

The
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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Over the Rapids

Almost as by magic the canoes of Indians and traders, which for years had quietly glided up and down the Father of Waters, gave way to the steamboats and barges of modern commerce. While Iowa was still a Territory and before the advent of railroads, steamboat traffic on the Mississippi had become the principal means of transportation for the produce of the great valley. As the country developed, steamboating grew into a major industry with a rapidity seldom if ever paralleled in the history of transportation. There was glamour and pride of achievement in life on the Mississippi in those virulent days.

On the Upper Mississippi there were two rapids which, when the river was in its lower stages, seriously menaced navigation. In river parlance they were known as the "Upper" or "Rock" Rapids above Rock Island and the "Lower" or "Des

Moines'' Rapids, located a short distance above the mouth of the Des Moines River between Keokuk and Montrose. Of the two the Des Moines Rapids constituted the more formidable obstacle. According to Robert E. Lee, who made a detailed survey of both rapids in the autumn of 1837 for the Department of War, the Des Moines Rapids extended a little over eleven miles and had a fall of over twenty-four feet. There the Mississippi flowed, he reported, "with great velocity over an irregular bed of blue limestone, reaching from shore to shore, at all times covered with water, and through which many crooked channels have been worn by the action of the current. Its longitudinal slope not being uniform, but raised at several places above its general elevation, divides the whole distance into as many pools or sections. The passage over these reefs becomes, during low stages of the river, very difficult, in consequence of the shoalness of the water, its great fall and velocity, and the narrow and winding channels through them; as the river rises, its surface becomes nearer and nearer parallel to a plane tangent to the highest of these points, its extreme fall is diminished, and the only impediment consists in the rapidity of the current."

When the river was at its lower stages these rapids baffled the earliest explorers and fur traders, and no doubt proved a barrier to the redmen as well. Father François Xavier, writing in 1721 from hearsay, states that a "league above the mouth of the

Moingona, there are two *rapids* or strong currents of a considerable length in the Mississippi, where passengers are obliged to unload and carry their pirogues''. From this statement it would seem that even then, less than fifty years after the discovery of the upper river by Joliet and Marquette, there had come into existence a well-established custom of lightering boats over the rapids.

With the development of the fur trade a village of Sac and Fox Indians, with a considerable number of half-breeds among them, took up their abode at the head of the rapids about the year 1770. The chief occupation of these Indians was the service of guiding itinerant traders up and down the river and especially over the rapids. Luggage and merchandise were unloaded and the rugged braves, sometimes assisted by a mule but more often by their squaws, carried the cargo along the shore to the other end of the rapids. In return for these services they were paid in blankets, baubles, firearms, and whisky.

In 1803 the United States came into possession of the country bordering the Mississippi on the west. Two years later, during the summer of 1805, Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike came up the river from St. Louis in a large keel boat propelled by sails and oars. On the morning of August 20th he arrived at the foot of the Des Moines Rapids. After having passed the first shoal with great difficulty he was met by a party of Sac lightermen consisting of four chiefs

and fifteen men in three canoes. With them was William Ewing, an Indian agent stationed at the head of the rapids, and Louis Tesson who six years before had obtained a Spanish land grant, set up a trading establishment, and planted an apple orchard near the Indian village. They "took out 13 of my heaviest barrels," wrote Lieutenant Pike, "and put two of their men in the barge to pilot us up."

Pike described the rapids as being eleven miles long, "with successive ridges and shoals extending from shore to shore. The first has the greatest fall and is the most difficult to ascend. The channel, a bad one, is on the east side in passing the two first bars; then passes under the edge of the third; crosses to the west, and ascends on that side, all the way to the Sac village."

In time keel boats, which were widely used by the immigrants who came to the Iowa country, were supplanted by steamboats. The *Western Engineer* was the first steamer to reach the Des Moines Rapids. *Niles' Weekly Register* for July 24, 1819, described her arrival at St. Louis and went on to say that the bow of this stern-wheel craft "exhibits the form of a huge serpent, black and scaly, rising out of the water from under the boat, his head as high as the deck, darted forward, his mouth open, vomiting smoke, and apparently carrying the boat on his back. From under the boat, at its stern, issues a stream of foaming water, dashing violently along. All the machinery is hid. Three small brass field

pieces, mounted on wheel carriages, stand on the deck. The boat is ascending the rapid stream at the rate of 3 miles an hour. Neither wind or human hands are seen to help her; and, to the eye of ignorance, the illusion is complete, that a monster of the deep carries her on his back, smoking with fatigue, and lashing the waves with violent exertion." The vessel carried an expedition sent by the national government to explore the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and during the following summer of 1820 it proceeded up the Mississippi to the Des Moines Rapids but made no attempt to go farther.

Three years later the steamboat *Virginia* performed the epoch-making feat of ascending over the rapids, the first steam-propelled craft to accomplish the passage. This boat was about one hundred and eighteen feet long, twenty-two feet wide, and had a carrying capacity of about one hundred and sixty tons. She left St. Louis on May 2, 1823, bound for Fort Snelling with supplies. On the evening of May 6th, according to J. C. Beltrami, a noted Italian traveller who was on board, the vessel set out from Fort Edward but soon returned on account of being too heavily laden to "make a very difficult and dangerous passage at a place called the Middle of the Rapids of the Moine, nine miles above the Fort. By great good luck we escaped from a rock which might have dashed our steam-boat to pieces; it was only slightly damaged." The following day was spent in preparation for another attempt at negoti-

ating the rapids, probably by lightening some of the cargo over, and on the eighth the boat made the ascent "though not without difficulty".

Very soon, encouraged no doubt by the outcome of this first venture, other steamers attempted to run the rapids, and it is recorded that not all were as successful in their efforts as was the *Virginia*. The *Mandan*, after being on the river "forty days *en route* from New Orleans", arrived at the foot of the rapids, "which she attempted to ascend, but could get no higher than Filly Rock, on account of heavy draught and the want of a correct knowledge of the channel by the pilot." Later, however, her efforts were crowned with greater success and on at least one trip it is known that she reached Fort Snelling.

Within the next six or seven years steamboats became common on the river above the rapids and several began to operate on regular schedules. The business of river transportation gradually assumed the character of an organized industry. It appears that the *Virginia*, *Neiville*, *Rufus Putnam*, *Mandan*, *Indiana*, *Lawrence*, *Express*, *Eclipse*, *Josephine*, and *Fulton* were the first ten steamboats to go over the Des Moines Rapids and reach the head of navigation at the Falls of St. Anthony. Other steamers, including the *Pike*, *Red Rover*, *Chieftain*, *Enterprise*, *Mechanic*, *Java*, *Shamrock*, *Mexico*, *Warrior*, *Dubuque*, *Winnebago*, *Wisconsin*, *Olive Branch*, and the *William Wallace*, plied the Mississippi along the eastern border of the Iowa country. These pioneer

steamboats were commanded by such men as Joseph Throckmorton, Thomas F. Flaherty, John Shellcross, Henry Crossle, George W. Atchison, M. Littleton, James May, and J. Clark — names that are famous in the early annals of steamboating on the Mississippi. River transportation developed apace and became a very prominent factor in the marvelously rapid settlement of the Black Hawk Purchase.

