# The Palimpsest

JUNE 1945

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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## 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 records 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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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## Strawberry Time

Early in June, 1835, a detachment of United States Dragoons marched up the Des Moines Valley. Near the present site of Oskaloosa a dragoon lieutenant recorded in his journal that the soldiers were traversing prairies "covered with strawberries" in such abundance "as to make the whole track red for miles". As they marched northward at the rate of about fifteen miles a day, the ripening of the strawberries coincided with their progress and gave them "this luxury for many weeks, increased by the incident of one of our beeves becoming a milker".

Although the United States Dragoons rode through miles of strawberries in 1835, Albert Miller Lea, a young dragoon lieutenant on the expedition, failed to forecast the prospects of Iowa as a fruit-growing State in his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory,* a guide to the "Iowa District" or "Black Hawk Purchase". For a score of years many of the pioneers seriously questioned the

practicability of raising fruit in Iowa because of the uncertain growing season. Eastern and southern horticulturists, jealous of the rapidly developing West, contributed to this attitude by commenting dismally on the climate and fruit-growing potentiality of the upper Mississippi Valley. To such misrepresentation, the Iowa newspapers responded by publishing contradictory items. "We understand", declared the Bloomington (Muscatine) *Herald* on October 11, 1844, "that a quantity of ripe wild strawberries, of the second growth were gathered on the Cedar river a few days since. What will our Southern friends, who suppose our season too short for the ripening of common crops think of this production of Iowa?"

In horticultural optimism, few writers surpassed John B. Newhall, who declared in his *Sketches of Iowa* published in 1841, "perhaps, no country on earth can excel this, in its adaptedness for rearing the choicest fruits and fruit-bearing shrubs. Wild fruits, crab-apples, berries, wild plums, strawberries, &c., are remarkably fine", Newhall concluded, and are a "great convenience to the judicious housewife in spreading her rustic table with excellent preserves." Yet as late as 1856 another immigrant-guide writer, Nathan H. Parker, deplored in his *Iowa Handbook* "the absence of a

full supply of fruit". "When our State shall have her orchards, and garden fruits growing on each farm, then a great *preventive* of disease" will be provided, he asserted.

There were other advocates of the healthfulness of fresh fruits. On August 4, 1843, the Bloomington *Herald* carried a long essay in praise of home gardens. "We pity the man that has no garden", because he thereby is deprived of half his happiness. A garden, insisted the author, "exerts a salutary influence on the heart", as well as the nutrition supplied by its rich and luscious products — "the cool, refreshing salad, the juicy melon, the fragrant strawberry, the purple plum, the delicious grape, and other fruits so grateful to the palate, so conducive to the health". At least one resident of Muscatine County was aware of such possibilities for, beginning with the March 17, 1843, issue of the Bloomington *Herald,* Dr. James Weed had been advertising his "Iowa Pomological and Horticultural Gardens" located a half mile north of Bloomington at "Pomona Villa". This was probably the earliest advertisement of its kind in Iowa, although Comstock & Avery were in the same business at Burlington.

Few editors wielded a greater influence on their readers than did Charles Aldrich of Webster City. Writing on the subject of "Strawberry Cul-

ture" in the *Hamilton Freeman* of August 5, 1858, he declared: "There are many ways in which our prairie homes may be made beautiful and attractive, which involve but slight expense. We shall speak of but one of these at this time — the cultivation of strawberries. Considering the little trouble incurred, nothing adds more to comfort and luxury. They require but little attention, and may be made a source of considerable profit. A few persons in this vicinity have undertaken the experiment, and found it profitable. There is no earthly reason why every person who owns a farm or a garden should not have a fine bed of strawberries. There ought to be at least one hundred beds planted in this County during this month — the earlier the better." Since it was impossible to get improved varieties so far "from shore", Aldrich advocated the cultivation of the wild prairie strawberries. "It is not impossible," he argued, "that we may have native strawberries, that on cultivation may prove equal to any in the world. It is worthwhile to try the experiment."

