

The **P**ALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1946

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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

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

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A Century of Mail Delivery

The Iowa pioneer was probably more interested in maintaining his connections with friends and relatives "back home" than in almost anything else except food and shelter. He depended upon the United States mail service to bring him his letters, his newspapers, and his magazines. At the same time his local editor served as an intermediary in dispensing news to the frontiersman — news which he gleaned from the score of newspaper exchanges which came to his desk through the United States postal service. Although these papers were sometimes two months old before they reached the Black Hawk Purchase, the Iowa pioneer avidly read and discussed each crumb of news that filtered westward.

Previous to the appointment of Colonel George Davenport as postmaster at Rock Island in 1824, the mails came up the Mississippi River at intervals which were regulated by the movement of troops and supplies. When Moses Meeker as-

cended the Upper Mississippi in the keelboat *Colonel Bomford* in 1823, he was detained by the commander at Fort Edwards who wished to make sure he was not engaging in the whisky trade with the Indians.

The next morning, as they were proceeding upstream, Meeker saw a boat approaching from the fort. "On their arrival a letter was handed me, containing a very polite apology for detaining me the day previous, with the mail for the upper forts, requesting that I should forward it as far as Prairie du Chien. At that day, and up to the fall of 1828, there was no regular mail above Fort Edwards; each military post was a post-office, and the commandant a postmaster. While the river was open, the mails traveled at the speed of a keel-boat, and as often as opportunities offered. After the closing of the river in the fall . . . there was an express sent through from one post to another, once a month."

Civilian mail delivery began in Iowa immediately following the advent of the first settlers in 1833. In the fall of that year George Ord Karrick was delivering a weekly mail from Galena to Dubuque. Milo H. Prentice was the first postmaster at Dubuque and the mail was delivered from a candle box in the store kept by a Mr. Pfozter.

In those early days it appears that the initiative of the pioneers supplemented the government in this matter just as it did in courts and land titles, and it is sometimes difficult to say whether an enterprise was a private or government activity. The first delivery of mail within the original limits of Burlington in 1834 was through the private enterprise of William R. Ross who became postmaster in 1835. In the spring of 1834 Ross had written Postmaster General William T. Barry asking for the establishment of a post office at Flint Hills. He was granted a route between Flint Hills (Burlington) and Shokokon, seven miles to the east across the Mississippi.

According to a local historian, Antoine LeClaire received a commission as the first postmaster at Davenport on April 19, 1836. He picked up the mail at Stephenson (now Rock Island), Illinois, and brought the letters to Davenport in his coattails. About this time, at New Salem, Abraham Lincoln was carrying mail in his hat. LeClaire, it is said, received an income of seventy-five cents for his first quarter's work.

This mail was usually carried on horseback and the compensation consisted of the proceeds of the office. At that time envelopes were a luxury, for the charge was twenty-five cents for each sheet of paper and an envelope was considered a separate

sheet. To avoid this extra charge, most persons folded a letter, sealed it, and then wrote the address on a blank space left on the outside.

Letters were sent "collect on delivery" and many Iowans found it extremely difficult to produce a quarter with which to pay for a letter. A Keokuk County pioneer recalled the trouble he had getting his first letter out of the Sigourney post office in 1845. "I heard that there was a letter in the postoffice for me, and knowing that it would require twenty-five cents to pay the postage, the problem of getting that sum of money taxed my energy and financial ability to the utmost for many days. None of my neighbors were in such affluent circumstances as to be able to 'do my paper' for that sum . . . and I was about despairing of being able to pay the postage, when I heard of a kind-hearted man (since dead, peace to his ashes), living in the western part of the county, some miles from where I did, who was reported to have received twenty-five dollars some time before from the East. . . . This news gave me new hope and courage. I started early one morning to find the capitalist, and negotiate with him for the loan of 'a quarter,' which, with some difficulty, I accomplished; and then, with hastening steps and palpitating heart, walked to Sigourney and procured the letter, and returned home the

same day, after a walk of something over twenty miles."