Hand in hand with the growth of the steamboat traffic developed the business of lightering. By 1830 the Indians were being crowded out by white men, and five years later lightering had assumed the proportions of a stable, well-organized industry. Towns which became the seat of this industry naturally sprang up at the head and the foot of the rapids. In 1832 Jenifer T. Sprigg made a survey of the Half-breed Tract and laid out a square mile at the head of the rapids on the Tesson land grant and another in 1833 at the foot of the rapids for town sites. The commercial importance of these places, where Montrose and Keokuk are now located, was noted in a letter from John W. Johnson to the Secretary of War in 1833, and the comment was added that during periods of "low water the steamboats cannot pass that rapid, and are compelled to unload at those two places, which makes those situations more valuable than any other part of the reservation".

With respect to steamboating over the rapids the

depth of the water was classified in four stages, each presenting essentially different conditions. First there was the "high stage" during the spring and early summer months when all boats went over the rapids fully loaded. At this stage, of course, lightering was not necessary. At the "normal stage" the smaller steamboats did not need to resort to lightering, but the vessels of deeper draught were compelled to unload at least a part of their cargo on to lighter-barges which they then pushed over the rapids. The lightermen were employed simply as stevedores and were called "ratters". The river was said to be at "low stage" or "floating stage" when all steamers were compelled to unload and transfer their freight on lighters to vessels waiting at the other end of the rapids. Just before "low stage" was reached the steamboat companies were accustomed to arrange their boats above and below the rapids with respect to size and the amount of draught, those of deepest draught below and the lighter boats above in order to take advantage of the shallower water of the Upper Mississippi. The fourth, or "very low stage", was too low even for the lighters to operate and at this stage freight had to be transported around the rapids on land. In the earlier years the freight was carried along the river bank on the backs of men and burros, while the passengers walked, but after roads were built four and six horse wagons were employed for freight and the passengers rode in handsome stagecoaches. Still

later the construction of a railroad again altered the method of portaging.

The lightering business was a seasonal occupation which seldom lasted more than three months when the river was at low stage, usually during the months of July, August, and September but sometimes beginning in June and lasting until November. A majority of the men engaged in lightering disdained to take up any regular occupation during the remainder or greater portion of the year, preferring to loaf until they could again find employment at their favorite occupation or "profession" as they considered it. Perhaps a few would condescend to work several weeks in the winter putting up ice or to do odd jobs at the brewery to obtain free beer. In the spring they would go out into the hard maple forests which skirted the river all the way between Montrose and Keokuk, and help the half-breeds make maple sugar.

In running the rapids the lighters were loaded with great care under the personal supervision of the pilot or a trustworthy assistant. First a row of sacks, barrels, or boxes was laid the entire length of the boat down the center. Then wings were built on each side. Every precaution was taken to see that the cargo was properly balanced. Frequent measurements were made with a hook-gauge to see that the water line was not too near the top of the boat at any point. The loading also depended upon the stage of the river above low water mark and upon

the character of the cargo. If the material being handled was light and bulky the space in the hold of the lighter was sometimes filled to capacity, in which case a bail-way had to be left at intervals to enable the crew to bail out any water that might seep through the bottom of the boat.

The lighters were manned by experienced crews, generally consisting of three men — two oarsmen, one on each side, and a third, called the “gouger”, who manipulated the sweep-oar at the stern as on lumber and log rafts. In addition, a special rapids pilot was in charge.

Piloting a Mississippi River steamer in the old days was nothing less than a fine art, and the rapids pilots were masters of their craft. They possessed marvelous skill, amazing knowledge, and resourcefulness equal to almost any emergency. They knew the exact location of every shoal, ripple, swirl, ledge, rock, and snag in the entire eleven miles of channel. They were absolutely familiar with every feature of the rapids in high water and low, in the dark as well as in the light. Indeed, that was part of their business and their success depended upon the accuracy of their knowledge and their skill in manipulating the vessels.

Intense rivalry existed among the pilots, and many a reputation was made by some act of heroism or marred by some circumstance over which the pilot had absolutely no control. Occasionally bitter jealousies sprang up and malicious trickery was re-

sorted to in order to play even with the other fellow. Pilots have been known to roll a small boulder off the stern of the boat at some strategic location in the channel where a hated rival on the next boat coming down would be likely to get "hung up" on it, to his great surprise and consternation.

