

The **P**ALIMPSEST

SEPTEMBER 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.

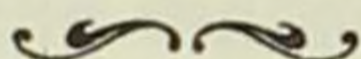
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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY RUTH A. GALLAHER

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The First State Election

Frontier democracy was party democracy. Although the pioneers were alert to local interests and issues they were even more concerned with party principles. That is, the Whigs were inclined to vote for the candidates of the Whig Party and the Democrats to vote for Democrats, no matter what local issues were involved. The first election in the State of Iowa for administrative and legislative officials was no exception to this rule.

The election of 1846 was complicated because it was involved in the legal machinery which marked the transition of Iowa from a Territory to a State. On August 3, 1846, the people of Iowa had gone to the polls and approved the proposal for a new Constitution and the establishment of a State government. Among the provisions of the basic document was one which required the Governor of the Territory to call a general election within three months after the ratification of the

Constitution. In this election, the voters of the new State were to select a Governor, two Representatives in Congress (unless Congress should authorize only one), an Auditor, a Treasurer, a Secretary of State, and members of a General Assembly. It was further provided that the election of these officials was to be conducted "in accordance with the existing election laws of this Territory".

Although the results of the ratifying election were slow in coming in, Governor James Clarke was satisfied by the end of August that the new Constitution had been adopted, since the votes from the two missing counties (Delaware and Buchanan) were not sufficient to change the result. The final report indicates that the vote was 9580 for the Constitution and 9105 against it.

He did not wait for formal congressional action on the admission of Iowa as a State but followed the provisions of the recently adopted Constitution and on September 9, 1846, he issued a proclamation designating Monday, October 26, 1846, as the day "for the holding of the first general election for the selection of State officers, and members of the first State Legislature." The Governor stipulated that the election was "to be conducted in all respects according to the existing laws of the Territory, except only in such cases as

the same may be found to conflict with the Constitution under which the election will be held."

This meant that the election was to be conducted in accordance with regulations adopted in 1838 by the First Territorial Legislative Assembly. The polls would be open between 9 A. M. and 6 P. M. and during that time an elector could approach "the bar in the election room" and vote "by presenting a ticket, folded in such a manner that no names on said ticket" were visible to the judges. Ballots were provided by the individual voters or by party committees, not by the officials in charge.

Even before Governor Clarke issued his proclamation fixing the date of the election, the two political parties in Iowa began to formulate their plans for the campaign. The Whigs, who had not been as well organized as the Democrats were, began the task of organizing the party in each of the counties. A mass meeting held in Tipton on the afternoon of September 19, 1846, for "effecting a proper organization of the Whig Party in Cedar County" was typical.

Late in August the Whig Central Committee issued a call for all Whigs to meet in a State convention at Iowa City on Friday, September 25th. Each county was to send one delegate for each one hundred voters. As outlined in the call, the

purpose of this convention was to enable "the Whigs of Iowa to express their views and feelings with reference to the great questions of national policy" and to form "a ticket for State officers to be supported at the ensuing election." This call was signed by William Penn Clarke, James Trimble, and James Robinson. The Democratic Party, not to be outdone, planned to hold its convention at the Capitol on Thursday, September 24, 1846.

The party convention system in use in 1846 followed the established political practice. Party members met in county conventions to discuss local issues, to nominate candidates for county offices, and to name delegates to the State convention. At the first election, only State officials were nominated, but in each county where the party was organized there was a county committee. At the State convention the parties named the candidates for State offices and drafted a party platform. It is interesting to note that these platforms were more concerned with national principles than with local issues. And from the 1846 party platforms in Iowa, it might be surmised that the campaign was to be conducted largely upon the basis of loyalty to party.

The Whig platform asserted that it was the duty of members to use "all honorable means"

to ensure "the success of our political principles in the State of Iowa." These principles included "a sound national currency", a tariff which would afford "sufficient revenue to the national treasury and just protection to American labor", the establishment of more "perfect restraints upon executive power", the equitable distribution "of the proceeds of the sales of the public lands among all the States", a one-term presidential tenure, and public expenditures for the improvement of rivers and lakes for the promotion of better transportation and communication.

