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The
PALIMPSEST

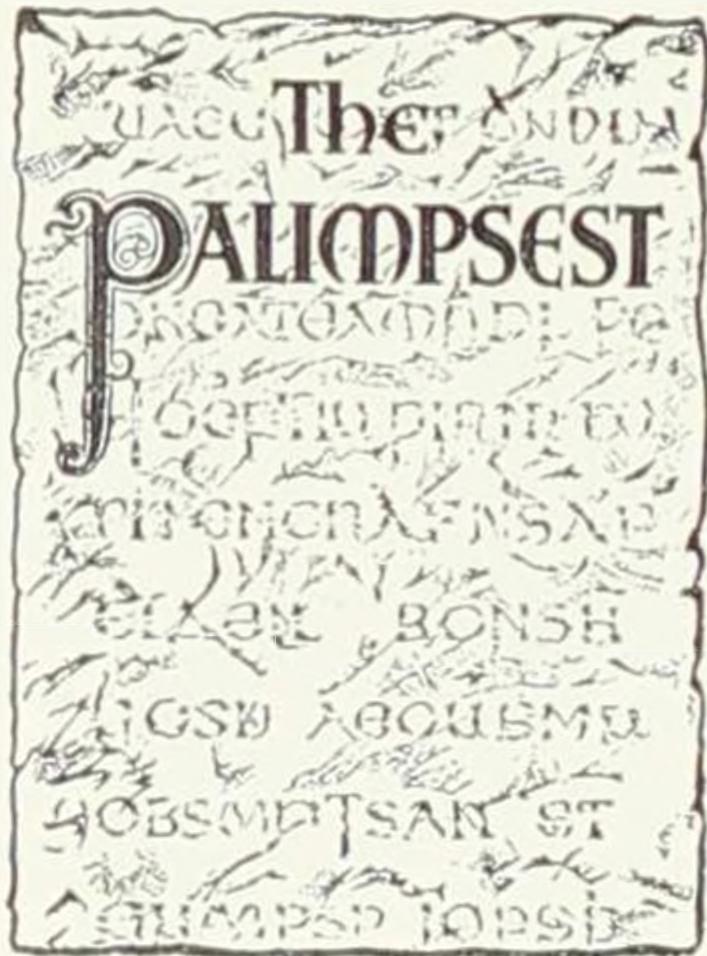


UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL, IOWA CITY

Published Monthly by
The State Historical Society of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

DECEMBER 1954

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DES MOINES, IOWA



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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Cover

Front — General Hospital, State University of Iowa, Iowa City.

Back — *Outside*: Hospital tower at the State University of Iowa in the Winter.

(Photos courtesy the State University of Iowa)

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT
IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

PRICE — 15 cents per copy; \$1.50 per year; free to Members
MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$3.00
ADDRESS — The State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XXXV

ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1954

No. 12

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An Early Grave Snatching Incident

Late at night on December 29, 1870, a wagon drawn by a span of mules left a livery stable in Iowa City. Three men, their bodies muffled against the crisp winter air, were riding in the wagon. They drove to the outskirts of Iowa City. Near the new Rose Hill Cemetery they stopped, tied their mules, and taking tools from the wagon, trudged into the cemetery. Here, a few hours before, an old woman had been buried. When the men returned to the wagon they were carrying a heavy, awkward burden. Loading it into the wagon, they returned to Iowa City and drove directly to South Hall which housed the laboratory of the newly established medical department of the State University of Iowa. One of the men had a key to the door. They removed their burden from the wagon and carried it into the building. The mules and wagon were returned to the livery stable. Iowa City slept on.

On the next morning, Friday, December 30, Dr. Boucher, professor of anatomy in the medical

department, bought materials for the preservation of laboratory specimens. If the druggist knew that Dr. Boucher had found it difficult to teach anatomy to his students because he had almost no laboratory materials, he was not thinking of it then. Nor did he know that in August, a month before the medical department opened for its first session, Dr. Boucher had written to Governor Samuel Merrill asking whether the unclaimed dead from the state penitentiary might be sent to the medical department. The Governor had not approved. Neither did he know that during the first session students had complained that they could not learn human anatomy by studying cats and dogs and one alcohol hardened and badly dissected cadaver. If anyone noticed that Dominick Bradley was sleepy-eyed that Friday morning, it is not recorded. Bradley, part time janitor of the medical department and driver for Dr. Boucher, possessed a local reputation which was none too good. Rumor linked his name with crime and prison sentence in another state. Even the keeper of the cemetery was unworried. Thus Friday passed, and evidence of unusual activity in South Hall aroused no comment.