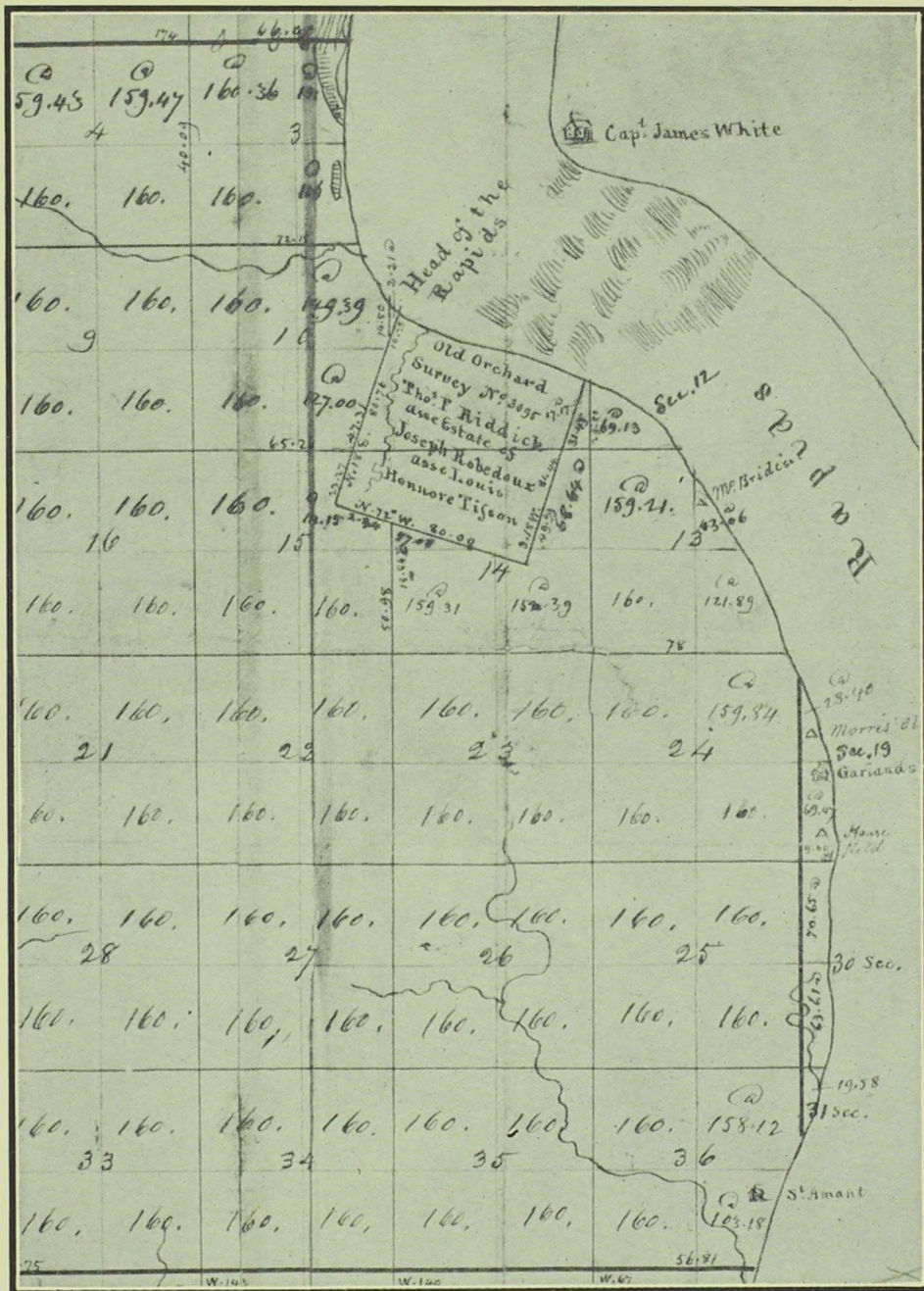
Running the Des Moines Rapids was always dangerous and scarcely a day passed without some narrow escape on the rocks, while almost every year witnessed a major accident frequently involving the loss of life and boats. As early as 1828 the *Mexico* struck Steamboat Rock but managed to navigate as far as Nashville before she keeled over. The wreck lay there partially submerged for forty years. The *Mechanic* and *West Newton* met a similar fate on Mechanic's Rock, while the *Cornelia*, the *Northwest*, the *J. W. Van Sant*, and the *Alex Mitchell* were also wrecked in the rapids. Many a proud packet has been "hung up" on the rocks and floated off by sinking a lighter-barge on each side, fastening them securely to the vessel, plugging the holes in the sunken barges, and then pumping out the water. Thus the steamboat was lifted sufficiently to free it from the reef. Only the most foolhardy captain ventured to subject his craft to the perils of the rapids during the "floating stage" and then only under the most urgent circumstances. On such occasions the steamer was lightened as much as possible and a "sound and buoy" route was laid out in advance. This was done by a rapids pilot who pre-

ceded in a yawl, sounding every foot of the way and setting buoys at short intervals.

There were many famous rapids pilots, but among them the names of "Sip" Owens, John Barber, Joshua Gore, Valentine Speaks, Robert Farris, and his son, Charles H. Farris, were prominent as men of conspicuous ability. The latter held the record for taking a steamer over the rapids in sixty-one minutes.

The downward freight consisted principally of sacked wheat, oats, potatoes, onions, a little corn, and considerable "Galena cotton", as the lead ore from the mines of Dubuque was called. The up-bound freight was of an entirely different character, consisting chiefly of farm implements, stoves, machinery, salt, coffee, sugar, and occasionally some gold coin to pay Indian annuities at the government agencies. Immigrants' belongings — a motley lot of odds and ends such as household furniture, bedding, and livestock — made up no small part of the northward traffic.

It was not unusual to see such boats as the *Muscantine*, with Captain Jim West in charge, steaming down the river with her decks loaded to the guards and pushing from one to five barges loaded with grain. The formation of these flotillas was as follows: if there was only one barge, it was pushed directly ahead of the boat; if two, they were lashed side by side as a pair ahead of the steamer; if three, they were arranged with one ahead and a pair be-



THE HEAD OF THE RAPIDS

THIS MAP IS REPRODUCED FROM A SECTION OF A MANUSCRIPT CHART MADE IN 1833 BY J. T. SPRIGG IN CONNECTION WITH HIS SURVEY OF THE HALF-BREED TRACT. AN ORIGINAL DRAFT OF THE CHART IS IN THE CALEB DAVIS COLLECTION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS IN THE KEOKUK PUBLIC LIBRARY

hind, all in front of the bow; four were placed two pairs tandem in front; in case of five there were three in front and one lashed to each side of the steamer. Large steamboats have been known to handle as many as fifteen loaded barges. As may readily be seen, this amount of traffic created a tremendous business for the lightermen. When the river development was at its peak in the early seventies, the average annual cost of handling the freight over the rapids amounted to about \$500,000.

In the fall when traffic was heaviest and the river was low it was no uncommon sight to see from fifteen to twenty palatial steamboats lined up at the wharves, both at Keokuk and Montrose, awaiting their turn to be lightered over the rapids. All these boats, with their lights, their crowds, and their music, presented a brilliant spectacle. The hustle and excitement of transferring the passengers, of loading and unloading the freight, and of "wooding up" the boats always furnished a thrill for even the most sophisticated.

During the busy season of the year competition in securing prompt services of lighters became very keen and the bidding spirited to a degree of recklessness. On ordinary occasions, when business was normal and lighter-boats and "ratters" plentiful, the loaders received from ten to fifteen cents an hour for transferring the freight from the steamers to the lighters and the oarsmen from one to two dollars a trip. When business was brisk and hands

scarce the loaders sometimes received as much as sixty or seventy-five cents an hour, the oarsmen from four to five dollars a trip, and the rapids pilots from ten to twenty-five dollars, according to their reputation and skill. The oarsmen frequently made two down trips and sometimes three in a single day, depending upon the demand for their services and their ability to get back to the head of the rapids quickly.

The trip down over the rapids was always exciting and often perilous. The oarsmen's duties, rather strenuous while they lasted, ended the instant the lighter touched the levee at Keokuk. If prospects for another trip were good, the men would leap for the shore and race to catch the bus that ran regularly between Keokuk and Montrose and which would haul them back to Montrose for a dollar, but when they were short of money or the chances of a second trip were poor they usually walked back. After the railroad was completed the oarsmen patronizingly helped the firemen "wood up" and carried water for the privilege of deadheading back on the engine.

At Keokuk the lighters were turned over to "ratters" who transferred the cargo back to the steamboat or to other steamboats and reloaded the lighters with up-bound cargoes. These lighters were then towed back up the rapids, at first by man power, then by oxen, later by four, six, and eight horse teams, and at last by steam towboats. Some-

times the lightermen propelled the boat up the rapids by poling, bushwhacking, cordelling, or warping.

