

The **P**ALIMPSEST

FEBRUARY 1923

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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

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials 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 Confederate Spy

A glamour of romance and mystery still clings to the old Chew mansion in Cascade. The very appearance of the house with its massive walls of solid stone, high gable roofs, and huge chimneys has always inspired interest and wonder. Built in Civil War days by Thomas J. Chew, a pioneer of southern nativity, the edifice was constructed on the generous design of a plantation home.

Enormous blocks of limestone for the thick walls were quarried from the bluffs along the North Fork of the Maquoketa River, while the studding, rafters, and heavy joists were of native oak cut to proper dimensions in the Chew sawmill. The spacious living room was finished with highly polished cherry, oak was used for the woodwork in the large library, the dining room, and the hallways, some of the chambers were finished in cherry and some in oak, while unvarnished walnut and cherry were used in

the rooms on the third floor. In every room of the house there was a great stone fireplace.

Too spacious for a dwelling, the mansion proved to be an expensive and unsatisfactory possession for its various owners after the Chews moved away, and more than once the suggestion was made that the great house should be converted into a hospital. At last the property was obtained by the school board and now the stately old residence is the home of the East Cascade High School.

But not even transformation into a schoolhouse has been sufficient to dispel entirely the atmosphere of former glory. The children notice the evidences of the magnificence of sixty years ago, and they are reminded of days that are gone and of the stirring times that the old house has witnessed. In one of the rooms, where the boys and girls of to-day follow the campaigns of Caesar in Gaul or of Sherman in Georgia and Lee in Virginia, John Yates Beall, master in the Confederate navy and picturesque marauder, once found refuge and care while he was recovering from a wound received in piercing the Union lines on his dangerous trip to Canada.

This is the story of the Cascade spy.

Weary and wounded, John Y. Beall, in the spring of 1864, crept to the Chew home for refuge. His brother had come to Cascade some time before to engage in the milling business with Thomas Chew, whose wife's people, the Bemis family of Maryland, and the Bealls of Virginia had been friends in the

South. For these reasons the sick and travel-worn Confederate hoped to receive aid and concealment at the Chew homestead until he recovered sufficiently to continue his journey.

He arrived just at dusk about the first of June and stopped in a dark corner at the rear of the house. Mrs. Chew came outside for a bucket of water and he called to her, saying, "It's John Beall, I'm wounded and I've come to you for protection." She replied that she would be glad to aid him but that she must first obtain the consent of Mr. Chew. She took him inside, gave him his supper, and led him upstairs to a bedroom. Then she laid the case before her husband and asked what she should do. "Maggie", he said, "attend to his wound as a man, but I do not want to know anything about him as a rebel."

Mrs. Chew dressed his bullet wound herself, and removed some small pieces of bone. During the long hot summer of 1864 she nursed the Confederate refugee back to health and strength, and his presence at the Chew home was known only to a few intimate friends of the family.

Beall was a quiet guest who spent much of the time in reading the Bible which Stonewall Jackson had given him. Every night he went over part of the Episcopalian service, while at other times he browsed through the books belonging to his host. His early schooling in Virginia and his studies in England had made him a gentleman of culture and

refinement — the chivalrous type of southerner so well known in fiction. He never revealed to his benefactors the real reason for his trip north, and after his departure they were surprised and shocked at the swift-moving events of his subsequent career.

Before coming to Cascade the spectacular exploits of John Y. Beall had made him a marked man. With a small band of kindred adventurers he had led an attack upon Union gunboats on the Rappahannock River and effected their capture. He had directed the destruction of light houses along the Virginia shore, and his command had succeeded in capturing Union transports off the Atlantic coast.

On the eighteenth of September, 1863, Beall, with a small party of picked men, had crossed the bay from Matthew's Point, Virginia, and on the following day he captured the United States schooner, *Alliance*, loaded with sutler's goods. Two days later his small force seized the schooners, *J. J. Houseman*, *Samuel Pearsall*, and *Alexandria*, captured the crews, and, lashing the helms and setting the sails, turned the vessels adrift. Five days afterward a Union blockader sighted the *Alliance*, with the Confederates on board, stuck on a sand bar at Mifford Haven. The Yankees opened fire, but the rebels set fire to the vessel and escaped.