The rapid spread of postal service in Iowa is attested by the *Dubuque Iowa News* of September 30, 1837, which listed 24 post offices in the Black Hawk Purchase after only four years of settlement. Half of these post offices were located in old Dubuque County — Du Buque, Peru, Weyman's, Higginsport, Pleasant Valley, Davenport, Belleview, Durango, Salisbury, Parkhurst, Wabesapinecon, and Carl Port. The remainder were located in the five counties of southern Iowa before they had achieved their present-day boundaries — Rockingham, Iowa, Clark's Ferry, Bloomington, Burlington, Gibson's Ferry, Montrose, Richland, Fort Madison, Keokuk, Wapello, and Black Hawk.

The Dubuque editor also observed that the people of the Iowa District had "much to complain of with regard to the irregular transportation of the mails from Du Buque to Belleview, Fort Madison, etc., the contractor having neglected to perform his duty".

Other editors were likewise irritated by the slow delivery of mails. On January 20, 1838, a Burlington editor complained: "The truth is, and we are compelled to say it, our mail establishment is a mere mockery; calculated rather to tantalize

than to accommodate the public. We would almost as soon have a lodge, at once, in some vast wilderness, where a mail never reached or was heard of, than to be subjected to the annoyance, disappointment and chagrin, incident to the mails of this flourishing, beautiful and populous country."

The following week this same editor stormed because a letter he had received from George Wallace Jones was seven weeks old. No newspapers had been received from the east for a similar period and hence there was nothing on hand to print for his readers. "No weather or climate seems to suit the mail-carriers. Summers too hot; Winters too cold.— When it rains its too wet, and when it don't its too dry. Presently, we shall get three bushels of papers from the east, and the latest will probably be up to the 20th or 25th of December." Before his newspaper went to press he was able to announce the arrival of three bushels of mail, with no papers later than December 23rd, and hence nothing "quite new" to report.

The demand of the Iowa pioneers for more post offices continued after the Territory of Iowa was created on July 4, 1838. More than one hundred post offices were established in the seven years before January 1, 1846. An additional thirty

were established during 1846. At that time Iowa had more post offices than there were in the whole United States at the time Washington became President.

Fort Atkinson was the northernmost post office established that year. The westernmost was Raccoon River, established on March 2, 1846, with Thomas K. Brooks as the first postmaster. It became Fort Des Moines on December 31, 1846, three days after Iowa achieved statehood, and was renamed Des Moines on January 30, 1857. The frontier of the post office was following close on the heels of the pioneer in 1846.

Between the opening of settlement in 1833 and the achievement of statehood in 1846 few changes occurred in the postal service. During this period the steamboat was the swiftest means of bringing the mails to the Upper Mississippi. By 1834 the Galena-Dubuque area chronicled 127 steamboat arrivals. Upper Mississippi steamboats quickly won mail contracts, one of the most famous "Mail Lines" being the St. Louis and Keokuk Packet Company. The magnitude of the mail carried on steamboats is demonstrated by the *War Eagle*, which left Dubuque in May of 1857 for points above with two and one-half tons of mail aboard.

But steamboats were long-haul carriers and

the average Iowan a century ago thought in terms of post offices and post roads because he was more intimately acquainted with them. The time of arrival and departure of the mails was usually carried in the local press. So also was the request of the United States government for bids to carry mail over the various post roads that streaked across the Iowa prairies. On May 25, 1846, Augustus Caesar Dodge sent to Iowa newspapers for publication a list of thirty-eight mail contracts on which Iowans had bid. C. T. Patterson agreed to carry the mail from Dubuque to Davenport by way of Belleview and Charleston for \$892. In contrast, N. Atkins got only \$332 for carrying the mail between Iowa City and Dubuque. Stagecoach drivers often competed for these contracts.