Isaac R. Campbell may be regarded as the pioneer in establishing the lightering industry. For several years he operated keel-boat lighters of fifty or sixty tons burden. In 1837, Daniel and Adam Hine succeeded Mr. Campbell in the lightering traffic, and introduced the regular lighter-boats which were specialized flatboats. With the increase in business a steam towboat, the *Dan Hine*, was put into operation and as time passed other small light-draught steamboats were added. These men continued in the lightering business until the St. Louis and Keokuk Northern Packet Company gained control.

The lightering season ended abruptly each year with the close of navigation on November 15th, when all marine insurance stopped. Consequently, as the end of the season approached, there was likely to be an increasing demand for lightermen, and the resulting high wages attracted many floating laborers who drifted in to take advantage of the situation. To meet this condition the "ratters" organized a kind of labor union, probably the first to be developed west of the Mississippi. Though it protected the local members against competition from outsiders, there was no effort to regulate wages or hours. Among themselves it was every man for himself. They stayed on the job during the busy season as long as they could stand, often working as many as eighteen or twenty hours a day for weeks at a time

under the stimulus of high wages and good whisky. But woe betide any outsider who attempted to break into the ring for there was many a ruffian "ratter" who would stoop to any end in the maintenance of the closed shop on the rapids.

Originally, brawny Americans and numerous Irishmen of the rough and ready type constituted a large proportion of the lightermen and "ratters" as well as the roustabouts on the steamboats. They were a hard-drinking, loud-swearing, devil-may-care race. After the Civil War, however, the Irish were supplanted by ex-slaves who in a few years practically monopolized steamboat labor. On warm summer evenings these negroes used to come ashore with their banjos at Montrose and Keokuk, while their boats were waiting to be lightered, and play and sing the old plantation melodies until after midnight. They were fresh from the southland, freed from the tribulations and sorrows of slavery, but the old life was still vivid in their consciousness and they sang with hearts full of former memories and new inspiration.

Most of the lighter-barges were built up the Ohio River in the region of the "prime oak" timber, floated down the Ohio, and towed up the Mississippi to the rapids. On one occasion at least, during the winter of 1859-1860, John Bunker took a crew of men up the Des Moines River to a sawmill near St. Francisville, Missouri, where there was plenty of good native oak and built two fine lighter-boats which

were christened the *Hawkeye* and the *Sucker*. These were floated down to Keokuk in the spring after the ice went out.

Staunch though the lighter-boats were, they were subjected to such terrific strain, hard usage, and continual scraping on jagged rocks that they were frequently in need of repairs. For this purpose two shipyards were maintained at Montrose — the upper one owned by John Bunker and the lower by George Anderson. For many years they did a thriving business.

When a boat began to leak dangerously, it had to be dry-docked for repairs. This was accomplished by bringing the boat alongside the shore, placing the ends of four long skid timbers under it, and hoisting the other end of the skids up on wooden horses. Cables were then attached to the boat and by the use of a "crab", which was a large capstan operated by a horse, the boat was hauled up the skids. The lower ends of the skids were then jacked up so that the repairmen could work with ease under the boat.

A crew of eight or ten expert boat carpenters made quick work of their job and the calkers took their turn. Each crack would be tightly filled with oakum. The sound of the calkers' mallets ringing merrily all day long with musical rhythm could be heard several miles up and down the river. After the calkers had finished their work, the cracks were daubed with hot pitch applied with a piece of sheepskin fastened to the end of a round wooden handle.

So efficient were the workmen that very seldom over a day and a half or two days were required for the entire process of repair. The boats, "as good as new", were then lowered back into the water.

In the course of time, as the development of the country increased the commerce on the upper river, there sprang up a demand for speedier and cheaper means of transportation over or around the Des Moines Rapids. Railroads were rapidly pushing westward, and a company was organized to build a line between Keokuk and Montrose. This road was begun in 1855 and commenced carrying freight around the rapids the following year. The coming of the railroad caused great consternation among the lightermen, for they realized that the whistle of the locomotive had sounded the death knell to their occupation. It was, indeed, the beginning of the end. Much to the relief of the public the railroad lowered the lighterage charge to fifty cents a ton, between a third and a fifth of what it had been. The Hine brothers, nevertheless, stoically continued to operate their towboats until the government canal was opened in 1877. That put an end to the occupation of lightering steamboats over the Des Moines Rapids, and a once flourishing industry now lives only in the memory of a few of the older inhabitants.

BEN HUR WILSON

The Scotch Grove Trail

The Highland Scot has ever displayed canny foresight, extraordinary thrift, steady industry, and sturdy fortitude in the face of obstacles. The more intimate feelings and emotions of the Scotchman — his tender sentiments of romance and love of home — have been disclosed in the poems of Robert Burns and the songs of Sir Harry Lauder. Such were the characteristics of the “Hielanders” who came in the late thirties to Jones County, Iowa, and built their log cabin homes in the timber along the sparkling waters of the Maquoketa River.

Theirs is a simple story of pioneers to whom the fertile prairies of Iowa were a promised land for men who were eager to become “lairds” of many acres. At the same time it is a tale of what they were prepared to give Iowa in return. It was a long, hard trail from the bleak Highlands of Scotland by way of Lord Selkirk’s Red River Settlement to Jones County, Iowa, yet this was the route by which Scotch Grove pioneers came to the new Territory and added their strength to the laying of the foundations for a Commonwealth.

The lot of these people had been a hard one in the desolate northern shires of Caithness and Sutherland in Scotland. Their houses for the most part were one story huts called “shielings” built of un-

cut stone, the chinks stuffed with moss, and the roof covered with turf or thatched with straw. If a "shieling" had a window it was covered with a bit of fish bladder, or the stomach lining of a sheep, or perhaps a piece of paper soaked in fish oil. Chunks of dried peat from the bogs furnished fuel for the rude fireplaces; and the "reek" or smoke from the smouldering fire often choked the inmates of a hut when the wind, swirling down the chimney, fanned the smoke into the room.

The struggle for food, too, was severe. The "Hie-landers" rented the land from the several lords and sundry earls, paying a large share of their crops for the use of small patches of arable soil. They raised "kale" or cabbages, a few turnips, some oats, a little barley, and a few potatoes. They pastured sheep on the open or common land where a limited quantity of grass grew among the heather and gorse. The flocks of sheep were limited in number, however, for the gentry preferred to save the grass for deer and rabbits in order that game might be plentiful when his lordship wished to hunt. If, in addition to a few sheep, a family owned a "coo", they were considered well to do — almost equal to the gentry.