The strawberries which the United States dragoons had trampled under foot and which Charles Aldrich had urged cultivating were of the meadow variety (*Fragaria virginiana*) native to eastern North America. This meadow straw-

berry differed considerably from the beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*) found along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to Chili. Since the *Fragaria virginiana,* which takes its name from the colony whence it was imported into England, was the most palatable species, it was crossed with the European and Oriental varieties, as well as *Fragaria chiloensis,* which had been taken to Europe by the Spaniards. It is a well-known fact that our modern strawberry was "born in North America, traveled to Europe, and finally returned", much improved. Evidently the Indians liked strawberries, for the Chippewa called the month following the summer solstice the strawberry moon.

Because of their perishable nature, strawberries cultivated for market had to be grown near large centers of population. Commercial production in the United States began about 1800. By the time Iowa settlement began in 1833, Nicholas Longworth, a prominent horticulturist of Cincinnati, Ohio, and grandfather of the late Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, made an important contribution to strawberry culture by recognizing sex differences and eliminating the sterile types. A landmark in the strawberry trade was the origination of the Wilson berry at Albany, New York, in 1851. It remained firm after

being picked and therefore was good for shipping. For years it was the most popular type in Iowa and continued to be advertised in seed catalogues as late as 1908, an unusual record for this highly cultivated fruit.

The tremendous increase in population, the growth of large cities, the coming of the railroads, the offering of awards for strawberry jam at local fairs, the organization of the State Horticultural Society in 1866, and the introduction of commercial varieties, all combined to stimulate the production of strawberries in Iowa. By 1862 Charles Aldrich was able to claim that J. S. Smith of Homer had the "finest strawberry garden in this county". Smith had "three or four varieties," which had produced several bushels that season, and in a few weeks he would "be able to furnish thousands of plants to any who desire them."

The cultivation of the strawberry in Iowa was soon reflected in the social activities of the people. In addition to strawberry and cream around the family board, the frugal housewife learned to make tempting jellies and preserves. In 1854 *The American Home Cook Book* instructed its readers just how to make strawberry cream and strawberry ice cream. It also told how to preserve strawberries, both with and without sugar.

A Michigan recipe of more than seventy years

ago, which has been preserved in *America Cooks,* doubtless found favor with many Iowa housewives. The foundation was a rich biscuit dough divided evenly in two jelly cake pans and baked in a quick oven. After spreading each layer with butter, the cook was instructed to have ready two quarts of strawberries, part of them lightly crushed and generously sugared one hour before, to draw out the juice. The crushed berries were to be spread on the lower cake while the other berries were to be piled on top of the upper layer. The cake was then set in the oven and just before serving all the syrup that had formed was poured over the entire short cake. No whipped cream was allowed to addle this luscious dessert.

In addition to pleasing the home circle, strawberries attracted many persons to the ice cream parlors. On June 9, 1856, the Iowa City *Republican* noted that Parker's ice cream rooms on the "Avenue" would satisfy all "lovers of good things" with their strawberries and ice cream. "We can attest the merits of the compound," the editor declared, "and if the reader doubts our testimony, just let him go and test the dish for himself." A few days later George Ohmer opened his "fashionable" ice cream saloon opposite the Baptist Church in Iowa City. The editor of the *Republican* assured his readers that he had "practical

knowledge" of the "superb" quality of Ohmer's ice cream and strawberries. Doubtless, the twenty-seven places in Davenport which, according to the *Weekly Gazette* of July 2, 1857, were open evenings for the sale of ice cream, featured strawberries in season.

In 1861 the Dubuque *Weekly Times* warmly recommended that a buggyride in the moonlight, when topped off with a delicious bowl of strawberries and ice cream, would serve as a proper elixir for the jaded young man who was inclined to take "too much of a pork and beans view of things". If, after hiring one of Judd's livery teams, securing an "engaging piece of calico", and devouring a delicious portion of strawberries and ice cream at Longworth's nursery, the young man did not "lose his appetite, commence reading poetry, buy a flute and toot Annie Laurie", the editor felt certain he did not have a "soul above buttons". Although a girl was indispensable and moonlight a "great institution" the editor felt that "Judd's team and the strawberries are very important adjuncts".

Perhaps the happiest and most colorful element of the social scene was contributed by the strawberry festivals. In all sections of Iowa, in cities large and small, in churches of all denominations, strawberry festivals were among the most popular

activities. As June approached, citizens awaited anxiously for reports on the strawberry crop. On June 11, 1857, for example, the editor of the Davenport *Gazette,* after noting that the ladies of St. Paul's Church in St. Louis had held a strawberry festival, hungrily commented: "Ladies and strawberries — sweetness doubly distilled. We wouldn't mind getting up a private strawberry festival, if we only had the strawberries — but none have yet shown themselves in the market."