The half century between 1846 and 1896 was marked by numerous postal innovations. The first postage stamps were authorized on March 3, 1847. The interest of Iowans in reduced postage was expressed by the editor of the *Davenport Gazette*, on January 16, 1845. While many cities were calling for "Two cents and no Franking" the editor felt that this was too extreme a reduction, and favored rather a rate of ten and five cents. This was the rate finally adopted in 1847 and the government promptly printed 3,650,000 five cent stamps and 875,000 ten cent stamps —

a small number when compared with the 125,000,000 Iowa centennial commemorative stamps printed in 1946.

Other postal reforms followed quickly. The system of registered letters was introduced in 1855. Free delivery service, inaugurated in large cities in 1863, was extended in 1887 to include towns of 10,000 population. Money order service began in 1864. One cent post cards were first placed on sale in May of 1873. Six years later double, or reply, postal cards were authorized. In 1885 Congress increased the weight of letter-mail from half an ounce for two cents to one ounce for two cents, and at the same time authorized a special delivery service. Rural free delivery service began experimentally in 1896.

During the half century between 1846 and 1896, Iowa's population soared from 102,000 to over two millions. The frontier line disappeared. The arrival of the telegraph in 1848 was a tremendous force in linking the Atlantic seaboard with Iowa. The arrival of the railroad on the banks of the Mississippi in 1854 and 1855 was another momentous force in uniting the East and the West. A dozen years were to slip by before the iron horse was to cross Iowa to the banks of the Missouri and it was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that railroads penetrated

every county in the State and Iowans were freed from at least partial dependence on the wagon and stagecoach for mail delivery.

According to Daniel C. Roper, mail was first forwarded by railroad as early as 1834. England had a railroad mail coach as early as 1838, the same year that Congress declared all railroads to be post roads. In that year the *Iowa News* of April 21st contained a description of a traveling post office car used on the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad. This car was "divided into two commodious apartments, one of which is a complete post office, furnished with a desk, pigeon holes, cases, and a letter box, and everything needful for a post office. This apartment is occupied by a clerk or agent of the post office department — who receives the letters which are put into the box at different towns on the route, stamps them, charges them, arranges them into parcels, and delivers them at the places of their destination. . . . The apartment in the rear of the travelling post office contains the great mail." Citizens, it was said, frequently availed themselves of the "locomotive post office" when their letters were too late for the regular establishment.

Railroads, however, were still in their infancy and apparently did not accept this system, which

required the service of a route agent, or agents, such as those who at that time traveled with the mails aboard steamboats and received and distributed all letters posted by boat. At any rate the honor of having the first railway post office in the United States seems to be claimed by two western railroads, both associated with Iowa — the Hannibal & St. Joe of the Burlington system, which in 1862 used a mail car to sort mail which was to be carried on west by the Pony Express, and the North Western, which ran its first railway mail car between Chicago and Clinton in 1864. Regular railway mail service was established in 1865 and today forms the very backbone of the postal distribution system.

Iowa towns were among the earliest in which free delivery service was inaugurated in 1863. The same is true for rural free delivery. On November 16, 1897, a preliminary rural free delivery route (one of forty-four in twenty-nine States) was started from Morning Sun, a town of about 1,000 in Louisa County. Four carriers were employed who averaged 23 miles per day in five or six hours. It was necessary to enlist the aid of farmers in erecting boxes by the roadside, but this was readily done and farmers expressed themselves as greatly pleased with the service. An additional route was established at New Prov-

idence in Hardin County in 1897. These deliveries were, of course, horse-powered.

On one occasion an Iowa city appears to have served as the sole proving ground for a post office innovation. On April 6, 1897, the Des Moines postmaster was authorized to enter into arrangements with the Des Moines traction company to equip street cars with letter boxes for mail-collection service in the suburban districts remote from substations. The collections began with 215 pieces of mail the first day, increased to 500 daily during the first month, and exceeded 1,000 daily in July of 1897, but the plan seems to have been dropped.