Women and girls spun wool into yarn with the distaff and spindle and wove thread into cloth on a hand loom. Oftentimes the thread was colored and woven into a plaid with the stripes and colors proclaiming the clan to which the family belonged. The women, also, dried oats and barley in a pan over the

fire and then ground the grain into meal with a "quern"—laborious work, all of it.

Yet in spite of poverty and the hard struggle for existence the "Hielanders" were happy folk, deeply religious, and loyal to the gentry until the clearances began. The general introduction of sheep farming by the nobility led to widespread eviction of the smaller tenantry. During 1812 and in the spring of 1813 evictions became so general in the Highlands that distress was everywhere prevalent. For a time serious riots occurred. Nevertheless, the Duchess of Sutherland proceeded to clear her land of tenants so as to convert her Highland domain into grazing land for sheep and into deer forests and shooting preserves. In two parishes in Sutherlandshire, Clyne and Kildonan, a single sheep farm displaced a hundred agricultural tenants with all the distress that had attended the earlier enclosures in England. It is recorded that when the Duchess of Sutherland went for a drive the indignant peasants would ring sheep bells in derision as her carriage passed. In vain, the Sutherlandshire tenantry sent a deputation to London to seek from the government some alleviation of the unemployment and destitution. There was no power in the Home Office to offset the forces of economic change.

Hence it was that the agents of Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, found the Kildonan tenants eager to accept his offer to transport them across the Atlantic to his newly established colony on the Red

River of the North where broad acres and farm implements and a home were to be theirs free. Applications came in from some seven hundred evicted tenants but less than a hundred could be taken. Little did those picked men and women realize the hardships they were to face or perhaps they would have been less eager to undertake the adventure.

Having secured a controlling interest in the Hudson's Bay Company, Lord Selkirk acquired from that organization a tract of 116,000 square miles of land lying west and south of Lake Winnipeg. It comprised roughly the area now included in the Province of Manitoba and the northern part of North Dakota and Minnesota. This tract was chiefly unbroken prairie traversed from south to north by the Red River and from west to east by the Assiniboine — a region which includes some of the best wheat land of North America. Lord Selkirk's purpose in securing control of the Hudson's Bay Company and in obtaining this huge grant of land was largely philanthropic: he hoped to afford relief to his evicted countrymen by establishing a colony in the heart of this land of promise.

Accordingly, a shipload of employees had been sent out in 1811 to prepare the way for the settlers to follow. Delays in starting from the port of Stornaway in the Hebrides and unforeseen disasters along the way retarded the arrival of the advance group at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine

rivers until August, 1812. Hasty preparations were then made to receive the second band of emigrants who arrived two months later. The officers and employees of the North-West Company, rival of the Hudson's Bay Company in the fur trade of the North, looked upon the newcomers as intruders in a territory explored by their men and in which their trading posts had long been established. Various impediments were thrown in the way of the Selkirk emigrants. From the first season, hostility developed between the settlement and the North-West Company which soon led to an open feud.

Such was the situation into which the evicted tenants of Sutherlandshire were headed when they gathered at the port of Stromness in the Orkneys. On June 28, 1813, the colonists embarked on the *Prince of Wales* and put to sea under convoy of a sloop-of-war. It was a terrible voyage. Ship fever — now known as typhoid — broke out, and the confinement and congested quarters proved fatal to many. The ship's surgeon was among the first to succumb, the disease spread rapidly to passengers and crew, and there were many burials at sea. Another misfortune was the blundering of the skipper who put the colonists ashore at Fort Churchill, instead of carrying them on down the western coast of Hudson's Bay to York Factory where Selkirk expected the expedition to land.

The settlers, weakened with fever, made what preparations they could for passing the winter at

Fort Churchill. On the sheltered, well-wooded bank of the Churchill River about fifteen miles from the fort, they built rough log houses. Thus it was necessary to make a thirty-mile trip by sledge or on snowshoes to the factory store to secure oatmeal and other provisions. Early in November, however, partridges appeared in such numbers that fresh meat was not wanting.

In the spring the colonists took up the overland journey to York Factory, travelling on snowshoes, drawing stores and provisions on rough sledges, camping at nightfall, and moving forward with the first dawn of the northern morning. The strongest of the party went ahead to beat the trail for the women and midway in the long procession marched the Highland piper, "skirling" a "pibroch" which filled the trudging emigrants with the unbending pride of their race. Thus the weary stragglers carried on to York Factory where they met with a hospitable reception. After a short halt they continued their journey by boat and reached Fort Douglas at the Forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers early in the summer of 1814.

There, on the site of the present city of Winnipeg, Governor Miles MacDonnell welcomed the new colonists, allotted to each head of a family one hundred acres of land fronting on the Red River, and supplied the settlers with horses, arms, ammunition, tools, and seed. Help was given them to erect their log cabins along the bank of the river. By autumn

houses and barns were built, potatoes and other vegetables were harvested, each family possessed some poultry, and a few cows were held in common. That winter was the first since the earliest settlers had arrived at the Forks in 1812 that the colonists found it unnecessary to move south to the Pembina River in order to be near the herds of buffalo for their food supply. Surely this was the promised land.

But the hostility of the North-West Company to the apparently firmly established colony grew apace. It was fanned to white heat by Governor MacDonnell's proclamation prohibiting the servants of the North-West Company from taking pemmican, or dried venison, from Selkirk's land, and the officers of the company began a resolute campaign of subtle policy against the colony. During the winter of 1814 Duncan Cameron at the North-West trading post, Fort Gibraltar, across the Red River entertained the Kildonan men and women at gay parties. By offers of free passage to Upper Canada, by a generous promise of land to each settler who would desert the colony, and by threats, cajolery, and bribes he secured the defection of a large number of the settlers. When the widowed mother of two of the pioneers who afterward came to Iowa was asked to desert the settlement she replied, "As for me and mine, we will keep faith. We have eaten Selkirk's bread, we dwell on lands he bought. We stay here as long as he wishes and if we perish, we perish."

During the summer of 1815 a notice signed by Cuthbert Grant, who had been appointed by the North-West Company to command the Bois-Brûlés, or French-Indian half-breeds, ordered the rest of the settlers to retire immediately from the Red River. The capture of Governor MacDonnell and an attack on the colony compelled the remnant of Selkirk's colonists to depart. They sorrowfully quitted their homes and proceeded in canoes to the mouth of Red River thence across Lake Winnipeg to a new abode at a trading post on Jack River. With fierce exultation the employees of the North-West Company applied the torch to cabins and barns and trampled the crops under foot.

In the meantime another party of settlers had been recruited from Sutherlandshire and were en route for the abandoned Red River Settlement. With these "Hielanders" in the expedition of 1815 came the new governor, Robert Semple. Word of the approaching reinforcements induced the fugitives on Jack River to return to the site of their colony and upon the arrival of Governor Semple and old neighbors from Kildonan the Scotch began to rebuild their ruined homes.