Since the northern section of Iowa was usually a fortnight behind the southern part of the State, editors kept an eagle eye open for the first report from below. "The Ladies of Keokuk," noted the Dubuque *Herald* of May 29, 1861, "gave a strawberry and ice cream supper on Thursday evening last — admission ten cents. Who will have the first strawberry and cream here this season?"

Church societies were prone to swing into action the moment strawberries appeared on the market. On June 8, 1859, the Iowa City *Weekly Republican* called attention to a strawberry festival to be given by the Ladies' Benevolent Association of the "Old Stone Church" at Market Hall. Although the spring of 1861 was "somewhat backward" the Anamosa *Eureka* of May 17th noted that strawberries were in bloom. On June 14th the editor observed that the ladies of St.

Mark's Church were making arrangements to hold a strawberry festival. Nine days later the *Eureka* recorded: "The Strawberry Festival at the Fisher House Hall last Tuesday evening was a very pleasant affair. The Hall was beautifully decorated with flags, pictures and oak boughs; the refreshments delicious; the ladies pretty and lively; the gentlemen liberal, and the singing by Messrs. Shaw, Lamson, Sherman and Clark, was excellent."

Strawberry festivals were frequently held for some specific church benefit. At Oskaloosa in 1865 the ladies of the First Presbyterian Church held a strawberry festival in the City Hall on June 20th for the purpose of procuring a bell. In 1868 the ladies of the Central Presbyterian Church at Des Moines held a similar festival to raise funds to replace the bell which had been destroyed by fire. Since nearly all the old settlers had contributed to the old bell, the *Iowa State Register* hoped that Des Moines citizens would eat plenty of the "rich strawberries and delicious ice cream" and thus insure the procurement of the new 1600-pound bell. At Des Moines in 1876 the young ladies' Catholic "Sodality" held a three-day strawberry festival to raise money for the purchase of a library. About $125 was taken in the first evening, and more on the second.

Because of the limited season it was sometimes difficult for all the churches in the larger cities to hold a strawberry festival. Thus, at Clinton in 1869, the Congregational, Baptist, and Episcopal churches held their festivals in Spencer Hall within the period of two weeks. The Baptists and Episcopalians charged ten cents admission while the Congregational ladies charged a quarter. The latter price was probably due to the fact that the Congregationalists gave the first festival of the season when berries were more expensive. The editor of the Clinton *Age* was indignantly aware of these high prices: "Strawberries are all the go now," he declared on June 4th. "They go down with the greatest of ease, though the expense sometimes gives a person the gripes. Strawberries ought to be sold now for about 15 cents per quart — we mean for a quart of strawberries, not for a quart box with the bottom in the middle."

At Cedar Falls in 1873 the Methodist ladies held a strawberry festival in the lecture room of the church for the benefit of the Sabbath school. The Baptists at Shellrock netted over thirty dollars toward a fine two-hundred-dollar organ at their strawberry festival in 1872.

At Sioux City in 1869, the First Congregational Church held a strawberry festival at Hedges's new building on June 17th which proved

a "grand success" socially and financially. The Glenwood *Opinion* of July 28, 1866, recorded an equally successful festival held by the Baptists in the courthouse. "Ladies were out by the hundred and men too, and something less than four hundred thousand barrels of Ice Cream was consumed, Lemonade, Straw Berries, Black Berries, Peaches, Cake and other things were there in great abundance. . . . Receipts of the evening $120.70; expenses $42.05.

Special entertainment was frequently provided at strawberry festivals. At Clinton the Baptists sponsored an auction of "useful and fancy articles" in 1869; good singing and a number of interesting tableaux were offered by the Baptists of Shellrock in 1872. The "Centennial Strawberry Sociable" at the Centenary Church in Des Moines in 1876 had members of two Sabbath schools impersonate famous American personalities of a century ago. The Washingtons, the Lafayettes, the Penns, and several other "ancient" characters were scheduled to dish up the ice cream and strawberries in the "most approved style".

