditation and reading. At seven o'clock they retire.

By an ancient rule of Saint Benedict the brothers are forbidden to speak. Only by special permission are any allowed to converse. Their clothing consists of a long gown of brown wool: rough

serge is worn next to the skin. Bread, rice, and potatoes are their principal diet: they never eat meat. The farm land, the buildings, and the thoroughbred livestock are all owned in common.

It was after two when we bade adieu to the old monastery, and the sun was just disappearing when we entered Dubuque. Behind us the curtain of darkness was falling over a hundred miles of the famous old highway replete with the memories of former times, and before us the lights of Hotel Julien Dubuque awakened no thought of Tim Fanning's tavern. We had arrived at the end of the trail.

JOHN E. BRIGGS

The Old Road-Then and Now

During the summer of 1920, Dr. John Carl Parish, editor of the newly-born State Historical Society publication—*The Palimpsest*—was giving serious thought to future numbers of his magazine. It would be no easy task to get the little 32-page *Palimpsest* out each month unless enough competent historians were enlisted to contribute articles that would be acceptable for publication. The assignment to write on the Old Military Road, Dr. Parish reasoned, would require individuals with outstanding literary talent. Available on a part-time basis were two men who already had contributed books and monographs to the State Historical Society publication program.

Parish was born in Des Moines in 1881. An able and productive scholar himself, he had received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1908, and had contributed such books as the biographies of *Robert Lucas* (1907), *John Chambers* (1909), and *George Wallace Jones* (1912), to the Society's publication program. In 1920 he had been named lecturer in Iowa history at the University of Iowa, serving in this capacity until 1922. Parish edited *The Palimpsest* until September, 1922.

Who were these adventurous men, both hardy enough to tramp along the hot, dusty road over which Lyman Dillon had plowed his furrow in 1839? They were Dr. John Ely Briggs and Dr. Marcus Lee Hansen—both of whom had achieved a reputation for excellence in scholarship before the age of thirty. Their reputation for excellence, however, was not shared by the Good Roads Movement at that time for there were only 25 miles of paved road, 624 miles of graveled road, and 800 miles of graded road in Iowa in 1920. Indeed, Briggs and Hansen were destined to absorb a considerable amount of dust before their long trek of almost 100 miles was completed. Fortunately, both were men capable of facing such inconveniences.

John Ely Briggs was born on a farm near Washburn, Iowa on July 30, 1890. He graduated from Morningside College in 1913, received his M.A. from the University of Iowa in 1914, and his Ph.D. from the same institution in 1916. Briggs had served as a Research Assistant and Research Associate on the staff of the State Historical Society of Iowa between 1914 and 1918, during which period he had contributed books and articles on Iowa history and government. He began teaching Political Science at the University of Iowa in 1919. An avid cameraman and nature lover, Briggs stood on the threshold of a long and distinguished career.

His companion, Dr. Marcus Lee Hansen, was born in Neenah, Wisconsin, on December 8, 1892. Hansen received his B.A. in 1916 and M.A. in 1917, both from the University of Iowa. His best known contributions to the Society's publications were *Old Fort Snelling* (1918) and two volumes on *Welfare Campaigns in Iowa* (1920-1921). He began his academic work at Smith College, and joined the University of Illinois history department in 1928. In 1941 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in American History for his *Atlantic Migrations*. He died on May 11, 1938.

Their past performances made these men ideal selections to write a report on the Old Military Road. The articles, while appearing in February of 1921, represented the eighth number of *The Palimpsest* which was first issued in July of 1920. It also was the first one devoted completely to one subject. The fact that it contained articles by the first and second editors of *The Palimpsest*, and by a future Pulitzer Prize winner, makes the Old Military Road number unique. Not a single map or picture graced either the inside pages or the covers. Furthermore, no reference could be made to the Newton D. Mereness list of Iowa post offices since this data had not yet come into the possession of the Society. It seems fitting to close the first fifty years of *The Palimpsest* by reprinting this story of the Old Military Road. We have taken the liberty of embellishing it with such pic-

tures and charts as may add to its attractiveness and usefulness.

