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PALIMPSEST
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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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The Iowa

At noon on the twenty-eighth of March, 1896, the shipyard of William Cramp and Sons at Philadelphia was thronged with spectators — many of them prominent officials from Washington and the State of Iowa. The day was warm, and the sunlight sparkled on the water of the Delaware River and lighted up the keel of a giant ship which, resplendent in red and white paint, rested as if in a cradle at the head of an incline. This was the center of attraction.

There was a word of command, the sound of a saw somewhere below, and the great hull began to move. At this moment Mary Lord Drake, the daughter of the Governor of Iowa, dashed a bottle of champagne against the bow which towered high above her head and, as the sparkling wine ran down the side, said, "I christen thee *Iowa*". Not many heard the words, however, for innumerable whistles

blew a noisy welcome as the keel slipped down the ways and floated out upon the waters of the Delaware, while the thousands of spectators cheered the promise of a new national defender.

Perhaps it was prophetic of the future that, in a poem written on this occasion, S. H. M. Byers included this stanza:

Far better the ship go down
And her guns, and her thousand men,
In the depth of the sea to drown,
Than ever to sail again
With the day of her promise done,
Or the star of her glory set,
Or a thread from the standard gone
That has never yielded yet.

Thus was born upon the surface of the waters the battleship *Iowa* which had been authorized by an act of Congress on July 19, 1892, with an initial appropriation of four million dollars. Slowly during the months which followed the keel became a warship, bearing upon her sides an armor of plated steel and having within five great boilers and two sets of triple expansion engines which were to give to the empty frame the throb of life.

When finally completed, at a total cost of \$5,871,206.32, the *Iowa* well deserved the title, "queen of warships", which had been conferred upon her by a newspaper correspondent at the time of the launching. Three hundred and sixty feet long — one-fifth longer than the average city block — and over

seventy-two feet wide, the *Iowa* had a displacement of over eleven thousand tons. The lighting plant alone weighed forty-five tons. She carried four 12-inch, eight 8-inch, and six 4-inch guns, in addition to numerous smaller weapons, and was capable of a speed of sixteen knots an hour. An enthusiastic Iowa editor declared: "As an example of the American naval architect's skill she is an achievement of which we should well be proud, and a namesake in which any state might glory."

A crew of about five hundred officers and men, under the command of Captain W. T. Sampson, was assigned to the new battleship and on June 16, 1897, the *Iowa*, equipped with intellect as well as body and life, was put in commission.

On July 19th, the silver service, purchased with an appropriation of five thousand dollars by the Iowa General Assembly, was presented to the ship at Newport, Rhode Island, by C. G. McCarthy, State Auditor of Iowa, whose brief speech included this wish: "While we hope that our navy shall never turn from the face of an enemy, may we not indulge the larger hope that this stately Iowa and the other battleships and the cruisers — armored and unarmored — shall somehow find a place as messengers of peace rather than of war — be heralds of human progress rather than foemen in international strife." The gift was accepted by Captain Sampson.

Less than a year later, however, the *Iowa* was stationed outside the harbor of Santiago, Cuba,

where the Spanish fleet under the command of Admiral Pascual de Cervera had taken refuge. The Cuban situation and the sinking of the *Maine* had at last brought on war between Spain and the United States. In the bottle-like harbor, shut off from view by high cliffs, were the Spanish warships which had crossed the Atlantic, like the Armada of old, to combat Anglo-Saxon civilization. While American cruisers patrolled the ocean, and seaboard cities began to talk of possible bombardment, the Spanish fleet had slipped into the harbor and a squadron of the United States navy was watching the entrance, lest the enemy's ships again escape to threaten American cities and commerce.

An attempt had been made by Richmond P. Hobson and seven sailors to so block the harbor that the Spanish fleet could not come out, but the plan did not prove entirely successful. There was still a passage way, and the American warships, stationed in a semi-circle about the harbor — like huge cats patiently watching a mouse hole — were doubtless hoping that the enemy would venture out.

The morning of July 3, 1898, was clear and calm. On board the American ships preparations were being made for inspection and religious services, for it was Sunday. At the extreme eastern point of the crescent formed by the blockading squadron was the *New York*, the flagship of Rear Admiral Sampson who had been the first captain of the *Iowa*. Far to the west was the *Brooklyn*, one of the fastest of the

American ships, flying the pennant of Commodore W. S. Schley, the second in command. Between the two from east to west lay the *Indiana*, the *Oregon* — just in from her trip around South America — the *Iowa*, and the *Texas*. Smaller craft hovered about. The *New York* was just starting eastward to Siboney where Admiral Sampson was to have a conference with General William R. Shafter.

Suddenly, at nine-thirty-five, the Sabbath calm which lay over the scene was broken, when the *Iowa*, stationed directly opposite the mouth of the harbor, fired a shot from a small gun and raised the signal, "The enemy is attempting to escape". The same signal soon flew from every ship and the *Brooklyn* — the flagship in the absence of the *New York* — signalled, "Clear for action".