On May 13, 1886, the Fort Dodge *Messenger* urged its readers to be sure to attend the Presbyterian Festival in Mr. Douds's new Building on May 21st. Apparently the local season had not opened, for strawberries were still being shipped

in on June 4th when the Episcopal ladies served strawberries with cake and cream in Douds's building. Although these imported strawberries sold as low as ten cents a quart, it was believed that the local supply would scarcely change these figures. Ice cream, cake, and strawberries, served to the music of an orchestra, were offered by the Methodist ladies of Fort Dodge on June 18th. So commonplace had strawberries become by this time that a report from Kalo-Otho read: "Picking strawberries and growling about the hard times are occupations of our farmers."

An entirely different type of strawberry festival was celebrated by some Muscatine youngsters in 1844. J. P. Walton, George Magoon, and a couple of their playmates found wild strawberries so abundant on Muscatine Island that the ground looked "more red than green". The boys gathered all they could carry and then repaired to the Magoon pantry and helped themselves to cream and sugar "while the old folks were in town attending meeting". After enjoying their repast, J. P. Walton recalled, "we adjourned to the attic to engage in a game of seven-up. When it was nicely in progress, the old folks returned, and found us 'treed' in the attic. We got down and departed in the best manner we could, leaving George to make matters right".

In times of plenty, Iowans were often surfeited with strawberries. On June 21, 1866, the editor of the Oskaloosa *Weekly Herald* exclaimed: "For the first time in life we have had enough strawberries. Strawberries with sugar, strawberries with cream, strawberries with sugar and cream, strawberry puddings, strawberries just from the vines, strawberry shortcake, strawberries — we've had enough." In 1867 a Keokuk citizen, who had attended "all the festivals" that season suggested "Pork and Beans for a change in the way of luxuries". Another resident of Keokuk cancelled his subscription to the *Gate City* because it contained too many items about festivals. "And from the bottom of our heart," the editor declared, "we pity the individual who can't take our paper because we urge upon our people to patronize festivals gotten up under the auspices of and for the benefit of the churches of all denominations in our city."

Nevertheless, many Iowans were interested in the cultivation of strawberries. Stir the earth in strawberry beds in May and keep down the weeds, the *Northwestern Farmer and Horticultural Journal* of Dubuque advised its readers in 1861. A year later, Charles Aldrich grew a Longworth strawberry in his garden which measured over four inches in circumference. Al-

though this was not half as large as the editor of the *Hamilton Freeman* expected to raise, it was said to be a "little ahead" of anything yet grown in the Webster City area. Aldrich was so proud of his strawberries that he flew into a rage when the robins began to eat them in 1868 and, "regardless of all poetry and legends", started "shooting them away".

At Oskaloosa in 1865, Dr. D. A. Hoffman picked six hundred strawberries from three Wilson's Albany plants. In the following year his strawberries were not only prolific but large and delicious. He had rivals however. The Oskaloosa editor was a "living witness" to the fine flavor of Silas Scott's strawberries, one of which measured seven and a half inches in circumference and ten of which weighed seven ounces. "Who can beat this?" the editor queried. Apparently "Master John Hoffman" could, for he brought in eight strawberries of the Agriculturist variety which weighed seven ounces!

The editor of the Anamosa *Eureka* asserted in 1874 that the newly-introduced Col. Cheeny strawberry surpassed all other varieties in richness and delicacy of flavor. In June, 1876, the *Iowa State Register* praised the "beautiful" and "luscious" Charles Downing variety that had been raised by W. S. Sims. "Strawberries are now

down to eating prices," the Des Moines editor declared. "They were selling at the fruit stands yesterday for from ten to twelve and half a box." The first annual report of the State Horticultural Society in 1867 indicated that Wilson's Albany was the most popular variety in Iowa.

Prior to 1875 the Charles Downing, Green's Prolific, the Colfax, Metcalf's Early, and the Agriculturist were all mentioned frequently. In 1871 Benjamin Green insisted that "Downer's" was "emphatically *the* berry for those who are too busy or too lazy to cut runners and spread straw and sawdust." J. L. Budd felt that Russell's Prolific would "not pay for ground rent and trouble unless mixed". On May 9, 1873, the editor of the Cedar Falls *Gazette* declared: "We've been laboring with great diligence for four years to cultivate strawberries and the result has been one quart and a quarter of delicious strawberries, worth twenty-five cents, cash, and costing $9.40. We've concluded to try onions, in hope, if nothing else, of raising a good smell."