With regard to the new State of Iowa, the Whigs expressed a dislike for certain "highly illiberal" provisions of the new Constitution (meaning, of course, the anti-banking section) and claimed that it was their "imperative duty to procure its speedy amendment." And then rhapsodizing upon their position in Iowa politics, the Whigs in a poetic resolution said: "we pledge ourselves to use our utmost exertions to keep up a thorough organization of the Whig party in Iowa, and although our opponents claim, erroneously as we believe, to possess an advantage in number and depend upon ignorance, prejudice, and credulity for success; yet, having a superiority in the principles we profess, we have implicit confidence in the dawning of a brighter day, when

the clouds and darkness of locofocoism will be dispelled by the cheering rays and invigorating influence of truth and knowledge." The Whig platform concluded by endorsing the candidates who had been nominated by the convention. It was the opinion of the delegates that the candidates were "good men" and that they should be given "cordial and zealous support."

The Democratic platform was likewise formulated upon the basis of national issues. It approved James K. Polk as a party member and sanctioned the work of the current session of Congress, particularly with regard to the repeal of the "fraudulent tariff act of 1842." Furthermore, the party in Iowa favored equitable taxation and "the separation of the public moneys from the banking institutions of the country." Speaking of the Mexican War, the Democrats claimed that "the repeated unjust aggressions of the Mexican people and Mexican government, have long since called for redress."

This section was concluded by a cryptic resolution that "General Taylor and our little army have won for themselves the everlasting gratitude of the country, for which they will never, like Scott, be exposed to a shot in their rear from Washington, or any other part of the country." The Democrats concluded: "we are determined

to know nothing but Democracy; and that we will support men only for their principles. Our motto will be, less legislation, few laws, strict obedience, short sessions, light taxes, and no State debt."

The candidates nominated for Governor of Iowa were Ansel Briggs, Democrat, and Thomas McKnight, Whig. The nomination of both men, it appears, came as something of a surprise. Neither had been considered as the leader of his party in Territorial politics. Ansel Briggs, the Democratic selection, was forty years old at the time of his nomination. He was born and educated in Vermont and had come to Iowa by way of Ohio. He was the operator of a stagecoach line in Jackson County at the time of his nomination. Although Briggs had been a member of the House of Representatives in the Fifth Legislative Assembly and had at one time been sheriff of Jackson County, he was comparatively unknown.

The Whig paper, the Burlington *Hawkeye*, claimed that Briggs owed his nomination to the fact that the Mississippi steamboat, *Governor Briggs*, arrived at Belleview just as the delegates were leaving for the convention. This suggested Briggs as a candidate, though the steamer had been named after a Whig Governor of Massachusetts. It has also been claimed that Briggs owed his nomination to Philip B. Bradley, a resi-

dent of Jackson County. Bradley was known to have been active in the Democratic Party and during the administration of the first Governor of Iowa he was his chief adviser. Another explanation for the nomination of Briggs was that a Jackson County man was chosen because of the "good showing" made by Jackson County in the ratifying election.

On the first ballot of their convention, the Whigs nominated Thomas McKnight, forty-seven years of age. He was a Virginian and had come to Iowa by way of St. Louis and the Territory of Wisconsin. Besides participating in a none-too-lucrative business enterprise, McKnight had held several political positions. In 1834 he had been named Chief Justice of the Court of Dubuque County and in 1836 he was a member of the Council from Dubuque County in the Wisconsin Territorial Legislative Assembly.

From 1840 to 1845, McKnight was Receiver of the United States Land Office in Dubuque. At the time of his appointment to this post, there was some question as to his party affiliation. In the ranks of the Democrats there were rumors that McKnight was a Whig. George Wallace Jones on several occasions asked McKnight for some evidence that he could use to show that the Iowan had a "change of sentiment" from the days of his

"opposition to General Jackson". Because of this it seems likely that the influence of both Jones and Henry Dodge had secured the receivership appointment for McKnight as a Democrat.

By 1842 it is certain that McKnight had become a confirmed Whig because he retained his position as Receiver even though there had been a change of political party in national politics. It was, therefore, the election of James K. Polk which forced McKnight out of office. Thus, although he could not be considered the leading Whig of the State of Iowa, he did have a background which could justify his selection for the gubernatorial position.