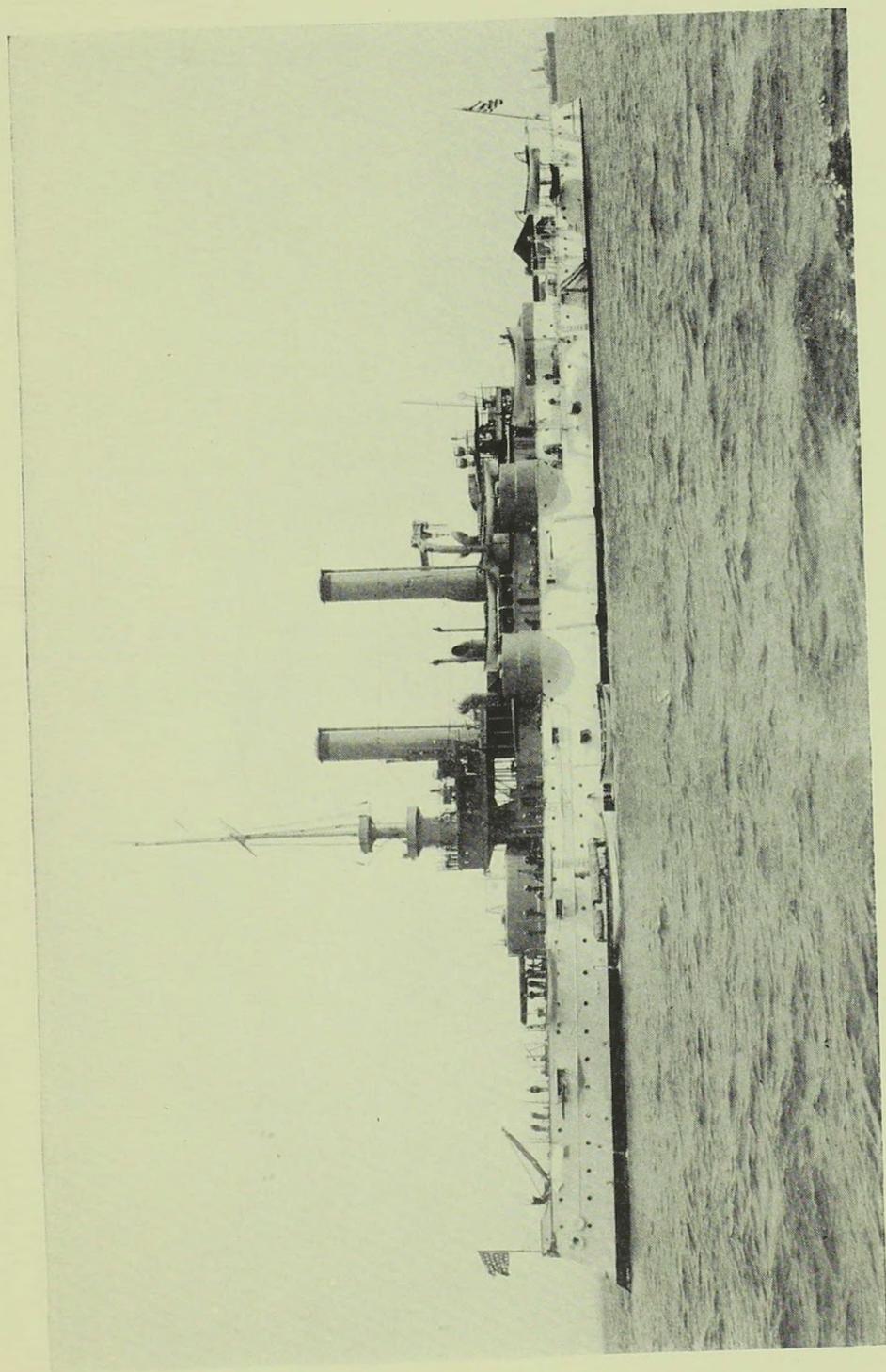
It was no false alarm: the Spanish ships were steaming out of the harbor. At the head, flying the Admiral's pennant, came the *Infanta Maria Teresa*, the red and yellow flag of Spain showing vividly against the green of the sloping Cuban shore. Behind her were the *Vizcaya*, the *Cristobal Colon*, and the *Almirante Oquendo*, followed by the smaller destroyers *Pluton* and *Furor*.

The signal from the flagship was hardly needed. With one accord the American sailors hurried to their places, literally throwing themselves down the ladders in their eagerness to reach their stations, while deep in the holds the engineers and firemen worked frantically to start their engines, for the

American cruisers were, of course, at rest. Almost as one ship the American fleet got into action, the faster warships like the *Brooklyn* and the *Oregon* leading the way. Under a vast cloud of smoke from the guns and smokestacks and later from fires on board the ships, the American squadron pursued the fleeing Spanish cruisers westward along the coast, pouring a rain of shot into whichever of the enemy happened to be within striking distance.

The Spanish ships were supposed to be faster than those of the United States, but the American sailors were enthusiastic and well prepared while the Spanish crews hoped at best for escape and not for victory. One by one the enemy ships, overwhelmed by the accuracy of the American gunners, turned in toward the shore, hoping at least to give the remnants of their men a chance to escape from the fire and shot-swept wrecks.

Nearest the harbor lay the smaller boats, the *Pluton* and *Furor*, and west of them were the burning hulks of the *Maria Teresa* and *Oquendo*. The *Vizcaya* — not long before an official guest in the harbor of New York — and the *Colon*, which had been protected to some extent by her sister ships, continued their desperate flight along the coast, still hoping to outdistance the slower American battle-ships and escape. There was no escape. The *Vizcaya* was soon on fire and American sailors were risking their lives to rescue the enemy from the burning wreck. The *Colon* continued a little farther



THE IOWA

along the coast, and then she too yielded to the combined attack of the *Oregon*, the *Brooklyn*, and the *Texas*. It was a quarter past one.

During the entire battle the American fleet lost only one man killed, and one seriously wounded. The enemy's loss was estimated at 323 killed, 151 wounded, and about 1800 prisoners.

The *Iowa*, having given the alarm, first attacked the *Teresa* in which she lodged two 12-inch shells that wrecked the steam pipes of the vessel and killed a number of the crew. Unable to handle the ship or work the guns in the face of the scalding steam and the fires which were soon raging as shell after shell found the target, the crew of the *Teresa* beached their ship and the *Iowa* for a time turned her guns upon the two destroyers which the converted yacht *Gloucester* was engaging. The smaller boats were soon put out of commission: the *Furor* was sunk and the *Pluton* was driven ashore not more than five miles from Santiago. Before long a shell penetrated one of the boilers of the *Pluton* and a vast geyser-like column of steam rose hundreds of feet in the air.

Leaving the wrecked destroyers, the *Iowa*, with some other battleships, concentrated upon the *Oquendo* and then upon the *Vizcaya*. When it was apparent that these Spanish ships were doomed, the *Indiana* was ordered back to the harbor, lest the *Alvarado* or the *Reina Mercedes* which had remained in the harbor should raid the transports to

the east; the *Iowa* was given permission to remain near the *Vizcaya* to help in the rescue of the crew; and the other ships went on in pursuit of the *Colon*.