Although Iowa has not led in strawberry culture, some kinds have originated in this State. In 1894 R. D. McGeehon, who had fruited some 175 to 200 varieties, wrote to the *Western Garden and Poultry Journal* that the Older variety, which had originated near Independence, was one of the best

strawberries on the market. Harlow Rockhill of Conrad, Iowa, was a pioneer experimenter with the everbearing strawberry. In 1908 Rockhill crossed the Dunlap and Pan American to produce his well-known Progressive, one of the hardiest varieties now grown in this country. According to Iowa State College experts, the Dunlap, the Premier, the Beaver, the Blakemore, the Dorsett, and the Fairfax are popular leading varieties in Iowa today. The Gem and Rockhill (Wayzata) are recommended as the most satisfactory fall or everbearing varieties.

Southeastern Iowa seems to have been an excellent region for strawberry culture. As early as 1864 Rankin & Taylor of Burlington advertised a thousand bushels of strawberries for sale to dealers and festival sponsors in surrounding cities. Most strawberry cultivation has been on a modest scale, however, the farmer's wife frequently taking care of the patch. "As a general thing," a Buchanan County enthusiast wrote in 1894, "men seem to have little taste for raising berries, except with a spoon, but in spite of uncharitable remarks about them, men are scarce who are not ready to give what work is needed to fertilize and plow a small garden patch."

"At the present time," writes H. E. Nichols, Extension Horticulturist at Iowa State College,

"most of the strawberries in the State are grown in small patches. There are small commercial plantings around all our larger towns but they usually do not produce enough for local use. Until recently there was a commercial area near Sandusky and Montrose in Lee County, but the acreage there has been greatly reduced in recent years."

Strawberry picking has always involved labor problems. Writing in the January and February issues of *Iowa Horticulture* in 1908, William Langham of Cedar Rapids declared that children, visitors, and dogs were the worst nuisances in strawberry time. He recommended for all dogs a gun with a silencer covertly fired. A threatening rain, a circus, or any unusual occurrence was sufficient excuse for strawberry pickers to take a holiday.

The average American boy has been one of the natural hazards of small strawberry patches. In 1878 a West Union editor warned: "If those boys whose appetites for strawberries exceed their regard for the commandment, continue their investigations in the 'patch' of Wm. Ash, they will catch it; this according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, which changeth not."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

# The Rise and Fall of Buxton

In the decade of the eighties the town of Muchakinock, five miles south of Oskaloosa, in Mahaska County, was a flourishing coal mining community. About that time the Consolidation Coal Company, a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western Railway Company, became interested in Iowa coal, and sent its agent, J. E. Buxton, to Muchakinock to purchase coal. Eventually, he was succeeded by his son, Ben C. Buxton.

When laborers at these mines became scarce because of strikes and increased demands for labor, H. A. "Hobe" Armstrong, a resident of Muchakinock, and other agents of the company went to Virginia to induce Negroes to come and work in the Iowa mines. Negro miners came also from Kentucky and Tennessee, and presently Muchakinock had a large colored population.

For the transportation of coal from this area, the Chicago and North Western Railway had run a branch from its main line at Belle Plaine, southwestward to What Cheer, thence to Muchakinock and Lakonta. When the mines at Muchakinock ceased to be profitable the railroad extend-

ed its tracks farther southward just over the line into Monroe County, and Ben Buxton and his miners, both white and colored, moved by train in a body, and founded the town of Buxton, about twelve miles north of Albia.

During the first decade of the twentieth century Buxton became one of the largest coal-mining towns west of the Mississippi River. Its population of approximately five thousand was about half white and half colored. In 1906 the Regal Coal Company, the Ackers Coal Company, and mines Nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of the Consolidation Coal Company were located near Buxton. The output from these mines that year was 1,183,143 tons of coal. This made Monroe County the largest coal-producing county in Iowa.

At that time and in the years immediately following, Buxton was reputed to be the largest unincorporated town in the United States. There was no city government — no mayor, no council, no police force. Order was maintained, insofar as order prevailed, by township and county officers, chiefly constables and deputy sheriffs.