For almost a month Beall and his men continued their activities along the Virginia coast, swooping down here, striking there, and hovering at times dangerously near the Union pickets and coast guards

who were alert for their capture. Finally, however, part of the command, in making a landing on the shore of Chesapeake Bay, were met by an equal number of coast guards, and after a spirited engagement the Confederates surrendered. The next day the reckless leader himself and nine more of his men were captured by a determined force from one of the Union coasting vessels. Both groups of prisoners were taken to Fort McHenry, where they were put in chains and regarded as pirates rather than as prisoners of war.

This treatment brought forth a vigorous protest from Robert Ould, Confederate agent of exchange, who informed the Union agent that the Confederate government had placed an equal number of officers and seamen of the United States navy in close confinement in irons as a retaliatory measure and that they were held as hostages for the proper treatment of Beall and his men. This protest succeeded ultimately in accomplishing its purpose, for in January, 1864, the Confederate prisoners were removed from Fort McHenry to Fort Norfolk, their irons struck off, and their status made that of prisoners of war.

Then Beall escaped.

In May, 1864, he wrote to the Secretary of War of the Confederacy offering to raise a small company of trustworthy men for special service along the northern boundary of the United States. President Jefferson Davis had already sent Jacob Thompson, who had been Secretary of the Interior under Presi-

dent James Buchanan, to Canada to direct a campaign of terrorization whereby the morale of the Union might be broken. This work called for courage and intelligence, the type of service for which Beall was admirably fitted and to which his love of adventure allured him. His offer was accepted and he and his men in civilian garb set out for Canada as individuals and by separate routes.

Ill fortune, however, marked this adventure from the start. In making his way through the Union lines Beall received the bullet wound which forced him to seek refuge with friends at Cascade and delayed his arrival at Windsor, Canada, for over three months. This inauspicious beginning of his new effort in behalf of the lost cause was a portent of ill omen, but with characteristic bravery he pushed on as soon as he had recovered from his injury and regained his strength.

In the meantime, the audacious plot in which Beall was destined to play a leading rôle had assumed definite form and the preliminary work had been accomplished. Jacob Thompson, from his headquarters at Windsor, sent Captain Charles H. Cole, formerly of N. B. Forrest's command, around the lakes as a lower deck passenger with instructions to become familiar with the channels, the approaches to the harbors, the strength of each prison camp, and especially to obtain all possible information about the war steamer *Michigan* on Lake Erie. Cole was given about four thousand dollars in gold which he

was to spend in establishing friendly relations with the officers and crew of the gunboat. When he succeeded with this part of the plot, Thompson planned to send Beall and his men across the lake on a passenger steamer which they would seize en route, and with it they were to capture the gunboat in the harbor of Sandusky. With the *Michigan* in their possession the Confederates hoped to overpower the guards at Johnson's Island near Sandusky and liberate nearly three thousand southern officers confined there who, mounted, armed, and guarded by the boat, would march along the lake to Cleveland. From Cleveland the Confederate officers proposed to turn south to Wheeling, thence to Virginia, and rejoin their commands. Such a bold coup, it was thought, would strike terror into the hearts of the Yankees, and at the same time revive the hopes of the South.

Cole reported progress to Thompson: he felt that his part of the job was succeeding and that the officers who could not be bribed could be rendered helpless by being drugged at a wine party on board the gunboat on the night of the capture. Accordingly, the night of September 19, 1864, was selected for the attempt. Prearranged signals were to let Beall know when Cole's part of the plot had been accomplished.

Some details of the plot leaked out, however. On Saturday night, the seventeenth of September, a stranger called upon Lieutenant Colonel B. H. Hill,

acting assistant provost marshal of Michigan, at his hotel in Detroit and introduced himself as a former Confederate soldier then a refugee in Canada. He told Hill that some of the officers and men of the steamboat, *Michigan*, on Lake Erie had been tampered with by one of Thompson's agents and that it was Thompson's intention to send a party from Windsor to capture the gunboat. The informant said that he had been asked to join the party and had consented to do so in order to learn the details of the plot. He added that he would return on the following night with more information. Hill did not fully credit the story because rumors of projected enterprises to commit depredations on the lake coasts of the United States by Confederate refugees in Canada had been current for more than a year, yet the man's earnestness led Hill to telegraph Captain J. C. Carter, the commanding officer of the *Michigan*, to be on his guard.

