

# THE PALIMPSEST

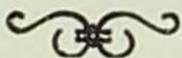
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## Kanesville

Harbor to the peripatetic Mormons on their search for a permanent home, stepping stone in the rushing current of westward emigration, pioneer community struggling to hold its identity after the human river swept onward — this was Council Bluffs in its formative years prior to the Civil War.

By 1961 almost ten years have elapsed since Council Bluffs celebrated its centennial. The past decade, however, has seen a resurgence of civic growth and improvement comparable proportionately to that first feverish decade after 1850. Council Bluffs, the one-time outfitting point for wagon trains to Oregon, California, and Utah, has now become a city of 55,733 residents, the principal trading center of southwestern Iowa, and the hub of a wheel of radiating railroad and highway connections. It is still "home" to a newspaper which has served the community through good and bad times since 1857 — the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*.

How the settlement and the newspaper grew to-

gether makes a historical mosaic colored with frontier humor as well as tragedy. Each one shaped the other, influenced by forceful pioneer personalities reacting, in turn, to trends shaping a nation.

Historians must go back to August 3, 1804, for the origin of the city's name. On that date Lewis and Clark, exploring the territory acquired in the Louisiana Purchase, conferred with the "Ottos & Missouries" at the foot of a high promontory near what is now Florence, Nebraska, on the west bank of the Missouri River. Their designation of this spot as "Councile Bluff" or "Handsom Prairie" was later adopted by traders, trappers and river navigators to describe all the territory adjacent to both sides of the river between that northern point and the Platte River on the south.

When Francois Guittar, a cook on an American Fur Company boat, first stepped ashore in the spring of 1824 at Trader's Point below the future townsite, he found a trading post already well-established at Bellevue on the west bank. Peter Sarpy, as factor for the fur company, controlled the fur trade with all the Indian country bordering the river. There was probably an Indian village on the flat bottom land between the bluffs and the Missouri River where present-day Council Bluffs now stands.

One historian has speculated that Guittar must have seen a panorama of singular beauty from the

peak of the lofty bluff along the fringe of the river's flood-plain.

In a clear day, the vision was not limited for thirty miles to the north nor . . . to the south. . . . Here and there, patches of timber, in green bunches, ran from the valley upward to the crest, marking the outlines of lateral gorges and canyons; out in front lay a plain . . . as level as a floor, covered with green luxurious grass, dotted with sparkling lakes and traversed by the great Missouri, meandering in huge, bright coils to the south. Beyond this were the blue hills of Nebraska.

In 1826 Guittar came back to set up his own fur trading post at Trader's Point. There he stayed, a trusted counsellor and dealer with the Indians until several years after the Mormons arrived. Only then did he move to the town to become a merchant, enjoying the distinction of being counted the settlement's first white resident, if only by peripheral inclusion.

Historic conjecture about an Iowa Indian chief called "Hard Heart," who may have given his name to "Hart's Bluff," for the area which includes the present location of Council Bluffs, is based on a description of this chief by Dr. Edwin James, secretary for the Stephen H. Long expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1819-20. An 1840 map drawn by David H. Burr on Congressional authorization reveals the city's present site as labelled Hart's Bluff. It also shows a village in the area identified as Council Bluff, specified as the only civilian village between Fort Leavenworth

and Fort Mandan, near what is now Bismarck in North Dakota.

Indians dwelt in the Council Bluffs area in pre-historic as well as historic times. Some 2,700 Potawatomi from the southern shores of Lake Michigan, together with members of the Ottawa and Chippewa tribes, moved to this region from their reservation on the Platte Purchase in Missouri in 1837. They scattered through the ample lands, but about 500 Potawatomi, led by their aging half-breed chief Sauganash, built wickiups and then log cabins along the valley floor and into the hills, overlooking the main thoroughfare from the east that would some day be named "Broadway."