The campaign of 1846 was a short one. Only a month elapsed between the State political conventions and the general election. For the most part, the electors were expected to vote the straight party ticket, but suggested amendments to the Constitution received considerable notice and the temperance question was discussed. In a few counties the Abolitionists were beginning to be heard from — in the election itself, for example, T. B. Clark, the Abolitionist candidate for the General Assembly, polled twenty votes in Johnson County.

Other than the campaign for Governor, few personalities were debated. The Whigs maintained

that Briggs was a "nobody" and a "dark horse" candidate. But the most sensational charges were made by the Democrats against McKnight. It was charged that the former Receiver of the Land Office had not accounted for all of the monies due the government and the city of Dubuque and the Locofoco papers referred to the Whig candidate as a "defaulter". McKnight had, in fact, received several requests from Washington for certain funds which, it was claimed, had not been accounted for. However, at the final audit there was a mere thirty-eight dollars in question. This McKnight insisted was an error in the calculations.

A few days before the election McKnight published a statement concerning his candidacy. He made no mention of the Democratic charges but summarized his past political experience and reiterated some of the principles of the Whig Party. He concluded by pointing out his devotion to free institutions: "In regard to our own State Government, may we not be permitted to hope, that availing ourselves of the experience of others, we may be able to avoid many of the evils which have preyed and are preying upon the prosperity of other States, by adhering to a strict economy in our State affairs, and shunning a public debt." McKnight also expressed his regret that his

health had prevented his conducting a more active campaign.

The hopes of the Whigs rose during the days of the campaign when it was rumored that Robert Lucas, the first Governor of the Territory of Iowa and the titular head of the Democratic Party in Iowa, might become an independent candidate. If the rumors proved to be true, the Whigs were confident that Lucas would draw enough votes from Briggs to guarantee the election of McKnight. Nothing came of this rumor, however, although Lucas was deeply disappointed because he had not received the Democratic nomination for Governor. Partly because of his advancing years and partly because he had made many political enemies both within and without his party through the formative years of Iowa politics, the old Governor did not get a single vote in the convention. Ironically, Ansel Briggs had arrived in Iowa with a letter of introduction written by the Governor of Ohio to Robert Lucas.

The voting was light and the election contest was close, but when the ballots were finally counted, the Democrats had elected their entire State ticket. It is interesting to note that because of the closeness of the contest Ansel Briggs received formal notification of his election only four days before the meeting of the General Assembly.

The following tabulation of results indicates the degree to which the citizens of Iowa voted a "straight ticket". Names of Democrats are in *italics*.

Governor

<i>Ansel Briggs</i>	6689
Thomas McKnight	6528

Representative to Congress

<i>S. Leffler</i>	6830
<i>S. C. Hastings</i>	6744
J. H. Hedrick	6425
G. C. R. Mitchell	6379

Secretary of State

<i>E. Cutler</i>	6714
J. H. Cowles	6418

Auditor

<i>J. T. Fales</i>	6744
Eastin Morris	6394

Treasurer

<i>Morgan Reno</i>	6819
E. T. Smith	6365

The election of the State legislators also indicated the closeness of the contest. Although the Democrats gained twelve out of nineteen seats in the Senate, the Whigs elected twenty Representatives to nineteen for the Democrats. The campaign for the legislative seats was, if possible,

more bitter than for other offices because it was the duty of the General Assembly to choose the United States Senators from Iowa and the Justices of the State Supreme Court.

The situation was complicated by the fact that one Lee County slate of candidates had campaigned as Independents, most likely at the suggestion of the Whigs. This coalition ticket, including three Whigs and two Democrats campaigning for seats in the House of Representatives, and one Whig and one Democrat as candidates for the two Senate seats, had defeated the regular Democratic slate by a large majority. Naturally, the loyalty of all three of the coalition Democrats to the party was open to some question. It was no surprise, therefore, that these so-called Democrats often voted with the Whigs. The editor of the *Iowa Standard* at Iowa City referred to these legislators as members of the "Possum" Party.

The turnout on election day indicated that the people of Iowa did not take the first campaign too seriously. It was obvious that the Whigs were disappointed by the failure of some of their party to vote on election day. And what was even worse, some of the Whigs voted for Democrats. On this aspect of party responsibility, the *Iowa Standard*, on November 11, 1846, com-

mented: "We are not strenuous about party organization, but when such a policy has been determined upon, by common consent, the party must be supported in some other manner than by voting for our adversaries." The election, however, was over and the Democrats had won the first battle of ballots.