True to his word the stranger returned on the following evening and told Hill that a man by the name of Cole was the Confederate agent at Sandusky who had attempted to bribe the officers of the gunboat and that he planned to drug those who could not be bought. He said, furthermore, that the attacking party planned to take passage on board the *Philo Parsons*, a passenger packet which made regular trips between Detroit and Sandusky, to take possession of the vessel out on the lake, and then to capture the *Michigan*. This more detailed informa-

tion of the plot was telegraphed immediately to Captain Carter who had Cole seized and imprisoned at once and the boat cleared for action to bag the marauding party. Provost Marshal Hill thought it advisable to let the enterprise proceed so that the entire party might be captured in the harbor of Sandusky rather than to arouse the suspicions of the plotters by placing soldiers on board the *Philo Parsons* to prevent the start of the expedition. To do this, he thought, would simply postpone the attempt to another time when he might not be forewarned.

Beall and his men, never dreaming that the details of the plot were already in the hands of their enemies, proceeded with their part of the scheme. About eight o'clock on Sunday night, September 18th, a fashionably dressed young man came on board the *Philo Parsons* which was lying at the docks at Detroit. He asked the clerk if the boat would stop in the morning at Sandwich, three miles below on the Canadian shore, to pick up a party of his friends who wanted to go to Kelley's Island on a pleasure trip. The clerk replied that the boat did not stop at Sandwich regularly but would do so for passengers. This satisfied the caller who then departed. This man was Bennett G. Burley, an acting master in the Confederate navy and Beall's assistant.

The next morning the *Philo Parsons* steamed away from the dock at Detroit with some forty pas-

sengers on board. Shortly after the vessel got under way the visitor of the night before came to the clerk and announced that his friends were waiting for the boat at Sandwich. The clerk reported this to Captain Sylvester F. Atwood, master of the boat, who called the stranger and asked why his friends had not come to Detroit to catch the steamer. Burley replied that one of them was lame and found it inconvenient to take the ferry.

Accordingly, the boat made the landing at Sandwich and four young fellows, one of whom limped, came on board. All of them were stylishly dressed in English clothes, and one carried a small hand satchel, the only baggage of the party. They were soon on intimate terms with the passengers and made themselves agreeable travelling companions. One of them, a young man of medium height, with brown hair, fair complexioned, and smooth shaven, was Beall himself. His evident culture and polished manners made him a favorite.

At Malden, about twenty miles below Detroit on the Canadian side, the steamer made its regular stop. Here a party of about twenty men came on board. They were all poorly dressed in ragged clothes that had apparently seen hard service, and two of the roughest looking in the lot lugged a heavy, old-fashioned, rope-bound trunk. All of the group were young except one who said he was a surgeon, and they explained that they were bound for Kelley's Island on a fishing trip. They paid their fare in

greenbacks and no sign of recognition passed between them and the four who came on board at Sandwich. Their number was not unusual and consequently excited no suspicion.

The steamer continued on its way, making the usual stops at North Bass, Middle Bass, and South Bass islands to discharge and take on passengers and freight. These islands lie about twenty-eight miles almost directly north of Sandusky. Captain Atwood left the boat at Middle Bass Island to spend the twenty-four hour interval before its return with his family, and the steamer proceeded under the command of DeWitt C. Nichols, mate and pilot.

Nothing suspicious had been observed up to this point although afterwards it was remembered that ten or twelve of the Malden crowd stayed on the upper deck and just after dinner the wheelman noticed two of them by the pilot house, two more by the wheelhouse, and two aft on the hurricane deck. One of the well dressed group asked the wheelman some questions about the course he was steering and borrowed his glass to look around.

From South Bass Island, the steamer proceeded to Kelley's Island, seven miles farther on, and made the regular landing there. When the boat drew up to the wharf four men came on board and one of them addressed a member of the Sandwich party, saying, "We have concluded to go to Sandusky."

None of those who had come on board at Sandwich and Malden left the boat at Kelley's Island,

and one of them told the clerk that they had decided to go on to Sandusky with the four who had just come on board.

The *Philo Parsons* left Kelley's Island about four o'clock in the afternoon and fifteen or twenty minutes later passed the *Island Queen*, another side-wheel steamer which made regular trips between Sandusky and the Bass islands. The boats passed at a distance of about twenty rods and no signals were exchanged.

Shortly after the *Philo Parsons* passed the *Island Queen* Beall accosted Nichols, then in command of the boat, and asked, "Are you captain of this boat?"

"No, sir;" Nichols answered, "I am mate."

"You have charge of her at present, have you not?"

"Yes, sir", replied the mate.

"Will you step back here for a minute? I want to talk to you."