A half century after Iowa became a State the President was appointing postmasters for 214 post offices in Iowa and the State ranked 12th in population and 4th in number of presidential post offices, being eclipsed only by New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. In 1896 presidential offices were divided into three classes. First-class offices, including eight in Iowa, were those in which the gross receipts were over \$40,000 per annum, and the salary of the postmaster was from \$3,000 to \$6,000. There were 26 second-class post offices in Iowa, with gross receipts ranging from \$8,000 to \$40,000 per annum. The salary of second-class postmasters ranged from \$2,000 to \$2,900

per annum. Third-class post offices (180 in Iowa) were those in which the gross receipts ranged from \$1,900 to \$8,000, and the salaries of the postmasters were between \$1,000 and \$1,900 per annum.

In addition to these there were 1,672 fourth-class post offices, those in which receipts were less than \$1,900, or the salary of the postmaster, who was appointed by the Postmaster General, did not amount to \$250 per quarter for four consecutive quarters. Fourth-class offices were divided into three groups — those which could sell money orders up to \$100, those which could sell money orders up to \$5, and those which could sell no money orders at all. In 1897 Iowa had 674 money order post offices, 60 limited money order offices, and 918 non-money order post offices.

In 1897 Iowa ranked 15th in the number of post offices of all kinds, with a total of 1,866, or three times as many as existed in the United States in 1797 when George Washington ended his second term as President. The gross receipts at these post offices was \$2,214,200.01, \$1.04 per capita for Iowans, which placed the State 24th in per capita receipts.

In the half century since 1896 there have been many additional postal reforms. A postal savings system, inaugurated in 1911, was especially pop-

ular with Iowans during the collapse of the banking system. A parcel post service was established in 1913 which became very popular with Iowa farmers although it was opposed by the express companies and small town merchants.

Air mail was inaugurated in 1918 between Washington and New York and a transcontinental system was started in 1920, crossing Iowa from Davenport to Omaha, by way of Iowa City. Foreign air mail routes were gradually added to the domestic system and after Pearl Harbor the wisdom of a well-developed air mail service was demonstrated to many Iowans with sons and daughters in the service.

The United States postal service today stands in sharp contrast with that offered citizens of yesteryears. In 1789, when Samuel Osgood was appointed Postmaster General, there were 75 post offices sprinkled along the Atlantic seaboard. Today the United States Post Office Department is the largest business in the world, employing 370,000 workers at an annual payroll in excess of \$800,000,000. During the year ending June 30, 1945, the 41,790 post offices in the United States handled more than 16 billion dollars annually and the gross receipts totalled \$1,243,673,689.86.

The growth of postal service in Iowa has been equally startling. The 1,110 Iowa post offices in

1946, though less than there were in 1897, represent a tenfold increase over 1846. The decrease in the number of post offices was largely due to rural free delivery. In 1940 there were approximately 64,359 miles of R. F. D. routes in Iowa compared with a total of 155,739 miles of post routes in the United States in 1840.

There are several reasons for this tremendous change. At the time settlers first poured into the Black Hawk Purchase a scant two letters per person a year were sent through United States mails. By 1946 an average of about 150 letters or cards per person were sent through the mails. The introduction of the postage stamp and the adoption of such innovations as registered mail, city, rural, and village delivery service, money orders, special delivery, postal savings, parcel post, and air mail, all have played a vital rôle in the expansion of the postal service in Iowa and the nation. In spite of the radio, the post office still plays as important a part in the lives of Iowans in 1946 as it did one hundred years ago.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Views and Reviews of Iowa

The whole story of Iowa's past can never be written. The dreams of the pioneers, the struggles of the settlers with droughts and chinch bugs, and the shadows of five wars — all these evade the historian as he strives to recapture the past and look into the future. Many of these human experiences lie buried with the men and women who dreamed and toiled, laughed and grieved, in the building of the State. Fortunately, however, some of these contemporary records have survived in guide books, diaries, and autobiographies, as well as in books wholly within the province of the historian.

Iowa had a past long before Congress opened the Black Hawk Purchase for settlement in 1833. Geological ages bequeathed to her material wealth in the form of rich and deep soil which was protected from erosion through the centuries before the farmer took over the land, by the penetrating roots of the prairie grass. Recorded history began as early as June of 1673, when Louis Jolliet and a black-robed priest, Pere Marquette, guided their party in canoes down the flooded Mississippi, the Messipi as they called it. They noted

the verdure of the Iowa bluffs, the abundant bird life, and the ceremonious hospitality shown them at an Indian village.