JACK T. JOHNSON

Land for Sale

On August 8, 1846, President James K. Polk signed a legislative act which authorized the establishment of an additional land office in Iowa, for the sale of public lands lying between townships seventy-six and eighty-three north inclusive. This area was henceforth to be known as the "Iowa District". A little later the same year, the President designated Iowa City as the site of this land office, and appointed Dr. Enos Lowe of Des Moines County as Receiver and Charles Neally of Muscatine as Register.

This was but one step in the transfer of the land owned by the government to private ownership. The broad acres of Iowa were all once a part of the public domain. The methods by which the greater part of this land eventually came into private hands, what price was paid for it, how funds were obtained for payment of the purchase price, when and where the transfers were made, and who signed the papers of transfer are items of more than passing interest.

The distribution of the public lands was effected chiefly by one of four methods — public land sales, private entries, preëmption, and Fed-

eral grants for various purposes. In the beginning it was the policy of the government to obtain as much revenue as possible from its public lands and at the same time promote settlement of the public domain. From 1796 to 1820 a minimum price of two dollars per acre was maintained. By 1820 the popular demand for cheap western lands led the government to reduce the price to \$1.25.

When the Indians withdrew from eastern Iowa in 1833 and title to the land was acquired by the Federal government, Congress ordered surveys by the usual system, dividing the land into townships, ranges, sections, and parts of sections, but there were no land offices in Iowa prior to 1838, and no land could be purchased. The settlers who pushed in ahead of the land office officials were in reality "squatters". But for the most part they were squatters in good faith, with the hope of building homes in the new West.

According to "squatter law", every man was allowed to stake a claim of 160 acres on any of the unoccupied land. To hold his claim he was required to commence improvements by building a house, fencing, or plowing, in order to show his good faith. It was understood that, at the proper time, each settler would be permitted to purchase from the Federal government the land which he had selected, occupied, and improved, but the

very early settlers were not given any legal right of priority of purchase of the land upon which they settled, no matter how long or undisputed may have been their priority of occupancy, or how valuable their improvements.

For the protection of these settlers who desired to purchase the claims which they had selected prior to the land sales, claim associations were organized in several counties. Rules and regulations were adopted by each association to determine the procedure. If disputes arose there were boards or committees to determine the equity of the case without much expense "and woe be unto the man who disobeyed the dictates of the body that set the rules for their observance."

Although the rights of a claim holder were recognized by the pioneers, the first general preëmption law was not passed until 1841, and it applied only to settlers who had "squatted" on their homesteads before a specified date, not to those who should subsequently do so. It was not until 1853 that the right of preëmption applied to settlers on unsurveyed lands.

The Johnson County Claim Association, organized in 1839, was one of the most active associations within the Territory of Iowa. In July, 1842, this extralegal organization declared that its members "would not associate with nor countenance

those who would not respect the claims of others" and they would "neither neighbor, grind, saw, trade, barter, or deal with them in any way whatever, in short we hold them as enemies of justice and good order, and no better than highway robbers."

Soon after Iowa became a separate Territory in 1838 two Federal land offices were opened within the Territory — one at Dubuque and one at Burlington. Lands located in east central Iowa were sold through these offices. Johnson County lands, in those early days, were sold chiefly through the Dubuque office. Subsequently offices were established for a time at Marion and at Fairfield. In 1846 Iowa City became the fifth city in Iowa to be given a Federal land office. In accordance with a proclamation of President James K. Polk this office was opened for official business on November 30th of that year, the day on which the first State General Assembly convened at Iowa City.

The *Iowa Standard*, on September 2, 1846, stated that "Pre-emptors are required to establish their right and pay for their land before the day of sale, or their claims will be forfeited." Thus the early settlers who had taken possession of land with the hope of purchasing it at the minimum price and without competition realized that they

must act quickly if they wished to secure their right to the land they claimed before it was offered at a public auction, although even at the public sale their rights were often protected.

