

## Council Bluffs Emerges

Since pioneer rigors develop strong character, there was no lack of responsible leadership left in this river community. Public sentiment was obviously against retaining the permanent flavor of its Mormon origins (and in favor of capitalizing on a legislative act ordering the terminus of the "M & M" railroad to be in "Council Bluffs."). As a result, the name of Kaneshville was abandoned in favor of Council Bluffs by special charter of the Iowa legislature on January 19, 1853. Incorporation was authorized on January 24.

This charter permitted the city council to organize a fire company, keep the town clean, regulate the "keeping and sale of gunpowder," license or prohibit theater performances, bowling alleys, billiard tables and games of chance, compel property owners to drain swamps, and tax property not more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1 per cent. City elections were to be held annually until 1882 when the city began operating under general public incorporation laws, and two-year terms followed.

Election on that first Monday in April, 1853, named Cornelius Voorhis as mayor; W. R. Robinson, first recorder and council clerk; his brother, M. W. Robinson, marshal; S. S. Bayliss, Rev. G.

G. Rice, Stephen T. Carey, L. O. Littlefield, L. M. Klein, Joseph E. Johnson, J. K. Cook and J. B. Stutsman as councilmen.

These names and others figured large in those important early years when foundations for steady growth were being laid. The town's only clergyman-councilman, Rev. George G. Rice, had arrived in November of 1851 as the community's first permanent Protestant pastor. The log church he prepared for his Congregationalist flock of eight persons at Pierce and Glen avenues in 1853 was shared with the Methodists and their eccentric mission pastor, Rev. Moses Shinn. To the Methodist circuit rider, William Simpson, goes the distinction of first evangelizing in this Mormon stronghold, paying his initial visit on August 7, 1850.

Another councilman and pioneer merchant, James B. Stutsman, and his partner, William Powers, had already divided over \$50,000 in earnings from the ferries they had astutely established over the Elkhorn and Loup rivers in Nebraska during the 1851 migrations. Samuel S. Bayliss had reputedly paid \$250 for Mormon Henry Miller's "squatter" claim of 400 acres, a choice strip of land through the center of town. The deed began, "Jesus Christ and the Church of Latter Day Saints sell to Samuel Bayliss . . ." and it bore Orson Hyde's signature.

The new town government made a valiant at-

tempt to control its flagrant gambling-liquor interests; ironically its only income of \$280 came from annual saloon and gambling license fees. Taxes could not be levied on land carrying only squatters' titles. In desperation, Mayor Voorhis resigned. For two years, government was virtually impotent.

During this title-less interval, S. S. Bayliss platted his midtown holdings, marking a choice block-square piece as a public square, and designating two other lots fronting the square as a courthouse site. For some reason the courthouse was ultimately built farther south in 1868, and the lots reverted to Bayliss. Later the Bayliss family brought suit to reclaim the public square property but were unsuccessful, and Bayliss park remains a cherished shady oasis in the heart of the business district to this day.

Bayliss' enterprise also gave Council Bluffs its first brick kiln in 1853 and its first steam ferry in 1854. Civic pride was kindled when Bayliss built the Pacific House in 1853 on Broadway facing Pearl Street. Three stories high, built of brick painted yellow, the Pacific House was advertised as "the finest hotel west of Des Moines and north of St. Joseph." Its doors were thrown open for the first time on Christmas night of 1853, when most of the town's solid citizens, and some who became less solid as the night wore on, stepped to its long front porch to join the festivity within. The gay

ball lasted till daylight, a forerunner of the hotel's role as the social center of Council Bluffs and of Omaha village. For a short time in 1854, it even served as the seat of government for the Territory of Nebraska. This came about after the untimely death of Governor Burt. Succeeding him as acting governor was his former secretary, Thomas B. Cuming of Keokuk, who chose the hotel as headquarters until accommodations in Omaha were ready.

Opening of the Kaneshville Land Office in the spring of 1853 brought land-hungry speculators, eager to acquire the rich acres of western Iowa. Troops who had aided in the conquest of New Mexico and California had been awarded 83,000 land warrants, many of which ended in speculators' hands and were subsequently located on Iowa holdings through this land office.

First public sale of government lands was held June 7, 1853. Rich unimproved Iowa land sold for \$1.25 per acre. Joseph H. D. Street served as first "register" and Dr. Samuel W. Ballard receiver. By law, all moneys had to be deposited in Dubuque, a round trip journey of two to three weeks by stage. Later, funds were sent to St. Louis by steamboat. By 1861 the public lands were largely sold off but it was 1873 before the office was closed. Council Bluffs meanwhile reaped a property-value boom of its own those first few years.

Problems of law enforcement plagued the new town government. N. T. Spoor was appointed the first chief of police in 1853 to cope with frontier violence. There were two lynch hangings in 1853 of murderers who had killed to rob their fellow emigrants. Other lynchings followed. Licentiousness as late as 1865 brought a council order to the marshal to "abate" the number of houses of prostitution in the town.