During the depth of the depression, in 1937, seven bronze markers were erected by the Iowa Daughters of the American Revolution in seven counties through which the Old Military Road passed. Four of them, appearing on the markers at Anamosa, Crawfordsville, Mount Pleasant, and Keosauqua, bore the following identical legends: This Highway / Is The / Old Military Road / From / Dubuque to the Northern / Boundary of Missouri / Authorized by Congress 1839 / Marked by / Iowa Daughters of the / American Revolution / 1937

The three remaining markers bore slightly different legends. The site of Tim Fanning's Log Tavern was the Northern terminus of the Old Military Road and the marker was placed on the Torbert Drug Company building at 100 Main Street in Dubuque. Five miles west of Dubuque a marker was placed honoring James L. and Lucius Langworthy for their part in constructing a "portion" of the Old Military Road. In Iowa City, on the south wall of the First National Bank drive-in, another bronze marker recalls an important "Stage Stop" along the Old Military Road. An enjoyable historical feast lies open for Iowans interested in ferreting out the historic ghost towns and markers along the Old Military Road.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

OLD MILITARY ROAD — DUBUQUE TO KEOSAUQUA

Mereness		P.O.	
Index	Location	Established	First Postmaster
35	Dubuque	8-7-1839	John King
1107	Rockdale	8-15-1857	Anthony Simpson
2275	Key West	8-7-1876	Frank Kraack
60	Cascade	2-7-1840	John Sherman
261	Bowen's Prairie (changed to Bowen)	3-24-1849 6-18-1883	Ebenezer Little
195	Monticello	1-4-1847	William Clark
1155	Langworthy	1-25-1858	Alanson B. Andrus
212	Anamosa	11-4-1847	Columbus C. Rockwell
78	Pamaho (changed to Fairview)	9-16-1840 7-8-1843	Gideon N. Peet
2084	Martelle	12-9-1872	Charles W. Ormsby
318	Mount Vernon	12-4-1849	Elijah D. Waln
161	Ivanhoe	12-22-1845	Joseph T. Fales
101	Solon	7-16-1842	Hamilton H. Kerr
25	Napoleon (changed to Iowa City)	3-2-1839 11-14-1839	John Gilbert
1154	Bon Accord P. O.	1-4-1858	Henry Pulvermacher
527	Seventy Eight P. O.	6-29-1852	George Fesler
1483	Dairy P. O.	3-3-1863	Robert Prettyman
453	Amboy (changed to Ainsworth)	9-29-1851 3-25-1862	Robert Allen
159	Crawfordsville	12-13-1845	Abraham Prather
2777	Olds	2-7-1884	Christian R. Miller
15	Mount Pleasant	8-23-1838	Alvin Saunders
935	Oakland Mills	6-10-1856	Frederick J. Clark
131	Hillsborough (changed to Hillsboro)	1-10-1844 1-20-1887	Nehemiah Tunis
62	Van Buren C. H. (changed to Keosauqua)	2-7-1840 10-9-1844	John I. Fairman

The above is a list of post offices that had been established along the Old Military Road, mostly before the Civil War. The traveler over the various highways following the Old Military Road from Dubuque to the Missouri Line, will find many post offices have been discontinued with their names no longer appearing on modern Iowa highway maps. In several instances virtually no vestige remains of a site that once hoped to become prosperous. See also Petersen's "Some Beginnings in Iowa" in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. 28, pp. 32-37, January, 1930. Mail was being delivered to Dubuque from Galena in the fall of 1833.



OLD MILITARY ROAD

On December 31, 1838, W.W. Chapman, Delegate to Congress from the Territory of Iowa, filed a resolution calling for the construction of a road from Dubuque to the Missouri border passing through as many county seats as practical. A bill appropriating \$20,000 for the first "Military Road" in Iowa was signed by President Van Buren on March 3, 1839. Work began promptly under the supervision of D.C. Tilghman, Corps of Topographical Engineers.

After a survey of the road, Lyman Dillon was employed to plow a furrow from Iowa City to Dubuque to serve as a guide for road builders. Timber was cut out along the route for forty feet, stumps grubbed, and wet places ditched. The "best sites for bridges or ferries" were determined. Stone abutments were built at some of the creeks and at the Wapsipinicon to insure more permanent bridges. Edward, James, and Lucius Langworthy had the contract to build the road from Dubuque to the Cedar River.

The Old Military Road passed through Dubuque, Cascade, Monticello, Langworthy, Anamosa, Mt. Vernon, Ivanhoe, Solon, Iowa City, Ainsworth, Crawfordsville, Mt. Pleasant, Hillsboro, and Keosauqua.

(over)

Erected by the State Historical Society of Iowa
and the Iowa State Highway Commission 1967

This marker, prepared by the writer, will be erected on a suitable location, at or near Dubuque, by the Iowa Highway Commission when the new road construction is completed. The cost of the marker comes from a special appropriation by the General Assembly for the State Historical Society of Iowa.