To protect these peaceful Potawatomi from their belligerent Sioux neighbors to the north, a company of U. S. Dragoons from Fort Leavenworth, commanded by Capt. D. B. Moore, arrived on July 21, 1837. They spent three months building a 24-foot-square log blockhouse which would serve as a fort in case of attack, locating it on a commanding hill overlooking present-day Broadway at about State Street.

Their duty done, the dragoons marched back to Fort Leavenworth. Winter brought near-starvation to the Indians even though Dr. Edwin James did what he could for them as newly-appointed sub-agent. Spring enabled them to begin farming operations under the tutelage of Davis Hardin, forerunner of the present "county agent."

News of the arrival of the steamboat *Howard* in late May, 1838, created a welcome diversion. Nearly 2,000 ceremonially-painted and curious Indians drifted south through the hills to the boat landing at Trader's Point. They were undoubtedly expecting to find liquor in the cargo; instead they got Catholic missionaries — Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, beginning his mission ministry to the Indians, accompanied by a second priest, Felix Verreydt, and a lay brother named Mazelli. When the trio stepped ashore to greet the Indians for whom they planned to establish a church and school, Chief Sauganash welcomed them. Known as Billy Caldwell, this intelligent Indian was the son of an Irish colonel in the British army and a Potawatomi princess. His Jesuit school education prompted a gesture of hospitality; he offered them the use of three cabins built by the soldiers the autumn before.

Father De Smet already had received permission to use the blockhouse from Col. S. W. Kearny, commander of Ft. Leavenworth. It was the famous missionary himself who climbed to the top of that building on Corpus Christi day to erect the cross which proclaimed it a church. He lost no time in beginning services, then school sessions. At its peak the St. Joseph mission school enrolled 30 boys; 118 Indians were baptized there.

The winter was filled with hunger and hardship. It was heart-breaking when, in April of

1839, a boatload of supplies sent by the government and the church struck a snag and sank in the Missouri. The loss was \$40,000; only a plow, a saw, some boots and some church wine were salvaged. But other boats arrived with "detestable" whiskies ordered by white traders to separate the Indians from their government annuities. Father De Smet wrote to his superiors:

A war of extermination appears preparing around the poor Potawatomes. Fifty large cannons have been landed, ready charged with the most murderous grape shot, each containing thirty gallons of whisky, brandy, rum or alcohol.

It was from this mission that De Smet began the series of reports which were to make his name famous as he pursued his churchly way through the northwest. He resumed his travels late in 1839; upon returning to his school in 1840, he found only 50 Indian families still faithful to Catholicism. By 1841 the Mission school was abandoned.

The Indians were moved south to their new lands on the Kansas River in 1846 and 1847, after selling the Potawatomi country back to the government by treaty June 5, 1846. By that time, pioneer merchants attracted by Indian trade had dotted the river on both sides with their trading posts. More and more adventuresome pioneers were feeling out the territory. But with the complete removal of the tribes from an area which the government foresaw to be on the main route of growing emigration to the west, the townsite became a

vacuum waiting to be filled by the Mormon tide.

Other communities in Iowa had felt the impact of the Mormons' passage, but this western-most settlement was created, named, governed, disciplined and shaped by these indomitable people as they tarried before completing their exodus to Deseret. After hostility at Nauvoo, Illinois, exploded into violence that sent the Saints westward into Iowa in February of 1846, their trail was studded with settlements they called "stakes," where subsequent waves of migration could be succored. At Garden Grove, Hebron, and Mount Pisgah they stopped to rest, then marched on, leaving fifteen "Camps of Israel" strewn across southern Iowa.

An advance group of Mormons led by Orson Hyde reached the Missouri River on June 14, 1846, just south of present-day Council Bluffs. Appreciating the fertile soil of the bottomland and the protection of encircling hills, Hyde decreed that a settlement should be made at this place, with shelters built and crops planted to accommodate the Mormon emigrants to follow. Almost their first community action was to arrange a form of municipal government at a meeting held July 21, 1846, on a hill they called "Council Point." Orson Hyde was selected to head the elected high council.