The two men walked aft to a place near the smoke-stack on the hurricane deck where Beall stopped and said, "I am a Confederate officer. There are thirty of us, well armed. I seize the boat, and take you as a prisoner. You must pilot the boat as I direct you, and", pulling a revolver out of his pocket and showing it, "here are the tools to make you. Run down and lie off the harbor." He meant the harbor of Sandusky then about twelve miles distant.

In the meantime four of the party had come up to the clerk who was standing in front of his office and,

drawing revolvers, leveled them at him and threatened to kill him if he offered any resistance. He surrendered. In a flash the old black trunk which had been carried aboard at Malden was opened and the marauders armed themselves with the revolvers and hand axes which it contained. They fired a few shots and drove the frightened passengers forward to the cabin where they searched them for arms. Leaving the women and children in the cabin, the boarding party drove the men and crew down to the main deck and thence to the hold.

When the attack began the wheelman who was standing in the saloon heard a shot on deck, a yell, and then another shot. He hastened out on the main deck and saw a man with a cocked revolver in his hand chasing the fireman and shouting to the fugitive to go down the main hatch or he would shoot. The fireman escaped temporarily and the man turned to the wheelman repeating the same command. The latter told him to go to hell and started quickly to climb from the main deck to the upper deck. The pirate fired but missed, the ball passing between the legs of the fleeing wheelman.

Within a short time, however, Beall and his men had complete possession of the boat, and although several shots had been fired no one was injured. The fireman, engineer, and wheelman were left at their posts under guard and commanded to obey the orders of the leader. Beall ordered the mate to head the boat east and to keep on this tack until a good

view of the harbor of Sandusky was obtained. At about five o'clock a position was reached where the United States steamer, *Michigan*, was plainly visible. After a careful examination of the harbor from the point outside the bar, and after ascertaining the position of the gunboat, Beall learned from the mate that the wood supply was low. Therefore, he ordered the wheelman to turn back to the wooding station at Middle Bass Island, and the boat drew up to the wharf between seven and eight in the evening, just at dusk.

The Confederates fired two or three shots at the owner of the wood yard, then released some of the deck hands to help wood up. The captain of the *Philo Parsons* who had spent the afternoon at home did not see his vessel return but was informed of its arrival by a little boy who came running up to the captain's house much frightened and shouting that they were killing his father. The captain hurried to the dock and seeing several men running to and fro, approached them and asked what was up. Thereupon three or four of the men levelled their pistols at him and he was ordered aboard. Upon his refusal he was rushed up the plank and made a prisoner in the cabin of his own vessel.

About this time the *Island Queen* whistled for the wharf and came steaming up to the dock alongside the *Philo Parsons*. It was now eight o'clock and moonlight. Immediately all the Confederates who could be spared rushed on board the new arrival

and, yelling and firing their revolvers, they drove the passengers and crew aboard the *Philo Parsons*. Among the former were twenty-five Union soldiers — one-hundred-day men from Ohio returning to Toledo to be mustered out. They were unarmed and without a leader and so offered no resistance. The men were crowded into the hold, the women and children left in the cabin.

The engineer of the *Island Queen* was busy with his engines after he brought his vessel alongside the wharf and the first he knew of the attack was when he heard some one yell. As he looked around one of the attacking party fired and the ball, whizzing past his nose, entered his cheek and passed out at his ear. Although Beall's men fired several shots no one was wounded except the engineer, though some of the passengers were knocked down with the butt end of revolvers and with hand axes.

Before putting out on the lake again Beall paroled the passengers of both boats, the Union soldiers, the crew of the *Island Queen*, the captain and part of the crew of the *Philo Parsons*, and secured their promise not to leave the island nor to speak of what had occurred for twenty-four hours. He kept on board the captain, clerk, and wounded engineer of the *Island Queen*, and the mate, wheelman, and part of the crew of the *Philo Parsons*. Most of the baggage of the passengers was piled on the dock and the cargo of pig iron, furniture, and tobacco was thrown overboard.

Beall then headed the *Philo Parsons* out on the lake with the *Island Queen* in tow. A few miles out from Middle Bass Island the captors opened the sea valves of the towed vessel and cast her adrift to sink. Fortunately, before filling she drifted onto a sand bar and was removed a few days later without having suffered serious injury.