Thus it happened that the *Iowa* received on board some two hundred and fifty Spanish prisoners from the sinking *Vizcaya*, including Captain Antonio Eulate. As the Spanish officer was lifted over the side of the *Iowa* the guard presented arms, the officer of the deck saluted, and the Spanish prisoners already on board stood at attention. Captain Eulate slowly rose to his feet, unbuckled his sword belt with some difficulty — for he had been wounded — kissed the hilt of his sword, and presented it to Captain Robley D. Evans, who declined to take the sword, but accepted the surrender and shook hands with the Spanish captain. The crew of the *Iowa*, stripped to the waist, blackened with powder, and covered with perspiration, broke into cheers.

As Captain Eulate was being conducted below for medical attention, he turned toward his wrecked and burning ship, stretched out his hand in farewell, and exclaimed, "Adios, *Vizcaya*". As the words left his lips the magazine of the *Vizcaya* exploded and there rose a column of smoke and steam which was seen fifteen miles away.

But the *Iowa* was to receive a still more distinguished guest that day. Early in the afternoon Admiral Cervera, his son, and a number of other officers were brought on board the *Iowa*, escorted by Commander Richard Wainwright of the *Gloucester*.

The marine guard of eighty men paraded, the officers and crew of the *Vizcaya* were grouped on the quarter deck, while the crew of the *Iowa* clustered over the turrets and superstructure. As the Spanish commander stepped upon the deck, the American sailors manifested their admiration for the bravery of the Spaniards by cheering repeatedly, while Admiral Cervera, scantily clad, bareheaded, and barefooted, just as he had been rescued from the *Teresa*, stood bowing his thanks.

On board the *Iowa* there was nothing to mar the victory. Although she had been in the thick of the fight and had been struck several times by small projectiles and by two 6-inch shells, one of which started a small fire, not a single member of the crew had been killed or even seriously wounded.

The next twenty years in the career of the *Iowa* were uneventful: there was the usual routine of cruising, with frequent periods out of commission. In 1899, when the Iowa delegation met the Fifty-first Iowa Infantry on its return from the Philippine Islands, they attended church services on board the *Iowa*, then commanded by Captain C. F. Goodrich and anchored in the harbor at San Francisco.

A report of the ship for 1901 shows an expenditure of \$431,173.53 for maintenance during the year, about half of which was for the pay of officers and men. In 1907, the *Iowa* was in the squadron assembled off the Virginia coast in honor of the James-

town Exposition, but when the fleet left for its triumphal cruise around the world in December of that year the *Iowa* was left behind: already a new generation had supplanted her.

During the next decade the *Iowa* was on duty only part of the time. In July, 1912, for example, she was sent on a cruise with the naval militia — a warrior turned pedagogue. For several months just preceding the entrance of the United States into the World War, the old *Iowa* was used as a receiving ship, and during the war she was assigned to coast defense.

Finally in 1919, a little more than twenty years after the victory at Santiago, even the name "Iowa" was erased from the records and the old battleship was designated merely as the "B S 4". About this time, the silver service, the gift of the Commonwealth for which the ship had been named, was removed to the Philadelphia navy yard where it still remains. In 1920 the former "pride of the navy" was used as a target for bombing planes, but suffered comparatively little damage.

The final chapter in the career of the *Iowa* was recorded in the Bay of Panama on the twenty-third of March, 1923, almost exactly twenty-seven years after the ship was launched. The veteran battleship had sailed for the last time down the Delaware River from her birthplace at Philadelphia, she had voyaged southward along the coast, and had passed

through the Panama Canal to the waters of the Pacific, where the spring maneuvers of the united American fleet were to be held.

There, surrounded by the new dreadnaughts, the *Iowa* made the supreme sacrifice for the sake of the American navy. Divested of her name, her crew, and her flag, the old warship was sent out under radio control as the target for the guns of the *Mississippi*, the new "queen of the navy"—a practical use for an old ship, perhaps, but unpleasantly suggestive of the treatment accorded aged or injured wolves by the pack. The officers of the fleet, the sailors, and a delegation of civilians, including high officials of the navy and about one hundred Senators and Representatives, were interested spectators.

The faithful *Iowa* responded to the control by wireless "as if the ghost of 'Fighting Bob' [Evans] might be on her bridge, and the spirits of those who manned her at Santiago standing at their battle stations." The sailors on the surrounding ships cheered as the shells, fired at a range of from eight to ten miles, found the target; and the officers watched through their field glasses as the lonely ship dodged and twisted as if conscious of her impending fate. Great water spouts rose where the projectiles struck and dashed over the battered ship. About four o'clock, when it was evident the *Iowa* could not remain afloat much longer, the *Mississippi* commenced using regular service shells at short

range. At last a shell smashed the *Iowa's* wireless attachment and the mortally wounded ship heeled over and began to sink.

The echoes of the big guns died away. The cheers of the sailors on the watching dreadnoughts were hushed; and, as the *Iowa* turned over and her smokestacks disappeared beneath the blue waters of the Pacific, the band of the *Maryland* played the Star Spangled Banner very slowly. Fifteen thousand men of the fleet snapped into salute, while the Secretary of the Navy and the other civilian spectators stood with bared heads. The last bars of the national anthem sounded across the waters just as the waves closed over the *Iowa* and at that moment the *Maryland* fired the first of a salute of twenty-one guns, the final honor to the old battleship. "She was a good ship," said Admiral Hiliary Jones, as he wiped his eyes, "and that was good shooting."

RUTH A. GALLAHER

The Winter of Eighty-One

Imagine winter coming on the fifteenth of October without any warning — coming to stay too, and ushered in by a blizzard that lasted two days. Northwestern Iowa has seen much severe weather, but for snow fall and unrelenting cold the winter of 1880-1881 has had few rivals. A pioneer of O'Brien County, Thomas Barry, relates the following story of that memorable winter.