Such early land sales were full of exciting events. It was the custom for settlers to attend the sales in a body, as a protection against any who might seek to secure an improved claim at the expense of the settler who had made the improvements. Moreover, although land was normally purchased for \$1.25 per acre, payment was required at the time of purchase and must be made in either silver or gold currency. The pioneer settler frequently did not have sufficient funds to pay the purchase price and was obliged to borrow it at an extremely high rate of interest. If it became necessary to borrow of a professional lender the almost universal custom was for the "capitalist" to buy the land in his own name and give the claimant a bond for a deed to be delivered at the expiration of one year upon the payment of the money, with interest at an exorbitant rate — frequently fifty per cent.

That seems like a hard bargain and it was, indeed, a lucrative return upon the investment, but it was sometimes a great accommodation to the borrower. It might be the only way by which he could possibly obtain title to the land. If he

bought the land, he could scarcely hope to make a profit of fifty per cent the first year, but some of the settlers had money due them which would be paid during the year. Others could borrow in the East at a little later date and at a much lower rate of interest and thus re-finance their loan at the end of one year. Still others sold half their land for enough to pay for the entire tract.

Occasionally a settler was obliged to have his loan extended for a second year at the exorbitant rate of interest. As a rule, however, the increase in land values following settlement was such that the settler who purchased and held his land found it a good investment, even though he was obliged to pay a high rate of interest for a few years. "All is well that ends well", and only rarely did the settlers have cause to complain of the treatment they received from the "bloated bondholders".

If the pioneer settler had money on hand to meet his needs at the time of the sale, it was probably only because the family had exercised extreme frugality and self denial. The day of the sale was awaited by the settler with great anxiety "and every dollar was carefully hoarded up for the approaching trial, since this was the time when he hoped to gain title to his land against all those who might oppose him in its peaceful possession." Those were dull times for the town merchants.

The Iowa City office, which was destined to be the scene of many pioneer interests, was located in block 23, on the southeast corner of Johnson and College streets — a site which later became the home of two presidents of the University, President Charles A. Schaeffer and President George E. MacLean. Beyond these brief facts, little is now known of this early office. If any historian, local chronicler, or pioneer settler left an adequate description of the physical aspects of the office, the rules of procedure, or the manner in which the officers conducted the business, such records have not been discovered.

It is on record, however, that "complete sets of new books" were opened for this office, and that 575 tracts of land were sold within the first ten months "to residents of almost every county of the State and of various States from Maine to Missouri."

The President's proclamation designated that 345,632 acres should be placed on sale at the Iowa City office. More land was added later. During the fiscal year 1846-1847, 4,162.47 acres of this land were sold for a cash price of \$5,203.08. Sales were increased to more than ten times that amount the next year, when 44,896.61 acres were sold for \$58,665.75. The fiscal year of 1853-1854 marked the peak period at this office, with

sales totaling 701,037.87 acres. By 1856, when the office was closed, 1,317,163.79 acres had been sold at Iowa City. Little wonder that the phrase, "doing a land office business", came to have a significant meaning among the pioneers. The surveyors, like scouts, "pointed out the outposts and the land officials directed the army of occupation. The goal of every member of the army was land — a farm at \$1.25 an acre. It is a humble figure. But what millions have contemplated it in their visions and heartened their hopes for a home!"

Despite the absence of detailed reports relative to the appearance of the office and the methods employed in transacting business at the Iowa City office, some idea of what transpired may be obtained by reading the reports of other offices. A pioneer settler, in describing an early land sale in Burlington, which he believed "was characteristic of those held elsewhere", said:

"As the time of the sale approached anxiety became somewhat intense. The 'bird was yet in the bush and not in the hand.' Maps of townships advertised were prepared, distinct, and of large size. On each legal subdivision of the various sections the name of the man who held a recognized claim to it was distinctly written. One man was appointed to bid for each township, no

one else to utter a word, but all were to attend as a kind of body-guard to see that everything went off right. On the day of the sale, by the courtesy of the Register, the township bidder was allowed to take his place, map in hand, by the side of the auctioneer. As the first tract was cried the bidder responded, '\$1.25,' the government minimum. The auctioneer glanced at the crowd and quietly said, 'sold!' The name of the purchaser was given from the map, and the clerk made the record. The same proceeding followed with each succeeding tract, until the township was finished, following sections in numerical order. Not a loud word had been spoken except by auctioneer and bidder. Had Goliath or Samson undertaken any interference by an over-bid, there would have been an experience that would have been a high price for life, if that even had been spared. This being distinctly understood, no one was rash enough to risk the consequences."