The Confederates then shaped a course for Sandusky, hiding the red and blue signal lights of the boat so that its course could not be detected. When the steamer reached a point opposite Marblehead Light outside the Bay of Sandusky the pilot told Beall that it was dangerous to attempt to run the channel at night for it was so narrow there was danger of running aground. Moreover, the signals by which Cole was to announce the success of his part of the plot had failed to appear. Beall called his men forward. After a brief consultation the Confederates decided to abandon the attack on the gunboat, *Michigan*. It was fortunate for them that they did, for both the commanding officer at Johnson's Island and Captain Carter of the *Michigan* were ready and waiting for the attack. Beall ordered the pilot to turn about and head the boat for Malden, Canada.

They passed the Bass islands under a full head of steam about one o'clock in the morning, slipped by Malden about four, and proceeded up the Canadian side of the Detroit River. A few miles above Malden the captors sent ashore a yawl boat loaded with plunder. Beall stopped the *Philo Parsons* also at

Fighting Point to put the crew ashore, keeping on board only three — the engineer, wheelman, and one other — for the rest of the trip. The boat arrived at the dock at Sandwich, Canada, about eight o'clock Tuesday morning.

One of the gang compelled the engineer to help smash the injection pipes of the vessel, while others carried ashore some cabin furniture and other plunder. Then, leaving the boat to sink, the Confederates, loaded down with bags of plunder, set off up the street of Sandwich. None of them were molested except two who were detained for a short time charged with violating the customs regulations by unloading goods without a license. The magistrate dismissed their case, however, and the entire group scattered throughout the country, most of them returning to the Confederacy. The *Philo Parsons* was saved by some of the crew before she filled and in a few days both of the captured vessels were making their regular trips again.

This audacious attempt by Beall and his men to capture the *Michigan* and to release the prisoners at Johnson's Island aroused the authorities to keep a careful watch for this bold plotter. The County Crown Attorney at Windsor assured the United States District Attorney of Michigan that he had received instructions from his government to spare no pains in bringing to justice those concerned with the plot. Burley, Beall's lieutenant, was arrested a few days afterward in Canada and later extradited

to the United States. Cole, who was confined on Johnson's Island and later at Fort Lafayette, was finally discharged on February 10, 1866. Thompson, the arch conspirator, seems to have escaped. He was afterward implicated in the assassination of President Lincoln.

On December 16, 1864, nearly three months after the lake episode, John S. Young, chief of the Metropolitan Detective Police, found and arrested Beall near the New York end of the suspension bridge over the Niagara River. He was fully identified by a witness who picked him out of a crowd in one of the rooms at police headquarters in New York. The witness stepped up to Beall and called him by name much to the discomfiture of the Confederate captain. After being thus identified the prisoner was confined in a cell at police headquarters, but having attempted to bribe one of the turnkeys by offering him \$3000 in gold for a chance to escape, he was removed to Fort Lafayette.

The military commission appointed to try his case convened on board the steamer, *Henry Burden*, while she was conveying Beall to Fort Lafayette, but as he desired a week's delay to procure counsel and to prepare his defense, it was granted him. The court martial met at Fort Lafayette on the morning of January 17, 1865, and adjourned until two days later, giving the prisoner that much more time to prepare his case. He asked that a fellow prisoner, Roger A. Pryor, be allowed to defend him, and this request

was forwarded by General John A. Dix to the Secretary of War. A reply was received two days later that under no circumstances could a prisoner of war be allowed to act as counsel for a person accused of being a spy. Hence another postponement of the trial was necessary while Beall secured other counsel.

Having engaged the professional services of James T. Brady, Beall's trial began February 10, 1865, with Brigadier General Fitz Henry Warren, formerly colonel of the First Iowa Volunteer Cavalry, as president. He was arraigned and tried under two charges: first, violation of the law of war, and second, acting as a spy. Under these charges it was specified that he seized and captured the *Philo Parsons* and *Island Queen* without lawful authority and by force of arms; that he acted as a spy near Kelley's Island, at Middle Bass Island, and at the suspension bridge; and that as a guerrilla he attempted to destroy lives and property by trying to wreck a train coming from the west to Buffalo. Beall attempted to justify his maneuvers on Lake Erie and his deeds in New York by showing that he was acting under the orders of Jefferson Davis and authorized agents of the Confederate government.

After a careful hearing of the evidence, the court found Beall guilty of both charges and on all the specifications save one in which the date had been stated erroneously. He was sentenced to be hanged and General Dix approved the sentence, directing it

to be executed on Governor's Island, Saturday, February 18th. Later a reprieve was granted until Friday, the twenty-fourth.