On Saturday morning, the keeper of the Rose Hill Cemetery made his rounds. The newest grave looked as if it had been molested. Frightened by the discovery he hurried to inform the members of the cemetery board. A member of

the City Council joined the members of the cemetery board that afternoon to go out to investigate. Bringing shovels along, the men dug into the grave. Almost at once a shovel struck a broken piece of the coffin — evidence enough of what had happened. In the trampled dirt someone picked up a pocket-notebook — it bore the name D. Bradley. A messenger was at once sent to notify the relatives of the dead woman.

Because of Bradley's connection with Dr. Boucher, suspicion fell immediately upon the medical department. By five o'clock that afternoon, the relatives appeared in the office of the county attorney to swear out a warrant for the search of the medical laboratory. But it was Saturday night and New Year's Eve, and the procedure was slower than it should have been. The warrant was not turned over to the sheriff until ten o'clock that night.

In the meantime, news of the "grave snatching" and the impending search of the medical department laboratory had spread like prairie fire through Iowa City. The Secretary of the University Board of Regents, whose duty it was to look after the business of the Board between sessions, had left town that afternoon and could not be reached. No member of the Board could be found, but there was one man who was, according to his own testimony, ready to meet the emergency and save the medical school from possible ruin. That

man, John P. Irish, had, as a member of the Board of Regents, been instrumental in establishing the medical department. Although no longer a member of the Board, he did everything in his power to support the department against its attackers. When excited students came to his room in the old Clinton House with the story of the impending search of the laboratory, Irish realized that if the body were found in the laboratory, the incident might well destroy the department. Thinking only of getting the evidence away from the University, Irish sent one student to the livery stable to secure a horse. The others he sent to the laboratory with instructions to wait there until the first returned with the horse, then to pass the body out the west window to the horseman. The rider was instructed to take the cadaver out of Iowa City and hide it in some secure place. These instructions were quickly followed and in less than half an hour, from his room in the Clinton House (located on the edge of the campus less than a block from the laboratory) Irish heard the clatter of a horse's hooves on the floor of the wooden bridge which spanned the Iowa River just west of the campus.

Meanwhile, after the warrant had been delivered to the sheriff, that officer decided that he could not legally serve it until daylight. Accordingly a group of excited townspeople organized a guard to patrol the University grounds during

the remainder of the night. Hardly had the sound of the horse's hooves died out before this self-constituted guard came noisily to the University campus. Nothing escaped from the medical building that night.

The next morning, New Year's Day 1871, the laboratory of the medical department was searched, but the search revealed only the inadequate facilities for teaching anatomy. One cadaver was found, but it was completely dissected, and, from its appearance, seemed to merit the name given it by the students of the department — Moses. All evidence pointed to the medical department, or some members of it, as being guilty, but the body had not been found. Dominick Bradley's pocket-notebook had been found near the grave. The druggist remembered that two days before Dr. Boucher had procured materials for the preservation of laboratory specimens. The demonstrator of anatomy, Mr. North, admitted that another cadaver was being prepared for dissection in the medical laboratories. Where it had come from and where it had gone he could not say. Despite this evidence, no one connected with the medical department would admit knowing anything about the grave snatching. Dominick Bradley had disappeared. Dr. Boucher protested his innocence. The few medical students who had remained in Iowa City for the holidays had suddenly vanished. Dr. Peck, Dean of the

medical department, expressed pained surprise — no doubt genuine — that the outrage had occurred and offered to do all that he could to help recover the body. In the face of the conspiracy of ignorance and silence, the searchers were almost helpless. Everyone connected with the case was convinced that the body had been in the laboratory, and that it had been removed and hidden somewhere in, or around, Iowa City. Accordingly searching parties were organized and sent out, but the night rider had covered his tracks well. The searchers returned empty handed.

Already indirectly implicated in the crime, John P. Irish again entered the affair. While the searching parties were scouring the countryside, Irish sent word to Dr. Kimball, who was acting for the relatives, offering to assist in recovering the body on the condition that no attempt would be made to prosecute the offenders. Irish's offer was gratefully accepted for at the time the only thought of the relatives was to recover the body and restore it to the grave. Returning to his office, Irish wrote a letter, a copy of which he sent by messenger to each member of the medical faculty and each medical student in town. In this letter he stated that a body had been taken from the Rose Hill Cemetery, that evidence pointed toward a member, or members of the medical department as the guilty parties. No attempt would be made to prosecute if the body were immediately re-

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turned. In order that the guilty individual might conceal his identity, a coffin would be placed in the alley behind the undertaker's establishment shortly before midnight. It would be brought in shortly after midnight, and the body must be in it.