On October 15, 1880, the morning after we finished threshing, my wife and I struck off for Sheldon, twelve miles away, to get some flour at the mill and to do our winter trading. The air was frosty, the sun hidden, and the sky looked like a big, gray dome settling down over the prairie. From the near-by cornfields we could hear the thump, thump of the ears against the throw-boards of the huskers' wagons. There being no native timber, we were denied the reds and the golds of woodland October: the brown prairie stretched away in every direction as far as the eye could see. Out in the stubble the prairie chickens called, tumble weeds went hurrying on ahead of us, and rabbits bounded away from the road as we passed. Young cottonwoods, set around the farm yards for windbreaks, had lost their tender leaves, so that the straw-thatched barns and unpainted houses peeped between the naked branches.

"Lots of birds flying to-day," my wife remarked, as we jogged along, planning our day's program. The heavens were filled with wild ducks and geese flying swiftly southward.

To make haste we shopped separately, and so were not together when the snow began to fall at two o'clock. The air was so warm that we thought the storm was only a squall, and completed our preparations to return home about five. In the meantime the wind had risen. The snow that had already fallen was picked up and driven through the air with such terrific force that our horses refused to face the gale. Thinking of the children at home we urged them on, but they would not budge. Not until then did we fully realize that a blizzard was upon us, and that we would be forced to remain in town until it was over.

I could hear the wind moan around the rude hotel all night. The windows rattled in their loose frames so that we could not sleep. "God will care for our children," murmured my wife, while my thoughts strayed also to our unprotected stock, for as yet no one was prepared for winter.

The blizzard raged fiercely that night and all the next day, but the second morning dawned calm and clear. Equipped with a large scoopshovel, we began our homeward trip. After leaving the streets of Sheldon, which were somewhat protected by buildings, we hit what we thought ought to be the county line. Our horses, rested and headed toward home,

were anxious enough to get on, but the low, heavy wagon was clumsy in the deep snow.

Before we had gone very far the horses floundered and the wagon stuck in a big drift. For a little while I sat there, overcome by the scene surrounding us. Our friendly, brown landscape of two days ago was transformed into a still, cold, sparkling, white pall that stretched to the horizon in every direction. Cornfields were entirely submerged, straw piles had lost their identity and become mere mounds of snow, while the struggling, man-made groves only served to catch the drifting snow. I had often seen the prairie covered with snow but the feeling of awe and reverence for that spectacle, as I sat there not knowing the fate of all dearest to me, held me spellbound. My wife felt so too, I think, for instead of urging me to begin shoveling out of the drift, she said, "My, how much I'd give for the folks back East to see this sight."

As we plowed and shoveled our way on, while the sun rose high and then began to descend, our fear for those at home became more haunting. Fortunately, the blizzard was not followed by the usual intense cold, but nevertheless our fingers were numb with cold and our backs ached from the shoveling. Our team became more and more exhausted with the heavy pulling and lack of food.

Finally, as the sun was sending its last red darts over the white prairie, we came in sight of our place. We knew it was our home not by any familiar ob-

ject, but by its position from the road. Nothing was to be seen but the tops of our tallest trees. Everything was as still as death, lying under that heavy blanket of snow. In the middle of the yard there was a drift as high as the house. It was the work of only a few minutes to round that drift and reach the door. Inside we found the children all safe, but crying bitterly because they were sure we must be dead.

Our oldest boy, a lad of eleven, had kept the little sisters comfortable. When the blizzard began he had cut the tethers of the cattle that were tied in an open shed, and let them forage with the rest. Under a mound of snow, from which arose a tiny line of steam, we found all our pigs — about forty in number. Only two were dead. Chickens and turkeys went under straw stacks and stayed in holes rooted out by the hogs.

The day after we got home I walked to a German neighbor's house a mile away to inquire about my calves. He had seen nothing of mine but had lost two cows. "Don't valk no more, Tom; dey go dead," he said. Another neighbor who came to my house to borrow flour had seen my calves going with the storm, and I finally found them all safe, near a row of young willows, their backs humped up and their heads stuck in the snow.

Nearly all my stock was saved, but I had no feed. What corn we had husked before the blizzard I stored in the loft of my dwelling for seed. My boy and I gathered a little in sacks for the cattle, but the

snow kept piling up so high that at last we had to abandon the fields. Then I fed oats. It snowed about twice a week all winter.

A mover who was going from O'Brien County into Sioux stopped to feed himself and team. He had husked most of his corn, and had no stock. Since the snow had become so deep, it was difficult for his horses to pull big loads, so in order to make better time he stored some of his corn in my empty crib.

As the winter wore on, my oats ran out. Only my seed corn remained and it would not go far. The pigs squealed with hunger. "Save that seed corn," said my wife, "feed them the corn from the crib and when the owner comes back give him the pigs, but don't let them starve." I went then and fed another man's corn to my hogs.

During that terrible snow-bound winter we had no wood or coal for fuel. But the prairie slew came to our rescue. Early in the fall we had stacked some slew grass in the yard, and this, twisted tightly, served for fuel the entire winter. It required a good deal of time and energy to twist enough prairie hay to keep us warm, even for a day. Children soon learned the art and worked faithfully at the irksome task. It was a common sight to see piles of twisted grass near the doors of prairie homes.

My children, usually healthy, took sick in mid-winter with a high fever. When our home remedies failed I walked seven miles to Hospers with butter and eggs to exchange for medicine—we had no

money. I struck off in the morning through the snow. Spurred on by anxiety for the children, I was utterly exhausted when I reached the store. The storekeeper — who was druggist too — allowed me four cents a dozen for the eggs and four cents a pound for the butter. He tried to jolly me, saying that I must be out of tobacco to walk so far, but I told him the symptoms of the sick children, secured some medicine, and started for home just as it was beginning to snow.

For an hour I trudged along. Thicker and thicker came the blinding snow. I could not see. The tall grass which stuck up through the snow was my only guide. The dog that was with me seemed bewildered, following so closely he impeded my progress. I became numb with cold as the flying snow sifted into my clothes. After a time I gave up trying to find landmarks and depended upon the mercy of God to lead me to some shelter. I kept walking and finally, toward morning, struck a grove which fortunately proved to be my own. I threw myself down to rest and became so stiff I was scarcely able to move for three days. The children were a little better, but my wife, who had exhausted her strength caring for them and keeping the house warm during my absence, became ill. Since no one was able to bring in the slew grass, we were forced to carry down our seed corn and burn it.