The cry of "Fire!" and the roar of crackling flames through wooden buildings cost the town the greatest comparative loss of its existence one day in November, 1853. Nearly twenty-five business houses on both sides of Broadway burned in two separate fires to inflict an \$18,000 loss. The *Council Bluffs Bugle* newspaper office went with the rest. But a year later there were 17 new buildings, many of them brick, and the newspaper hastened to re-equip and resume publishing.

In that same November, a young man who was to achieve status as Council Bluffs' "first citizen" for sixty years to come, stood on a bluff-top just south of town to view the valley of the Missouri River, which "sprawled out on the flood-plain like a great chocolate-covered worm." This was Grenville Mellen Dodge, who was finishing a survey across the state on behalf of the Mississippi and Missouri railroad line, forerunner of the Rock Island railroad.

The surveyor and his party were welcomed by

Council Bluffs' railroad-crazy citizens at a lavish reception and ball. Equal enthusiasm a few days later greeted the members of a competing survey for the Lyons and Iowa Central railroad, destined to become the North Western.

Dodge plunged westward across the Missouri, seeking a route to the Pacific for the trans-continental railroad which had become a national concern. When, in 1854, he married Annie Brown of Peru, Illinois, he brought her to a homestead on the Elkhorn River and a few months later, to a residence in Council Bluffs. Here Dodge began the business ventures which laid the basis for his large fortune and began the career which led him to the rank of major general in the Civil War, to recognition as the "builder of the Union Pacific" and the presidency of seven railroads.

The town that couldn't levy taxes won that privilege when by Congressional act of April 6, 1854, Judge Frank Street was authorized to enter 640 acres of land at \$1.25 an acre, to be laid out as Council Bluffs. Thomas Tostevin undertook the survey of the land into lots, from which adjudication of property was made among the many conflicting squatters' claims.

Now that property holdings were legally established, the town's 1855 officials wasted no time. With C. E. Stone as mayor, C. W. Boyer recorder, B. R. Pegram treasurer, A. F. Thompson marshal and G. A. Robinson assessor, the council

levied a 5-mill tax and put through a bond issue to finance improvements. Broadway was ordered surveyed to establish a uniform width. Traffic matters were important then as now: A resolution directed that "no one shall drive horses through the streets faster than a common trot." A "pole" tax of two days' labor was levied on each male. Arrangements were made for a hook (to pull down burning walls) and ladders and buckets to equip a volunteer fire brigade. The first "city calaboose" was established in a house belonging to Councilman Stutsman, who offered it rent free.

By this time, townspeople had two newspapers to read; the *Bugle* was now published by James E. Johnson, and the *Weekly Chronotype* had been established in 1854 by W. W. Maynard and Jeremiah Folsom. In the latter's issue of mid-April, 1855, appeared a paragraph which introduced two important new residents: "Mr. D. C. Bloomer and lady arrived in this city on Sunday evening last. Mrs. Bloomer still pertinaciously adheres to the wearing of the reform costume which has gained her a world-wide notoriety."

In a town accustomed to idiosyncrasy, a first-rank nonconformist had come to make her home. Her costume of Turkish-style trousers worn under a full-skirted dress had become the symbol of the Suffragettes, and "bloomers" they continued to be called long after they had lost their feminist implication.

The Bloomers had joined the westward movement starting at Seneca Falls, New York, where Amelia Jenks Bloomer had founded her famous magazine, *The Lily*, to promote temperance and woman suffrage. Her progressive husband encouraged her contempt for laws which denied women the right to keep their own property after marriage or to have a voice in the disposition of her own children.

After coming here, Mrs. Bloomer sent articles on Council Bluffs to the new owner of *The Lily*. In an issue of June, 1855, now owned by the Council Bluffs library, Amelia described the town of 2,000, noting that it was 300 miles west of the nearest railroad, but prophesying an early arrival of the "iron horse."

The intelligent, talented Amelia abandoned her controversial costume within a couple of years, but continued her crusade in speeches and articles. The Bloomer home at 123 Fourth Street became noted for its generous hospitality particularly to clergy and dignitaries of the Episcopal church, whose local St. Paul's parish Dexter Bloomer helped establish in 1856. Lawyer and real estate dealer, Dexter Bloomer plunged into community life with zest, becoming one of the organizers of the Republican party in western Iowa, a city council member, a two-term mayor, an 11-year member of the school board, president of the library board, and author of a history of Pottawattamie County,

published in the *Annals of Iowa*, the first quarterly of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Amelia Bloomer was listed as one of Iowa's all-time ten outstanding women by Governor Nate Kendall in 1923.

Indian threats from the north triggered the formation of the Council Bluffs Guards in 1856 under Grenville M. Dodge, whose military-school background in Vermont qualified him in matters of soldiery. Public subscription paid the \$1,500 cost of their smart uniforms and equipment. That same year saw the founding (again by Dodge in partnership with John T. Baldwin) of the banking house of Baldwin and Dodge, which would eventually become the Council Bluffs Savings Bank.

It was in 1856, too, that "Bill" Maynard decided his politics were all wrong for his partnership in the *Chronicle*. He went to Des Moines as a printer. But his editorial skill had attracted admiration. Dodge, Baldwin and others hated to lose his expressive talent and, above all, his Republican viewpoint. Maynard didn't know it then, but he would be back.