While Irish was thus preparing the way for the return of the body, another citizen, A. B. Harris, learned that no prosecution was intended if the body were promptly returned. Shortly after getting this information, either by design or accident, he met a member of the medical department. To him Harris related what he had heard. The professor, who remained unnamed, knew of no one who might have been implicated, but gave assurance that he would do all he could to spread the information. Two hours later a "stranger" came to Harris offering to direct him to the body on the condition that he go alone, return alone, ask no questions, and maintain absolute secrecy; Harris demurred, insisting that he had no desire to go on such an unusual mission without company. The stranger, however, refused to do anything unless his directions were scrupulously observed. Finally Harris decided to go. Accordingly the stranger gave him the directions which he was to follow.

After getting a horse and wagon, Harris drove out of Iowa City over the rough frozen ground. West of town, at the place specified, he found a second "stranger" waiting for him. This man di-

rected Harris to a place about three miles west of Iowa City. Here, a short distance from the road and buried in a strawstack, the body was found. With the help of the stranger, Harris got the body into the wagon and returned to Iowa City. The stranger, however, accompanied him only to the place where he first appeared, and there, after bidding Harris goodnight, he disappeared into the night. Harris drove on to Iowa City. In the alley behind Dixon and Roe's undertaking establishment he found the coffin. After placing the body in it, he went to the front entrance and announced to the waiting group of men that the body had been returned. The coffin was brought into the building. One glance showed that dissection had been begun. Without further examination the lid of the coffin was fastened down and in the early morning of January 2, 1871, the body was taken back to the cemetery from which it had been carried four days before.

But the story of Iowa City's first grave snatching does not end with this dreary and silent midnight trip. The damage done by Dominick Bradley and his two companions was not easily mended; the people of Iowa City were not prone to forget the outrage. The evidence was clear that Bradley had robbed the grave. It also appeared that Dr. Boucher and several medical students had agreed to pay Bradley the sum of ten dollars for his night's work. To most people this

meant that the medical department of the University had deliberately fostered the act, and whether justified or not, they criticized the medical department. Furthermore, although the promise had been given that no attempt would be made to prosecute the offenders, warrants were sworn out for the arrest of Dominick Bradley, Dr. Boucher, John P. Irish, and two students of the medical department, I. L. Potter and A. B. Nichols. On February 10, the accused were examined in Justice Dodder's court, and all, with the exception of Irish, were bound over for trial in the May term of the District Court. When the grand jury met, no indictment was returned — not even against Bradley who had signed a confession claiming entire responsibility for the act. But even then the case was not closed. John P. Irish was suspected by many of having had a part in the affair. For more than a year afterwards, Republicans attempted to blacken his character by reference to his "grave snatching" proclivities. Irish, prominent in the Democratic party, both in Johnson County and the State, suffered from this abuse. Although Dr. Boucher resigned his professorship ("because of the pressure of his private practice," he asserted in his letter of resignation) and shortly afterwards moved to California and died, the medical department was severely criticized not only by those who held the department directly responsible for the outrage, but also by those who

welcomed an opportunity to attack the Dean and the State University. From January until June, the Iowa City papers hurled charges and counter-charges at one another, the medical school, and the University. Letters to the editor from irate and outraged citizens poured in and were printed. So bitter did the vituperation become at one time that the *State Press*, edited and published by John P. Irish, devoted almost half of its weekly space to the topic. Newspaper gossip and quarreling ceased only after a group of eighty-three business and professional men — including the entire City Council — inserted a notice in the papers in which they lamented that the culprits of the act had not been brought to justice and demanded, for the good of the University and of Iowa City, that the newspapers drop the subject once for all. So the incident was finally closed leaving bitterness and ruined careers in its wake, and bequeathing a long enduring popular prejudice against the medical department and its students. But for a few years memory of the act itself was kept alive in the lurid game of "grave snatching" which the little girls of Iowa City played with their dolls.

The next General Assembly passed a law which allowed the medical department of the University to secure the unclaimed dead from the state prisons.