Those of us whose cattle were spared supplied our less fortunate neighbors with milk. The milk,

frozen solid even in the house, was thawed enough to remove it from the container, then it was wrapped in cloth or paper and sent where it was needed.

Roads were blocked almost all the time. Just as soon as a path was broken, fresh snow and wind would wipe out the trail. Many a morning I was forced to shovel my way out of my dwelling. The only time a person ventured from home was for an occasional trip, usually on foot, to the nearest town or to a neighbor's to borrow or to lend. My wife — whose father was a railroad surgeon in Massachusetts — was very proficient in aiding the sick and she was often called upon to lend a hand in caring for needy neighbors.

There was only one social function in the county that winter so far as I know. Mrs. Bert McMillan, near Sheldon, had a rag bee. Three bob sled loads attended the party, making a long detour to follow a broken trail. About two o'clock it began snowing; the party immediately broke up; and the three bobs, keeping in a line, set out for home. They got lost and about ten o'clock came to Whitmore's place, where they spent the night. It was fully a week before some of the party reached home.

Toward evening, on fair days, I often rounded the big drift in my yard and reached a clearing to the south; then, facing the east, I would gaze over the soft, white prairie to where the gray sky closed down on our deserted world and wonder what was going on back East. I thought of the anxiety of our

kin, the companionship of old friends, and tried to imagine what was occupying the minds of politicians and legislators while we fought for mere existence. How quiet that prairie was: only a slight clicking from the frozen twigs of the cottonwoods broke the stillness. The wind seemed to be resting, regenerating its forces, waiting only for the stimulus of fresh snow, when it would again rage mercilessly and, after lashing us to shelter, would howl and moan while it pelted the snow against our dwellings and forced it in through every crevice.

We marked off each day on our calendar and, like everything else, that winter came to an end. Spring sunshine and spring duties met a hearty welcome. We crept out from our shelter like the badgers on the prairie, shook off our winter coma, greeted distant neighbors, and were thankful we survived.

When the snow melted our roofs went in with the weight. The corn which had been left in the fields had become soft and sour: neither cattle nor chickens would eat it. When my mover returned for his corn I told him what had been done with it and offered him the pigs. He smiled and said: "I don't want any of your hogs, but lend me your breaking plow and I'll call it square."

JOSEPHINE BARRY DONOVAN

Tesson's Apple Orchard

When the first settlers began to filter into southeastern Iowa during the early thirties of the last century, they were struck with wonder and amazement on finding, in the primeval forests skirting the banks of the Mississippi River, evidence of an earlier habitation of the white man. Near the head of the Des Moines Rapids in the Mississippi was an old apple orchard. Already the trees had reached maturity and many of them had fallen into decay; some had been toppled over by storms and second growth saplings were springing up about their roots.

Whence came these apple trees? Whose hand had planted and protected them against the encroachments of the more hardy varieties of native timber with which they were promiscuously intermingled? It was thought improbable that the Indians, owing to their roving and shiftless disposition, had ever engaged in horticultural pursuits. Evidently some white men must have preceded the early settlers in a futile attempt at colonization and permanent settlement in that locality.

One hundred and thirty years elapsed between the time when Louis Joliet with Father Marquette one day in June, 1673, paddled their frail birch-bark canoes out of the mouth of the Wisconsin River onto the bosom of the mighty Mississippi, with a joy that

they could not express, and the time when the vast, unknown territory west of the Father of Waters came into the possession of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase. During this period, while Louisiana was under the rule of Spain, three land grants were made looking toward the permanent development of small areas within the boundaries of the present State of Iowa.

In 1788 a French-Canadian by the name of Julien Dubuque obtained permission from the Fox Indians to mine lead in the vicinity of the present city of Dubuque. For eight years he worked industriously, but realizing that the Indian grant did not fully establish his claim to land in the Spanish domain, he secured a formal confirmation of his mining rights from the Spanish Governor General in 1796, together with the possession of a piece of territory twenty-one miles long and nine miles wide along the Mississippi. Another undertaking was that of Basil Giard, a friend of Dubuque, who about 1796 took possession of and made improvements upon a strip of land a mile and a half wide and extending six miles east and west opposite the village of Prairie du Chien. The Spanish Lieutenant Governor of Upper Louisiana made a concession of this tract to Giard in 1800. Upon this old Spanish land grant, probably on the site of the Indian trading post Giard established, is now located the town of McGregor.

The third venture in the ownership of Iowa land was hazarded by Louis Honoré Tesson, the son of a

French-Canadian tailor who lived in St. Louis. Like so many of his race, Tesson seems to have responded to the lure of the wild. He voyaged up and down the Mississippi, traded with the Indians, and made the acquaintance of other hardy adventurers engaged in the same occupation. Perhaps he knew Dubuque and Giard, and learned of land grants from them. In the course of his travels, Tesson probably spent some time at the large Sac Indian village at the head of the Des Moines Rapids on the Iowa side. Here he seems to have made friends among the Indians for if they did not prevail upon him to come and establish a trading post near by, they at least were not hostile to the project.

This site, situated on a beautiful level terrace of second bottom land, fertile and picturesque, probably appealed to Tesson. A high prominence at the rear afforded a magnificent view of the river for miles in either direction, while below was an excellent landing for boats. Being about midway between the Spanish mines (Dubuque) and the seat of government at St. Louis, the place gave abundant promise of being a splendid location for a trading post, both from the standpoint of the Indians and those who plied the river. Moreover, the position at the head of the rapids was strategic as the beginning or end of a long portage.

With these considerations in mind, Tesson approached the Spanish government where his proposal to establish a trading post was favorably received.