But scarcely had the Mormons put up temporary quarters than Captain James Allen of the

First U. S. Dragoons from Ft. Leavenworth arrived, to recruit a force of 500 men to serve in the war against Mexico. Encouraged by Brigham Young, president of the Twelve Apostles of the Latter Day Saints church, 520 men enlisted. Believing the recruiters' promises that they would be taken through to California, where they would be discharged with full pay and retention of all arms and equipment, they marched for Ft. Leavenworth on July 20. It was to be two years before the survivors were to see their own people again, and not in California where some Mormons had expected to find their Zion, but in Utah.

Lacking this vigorous corps of younger men, the Mormons deemed it imprudent to attempt crossing the plains that season. About 5,000 of the main body established a community in a wooded location across the river near what is now Florence, Nebraska, to avoid possible difficulty in fording the river the next spring. They built hundreds of homes on a plateau overlooking the river. In April of 1847, Brigham Young and his exploring party started west to search out their Zion; they returned in October after deciding to settle near the Great Salt Lake.

In the meantime the starving Mormons at "Winter Quarters" found themselves unpopular with the Omaha Indians, whose forests and game they had despoiled. At the insistence of the tribe's agents, many Mormons went back to the

Iowa side, where the settlement was being called "Miller's Hollow" after a prominent Mormon. Orson Hyde built his log house near Indian Creek, near Washington Avenue and Harmony Street.

True to their custom, the Saints hastened to build a tabernacle large enough to hold 1,000 worshippers, which they occupied in December of 1847. Brigham Young, who had returned to organize the main body for the long journey to Salt Lake, became the first president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in a reorganization meeting held in the tabernacle December 24, 1847.

Young's vigorous leadership extended to matters of community as well as church. His action in presenting the proper federal petition to Congress obtained a post office they called "Kane" on January 17, 1848. Evan M. Greene was its first postmaster.

The name "Kanesville" to designate the new settlement was adopted in meeting April 8. In so doing the church members honored Colonel Thomas L. Kane of Philadelphia, a Gentile whose sympathetic interest in the beleaguered Mormons had smoothed the path of their migrations.

For two years the community was entirely controlled by the church. After Brigham Young and some 4,000 Saints had left in the spring of 1848, there were still enough left to maintain about 40 churches scattered up and down the Iowa side of

the river. Mormons filled all public offices and represented the area in two General Assemblies of the Iowa legislature. Shivering Mormon converts proved the strength of their faith when the ice of the mill pond was cut through to make a place for winter baptism ceremonies.

One early Gentile pioneer, William Robinson, has written of a huge prayer meeting called by Orson Hyde to ask rain during a drouth. At least 3,000 supplicants knelt at noon in a natural amphitheater in what is now Fairmount park. By 2 o'clock the brassy sky had become flecked with wisps of cloud, and at 5 p. m. a gentle rain began to fall over the entire section, saving the crops.

As early as February 24, 1847, the State Legislature had approved the organization of a county government within the limits of the "Pottawatomie Purchase," instigated by the indefatigable Brigham Young. The Mormons met September 21, 1848, to elect commissioners to govern the county, which then included a possible 5-million-acre area composed of the present eleven surrounding counties and parts of nine others. County commissioners met October 10 at the house of Hiram Clark to begin turning the wheels of government. They made history when the first assessment rolls for 1848 were approved on April 17, 1849. Tax levies were set at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  mills for the state,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  for county,  $\frac{1}{2}$  mill for each of schools and roads, and a poll tax of 50¢ on males over 21 years.

Kanesville gained a voice when Orson Hyde established *The Frontier Guardian* on February 7, 1849. Bishop Hyde was now president of the Council of Twelve of the church, so the paper was an official "organ of the Saints." Hyde used its columns to invite emigration from this point out to the west, in competition with other routes farther south.