Rowdyism and violence prevailed throughout the town. Murders were not rare. Holdups and robberies were common, and assaults were frequent. A former resident refers to the town as a modern Sodom and adds: "People think I am

telling a cock and bull story when I tell them what I saw in Buxton. But it's the truth."

But Buxton was not wholly bad even in those days. There were churches of various denominations — one maintained by colored Methodists, one supported by white Methodists, a Swedish Lutheran Church, and a church for colored folk of the Baptist faith. Schools were maintained for both white and colored pupils. Usually they were not segregated. At one time Buxton had a thoroughly mixed high school, with a Negro superintendent and a Negro principal, with teachers of both races, and with both white and black pupils attending.

When Buxton was at its height, no other town in Iowa could boast of so many professional and business people of the colored race. Mrs. Minnie B. London, for many years a teacher in the Buxton schools, writes: "Doctors, lawyers, teachers, druggists, pharmacists, undertakers, clerks, the Postmaster, Justice of the Peace, Constable, members of the School Board, and what have you" were of Negro blood. There were, of course, physicians, ministers, lawyers, teachers, merchants, mechanics, and miners of the white race, too, for Buxton was a thoroughly mixed community. There, too, as in other towns, good and evil influences existed side by side. No one race or

group was responsible for all the evil influences, nor was any one race or group to be credited with all the good. Rather the good and the evil, like the white and colored population, was scattered throughout the town.

Various parts of the town or "camp", as it was commonly called, were given characteristic names. "East Swede Town" and "West Swede Town" designated areas in which Swedish immigrants predominated. Another section of town was called "Gobblers Nob"— just why, no one seemed to know. "Sharp End" applied to the "sudden termination of the town to the south". In that area was Ike Hutchinson's drug store where Mrs. Hattie Hutchinson, said to be the only colored woman registered pharmacist in Iowa, filled prescriptions. Coopertown, named in honor of B. F. Cooper, another Negro druggist, was located to the north on the Mahaska County line. But these areas were all parts of the Buxton community.

News of local interest appeared in the *Gazette,* the *Advocate,* and the *Bulletin,* which were published weekly in Buxton at different times. When Mrs. London wrote her reminiscences for the Howard Newspaper Syndicate in 1940, her descriptions of the unique community were as circumstantial as the items that might have been read during the decade from 1906 to 1916 in the

columns of these papers. For example: "Manie Lobbins had a livery barn in the Sharp End, and since this was in the horse and buggy days no one was required to take Hobson's choice.

"If you wanted coffee like your mother made, you would go to the Rising Sun Restaurant in Coopertown, operated by Mrs. Anna Lobbins. She would serve you a hot lunch or a complete dinner at reasonable prices.

"Peter Carey's barber shop was also in this section, located across from Cooper's store. He was always in whenever one wanted a hair cut or shave.

"The hair dressing, manicuring, face massage, and chiropody were all done by Madam Ella Yancy. She was an honor graduate of the New York College of Hairdressing. Madam Yancy was Buxton's best specialist in scalp treatment. 'If your hair won't grow, won't straighten, all you have to do is to see Madam Yancy and find out the reason and get a remedy'; and 'If your wrinkles won't leave and your cheeks won't fill out, see Madam Yancy'; and 'If your corns bother you and just won't stop hurting, see Madam Yancy'.

"Near the depot Anderson Perkins and Son operated a hotel and confectionary. They advertised good meals and first class service. Hotel rates $1 and $1.50.

"If you desired an old fashioned meal and did not wish to go home or bother to cook on a hot day, all you had to do was to stop in the Jeffers Restaurant, run by Andy Jeffers and his wife Maggie.

"Peter Abington, the caterer, kept his wagon on the street all day long selling ice cream, pies, bread, butter and eggs.

"Lewis Reasby had a hamburger stand in front of the Y. M. C. A. His comical manner of crying his wares would attract passers-by who would stop to listen to him, then find themselves thrusting their hands into their pockets and saying, 'A hot dog please'."

The Y. M. C. A. was a large three-story building built expressly for the colored miners by the coal company. Though slow to be accepted, it eventually became a popular center of recreation. At one time this was reputed to be "the largest Negro Y. M. C. A. in the country" with a membership of about three hundred. The third floor was occupied by the rooms of many secret societies, for nearly every adult belonged to one or more. "When a member died his lodge would turn out in full regalia. The funeral procession would be headed by the band playing a funeral dirge all the way to the cemetery." The Buxton Negro Concert Band was famous throughout southern Iowa.