In the past, Spanish traders had not been particularly successful in competition with the British, and it may have been for this reason that the officials at St. Louis were willing to foster any enterprise that gave promise of promoting the interests of Spain in the New World. On March 30, 1799, Louis Honoré Tesson received permission from Zenon Trudeau, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Upper Louisiana, to make a settlement upon 7056 arpents of land. According to the terms of this permit, "Mr. Louis Honoré [Tesson] is permitted to settle" at the head of the Des Moines Rapids, "and having effected his establishment he will write to the Governor General to obtain the concession of a suitable area in order to validate said establishment, and at the same time to make him useful in the trade in peltries in that country, to watch the savages and to keep them in the fealty which they owe His Majesty." He was also placed under obligations to plant trees and sow seeds, to instruct the Indians in the art of agriculture, and to spread the tenets of the Catholic faith. His conduct in these respects was to "serve him as a recommendation to be favored by the Government in such a way as to let him have the benefit of whatever he may do to contribute to the increase of the commerce in which he is to participate".

In order to secure a clear title to his land through confirmation by the Governor General, Tesson set about fulfilling the terms of the grant. Having pur-

chased some supplies in St. Louis, largely on credit, and obtained about a hundred seedling apple trees of several varieties at St. Charles, he proceeded on his northward journey, transporting the small apple trees, it is said, on pack mules. His family may have accompanied him upon this trip, for it is recorded that he married Theresa Creely in 1788 and that a son bearing the name of Louis Honoré was born in St. Louis about 1790.

Sometime in the summer of 1799 Tesson reached the site of his land grant. There he erected buildings, built some fences, cultivated a small patch, and planted his apple trees.

For a number of years he lived at the head of the rapids, fraternizing with the Indians, and trading in liquor, pelts, and baubles. Life on the very outskirts of civilization was probably not altogether monotonous. Dubuque, Giard, and other itinerant traders must have stopped on their way to St. Louis. There was plenty of excitement when the ice went out of the river, when the flood waters rose, and when the Indians went on the warpath. Living was easy. The river teemed with delectable fish, while game was abundant. Quail, prairie chickens, turkeys, and deer were commonplace. Wild strawberries, blackberries, and grapes varied the menu — the apple trees were probably too young to bear.

All of the circumstances pertaining to Tesson's undertaking were not so rosy. He seems to have been lacking in tact and general business ability. At

all events he incurred the enmity of some of the Indians and was no match for the shrewd British traders. His trading operations failed, and he fell deeper and deeper into debt at St. Louis. After four years of patience and forbearance on the part of his creditors, all of his property was attached. According to Spanish law and upon the authority of an order from the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Louisiana, P. A. Tablaux, acting as attorney for Joseph Robidoux, appeared unexpectedly before the door of Tesson's house on March 27, 1803, and there, accompanied by two witnesses and in the presence of Tesson, seized the property and gave notice that it would be sold in public at the door of the parish church in St. Louis for the benefit of the creditors. The auction occurred in customary form at "the conclusion of high mass, the people coming out in great number, after due notice given by the public crier of the town in a high and intelligible voice, on three successive Sundays, May 1, 8, 15, 1803". On the first Sunday only "twenty-five dollars was bid; on the second, thirty dollars; on the third, the last adjudication, one hundred dollars; and subsequently, one hundred and fifty dollars by Joseph Robidoux", Tesson's chief creditor. This offer was "repeated until twelve o'clock at noon; and the public retiring, the said Robidoux demanded a deed of his bid. It was cried at one o'clock, at two o'clock, and at three o'clock, and no other persons presenting themselves, the said land and appurtenances were adjudged to

him for the mentioned price of one hundred and fifty dollars, and having to receive this sum himself, he gave no security."

Robidoux, finding himself possessed of property for which he had no immediate need, permitted Tesson to remain on the tract for some time thereafter. It is not known whether Tesson was finally ejected from the land, or whether he left of his own accord. He was still in the vicinity in 1805 when Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike explored the Mississippi River from St. Louis to its source. Pike began the ascent of the Des Moines Rapids in the Mississippi on the morning of August 20th. After passing the first shoal, they met Mr. Ewing who had come to assist in negotiating the rapids. He was accompanied by "a French interpreter, four chiefs and 15 men of the Sac nation, in their canoes, bearing a flag of the United States." The interpreter, Lieutenant Pike explained, was "Monsieur Louis Tisson", who had "calculated on going with me as my interpreter", and who "appeared much disappointed when I told him I had no instructions to that effect." He also promised to discover mines, "which no person knew but himself; but, as I conceive him much of a hypocrite, and possessing great gasconism, I am happy he was not chosen for my voyage."

On the death of Joseph Robidoux in 1809, the Tesson land, including all buildings and appurtenances thereto, was acquired by Thomas F. Riddick at an auction held on April 9, 1810. Riddick paid sixty-

three dollars for the property — the highest and last bid. Nearly thirty years later the legality of this transaction was confirmed and Tesson's title acquired in 1799 was established by the United States government when a land patent was issued covering six hundred and forty acres of the tract. This was the first patent to Iowa land and established a title record that dates back to 1799 — the oldest in the State.

From the time when the property passed into the hands of Riddick in 1810, the thread of the story is lost until eleven years later, when Isaac R. Campbell explored the southern portion of the Iowa country and later mentioned in his memoirs that at that date Chief Cut Nose lived in a village at the head of the Des Moines Rapids, near the site of the old establishment of Louis Tesson. "Below the creek running into the river," he writes, "on the lower side of the Indian town, were the remains of a deserted trading house, around which was growing a number of apple trees." Tesson himself had dropped from sight altogether. At what time he forsook the environs of his hapless undertaking, where he went, what he did, and where he died are unknown facts.

J. P. Cruikshank says that his father, Alexander Cruikshank, visited the old orchard in the summer of 1832. At that time about fifteen trees were bearing, though the fruit was of a very inferior quality. That the apples should be poor was not surprising, as it was obvious that the trees had been neglected for many, many years.