In desperation Beall wrote the following letter to the Confederate agent of exchange:

FORT COLUMBUS, *February 21, 1865.*

COL. R. OULD, *Commissioner of Exchange, Richmond, Va.:*

Sir: The proceedings of a military commission in my case published in the New York papers of the 15th instant made you and my Government aware of my sentence and doom. A reprieve, on account of some informality, from the 18th to the 24th was granted. The authorities are possessed of the facts in my case. They know that I acted under orders. I appeal to my Government to use its utmost efforts to protect me, and if unable to prevent my murder, to vindicate my reputation. I can only declare that I was no "spy" or "guerrilla," and am a true Confederate.

Respectfully,

JOHN Y. BEALL,
Acting Master, C. S. Navy.

This letter, however, was not received until February twenty-seventh. Three days before, between noon and two o'clock in the afternoon, the commanding officer of Fort Columbus had carried out the sentence of the court and the spectacular career of John Y. Beall was ended.

BRUCE E. MAHAN

Ventures in Wheat

It was thought, in the fall of 1845 and during the following winter, that there was going to be a big foreign demand for breadstuffs, on account of a great deficiency in the English crops. Consequently there was much speculation in breadstuffs in this country. At that time the firm of Burrows & Prettyman had been operating a produce house in Davenport for more than a year. We were doing business with the largest produce merchants in the United States, the Woodruff brothers, who maintained branches in St. Louis, New Orleans, and New York City. You could ship to any branch you preferred. It was a concern of unlimited means. The senior partner, James E. Woodruff, was the best business friend I ever had, and he was also the best business man I ever knew.

Mr. Woodruff thought there would be a sharp advance in the prices of breadstuffs before spring to supply the deficiency in the English market, and he wrote me repeatedly, urging me to buy every barrel of flour we could find and all the wheat and other provisions, and that we were at liberty to draw on him for one hundred thousand dollars for that purpose. If we were afraid to buy on our own account,

[This account of wheat speculation by a pioneer commission merchant in Davenport is adapted for THE PALIMPSEST from J. M. D. Burrows's *Fifty Years in Iowa*.—THE EDITOR]

he said to buy for him. He urged us so strongly and persistently that we followed his advice, buying on our own account. I visited every point, myself, as far as Dubuque, and bought every barrel of flour and all the grain I could find in New Albany, Savanna, Galena, and Dubuque, besides a large amount of provisions. We also sent an agent on the ice above Dubuque to visit every point and buy all the flour and grain he could find in store. Consequently, at the opening of navigation in the spring of 1846 we controlled the larger part of the produce in store above Davenport.

Then came trouble and disaster. The United States declared war against Mexico that spring, and everything collapsed. Prices tumbled more than one-half. The only way we could get to the seaboard was by the river to New Orleans and thence by sea to New York. The excitement then prevalent concerning privateers on the ocean almost suspended shipping. Insurance on the ocean advanced to ten per cent.

Soon after the opening of navigation, I began to move my winter accumulation, as I could see no prospect of any change for the better. I thought it best to face the music at once. Our flour, in store on the river, had been bought at from four dollars to four dollars and fifty cents per barrel and the wheat at an average of sixty cents a bushel. On arriving at St. Louis, the nominal price of flour was from two dollars to two dollars and twenty-five cents a barrel,

but no buyers; wheat was forty cents a bushel, for which there was a small local demand. Selling what wheat we could, we sent out flour and surplus wheat to New York, where it fared worse. Most of the flour became sour on the trip and did not net us over one dollar per barrel, while the wheat went for twenty-five cents a bushel. When all was sold, Burrows & Prettyman found themselves nearly bankrupt. I do not think we could have paid over twenty-five cents on the dollar, if we had been forced to close up our business.

During the following winter people began to get over their scare of the previous season and, a good foreign demand springing up, prices began to advance. Before the advance had fairly commenced, Woodruff, foreseeing what was going to happen, urged me to send out an agent at once and buy everything I could north of Davenport. I did so. People, remembering the disaster of the year before, were willing sellers.

About this time hogs had begun to be plentiful and we were packing so extensively that my winters were occupied chiefly in overseeing that branch of the industry, so I was obliged to employ an agent to make the trips abroad. One bitter cold, stormy day, about the first of February, there was nothing doing; no farmers in town, and I was tired of sitting around the stove. I put on my overcoat, and said to Mr. Prettyman, "I will go out and try to buy what wheat there is in town."