An early issue of the *Frontier Guardian* praised the establishment of two schools, attended by 80 students each, conducted by a principal (Orson Hyde himself) and an assistant, Joseph Merritt. But the *Guardian's* horizons were soon to enlarge, for the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in California was a magnet that drew thousands through the needle's eye that was Kanesville. The "seekers after gold as well as the seekers after God" as J. R. Perkins later phrased it, funneled through in almost unbelievable numbers.

The *Guardian's* issue of June 12, 1850, estimated that 4,500 teams crossed the river at Kanesville that spring, with 13,500 men and 22,000 horses, mules, oxen and cows. In May, 14,000 gold-seekers had milled through the town, and 350 wagons of Mormon emigrants had been organized up to June 8, it reported.

Some caravans remained in Kanesville for months, outfitting for the long push ahead. Enterprising merchants had moved in, quick to perceive the lucrative market. Among the first were Jona-

than B. Stutsman and Cornelius Voorhis. Not far behind were Joseph Tootle and James A. Jackson, B. R. Pegram and A. S. Bryant.

Dustin Amy had sold hardware to the Mormons at Winter Quarters, returning to Kaneshville where he started a tin and hardware business "at the sign of the coffee boiler" in a cabin next to the present Broadway Methodist church location. In 1849 he moved west, leaving his son, 16-year-old Royal D. Amy, to conduct the business. Royal gained fame of sorts when he successfully fashioned a zinc casket which he soldered air-tight to bear the body of Governor Francis Burt of the Nebraska Territory back to his home in Charleston, S. C., after his untimely death.

Every steamboat that arrived from St. Louis was loaded with goods — harness, rifles, liquor and adventurers, both male and female. Several boats were stationed at Kaneshville as ferries, charging as high as \$10 for team and wagon.

Editor Hyde thundered in his weekly journal against the worldly forces invading the once-orderly community, but was not above wooing his readers into the Whig party. Not all Mormons were sympathetic. In consequence, Almon W. Babbitt, also an elder in the church, began publication of an opposition paper called the *Weekly Western Bugle* in 1850.

By that year, the emigration-gold rush tide was running high. Broadway was lined almost solidly

with saloons. Gambling devices at every turn invited the unwary to risk their cash; it was not uncommon to see hundreds of dollars stacked beside dicemen operating in the street. Bets were made on Sunday horse races down Broadway. "Notorious as far as the most obscure mining camp on the Sacramento river" was the Ocean Wave saloon, a two-story log and weather-board building located on a principal corner jogging out to look down the length of Broadway. For that day it was a splendid structure, and summer nights found tables set up outside as well as in. Higher-minded citizens undoubtedly rejoiced when this "palace of sin" was struck by lightning and burned to the ground in 1861. It was replaced in 1868 by the First Methodist Church which still occupies the historic site.

Politics and government were of intense interest to those early residents. They braved snow and freezing rain on April 5, 1851, to vote in the first Pottawattamie County judicial election. Size of the county had been radically reduced to its present proportions by the legislature on January 15. In the election, Kanessville was selected the seat of justice and James Sloan chosen judge of the Sixth District. Nervous, witty, Irish to the hilt, yet of professed Mormon faith, Judge Sloan's early court proceedings read like a caricature of judicial decorum. Court records of his first trial report his forceful instruction to the jury, which

included "To hell with the code [of Iowa] — I have the law in my head."

Authority to declare and enforce the law rested with county probate judges, allowing virtual dictatorship which extended even to laying out routes of roads and highways.

Bishop Hyde had established himself as a power in the community, his prestige high, his portly figure a commanding presence at the vigorous dances in the log tabernacle. It was with reluctance, therefore, that he acceded to a final forceful instruction from Brigham Young that he lead out the remaining Saints to Salt Lake. When the last of the trains had started west in the summer of 1852, fewer than 2,500 residents were left in Kaneshville from a high count of 7,000. Mormon control was over, but scores of Mormons stayed behind to make Iowa their home. And A. W. Babbitt of the *Bugle* was left in triumphant possession of Kaneshville's exclusive newspaper, plus such of the *Frontier Guardian's* equipment as Orson Hyde chose to leave behind.