The influx of more immigrants, however, only added fuel to the flame of hatred between the rival fur companies. During the following winter the blaze kindled and in the summer of 1816 the conflagration swept down upon the Red River Colony in the attack of Bois-Brûlés led by Cuthbert Grant.

Governor Semple and a score of men lay dead after the fatal clash at Seven Oaks on the afternoon of June 19, 1816. Again the ill-fated colonists withdrew down the Red River.

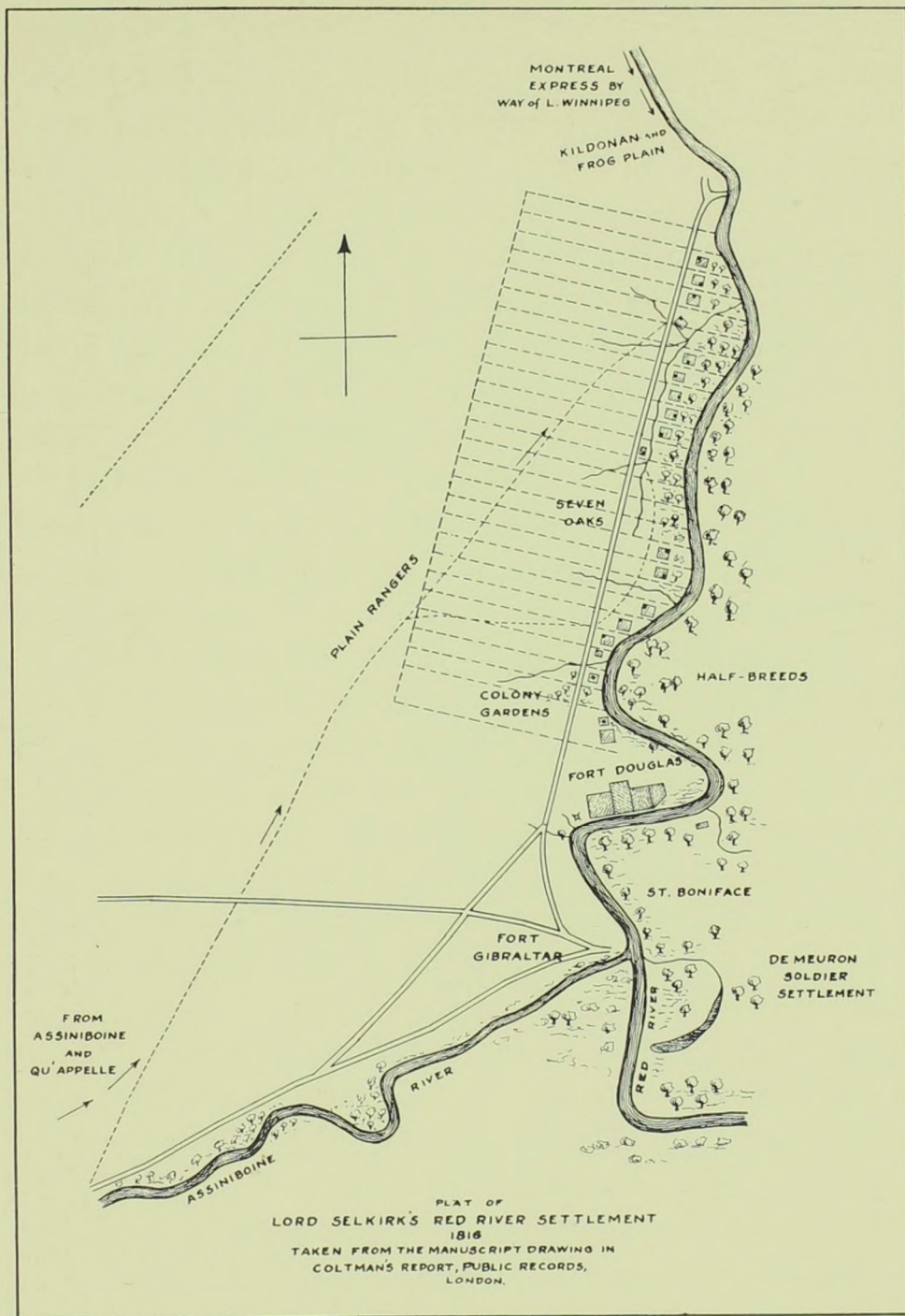
Lord Selkirk himself now came to the rescue of his unhappy people. With a force organized from the disbanded De Meuron regiment of mercenary soldiers of the War of 1812 he swooped down on Fort William, the headquarters of the North-West Company on Lake Superior, and captured it. Then in 1817 he visited the Red River Settlement where he was able to rally his scattered colonists and to assure them of protection. He listened sympathetically to their complaints, shook the hand of everyone, deeded them tracts of land for a church, a cemetery, and a school, and directed that the settlement should be called "Kildonan" after their old home in Scotland. To the soldiers of the De Meuron regiment he allotted land on the east side of the Red River. Arrangements were made for an experimental farm on a large scale, while public roads, bridges, and a new mill site were planned. Moreover, a treaty with surrounding tribes of Indians gave the settlers assurance of freedom from attack by the savages.

Lord Selkirk's vigorous assault upon the North-West Company, however, resulted disastrously for him. Arrested and tried for his part in the affair he was found guilty and fined, while those concerned in the massacre of Seven Oaks were acquitted.

This broke the spirit of Selkirk and he died in 1820 a disappointed man. One year later a union was effected between the Hudson's Bay Company and their ancient foes, the North-West Company.

Apparently the troubles of the Scotch colonists on the Red River were over and no longer would they be ground like wheat between the upper and nether millstones of the two rival fur companies. But they were not happy. Farming in this country of long, cold winters and short summers was but little more of a success than it had been in the bleak, rough Highlands of Sutherlandshire. Moreover, there was no market for surplus products when there were any. The school and church promised by the Hudson's Bay Company had not materialized. True, a rector of the Church of England came to the colony; but shades of solemn leagues and covenants and Jenny Geddes with her stool, could Scotch Presbyterians be satisfied with a minister of the Church of England? Grasshopper plagues, too, ruined the crops for two or three seasons and as in the early days of the colony, hunting had to be resorted to for a living. The arbitrary rules of the Company caused much dissatisfaction. Agents inspected everything that was shipped out and all furs had to be sold through the Company. The colonists called the Hudson's Bay Company the "Smug Old Lady".

To the credit of the Company, be it said, however, that honest efforts were made in behalf of the colony. Sheep were brought from the United States at great



THE SELKIRK SETTLEMENT

expense, and horses and cattle were imported from England at heavy cost. The experimental farm projected by Selkirk was like a baronial estate. At one time when grasshoppers had destroyed the crops, agents of the colony purchased some three hundred bushels of wheat, oats, and peas at Prairie du Chein, Wisconsin, and when the seed was finally delivered at Red River Colony the cost to the Company was said to be £1040 sterling.