Under the leadership of F. E. Goggins, it had frequent engagements in surrounding towns, playing at fairs and on other occasions.

The second floor of the Y. M. C. A. was occupied by a spacious auditorium, with a stage and dressing rooms. There the Langois sisters, better known as the "French women", displayed motion pictures every night, which afforded enjoyable recreation for the miners and their families. Road shows as well as motion pictures were featured in the auditorium — among them East Lynne and the Count of Monte Christo. Among the negro characters who entertained packed houses were Booker T. Washington, Hallie I. Brown, Blind Boone, and Roscoe Conklin Simmons.

The homes of the miners at Buxton were owned by the coal company. They were usually five or six-room frame structures, "each built on about a quarter acre of land so that the miners could have a cow, chickens, pigs, and small gardens". The streets were irregular, "following the lay of the land". There were "no sidewalks to speak of", and of course no city treasury and no city engineer. There were, however, a few electric lights, and a telephone office. Three company doctors took care of the sick and injured, but they had no hospital facilities. Under the auspices of the company, an association was organized whereby sin-

gle men for seventy-five cents a month and married men for $1.50 could have medical attention.

Ben C. Buxton was social minded, though rather paternalistic. "He would offer prizes for the best kept yards and gardens. At each Christmas season for a time he would give a turkey and a basket of groceries to each family — white and colored — and some years a gallon of fine syrup from his father's estate in Vermont". He also tried to prevent trouble by forbidding saloons on company property. Although saloons were not permitted in the town of Buxton or in Monroe County, liquor could be obtained at the drug stores. Moreover, saloons flourished just north of Buxton, over the Mahaska County line.

A big general company store was operated by W. A. Wells, a brother-in-law of Ben Buxton, and the company meat market was under the direction of "Hobe" Armstrong. For both the store and the meat market there was a credit plan and "a check off system" whereby charge accounts were deducted from the miner's pay. No cash was needed. As goods were ordered, the clerks punched the amount on the customer's credit card. The total sum was then withheld on the next pay day. The miners, however, were not compelled to buy at the company store. "Everything is kept there from wedding garments to coffins", com-

mented a reporter in 1910. "They have a system that takes every penny to the cashier's desk like in the biggest houses in Chicago."

On the night of February 21, 1911, a fire of unknown origin destroyed the "big store" and its contents, causing a loss estimated at from $100,000 to $150,000. Food supplies were shipped in carload lots from Oskaloosa to meet immediate demands. Although the store was soon rebuilt and stocked with new goods, it never was as prominent in the life of the community as the old store had been. At night, after the miners had cleaned up and eaten supper, they used to gather at the store to smoke and visit. There was no objection to loafing. The manager preferred to have the men hang around the store instead of spending their time and money at the saloons.

In busy seasons the miners made big wages. They were paid in gold and silver. "It was a common thing to see a man with a twenty dollar gold coin on his watch chain." As a rule the young men were well dressed. Many of them wore tailor-made clothes and some had high silk hats for special occasions. They spent freely. A former resident observed that as soon as they had a few dollars in the bank, they would "go to Albia and buy out the town".

In 1913 mine No. 18 was opened a few miles

south of Buxton. It was believed that it would last for twenty years. The equipment was extensive, modern, and powerful. "Eight boilers were necessary to furnish steam, and an engine room filled with dynamos, steam turbines and hoisting engines occupied almost a half block." At this new mine "Billy Llewellyn hung up his hoisting record of 3,774 tons of coal in eight hours".

Meanwhile, the Chicago and North Western Railway Company had extended its tracks southwestward to Bucknell and Haydock and these towns attracted business that had formerly gone to Buxton. Then came the first World War. The railroad company not only abandoned its plans for further extension, but removed its equipment from Haydock, closed the mines at Bucknell, and stopped the train several miles short of the terminal.