VERNON CARSTENSEN

Sioux City and the Frontier

[In 1866 Sioux City lay on the fringe of American settlement — a bustling outpost on the American frontier. Although the railroad did not reach Sioux City until 1871, a steady stream of steamboats was churning up the Big Muddy as far as Fort Benton making Sioux City an important outfitting and jumping-off point for the Upper Missouri. The Indian, the fur trader, and the soldier dominated most of Dakota Territory, but squatters were filtering into the eastern section. Nebraska was destined to be admitted into the Union in 1867, and settlers were rushing into that territory. Newspaper editors in eastern Iowa found their readers deeply interested in this new country which was just opening to settlement. The following two letters, printed in the *Dubuque Weekly-Herald* for May 23, and June 13, 1866, are typical of their efforts to provide subscribers with first-hand information about the fabulous land beyond the Missouri.

C. A. Reed, the author of these letters, was born in Platteville, Wisconsin, in 1841 and was brought to Dubuque by his parents in 1843. He graduated from Cornell College and the University of Michigan medical school. He served as surgeon with several Iowa regiments during the Civil War. In 1866 he was secretary and surgeon of the commission sent out to make treaties with the Indians on the Missouri. It is the early activities of this commission which he describes here. Reed later went into business in Dubuque as a member of the grocery firm of Stahlman and Reed. — THE EDITOR]

Sioux City, May 13, 1866.

After one week's travel by railway and stage-coach, (the latter mode of traveling I suppose you know consists in riding on good roads), with the privilege of walking and pushing the coach through all bad sloughs, which by the way are rather numerous in this country, we find ourselves safe and sound in Sioux City on the eastern bank of the Great Muddy, awaiting the arrival of the steamer which is to convey us with the other members of the "Northwestern Peace Commission" to our destination in the upper Indian country.

We are now near the northwestern boundaries of civilization. A short distance west of this point are located the lands of the Sioux Indians who are being transferred from their former reservations in Minnesota, and together with the Santees who have been held as prisoners of war at Rock Island, are being it is to be hoped permanently settled on the Niobrara, or Running Water River, in northern Nebraska. Directly north of this in the territory of Dakota is the reservation of the Yanctons. Below a distance of twenty-five miles are the Omaha lands, and recently the government has concluded to remove the Winnebagoes, who were formerly in Wisconsin, and more recently about four hundred miles above here on the river, and locate them a short distance below and opposite this point, thus making it in reality for years to come the very westernmost verge of civilization.

The City of Sioux is surrounded with a chain of hills, not unlike the bluffs which encircle our own city of Dubuque. The highest of these is about one mile above the town. From its summit there is a landscape view hardly excelled in picturesqueness, and extent, by any on this continent. Looking in a northwesterly direction we have a clear view of the Missouri river wending its tortuous course among the hills as far as the eye can reach, the valley covered with a dense forest of Cottonwood trees and varying in width from two

to three miles, still retaining all its natural beauty and grandeur, unmarred by the hand of progress and civilization. On the opposite slope and meeting among the hills as if for protection, can be seen the promising little town of Dakota City. Directly north is the valley of the Great Sioux River, which empties into the Missouri at this point and forms the boundary line between Iowa and Dakota Territory. To the south and east there is an almost unlimited view of one of Iowa's broadest prairies.

In a business point of view this is one of the best locations in the state. As the last point of any importance on the Missouri, and just below the mouth of the Great Sioux River, it naturally controls a large share of the trading interest of the upper country, and judging from the apparent enterprise of its citizens and its natural advantages of location we predict for Sioux City an important future.

The gold discoveries of Montana territory, seem to produce almost as much excitement here as do the petroleum discoveries upon our neighbors farther east.

Already this spring some thirty-five steamers have passed this point en route for the mountains, or as far in that direction as they can possibly navigate the river, all heavily laden with men and supplies, bound for this comparatively new field of golden wealth. There are also quite a large

number of trains starting across the country on the new overland route, via Niobrara River. — The largest train which starts from this point is under the control of Col. Sawyer[s], a gentleman of enterprise and long experience on this frontier. They will start about the 20th inst., and if ordinarily successful expects to make the trip in about ninety days. They go fully armed and in large enough force to resist any attack which may be made upon them by hostile Indians.

This place has for some time past been the headquarters of the "Military District of the Northwest," formerly under the command of Gen. Sully, but at present commanded by Col. Reeves of the 13th U. S. Infantry. I am informed, however, that the "headquarters" will soon be removed to Ft. Sully or some point further up the river. The volunteer troops which have been doing duty in this department are now being rapidly relieved and sent to their respective states to be mustered *out* of the service of Uncle Samuel and INTO the bosoms of their several families. The 13th Regulars will hereafter be on duty in this district. Several companies have already passed up the river for Ft. Sully and other points above. They are a fine body of men, commanded by an able corps of officers, and have won honor and distinction on many a bloody and well-fought field. May they find much pleasure in their isolated life.