Confronted with all these disadvantages of the Red River Colony while the children grew to maturity, the canny Scotchmen began to ponder ways of improving their situation. Word filtered back over the Red River trail from St. Paul of opportunities to buy cheap farms in the rich valley of the Mississippi River in the "States". Many Swiss immigrants whom Selkirk's agents had sent to the Red River Settlement in the early twenties had already migrated to the reputed Eldorado of the South. Accordingly, in 1835 Alexander McLain went down to the recently opened strip of territory in eastern Iowa known as the "Black Hawk Purchase". Like Joshua of old he explored the country, and carried back a glowing report of a fertile prairie land, well watered and having sufficient timber for building, located about fifty miles from Dubuque.

After his return to the settlement, a group consisting of John Sutherland, with his ten sons and two daughters, Alexander Sutherland, David McCoy, Joseph Brimmer, and Alexander McLain with their

families set out on the thousand mile trek to a new promised land. They loaded into their Pembina carts a few possessions — bedding, cooking utensils, coarse flour, pemmican, clothing, tools, and some relics brought from Scotland — and departed on the long, hard trip.

The Red River or Pembina cart was a home invention. They were rude, wooden vehicles put together without a particle of iron. The wheels were without tires, were five or six feet in diameter, and had a tread about four inches wide. From the base of the rectangular body of the cart extended the heavy shafts between which one animal, usually an ox, was harnessed with strips of rawhide. Each cart could carry a load of six or eight hundred pounds which was protected from rain by a buffalo robe or canvas cover. These carts, while crude and clumsy in appearance, would go where another vehicle would flounder.

Day by day the caravan crawled slowly southward, while the heavy wheels which had never known grease kept up an incessant creaking and groaning. When night approached the carts were drawn into a circle with the shafts pointing inward and within this temporary fortification camp was pitched. The animals were either allowed to graze or tethered on the outside of the circle. Every precaution was taken to guard against an Indian attack, and the men stood watch in turn until dawn. Rivers were forded and numerous sloughs and marshes

crossed, the wide-wheeled carts leaving a deep track in the soft ground of the lowlands. Mosquitoes, black flies, and gnats tormented the plodding caravan; and the mid-day sun beat down without mercy upon them. Sometimes the carts sank to the hubs in mud and water; again the travellers were covered with a thick coat of dust as the carts in single file rolled along the Red River trail. Sometimes roving bands of Indians approached and killed a cow which the settlers could ill afford to lose.

On they came, making about fifteen miles a day, across the present State of Minnesota and down the west side of the Mississippi River to Dubuque. The same fortitude that enabled the tenants of Kildonan to brave the perils of a long ocean voyage and to endure the hardships at the Red River Colony enabled this first group of Scotch pioneers to push on to the banks of the Maquoketa River. Although the effect of the long and toilsome journey of almost four months was traced on nearly every face in lines of care, the sight of their new home restored hope. Along the banks of the river, as far as they could see, a belt of timber marked its course. Before them stretched the fertile prairie in an almost unbroken level to the sky line. The prairie grass was most luxuriant and the fall flowers, richly tinted, bloomed on every side. The future loomed large.

In 1838 a second band came from the Red River Colony to the Scotch Grove settlement. In this party, among others, were Donald and Ebenezer

Sutherland and Donald Sinclair with their families. Mrs. Sinclair had been a waiting maid in Scotland and her stories of court life were in continual demand by her companions. Her husband was a peaceable, devout man yet fearless in defending his rights. It is related that on this trip one of the bachelors in the group spoke insultingly to Mrs. Sinclair, who replied, "If you say that again, I'll slap your mouth."

"I'll do more than slap your mouth," was the man's retort.

Suddenly from somewhere appeared Donald Sinclair who had by chance overheard the conversation. "Ye'll hae to slap me, first, mon," he said quietly, and then he proceeded to administer a thorough thrashing to the man who had annoyed his wife.

This trip, like the first emigration, occupied the entire summer and the weary travellers arrived at the Scotch Grove settlement in the early autumn. Again in 1840 another delegation followed the route of the Red River trail to St. Paul and thence south to the Iowa prairies of Jones County. In this group were Donald and John Livingston, David Esson, and Lawrence Devaney with their families. The Devaneys quit the caravan at Dubuque, where a son was born.

In some ways this was the most difficult and discouraging journey of the three principal migrations to Iowa. On the Red River section of the trail the guide took sick and one of the party, in endeavoring

to fill his place, led the caravan through the swamps of Minnesota for days and finally emerged at the spot where they had entered. Grandmother Livingston was an old lady when this journey began. She could have remained with friends on the Red River but she insisted upon making the trip. She rode in one of the jolting, springless carts and was warned not to try to get out of it without help. Somehow she eluded the vigilance of her relatives one day and in trying to climb down from the box of the cart alone, she slipped and broke a leg. What was to be done? No doctor, no splints! The men set the broken bone and bound the fracture with bark for splints and strips of sheets for bandages. Feather beds were piled in the cart to make the suffering woman as comfortable as possible but the jolting of the rude conveyance was unbearable. As soon as the headwaters of the Mississippi were reached the men constructed a crude raft on which the injured woman was placed and one of her sons was assigned the task of poling the raft downstream. The route of the caravan led away from the river and great apprehension was felt about the progress of the raft and its occupants. When the emigrants again approached the river several days were spent in anxious waiting before the raft was sighted floating downstream. This journey like the others occupied the entire summer but eventually the wayfarers, Grandmother Livingston and all, were welcomed by friends who had preceded them to Scotch Grove.

During the years of the migrations to Jones County other Scotch "Hielanders" from Red River Colony came southward but were deflected to other localities. James Livingston, Alexander Rose, and Angus Matthieson, for instance, settled in Upper Scotch Grove where the town of Hopkinton is located; while the McIntyres, Campbells, and some of the Matthiesons crossed the Mississippi to the lead-mine region opposite Bellevue, Iowa.

Pioneer days at Scotch Grove and in Upper Scotch Grove were laborious, yet the settlers were happy for nature was kind to them and the future was filled with promise. Log cabins were built, gardens were spaded, and the fields were planted. Everyone worked — men, women, and children.

To-day a visitor stopping at one of the prosperous homes of Scotch Grove may observe two round stones, six inches thick and about two feet in diameter, used as a door step. These old quern stones, brought from the Highlands to Red River, and thence to Iowa, are mute reminders of the days when two Scotch women, squatting on the floor, alternately pushed and pulled the handle of the upper stone while the wheat, poured by hand into a hole in the middle of the top stone, was ground into coarse flour between the corrugated faces of the quern and fell from the edges to a cloth on the floor below.