Jolliet's report was lost by shipwreck, but Marquette's records were sent to Quebec, and then to Paris where they became a part of the *Jesuit Relations*, now a treasure store for American writers of fiction and of history. Other explorers, in the day when Spain and France claimed Iowa, charted the Des Moines River as the "Riviere des Moingona" and the river-to-river trail of the fur traders across northern Iowa as the "Chemin des Voyageurs".

From the first of June, 1833, when Iowa was first opened to settlers, down to 1870, when the frontier had definitely passed beyond the Missouri, Iowa was the goal of American and foreign land-seekers. The information which interested Iowans and would-be immigrants to Iowa came largely through "guide books", small volumes designed to attract settlers. In form and content they were the literary descendants of the plantation tracts which Captain John Smith, William Penn, and New Englanders sent back to England to explain the economic and religious advantages of life in the new colonies.

The earliest and for Iowa the most important of these guide books was Lieutenant Albert Mil-

ler Lea's *Notes on Wisconsin Territory; Particularly with Reference to the Iowa District or Black Hawk Purchase with a Map*. The little volume was printed in 1836, two years before the Territory of Iowa was set off from Wisconsin Territory. Under the title, *The Book That Gave Iowa Its Name*, a facsimile reprint of this volume was issued by the State Historical Society in 1935.

Lieutenant Lea wrote not from hearsay but from actual experience. In charge of one of three companies of dragoons, he broke paths through the tall prairie grass from the mouth of the Des Moines River, riding first northwest and then northward and northeastward into southern Minnesota, fording the Skunk (then called by its more euphonious Indian name of Chacagua), the Iowa, the Cedar, the Wapsipinicon, and the Upper Iowa rivers.

In 1838, John Plumbe, Jr., published his *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin, Taken During a Residence of Three Years in Those Territories*. Very clearly he stated his hope that his little guide would be "the means of effecting some good, by assisting in directing the attention of Emigrants and others, to a portion of the United States, which all, who have examined it, unite in representing . . . as 'one of the finest domains that nature ever offered to man.' "

A few years later John B. Newhall wrote three guide books dealing with Iowa. He not only wrote in glowing and enthusiastic terms about Iowa; he lectured to prospective settlers in Birmingham, Liverpool, and London about Iowa's soil and resources. The first of his books, *Sketches of Iowa, or the Emigrant's Guide*, appeared in 1841 and the second, *The British Emigrant's Handbook*, in 1844. The third was *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*. In all, he pictured Iowa as an inviting place, almost a Utopia.

In the years just before the Civil War, Nathan H. Parker wrote a series of guide books on Iowa — *Iowa As It Is in 1855*, *Iowa As It Is in 1856*, and *Iowa As It Is in 1857*, with the sub-title *A Gazetteer for Citizens, and a Handbook for Immigrants*. He also published *The Iowa Handbook for 1856* and *The Iowa Handbook for 1857*.

In the seventies the Iowa Board of Immigration officially supervised the preparation of additional guides to attract immigrants to Iowa. In 1870, *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants* was published in German, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish, as well as in English.

Guide books have sometimes been turned to frankly propagandist ends. The Columbian Exposition in 1893 stimulated zeal of this kind. The Iowa Commissioners issued *A Hand Book of*

Iowa with the scintillating sub-title, *The Brightest Star in the American Constellation*, which was distributed to visitors in the Iowa Building.

The most ambitious of later guide books, *Iowa — A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, was published in 1938 by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. It not only gives a general survey of the State and enumerates the number of miles of dirt, gravel, and paved roads in Iowa, but it describes sites of historic events.