C.A.R.

Fort Thompson, Dak., May 24.

The day after I wrote you from Sioux City, we learned that there would be considerable delay of the steamers which were to take us to the Indian country, one having been destroyed by fire together with a large share of the supplies and annuities, and the other delayed far beyond her time. It was decided that our better course would be to go as far as we could by land. According with this decision we went by stage as far as Yankton City, where we chartered trains for the remainder of our journey.

At Yankton, the capital city of Dakota territory, we met several old residents of Dubuque, among others Mr. Higby, who was formerly for a number of years connected with the "surveyor general's office."

We passed several days quite pleasantly at the agency of the Yankton Indians, of whom Mr. P. H. Conger, formerly of our city is agent. Here we had our first introduction to the Indians of the northwestern territories. He has under his charge about two thousand natives of the forest, and is cultivating for these, and with their assistance, a farm of about one thousand acres of land. They all seem contented and happy and well satisfied with the present administration of their affairs, and should the season prove favorable, they will produce grain enough this summer to supply themselves with bread for the coming year.

This is a delightful prairie country, with fine fertile soil and is well adapted to grazing purposes, but owing to its close proximity to the Rocky Mountains, there is very little rain during the summer season, which renders agriculture very uncertain. The country is almost entirely destitute of timber, the only source of supply being a small strip of cotton-wood along the banks of the Missouri and for a short distance along the margin of its tributary streams.

Most of the Indians we have seen thus far still retain many of their original habits of living and dress. With the exception of occasionally a chief they still inhabit the teepees (or lodges) of their forefathers, and regard any attempt at improvement in this direction as an innovation upon their ancient and inalienable rights. Occasionally you can see a chief arrayed in the full dress of his more civilized neighbors, but by far the larger number retain their original habit of dress.

The ladies too are loth to adopt any of the new fashions, which from time to time agitate the hearts, minds and purses of their more favored sisters of enlightened lands, and retain with commendable persistence the same style of dress adopted by their maternal ancestors in ages long since gone by. I have yet to see the first Indian woman who has adopted that much abused article of female apparel, the hoop skirt.

Few of the Indians of this country make any

attempt at speaking the English language. Although in some nations many can read and write their own language with ease and rapidity. At the agency of the Santa Sioux they have a large and prosperous school under the control of Rev. Mr. Williamson; their text books consist of a primary reader and spelling book, together with a hymn book, testament and dictionary, all printed in the Dakota language, and their agent informed me that when a part of their tribe were prisoners of war at Rock Island, they regularly received and sent more letters than the company of soldiers who were stationed at this fort.

The country about here abounds in game of all kinds, especially Buffalo, Elk, and Antelope in almost countless numbers. We have also passed several large colonies of Prairie dogs, but owing to the celerity of their movements we have been unable to succeed in killing any of them as yet.

The past winter was a very severe one in this latitude, with deep and continuous snows. This, in connection with the failure of the corn crops last summer, has produced a great deal of severe suffering among the Indians of this district. In many instances they have been compelled to kill and eat their horses, to keep from actual starvation. Notwithstanding this however, those with whom treaties were made last year, have in almost every instance preserved them inviolate. Had the same number of white men been placed in like

circumstances would they have acted in like good faith toward the government?

The next point which we will visit is Fort Sully, where we learn there are already some five thousand Indians, representatives of the various surrounding tribes, awaiting our arrival.

C.A.R.

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UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS, EIGHTY YEARS AFTER 1870-1871 INCIDENT

State University of Iowa

UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS SERVICE RECORD

General Hospital and Children's Hospital
July 1950 to July 1951

Admissions	19,367
Patient Days	274,328
Out-Patient Registrations . . .	29,276
Births	1,249
Operations, Major; 6,946 . . .	9,255
Minor; 2,309	
Minor procedures, including emergencies	13,748

X-ray examinations & treatment . . .	56,459	Meals served	1,528,022
Laboratory examinations	98,618	Pounds of Laundry	2,687,790
Prescriptions	154,711	Patients by ambulance	22,465
Physical Therapy treatments	51,282	Social Service cases	7,409
Blood transfusions	6,702	Brace Shop orders	5,170

Professional Personnel

Staff Physicians	75	Student Nurses	287
Residents	103	Medical Clerks	86
Interns	17	Other professional personnel	81
Graduate Nurses	185	Other hospital personnel	619