Perhaps at times business may have been transacted in a less orderly fashion, due to the pressure and excitement of obtaining title to the coveted land. An early newspaper of Dubuque reveals that at a land sale in that city applicants stood in line before the door of the land office from Saturday evening until Monday morning. It is not surprising that some became quarrelsome.

Another pioneer who was familiar with conditions attending public land sales has said: "The place of sale presented the most exciting aspect; great crowds of settlers came in from the section of the district that was to be sold in order to be on the ground when the bid was made by the one appointed to do this work. One man was appointed from the township; he held in his hand a list of all the lands with the respective claimants' names attached and as the parcel was called in the sale, he bid it off in the name of the one who waited for the opportunity to clear his title. Considerable time was necessary to complete these sales, and it is said by those who know that they sometimes continued for three weeks. But what was that to the man who was to become the lord of the soil in a short time, provided he had been able to save the necessary amount to make the required payment."

It was a sad occasion when some "claim jumper" was able to secure the land of the rightful settler, but this seldom occurred for, if occasion demanded, "these fellows were roughly treated" by the sympathizing neighbors of the rightful claimant. Says a pioneer writer: "It was here that the money-lender did some good, even though his rate of interest was at times enormous. He may have saved the day for the man who had

his hopes fixed upon a choice piece of good land, that is now so far beyond the reach of the young man, who would till the soil by preference."

When land sales were called they usually continued for a period of two or three weeks unless all the land designated by the President's proclamation were sooner disposed of, as was rarely the case. When the public auction closed the lands remaining unsold were subject to private sale. Thereafter any individual might call at the land office and privately purchase such land as he might desire, within the area designated. Frequently, too, pioneer settlers purchased land of earlier settlers or of speculators. Land warrants, given to men who had performed military service in various wars, could frequently be purchased of non-residents for less than the minimum price of government land. Such warrants could then be used to secure public land up to the number of acres indicated.

Members of colonies or groups such as the Dutch at Pella, the Swedenborgian colony in Iowa County, or the Amana Society sometimes purchased land individually or for the colony. When the first settlers came to Pella, their leader, Henry P. Scholte, secured the aid of a Baptist circuit rider at Fairfield to help him select and purchase choice lands in Marion County.

The Swedenborgian colonists came to Iowa about 1850 and a considerable number of them bought land at the Iowa City office. Thus, a land patent was issued to William Wolbers, who appears as one of the trustees of the colony, on April 11, 1851. This was for 120 acres of land in Section 18, Township 81 North, Range 9 West in what was later Lenox Township, Iowa County.

When the Amana Colony was settled "there was little government land left for direct entry and most of the land was purchased from early settlers or land speculators." The land office was still operating at Iowa City when the first settlers came to Amana, but it was closed the following year.

A quarter section of Johnson County land was purchased by C. J. Swartzendruber, prominent Mennonite settler, in 1851, for a land warrant, probably bought from a soldier of the Mexican War for \$145 or about 90 cents per acre. It may seem strange now that more pioneers did not purchase land at this low price. But even \$145 was difficult to obtain in those days. Moreover, no one could foresee that Johnson County land might some day be worth \$300 per acre.

Whether lands were purchased at public or private sale, by individuals for their own use or for the use of others, if they were purchased di-

rectly from the government, patents were issued soon after the purchase and signed by the President of the United States. Patents for lands in the Iowa City area if issued from the Dubuque, Marion, Burlington, or Fairfield offices prior to 1846 may have been signed by Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, or James K. Polk.

In 1846 when the Iowa City office was first opened President Polk was in office and the first patents issued through this office were signed by him. Later patents issued from this office may have been signed by Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, or Franklin Pierce — at least their signatures appear on the documents but it may be that even then authorized ghost writers copied the signatures of Presidents, since the work of signing so many patents would have taken a great deal of time.

In August, 1852, a Federal land office was opened at Fort Des Moines, and in July, 1856, the Iowa City office was discontinued. Subsequently Federal land sales in this area were consummated chiefly through the Des Moines office.

The county recorder's office in Iowa City reveals an interesting case in which land in what is now Union Township, Johnson County, was originally transferred, in July, 1853, to John Wig-

field, a soldier in the War of 1812, the patent being signed by President Millard Fillmore. Because of an error in execution, the patent was reissued to Alonzo C. Denison, an assignee, by President Woodrow Wilson in April, 1919.