The most recent guide book appears in a new guise, bearing the title *The State of Iowa Welcomes You*, its cover resplendent with colorful pictures of the Mississippi and Old Capitol. Published by the State of Iowa in a most attractive form, it gives statistics of Iowa's excellence in agriculture and education, pictures of historic sites, such as the Floyd Monument and Hoover's birthplace, and specific directions for reaching Iowa's many State parks.

Men of a different frame of mind have left permanent and very human records of their experiences in Iowa in the form of diaries and autobiographies. First among these was *The Autobiography of Black Hawk*, giving the experiences of an Indian in Illinois and Iowa. Dictated in 1833 to Antoine LeClaire and published in 1834 by

J. B. Patterson, this unique autobiography reveals Black Hawk's motives for starting the war which bears his name, describes his family and tribal life, and explains his religious beliefs.

Cyrus Sanders, a pioneer surveyor, kept a diary as he traveled by coach to Burlington in 1838 and trekked on foot from there to Salem and on to Iowa City. He recounted his difficulties in finding his way through the pathless prairie grass, criticized the greasy, ill-smelling food and the dirty bed linen of the taverns, and bemoaned his hopeless bachelorhood when he found himself forced to sew buttons on his shirts or to mend his pantaloons.

A very different diary was kept by Ephraim Adams, who came from Andover, Massachusetts, in 1843 with the Iowa Band, whose eleven members had adopted the slogan "Each to found a church and all a college". In 1870 he incorporated into his book, *The Iowa Band*, long passages from his diary. With touches of pathos and humor, he described the experiences of a young minister who had looked forward to preparing sermons in a quiet study and found himself forced to compose on horseback, or behind a patchwork quilt which separated his sanctum from the main room in some pioneer cabin.

Less strenuous days brought a degree of leisure

unknown in the 1830's and 1840's when the search for food, clothing, and shelter dominated life. Men and women turned to the writing of their life stories against a background of Iowa's material and cultural growth.

In 1917 Henry Wallace, editor of *Wallace's Farmer*, published *Uncle Henry's Own Story of His Life*. In a series of simply worded letters addressed to his great grandchildren he sketched from experience many phases of pioneer life, among them husking bees, quilting parties, coon hunts, and square dances.

Perhaps the most representative autobiography written in Iowa, by an Iowan, is *One Man's Life*, Herbert Quick's story of his life, describing his book-hungry boyhood, his debt to the McGuffey readers, and his work as school teacher, reporter, lawyer, and editor. In the background runs the history of agriculture and politics in Iowa, the basic material for his trilogy, *Vandemark's Folly*, *The Hawkeye*, and *The Invisible Woman*.

Nor did the white settlers in Iowa lose interest in the primitive people they had displaced. The most complete survey of the Iowa Indians was *The Red Men of Iowa*, prepared by A. R. Fulton, and published in 1882. Out of print, and today a rare book for the collectors of Iowana, it contains invaluable accounts of many individual Indians,

including Black Hawk, his rival, Keokuk, the Ioway chief, Mahaska, and his beautiful wife, Rantche-wai-me, who insisted on accompanying her husband to Washington to see the Great White Father.

Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp published the *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre and Captivity of Miss Abbie Gardner* which has often been reprinted. As one of the two survivors of the attack made by the Sioux Indians in 1857, she vividly described the attack, the murder of her family, and her forced captivity under Inkpaduta until she was ransomed for two horses, thirty-seven yards of calico, two kegs of powder, and a few other items.

One hundred years after Black Hawk dictated his autobiography, Cyrenus Cole wrote *I Am A Man — The Indian Black Hawk*, which was published by the State Historical Society of Iowa. The first part of the title was taken from the greeting with which Black Hawk, the captive, opened his interview with Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, "I am a man. You are another."

As life settled down to routine living, Iowans began to assemble the records of communities, counties, and the State. The first of these volumes were frequently combinations of guide books

and histories. In 1858 Franc B. Wilkie published his *Davenport Past and Present*, a treasure house of materials on eastern Iowa before the Civil War.