During the war, however, the demand for coal was so great that the Consolidation Coal Company was forced to sacrifice everything for production. Accordingly, the big mine No. 18, worked overtime. The peak of coal production in Iowa was reached in 1917 when over nine million tons were mined, nearly a fourth of it in Monroe County. After the war, however, the business depression, increased competition with Illinois and Kentucky coal, and the decline of railroad

transportation severely reduced production. Labor trouble developed. On March 15, 1927, No. 18 closed, six years before its estimated time. Fifteen days later, No. 19, a 1950-ton mine shut down with the declaration of a strike. Two years later more than a hundred cars of coal were still waiting at the bottom to be hoisted.

Meanwhile, the Consolidation Coal Company was disposing of its Buxton property estimated in value at $2,000,000. Company-owned miners' homes were being sold for fifty dollars each, while "junk men" were "awaiting the results of their bids on the remains at the Buxton No. 18 — once the largest mine in Iowa."

In October, 1929, the Oskaloosa *Times,* commenting on conditions in Buxton reported: "The four winds called to the population and last year it literally melted away. The banking and business houses began closing. School opened in the fine high school this year with only a few pupils and one school building entirely unused . . . Like some ancient village in the jungle, the weeds and undergrowth are creeping in on Bucknell and Haydock. Today they are standing in the lobby of the movie theatre; six months from now nature will reclaim its own, and only a few foundations, a ramshackle store or two, will mark the glory which was once only Buxton's."

Alas, how true the prophecy!

As a precaution of safety in June, 1944, the Hercules Powder Company of Chicago used twelve pounds of dynamite, set at the base of the 155-foot stack at Buxton mine No. 18 to level it to earth. Erected in 1918 at a cost of $10,000, the giant stack had served its day. Made of concrete and steel, the stack fell gracefully to the ground "and shattered within inches of the opening of the shaft". The debris was used to fill the shaft of what had been one of Iowa's greatest mines.

With the closing of the mines, Buxton became a deserted village. For the most part the area is now a cornfield. Cement foundations of the old store remain. An eroding embankment marks what was once a busy railroad. The large stone warehouse with its red tile roof still stands, but it too is now badly weathered. Yonder in the low lands are the remains of the old vault — a once substantial brick structure where great quantities of gold and silver were stored, and from which the miners received their bi-weekly pay. This brick and stone structure, like old Buxton, itself, is all but gone.

Perhaps the most significant landmark in all this area is one that is not made of brick, or stone, or steel. Rather it is a work of art. Upon the

highlands of what was once East Swede Town, the Swedish Lutheran Church, a substantial frame structure, still stands. But it is now a typical rural church with little of outward appearance to attract the attention of passers-by. Inside the church, however, just over the altar, and facing the congregation as they sit in the wooden pews, is a beautiful painting, seven by eleven feet in dimensions, with a background of blue, representing Christ in Gethsemane. It was painted by Birger Sandzen in 1904, when Buxton was a flourishing mining town. Today Buxton is gone. Only the church with its beautiful painting remains.

No, Buxton is not entirely gone. Ancient Rome fell, but it still lives in history. Buxton, as a town, with its boasted material wealth and prosperity is gone. Yet there is a hint of immortality even in a deserted mining camp. In history and in memory Buxton still lives.

Look backward across the years to the time when Muchakinock was a flourishing mining town, before Buxton was founded. A colored lad, E. A. Carter, was the son of a coal miner, and he himself worked in the mines. Young Carter was resolved to get an education. He attended the State University of Iowa, graduating in Liberal Arts and Medicine. For the practice of his pro-

fession he located at Buxton where he became assistant and then chief surgeon for the North Western Railway Company and the Consolidation Coal Company in that community. Now he is a prominent physician and surgeon in Detroit, Michigan.

Another outstanding Negro citizen of Buxton was Attorney George H. Woodson, who practiced law there for twenty years, and served his people so well that he was nominated by the Republicans for the office of State Representative — the only Negro ever so honored by a major party in Iowa. Other prominent residents of Buxton, both colored and white, might be mentioned, but these will suffice to show that memories of Buxton still live.

Many people throughout Iowa and neighboring States recall mining interests and activities at Buxton. Indeed, in recent years, it has been the custom to hold an annual reunion at the site of this once flourishing mining town. Former residents of Buxton come from Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Des Moines, and other cities, and, indeed, from other States to observe the annual festivities and to recall the days of prosperity and adversity — the rise and fall of Buxton.

J. A. SWISHER

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