In this centennial year it is of interest to recall that a considerable number of families in eastern Iowa reside on farms that their ancestors purchased of the government one hundred or more years ago. In Johnson County alone more than twenty such farms have been located, and certificates have been issued to the families that have resided there for a hundred years. Land owners who have preserved patents that were issued to their ancestors or other pioneer settlers in the years between 1846 and 1856 may find among them documents that were issued through the land office at Iowa City and signed by President James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, or Franklin Pierce. The patent may be cherished as a relic and souvenir of the century, but the land which it represents is more valuable than the autograph.

JACOB A. SWISHER

A Pension Gone Astray

It was, in early days, customary for the United States government to give land warrants for military service, but the Civil War left too many veterans for such rewards. It became necessary, or at least popular, to give pensions to such veterans, their widows, and certain minor children. This pension system created many an odd problem for those to whom the work was entrusted. One of the strangest incidents of the pension program concerned a veteran in Mills County, Iowa, who refused his pension because he believed such largesse should go only to the needy.

This veteran, H. C. Robbins, had served nearly three years (1862-1865) in Company A, 92nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. After he returned from the war he purchased land in the fertile valley of the West Nishnabotna River near the town of Hastings, Iowa. As he looked over his productive acres he could see no reason why the government should pay him a pension and so for many years, while his comrades received their allotments from the government, he applied for no such checks.

Finally, as he approached the sunset years, a

relative convinced him that since the government was paying out the money to other veterans of that conflict, whether needy or not, he would not be accepting charity if he applied for the pension. He made out an application and sent it to Washington, but was quite chagrined to have the government question his eligibility on the ground that he had been receiving a pension for the past twenty years. When he, in turn, wrote that he had never before applied for a pension, the government sent an investigator from Washington to look into the matter.

Before the investigator was convinced that Mr. Robbins had received no pension and was eligible for one, he had made three trips out from the capital. When he came the third time, Mr. Robbins was thoroughly irritated with the business. "If it takes so much trouble to get a pension", he told the investigator, rather testily, "you can just keep the damn thing." Mrs. Robbins brought out some checks which had been issued over a period of several years and Mr. Robbins' signatures showed with such exceptional regularity that they looked as if they might have been made with a rubber stamp. The investigator was convinced that the signatures on the pension checks were not those of Mr. Robbins.

The investigator later found that the pension

checks which had supposedly been going to Mr. Robbins were being received and cashed by a man in a small town in Colorado. From the investigator's description, Mr. Robbins identified him as a man named Harrison who had lived on a neighboring farm more than two decades earlier. This former neighbor, having learned of Mr. Robbins' attitude toward pensions, had collected sufficient data to make an acceptable application, moved to Colorado, applied for the pension, and had drawn it for a full twenty years.

After discovering the fraud and settling with Harrison, the investigator returned and told Mr. Robbins about it. Harrison, he said, had carried his deception to an exceptional degree. He ran a hotel in Colorado, had joined the local G. A. R. post there, and shortly before the investigator arrived had been elected post commander. His hotel was headquarters for the post.

Harrison met the trains to get business for his hostelry and so met the investigator when he arrived. They went to the hotel together and when the investigator told him that he wished to see him privately they went upstairs to a bedroom. There the investigator confronted him with evidence of the fraud and Harrison confessed. Meanwhile Harrison's wife heard the men talking in the room, joined them, and was informed of

her husband's deceit. She was evidently a woman of direct action, for she at once accused her husband of "two-timing" her and then assaulted him with her fists with such violence that the man was well battered before the investigator could separate them. Then the investigator took Harrison down to the lobby of the hotel and introduced him to a group of old soldiers there, his former comrades in the G. A. R. post, as a fraud and a scoundrel.

The government, oddly enough, preferred no criminal charges against Harrison and when Mr. Robbins asked the investigator about this he replied: "After what the old lady did to him and what the old soldiers said to him, I thought he had about punishment enough."

So Harrison was turned loose and lost no time getting out of that town. The incident and its strange ending amused the investigator and he laughed heartily as he told of the affair. Mr. Robbins received his pension from then on until his death without further difficulty.

F. A. WORTMAN

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