About this time, too, came the first county histories, beginning with one of Des Moines and Polk County in 1857. After the Civil War, when associations of old settlers became popular, numerous papers read at the annual picnics helped preserve many human interest stories. As an example a story presents the picture of a family of seven riding to church on two horses. The mother, with the youngest child in her arms, sat in the saddle; the oldest boy sat on a pillow behind his mother with the next to the youngest between them, while the father, on the other horse, managed his second and third offspring as best he could.

It was not, however, until the Centennial Exposition of 1876 made Americans history conscious, that county histories became general, some written by individuals who financed their own publications. These were followed by county histories largely financed by commercial companies. Those issued by each company followed a set pattern, containing identical material on the Presidents and on State history. The companies followed the policy of securing one man in each township

to be responsible for the history of the press, bar, schools, railroads, churches, military activities, and representative families in his district. An "historical writer" was then sent out from headquarters who sought to contact the past-minded citizens and then wrote the history.

The second wave of county histories came in the late eighties and early nineties. These were largely biographical in material and ornate in binding. County histories in a third series which appeared from 1910 to 1918 were published by commercial companies in two volumes — the first historical, the second biographical. These, like the preceding groups, were usually sold in advance by subscription, the subscribers paying well for the biographical sketches and for their portraits.

The last series of county histories was prepared by the Iowa Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration and appeared early in the nineteen forties. This series includes less than twenty Iowa counties. Often they add new material by supplying folklore, songs, and ballads collected in the counties, or add later historical events such as a diamond jubilee in 1910 or some centennial celebration. Some bring the history up to date with accounts of new murals in Federal post offices, the acquisition of an art museum, or the use of a recreational lake within the county.

All in all the ninety-nine counties of Iowa have produced some three hundred county histories. One may seek in vain for an index and criticize the faulty assembling of material in many of these county histories, but the seeker after details concerning the pioneers, the early press, the Fourth of July celebrations, and entertainments at rural fairs is eternally grateful for these records, and the historical and biographical material thus salvaged has saved many a worthy blacksmith or justice of the peace from being wholly forgotten.

Out of the accumulation of letters, newspaper files, old settlers' memories, and county histories — to mention but a few sources — Iowa's past has been viewed and reviewed in several histories. In 1875, A. T. Andreas, a Chicago editor and publisher of midwestern histories, compiled an *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*. Between its covers he enclosed many excellent prints of Iowa farmsteads, old mills, and public buildings as well as historical sketches and maps of the counties.

Iowa will always be indebted to William Salter, not only for his share in the Iowa Band but for his *Iowa: The First Free State in the Louisiana Purchase*. As his beginning date he used Marquette's and Jolliet's discovery of Iowa in 1673 and closed with Iowa's admission in 1846.

Two noteworthy single volume histories of Iowa are Irving B. Richman's vividly written *Ioway to Iowa* (1931), and Cyrenus Cole's *A History of the People of Iowa* (1921). In a revised form the latter was re-issued in 1940 under the title, *Iowa Through the Years*. Both hold a reader's interest as they describe how the State changed from the fighting ground of the Sauk and the Sioux to an agricultural and commercial region supporting over two million people with all the comforts which civilization affords.

Nor have the young people of Iowa been neglected in the field of history. In 1916 Henry and Edwin S. Sabin published *The Making of Iowa*. Two volumes of juvenile history were published in the twenties — *The Story of Iowa*, by Thomas P. Christensen in 1928 and *Stories of Iowa for Boys and Girls*, by Bruce E. Mahan and Ruth A. Gallaher in 1929. Ten years later John E. Briggs published *Iowa Old and New*.

Three men devoted years of their lives to the writing of general histories of Iowa — Benjamin F. Gue, Johnson Brigham, and Edgar Rubey Harlan. The first of these was Gue's *History of Iowa From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1903 in four sizable volumes. Knowing life in Iowa for sixty years, Gue, quondam pioneer editor, legislator,

and Lieutenant Governor, wrote of people and events from actual experience.

Johnson Brigham spent seventeen years in the State Library with statistics and records close at hand before he published in three large volumes his *Iowa, Its History and Its Foremost Citizens* in 1915. From his experiences as editor of the *Cedar Rapids Republican* and of the *Midland Monthly* and from wide reading he compiled his account, incorporating in his history many notable biographical sketches.