I first called on Charles Lesslie, at the corner of Front and Brady streets. He had a small warehouse full of very choice wheat, most of it raised by the Brownlies, at Long Grove, who at that time were considered the best farmers in the county. After considerable talk I bought him out. I agreed to pay him sixty cents a bushel, to take the wheat away any time I pleased between then and the first of May, and to pay for it when removed. There were about twenty-five hundred bushels.

I then called on William Inslee and bought about the same amount from him, paying the same price. Whisler then occupied the lot at the corner of Front and Main streets and had a large warehouse nearly full of wheat. I bought him out also at the same price of sixty cents a bushel.

This closed out all the wheat in town. I went back to the store well satisfied with my forenoon's work. As I afterwards sold this wheat for double what I paid for it, we made about five thousand dollars in the operation. All the expense I had was to sack the wheat and deliver it to the boat: the buyer furnished the sacks.

We found, at the opening of navigation, that we had on hand a larger supply of breadstuffs than any other dealer on the river. The profit on flour which had been made in the fall and held over and on wheat which had been bought in the early part of the winter for thirty cents a bushel, was simply enormous. Flour that cost us two dollars a barrel sold for seven

dollars. In the spring we put our stuff on the market as rapidly as possible. By July 1st we had paid every dollar we owed and had money to our credit with which we proposed to put up a flouring mill in Davenport. The town thus far had neither a flour mill nor a sawmill. We intended to give her both.

The Crimean War began in the fall of 1853 and in March, 1854, France and England formed an alliance with Turkey and declared war on Russia. I had been watching the markets and the foreign news. Most people thought the war would all end in smoke, but I believed Russia would fight. Others thought the war would not affect our markets, but I thought it would, as Russia exported a large quantity of wheat, especially from the port of Sebastopol. When that port was blockaded I believed there would be a sharp advance in breadstuffs.

I was in New York during the early part of July, and visited my old friend, James E. Woodruff. I had many talks with him about the prospect of the business season about to open. At that time breadstuff markets were very much depressed, both in the East and the West.

Woodruff asked me what I was going to pay for wheat. I told him fifty cents a bushel. He said, "I don't know what you are going to do with it at that price. There is not a market in the world that you can ship wheat to where it will net you more than forty cents a bushel. You ought not to pay to exceed forty cents. You are too good to the farmers. You

pay too much for produce. You always pay higher prices than any of our customers. You work harder, for less money, than any man I ever knew."

"Well," said I, "we are going to have a heavy crop of wheat, and I have doubled the capacity of my mill. Our farmers will not sell wheat freely at less than fifty cents a bushel. Burrows & Prettyman have a large amount standing out which they must get in, and it will require fifty cents a bushel to make collections. I have more faith in the future than you have. I intend to ship everything to New York — all my flour and surplus wheat — and don't care how long it is on the way; the longer the better, because I am satisfied the prices are going to be much higher."

I returned home. On my way I stopped one day in Chicago to see how the markets were. T. J. S. Flint and C. T. Wheeler were the strongest and heaviest grain men in Chicago then, and had the largest elevator in the city. They took me on 'Change and showed me various samples of new winter wheat, which was just beginning to come in from southern Illinois and which was selling that day at sixty cents a bushel. I had a long talk with them about the fall business. They coincided with Woodruff that forty cents was a generous price, and all I ought to pay.

Our railroad, the Chicago & Rock Island, had just been opened and freight was very high, being about twenty cents a bushel for wheat from Davenport to

Chicago. The expense of handling the grain in Chicago would amount to about two cents a bushel more.

Fifty cents a bushel for spring wheat in Davenport, with twenty-two cents added for freight and expenses in Chicago making the price seventy-two cents a bushel, when the best of fall wheat was actually selling at sixty cents, did look somewhat venturesome. But in my whole experience I never felt so sure of a season's business as I did then. My friends thought I would ruin myself.

Such a crop of wheat Scott County never produced before or since. Farmers were beginning to harvest. Our land was new and in condition to produce its very best. Club wheat had recently been introduced and nearly all the growing crop was of that variety. It stood thick and even on the ground, nearly five feet high, and well headed. For six inches below the head the straw was as yellow as gold.

Wheat ran, that year, from thirty to forty bushels to the acre. What was more remarkable, the quality of the wheat was all number one. You could not get an inferior quality, even if you paid a premium for it. This extraordinary crop made me still more sanguine, and I felt in my very bones that this was the time to pitch in.