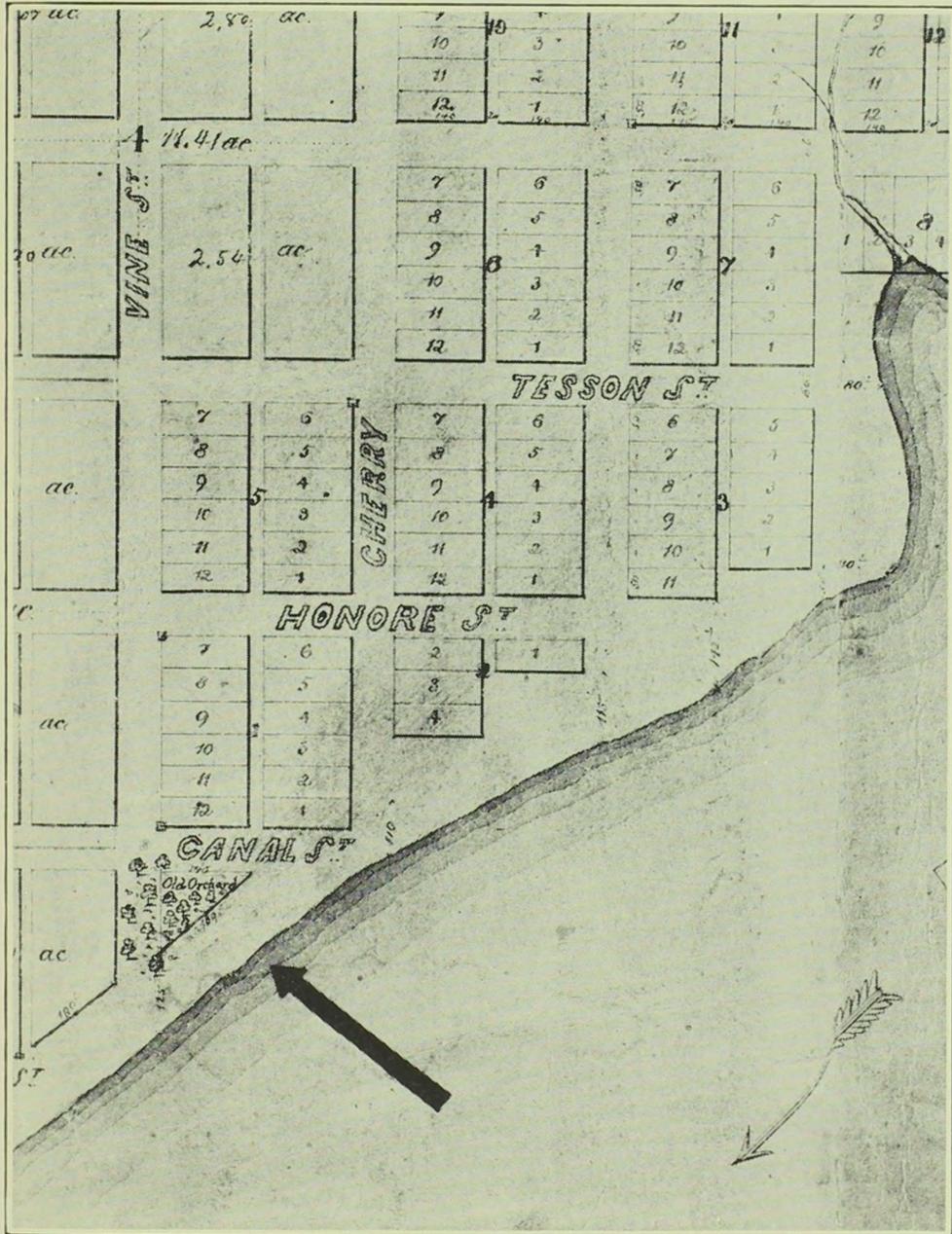
In the year 1834 the original Fort Des Moines was established by the United States government on the Tesson grant. The buildings of the fort were immediately adjacent to and north of the old apple orchard. At that time there were "many traces of a former settlement around the camp, the most prominent of which was the old orchard of apple-trees a short distance below. The orchard at that time contained some ten or fifteen trees in bearing condition. The fruit was very ordinary, being a common seedling. The Indians were in the habit of visiting the orchard, and gathering the fruit in its green state" so that none of it ever matured. There were also "remains of dirt, or adobe, chimneys visible in the same locality; which goes to prove that a settlement had existed there at some former period."

During the three years that the old fort was maintained, a number of men illustrious in the history of Iowa and the nation were there. The three companies of United States Dragoons, which constituted the garrison, were commanded by Stephen W. Kearny, famous western explorer. Albert M. Lea, in command of one of the companies that made a thousand-mile march across the prairies of Iowa and Minnesota in 1835, published the first popular description of the Iowa country. Zachary Taylor and Jefferson Davis were stationed at Fort Crawford at the time Fort Des Moines was established and may have visited the dragoons down the river. In 1837 Lieutenant Robert E. Lee, for whom Lee

County is said to have been named, was sent by the War Department to survey the Des Moines Rapids of the Mississippi for the purpose of making recommendations toward the improvement of the navigation of the river.

During the same year, 1837, when Fort Des Moines was abandoned, the town of Montrose was laid out by D. W. Kilbourne on the site of the old apple orchard. Unfortunately for Kilbourne, however, he failed to secure a perfect title to the land before beginning his operations, and the heirs of Thomas F. Riddick brought suit against him for possession. During the trial Kilbourne attempted to discredit Tesson and his activities altogether, bringing as a witness, Red Bird, who claimed that he himself had planted the apple trees and that Tesson was an impostor and a "che-wal-is-ki" (a rascal), who had never bought an acre of land. Red Bird's story was in part substantiated by Black Hawk but the court upheld the Tesson title to the land, giving the Riddick heirs possession. The case eventually found its way to the Supreme Court of the United States which affirmed the decisions of the lower courts.

As the town of Montrose developed, the Riddick heirs disposed of their inheritance to various people. The old orchard site at last came into the possession of George B. Dennison who, in 1874, conveyed the plot to the town of Montrose, to be held in trust for the Old Settlers' Association. The intention at that time was to erect an ornamental iron fence around



THE TESSON APPLE ORCHARD SITE

THIS MAP IS REPRODUCED FROM THE PLAT OF MONTROSE MADE BY D. BALDWIN
 IN 1853 FOR THE HEIRS OF THOMAS F. RIDDICK

the premises and otherwise improve the appearance of the grounds, but these well-meant plans did not materialize, and only spasmodic efforts have since been made. None of the trees survive. The last one, according to the memory of the older residents of Montrose, died or disappeared nearly half a century ago.