Bee trees along the Maquoketa supplied the settlers with honey which was stored in improvised

kegs made from thick logs. Bunches of wild grapes mixed with the honey made a tasty sauce to spread on hot biscuits. The cooking was done in the fireplaces where a crane supporting a heavy iron kettle was swung over the fire. "Scones", or thin biscuits, were baked in skillets which stood on short iron legs over a bed of coals at the edge of the fireplace. Fried pies — a favorite dessert — were made by cutting a round crust the size of a saucer, pouring cooked sauce on one half, folding the other half over and crimping the edges together, then frying the pastry in a skillet or kettle of hot grease. To-day a Selkirk teapot, a few copper utensils, some heavy iron skillets, lidded pots with little legs, and a square tin candle lantern with perforated sides — surviving relics of the long trail — are the prized possessions of the descendants of these Scotch pioneers.

For many years the nearest mill to the Scotch Grove settlers was on Catfish Creek and the nearest market for grain and hogs was Dubuque, fifty miles distant. Then it took a day and a half to go to market while to-day the grandchildren of these pioneers make the trip to Dubuque in almost as many hours. Two of the Livingstons from the Upper Grove on separate trips to Dubuque were frozen to death in prairie blizzards. The wife of one of these men, mother of nine children, set to work with Scotch fortitude to keep the farm and to raise and educate her family. Her success was another triumph for Scotch frugality and industry.

The Jones County settlement prospered materially, and at the same time religion and education were not neglected. The First Presbyterian Church of Scotch Grove was organized in the log house of Ebenezer Sutherland in 1841, and has been the center of the community life of the township to this day. In 1851 a church was built and ten years later a larger and finer house of worship was erected by these devout Scotchmen. The eccentric Michael Hummer, of "Hummer's Bell" fame, was the first minister who served this parish. Other strong men have since been ministers of the Scotch Grove church and their influence has extended wherever the children of the pioneers have gone.

The older men and women who came from Red River used the Gaelic language extensively, especially when asking a blessing at meals or in offering prayers in public. During the early seventies a Scotch evangelist came to Scotch Grove to assist the minister, Reverend John Rice, in conducting a "protracted meeting". One Sunday, the evangelist consented to preach a sermon in Gaelic. As the impassioned words of his discourse rang out from the pulpit in the language they loved so well, tears welled up in the eyes of these men and women of the long trail and rolled unheeded down their cheeks.

The pioneers also provided schools for the "bairns", first at different homes in the settlement, then in a log cabin schoolhouse built near the center of the township. In 1860 a more commodious schoolhouse was erected. The teacher boarded

'round and received sixteen dollars a month for his services. Nor was higher education neglected, for the rolls of Lenox College at Hopkinton contain the names of many Scotch Grove boys and girls who went to college in the days when this privilege was accorded only to a small number of Iowa's young men and women.

Little wonder was it that in such a locality where industry and religion went hand in hand and where love of home and interest in education were outstanding traits that patriotism, too, was genuine and vigorous. The records of the Civil War show that no men were drafted from Scotch Grove Township; in fact, the township furnished more than its quota of volunteers. The muster rolls of the World War reveal the names of many lads whose grandfathers and great grandfathers followed the long trail from the Red River to Iowa.

The descendants of these pioneers are proud of their families and their Scotch blood. Why shouldn't they be? The story of the long journey from the Highlands of Sutherlandshire to Lord Selkirk's Colony and by ox-cart brigade to Iowa is a tale of courageous adventure. Let them revere the flowers of the clans to which they have a right to belong. Let them honor their "tartans" or "plaids"—backgrounds of green or black or red or blue with fine overlay in lines of contrasting color. Let them thrill with pride to hear the songs of Old Scotland. It is their rightful heritage.

BRUCE E. MAHAN

Comment by the Editor

IOWA DIALECT

Literature is likely to be language in a formal mood. Perhaps it could be described as language in its parlor manners, if it is permissible to use that expression in its colloquial sense. At all events written language tends to become rigid, dignified, and nice. It loses the flexibility of pronunciation, the friendly familiarity, and the flavor of the dialect from which it sprang. Except for the terms of science and invention, which are taken bodily from the classical Greek or Latin, language grows from the speech of every-day life.

There was a time not long ago when dialect words were regarded as barbarisms to be studiously avoided, but now they are recognized as an essential part of the language of a people. Forsooth, nearly all new words that are particularly apt, picturesque, and full of the genius of idiom are dialectic. Dialect words have personality. Being linguistically youthful, they have the vitality and unabashed candor of children. They might be conceived as the second generation of slang grown highly respectable like prosperous tradespeople, and yet they have none of the stilted refinement of literary usage.

Every language was once a dialect, born in igno-

rance. And it has come to pass that the talk of the common people, even the illiterate, is the fountain of perpetual youth in any tongue. The speech of the southern negro is rich in distinctive dialect. Narrow interests, provincialism, new environment, and an atmosphere of easy democracy are the conditions in which dialects thrive. Under just such circumstances — so prevalent in pioneer Iowa — much of the “abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English” has probably occurred.

Life on the Mississippi in early times was especially conducive to the coining of dialect words. The lightering crews on the Des Moines Rapids spoke the lingo of Mark Twain’s rivermen, and probably contributed their share to river dialect. Who but a denizen of the levee would know what “filling and backing” meant, what a “sawyer” was, or understand the leadsmen’s cry of “mark twain”? A stevedore on the lighter-boats was called a “ratter”— perhaps because he carried grain in and out of the hold like a rat, just as the men who handle the baggage of tourists in Yellowstone Park are called “pack rats”. A workman who accepts less than union wages or takes the job of a striker is colloquially known as a “rat”, and the antagonism of the lighter loaders toward outsiders may have earned for them the epithet of “ratters”. Another peculiar expression of the lightermen was “gouger”, referring to the member of the boat crew who manned the sweep at the stern, because he gouged

his oar into the bed of the shallow stream and thus guided the craft between the rocks.

The settlers of Iowa came from little provincial communities at the ends of the earth—from the villages of New England and the farms of New York, from the tobacco plantations of Virginia and the blue-grass region of Kentucky, from the Red River of the North and various parts of the Old Country—and they brought their dialects along. Here they found fur traders, miners, and half-breeds, each group speaking a tongue of its own. And they also encountered a new environment and devised new modes of living—all of which stimulated the use of new words. No wonder the language of early Iowans was rich in dialect.

A careful study of dialect words, as Frank L. Mott suggests, would help to determine the geographical origins of the settlers of Iowa. Did they come predominantly from the South, as some suppose, or were they chiefly of New England stock? Examine their speech. The words “quern”, “reek”, “skirl”, “pibroch”, “scone”, “pemmican”, and “Pembina cart” would place the Selkirk Scotchmen of Jones County, though the story of their migration were lost.

J. E. B.

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