Edgar Rubey Harlan published his five-volume *Narrative History of the People of Iowa* in 1931. The last three volumes contain brief biographies of Iowans prepared by a special staff of writers from the American Historical Society, a commercial company.

Outstanding contributions to the history of Iowa have been made by the State Historical Society of Iowa, which for many years was under the direction of Benj. F. Shambaugh, its superintendent and editor from 1907 to 1940. Since its organization in 1857, the Society has issued some one hundred and fifty volumes on Iowa history and over one hundred volumes of historical periodicals — *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), the *Iowa Historical Record*, *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, and *The Palimpsest*. In addi-

tion to his editorial and administrative work for the Society, Dr. Shambaugh was himself the author of several volumes, including *The Old Stone Capitol Remembers* and *The Constitutions of Iowa*.

Although Iowa is fortunate in possessing these and many other views and reviews of her past and although of the writing of histories there is no end, every writer and every reader interested in Iowa's past knows that much that went into the making of the State has never been fully reported. Official records and historical accounts often lack human interest. Poets and prose writers of today and tomorrow can revitalize many of these stories by humanizing them into living portrayals of Iowa's pioneers and their descendants.

LUELLE M. WRIGHT

What Is History?

If an inquiring reporter should take the trouble to ask, "What is history?", it is probable that most of the answers would run something like this: "History is a record of the past." But what record? Who wrote it? And who reads it?

In this centennial year, Iowans have a renewed interest in things historical. An ox yoke, a grain cradle, a candle mold, or a hackle lying in a display window, oldtime songs on the radio, pageants, and parades, women with bonnets and men with whiskers — all these recall the life of the pioneers. The present looks at the past, old records are made into palimpsests, and we ask once more, "What is history?"

A ten-ton dinosaur with a three-ounce brain once left a footprint in the mud. He had no thought of writing history, but millions of years later that footprint was recognized by a geologist as a part of the history of the earth. The laws of Hammurabi were not history to those who had to obey them, but centuries later they became a mirror of the life of the Babylonians of that age. The letter one receives, reads, and lays aside, the newspaper which is read and discarded, the ad-

vertisement which is tossed on the doorstep — all these are unintentional history, ephemeral but invaluable in understanding the life of the people.

Some records there are which are made for preservation — laws, journals of legislatures, reports of courts, accounts kept by officials of the government, records of societies, corporations, and churches. Official documents are presumably to be kept permanently, but courthouse basements are often crowded with old papers which sooner or later go into the furnace or a waste paper drive. Unofficial records are often stored in homes and are forgotten until housecleaning, a fire, or the sale of the house ends in their destruction.

But there is inherent in all people, even in the most primitive, an instinct to perpetuate the memory of persons, events, and ideas. A rude drawing on the wall of a cave, the pyramids and the Taj Mahal, an inscription on a tombstone or marker, a commemorative stamp, the granite monument built around the cabin where Lincoln was born — all these are mute witnesses of man's desire to preserve the memory of those he loves and admires against the obliteration which is part of death.

Along the way man learned to substitute words for rude pictures and history took the form of tablets, scrolls, and finally printed books. Man wrote the story of his life, wrote of his friends and his

enemies, his own people, his neighbors, and the world. In spite of all these efforts, much history is unrecorded or unread. Many records are lost forever. In the words of Bayard Taylor:

“For every sentence uttered, a million
more are dumb;

Men's lives are chains of chances, and
History their sum.”

Some records, painstakingly prepared, are found by those who cannot read them. They are to history what the subconscious mind is to memory. Some day a word or a fleeting idea may bring them into the consciousness of man. What is history? To each individual it is what he knows of the past. It is *his* story of life, family, country, the earth, and all things on it. It is also all that went to produce that individual and his kind. Conscious history is what we know of the past; real history is the foundation of the present.

RUTH A. GALLAHER

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857
Located at Iowa City Iowa

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