In 1912 J. P. Cruikshank earnestly endeavored to rally sufficient interest to save the old orchard site from inundation by Lake Cooper, soon to be created by the completion of the Keokuk dam. It was impossible to inspire sufficient enthusiasm in the project, however, and during the second week of June, 1913, when the flood gates of the great dam were closed, the bleak, swirling waters of the Mississippi were transformed into a placid lake which slowly enveloped the greater portion of the historic spot.

BEN HUR WILSON

Comment by the Editor

HISTORICAL MEMOIRS

The facts of local history are usually more elusive than the circumstances of great events. Episodes of general interest have obvious effects, leave definite records, and serve as subjects of written description or comment; while the affairs of every-day life leave little specific evidence for the historian. Most people attach no significance to the daily routine, yet the common customs, foibles, and fancies are the substance of the times. Not once in a generation does a Samuel Pepys record his rising betimes, his very merry dining out, the purchase of a new "coat of the fashion" which pleased him well, his stint at the office — "and so early to bed, to-morrow being washing day."

In a new, sparsely inhabited country historical materials are apt to be scarce. Pioneers have little time or inclination to keep diaries. There are few or no newspapers to chronicle events; letters written to friends are usually lost or inaccessible; while public records are confined to a few subjects such as office holding, taxes, and the ownership of land. For these reasons the memory of the people who have seen and heard is often the only source for the facts of local history.

Reminiscences are sometimes unreliable; but inaccuracy is not an inherent characteristic of personal memoirs. Recollections can usually be verified, and they have the additional merit of vividness and first-hand information. It was a simple task, for example, to find in the weather reports that the winter of 1880-1881 was unusually severe, that the snow fall was very heavy, and that the velocity of the wind was sixty miles an hour on October 16th — the day of the blizzard in northwestern Iowa.

PROBABILITY OF TRUTH IN TRADITION

There is danger of placing too much faith in reminiscence, especially if it departs from the field of personal observation and invades the realm of tradition. Take an account of the disposal of Louis Tesson's old Spanish land grant in 1803. It has been alleged that the transaction was conducted in strict observance of the ancient Civil Law of Rome — that a twig of a tree and a clod of the earth were actually passed from the hand of the owner to the garment of the purchaser, who held up the corner of his cloak to receive the evidences of his new possessions. No one can positively prove that such a performance did not occur, yet no evidence can be found to substantiate the tale. The tradition is possible, but highly improbable.

Some stories of early days, which have not been completely confirmed, are not only within the range of possibility but are probable as well. The conclu-

sion that Tesson set out the old apple orchard which bears his name is based almost entirely on probability. It can not be asserted beyond the shadow of a doubt that he actually planted the trees which were later found upon his land. No record of that fact has yet been found.

There are at least three other possible explanations of the origin of the old orchard, none of which, however, are as plausible as the Tesson version. It is conceivable that the Indians set out the trees; but that is incompatible with Indian character. William Ewing, who was stationed across the river by the United States government as an Indian sub-agent, may have been responsible, for one of his duties was to teach the arts of agriculture to the Indians who lived at the head of the Des Moines Rapids on the Iowa side of the Mississippi. In 1806 Nicolas Boilvin was appointed Indian agent with headquarters at this same Sac village. He also was ordered to teach agriculture to the Indians by precept and example. "You should early procure Garden seeds, peach and other fruit stones, and apple seeds", advised the Secretary of War. "A Garden should be established for the most useful vegetables, and nurseries planted with fruit trees; for the purpose of distributing the most useful seeds and trees among such of the Chiefs as will take care to cultivate them."

It is unlikely that either Ewing or Boilvin would have located the orchard on the only piece of pri-

vately owned land in the vicinity. And so, in the absence of positive proof to the contrary, the most probable explanation may still be accepted and the credit for the first horticultural endeavor in Iowa may still be ascribed to Louis Tesson.

WHO WAS TESSON

If events are sometimes difficult to ascertain, how much more frequently are the names and identity of people lost to subsequent generations. Rare indeed is the man who can name his eight great grandparents. Of the millions who have lived and died only a few are known to the world.

Who was this Louis Honoré Tesson, whose surname is spelled in various ways and appears as Honoré almost as often as Tesson? For a few years he came upon the stage of Iowa history as a conspicuous land owner, associated with merchants and public officials, and then made his exit. No one cared whence he came, and no one knows where he went. He was only a minor actor in one of the scenes of the tremendous drama of the Great Valley.

Elliott Coues says that three Tessons lived in the Mississippi Valley in 1805. "Louis Tesson Honoré 1st, b. Canada, 1734, d. St. Louis, 1807, aged 73; married Magdalena Peterson, b. 1739, d. St. Louis, 1812. The family came to St. Louis from Kaskaskia. Among 8 children was — Louis Tesson Honoré 2d, eldest son; he married (1) Marie Duchouquette, (2) Theresa Creely, in 1788; by the latter he had Louis

Tesson Honoré 3d, b. St. Louis about 1790; married Amaranthe Dumoulin; d. there Aug. 20th, 1827."

Since the days of Pike and the fur traders, the Tessons have passed into the obscurity of commonalty whence they came. The later history of Iowa affords only occasional glimpses of men bearing the name of Tesson, and there is no assurance that they are related to the owner of the old Spanish land grant in Lee County.

When the Indians ceded the Half-breed Tract to the United States in 1824, a Louis Tesson witnessed the signing of the treaty. The names of Michael, Francis, and Edward Tesson appear in subsequent records of the Half-breed Tract. For many years a Joseph Tesson, born in Iowa in 1841 of part French parentage, resided with the Meskwaki Indians near Tama and served in the capacity of tribal interpreter. No doubt there are others, and hither and yon the descendants of Louis Tesson are living to-day though perchance they have never heard of their forefather who lived in Iowa under the reign of King Charles IV of Spain.

J. E. B.

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