The heaviest dealers in produce in Davenport, besides myself, were J. R. Graham and G. W. Kepner. I told them I was going to control the wheat market of Davenport that fall and that I should keep the price of wheat about two cents above that paid by

dealers in Muscatine who, at that time, were our only competitors. I also told them that I intended to draw the wheat from Cedar and Linn counties away from Muscatine.

To Graham & Kepner I made this proposition: "I will give you five cents a bushel for all the wheat you will buy between now and the first of next December. You shall put it in my mill, on the railroad cars, or on a steamboat, or wherever I shall instruct you. I will give you the price each morning which you are to pay that day. You shall pay just what I pay. I will never bid against you. You will furnish your own money. I want your bills of lading and vouchers every Saturday; you are to bring in your bill every Monday morning and I will pay you."

Graham & Kepner accepted my proposition. I used to pay them from ten to twenty thousand dollars every Monday morning. Mr. Graham has told me since that they never did as well any season as they did under this arrangement with me.

I had all of this wheat put into cars for shipment to New York. Arrangements were made with the railroad company to place cars where the farmers could get at them and unload their wheat into the car, thus saving a second handling and the additional expense.

Flint & Wheeler agreed to receive and forward my shipments in Chicago. I told them I expected to be able to load a vessel every week, and that I did not want my wheat inspected. All I wanted was to have

them receive the flour and wheat from day to day as it arrived, hold it until they had enough to load a vessel, and then consign it to Woodruff in New York.

It took but a short time to show that I was in luck. Sebastopol was invested. Breadstuffs advanced in Europe. Russia's ports were blockaded: her grain was locked up. The first of my fifty-cent wheat brought two dollars and twenty-five cents a bushel in New York. I made more than one hundred thousand dollars between the first of August and the first of December. Most of the money was made the first sixty days when wheat was low. I began buying at fifty cents and in October I was paying a dollar and forty cents a bushel. At the latter price only ordinary profits were made.

Everything seemed to favor me that fall. One propeller, loaded entirely with my wheat and flour, exploded on the lake and sank, the whole cargo being lost. Yet I made four thousand dollars by it: the cargo was insured in New York City and I saved the freight from Davenport to New York.

For over a year I did a fairly good business. Then came a dreadful blow. First, the news of the death of Nicholas, Czar of Russia; then a few months later, the fall of Sebastopol. Everyone knew the war was at an end. Prices of produce fell instantly all over the United States — wheat from fifty to sixty cents a bushel; flour, three dollars a barrel; and everything else in proportion. The decline continued day after day. I went to bed on the night the news ar-

rived two hundred thousand dollars poorer than I had arisen the same morning. I had on the market six thousand barrels of flour, and in Davenport one hundred and fifty thousand bushels of wheat and all my winter's packing, not a dollar's worth of which had been sold.

That drop in prices was an overwhelming catastrophe. It broke up nearly every dealer on the Mississippi River, and was really what finally broke Burrows & Prettyman.

J. M. D. BURROWS

Comment by the Editor

THE MATERIALS OF HISTORY

Historians who delve into the prehistoric find few materials and only scattered records. They view a limestone cliff, and tell of the time when Iowa was under the sea; they reconstruct a race of men from fragmentary skulls and thigh bones; they visit the Valley of the Kings, and vitalize the reign of Tutankhamen from an inspection of his tomb. They deal with symbols, as all historians should.

The annalist of the present age has a different problem, for records of modern life are without number. The harmony of events, like the organization of matter, defies understanding and yet compels contemplation. To produce cosmos from chaos is the alchemy of modern history.

He who undertakes to review all events, to read all accounts, to discover all causes, and to perceive all effects, in order that he may produce a complete and truthful image of the times, attempts the impossible. Selection is his task. It is for the historian to choose significant facts, to interpret the symbolism of events, to dwell upon typical characters, to write literature—in short, to be an artist as well as a scholar.

Abundance of material has its advantages. Think of the newspapers. What an infinite variety of sub-

jects they cover. With what detail events are described, and how rich is the comment.

Consider the service of photography. The eye of the camera sees all and never forgets. It beggars all language in the realm of description. The most trivial snapshot may be of great value, while the utility of an aërial view of a battle or city is beyond calculation. As for the movies, they verily challenge mortality. Death has lost its meaning to history; for those who are dead still live and move and have their being.

Even sound can now be preserved. The past may be heard as well as seen. He who runs need not read: he may simply look and listen.

J. E. B.

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