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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Jasons of 1860

The lure of the frontier has ever been a potent urge in the breast of the young manhood of America. Not only the exploration of unknown land beyond the pale of civilization, but the possibility of finding wealth, especially gold, has incited hardy spirits to seek fame and fortune farther west.

Gold brought California into the Union in 1850. The discovery of gold near Pike's Peak in 1858 and both silver and gold in the rich Comstock Lode in 1859 caused such an influx of population that Colorado and Nevada became Territories in 1861. Overland routes were crowded with caravans of prairie schooners. What strong young man, foot loose and fancy free, could resist the temptation to join the quest for golden fleece less legendary than Jason sought?

In the spring of 1860, five neighbors near Winfield, Iowa, were seized by an irresistible urge to share in the adventure of finding ready-made for-

tunes. Already experienced in pioneering, these hardy optimists, like every generation of Americans before them, could not be satisfied where they were without seeing for themselves what opportunities might be available farther west. And so James M. Willis, Alexander M. Smith, and Hiram Dunn joined the gold rush to Pike's Peak, while Robert Willis and John H. Dunn went along to have a look at Kansas.

"This was a beautiful morning, ushered in by bright sunshine, and a balmy breeze", wrote James M. Willis in the journal he kept of their odyssey. It was April 3, 1860, when they set out. The birds were singing, and "all this glory was very acceptable, under the pressure of leaving kind friends." At noon they ate dinner on the bank of Big Creek northeast of Mount Pleasant, and by one-thirty they were in town buying cooking utensils and other equipment. Then they drove on, crossed the Skunk River at Rome, and camped a mile west of that village.

Thus, day by day, Willis described the trip through southern Iowa and across the plains, related the adventures of prospecting, and commented upon human nature as he observed it in primitive circumstances. The diary has been preserved by his daughter, Miss Kate Reed Willis, who lives at Gravette, Arkansas. James Madison

Willis came to Iowa on the last day of 1853; he attended Howe's Academy and taught school a while; and he was twenty-seven when he started with his uncle Robert and three friends on the journey "to, through, and from the Rocky Mountains". Most of the story of that expedition can be told best in his own words.

The travelers reached Fairfield a little after noon on the second day. It was "a flourishing town, of some size, on elevated ground, through which the Burlington and Missouri river rail road runs." Near Batavia, they found a bridge burned because campers had neglected to put out their fire, and so the creek had to be crossed at a ford below. They camped that night by the side of the road four miles east of Agency City.

At eleven o'clock on April 5th, they arrived at Ottumwa. "It is the county seat of Wapello County, located on the east bank of the Des Moines river; on uneven ground. It is the present terminus of the Burlington and Missouri river rail road, and hence it is a lively place." But the gold hunters did not stop. They forded the river "and dined one mile west of town." At one o'clock they "started for Albia, buying some eggs on the way, and camping at Blakesburg, on an old brick yard." It was "a calm warm day," according to the diarist, "and we had more fun than enough",

which may account for his opinion that there were worse towns than Blakesburg in the world.

After half a day's travel over rough land, they arrived at Albia, where they dined and bought some beans. "Albia is distinguished only as being the county seat of Monroe County, possessing a good court house, and being nicely located, it bids fair for the future. Monroe is a rough county."

Having camped on the prairie with some Kansas emigrants, they moved on to Chariton, "at one time the seat of a United States land office, infested with land sharks". Though respectably located, the town was considered unimportant. Pushing on in the direction of Leon, the party halted eight or nine miles southwest of Chariton. The day being exceedingly warm, James Willis "drank too much water and suffered the consequences" of his folly, "becoming very sick at the stomach and throwing up."

The next day being Easter, Sunday, April 8th, the party remained in camp. "I am still unwell", wrote Willis. "A. M. Smith and H. Dunn went to church, while John Dunn, Robert Willis and myself remained in camp as guard. During this time John D. takes advantage of H. D.'s fondness for smoking, by making a cob pipe, filling it with dry cow manure, covering the top slightly with tobacco. On H's return, John commenced a feigned

smoke, and as we anticipated, H. wanted a draw. The pipe was passed over with the greatest gravity. H. puffs away but 'don't like the taste' finally takes the hint, discovering the joke at which the camp laughed heartily, though not endorsing the caper, which was well contrived, and will do in place of eggs, as this is Easter."

But fun and pranks were followed by a heavy hail and rain storm on April 9th, after which the party passed through Garden Grove, "a handsome little town", and near by "saw a man planting corn" — a fact which proclaims that the spring of 1860 must have been very early. Leon, county seat of Decatur County, was said to have a good location, though "the town is small, surrounded principally by brush land."

Halting at Decatur City on April 10th, the Henry County prospectors bought a supply of bacon and a knit coat apiece. Concluding that they were dry, "each drank a glass of sweet wine for his stomach's sake." But that indulgence was a mistake "for the filthy adulterated stuff had a bad effect, those having weak stomachs serving it as the whale did Jonah, puked it up, on dry land, making a good joke of the misfortune, which wound up by H. Dunn paying John back for his Easter loan handsomely."

An early start was made the next morning and

by eight o'clock they were in Mt. Ayr, the county seat of Ringgold County. "It stands on the summit of a high hill and is no doubt airish, surrounded with rough land, and is certainly remarkable for its insignificance; though we here saw two spry ladies, with long gowns, capering on horse back."

Bedford, "seat of justice of Taylor County", was passed on April 12th, and "we came to a school house, having a forsaken look, indicative of hard treatment. The doors being open, some of us went in and cheered up the old thing, by engaging in a regular French four, to the tune of 'Over the Hills and Far Away'." That night they camped on the East Nodaway, "in a heartsome place. The white plum bushes, with other vernal flowers, filled the warm air with a fragrance not at all unpleasant. As the evening was warm and the water clear we concluded to have a social swim, after supper".

At Shambaugh's Mill, on the West Nodaway, "no doubt a valuable stream," they laid in a supply of 400 pounds of flour. Clarinda, the capital of Page County, was described as "beautifully located in open prairie" and "surrounded by a good agricultural district. Look out for Clarinda."

On Saturday, April 14th, while camping fifteen miles east of Sidney, a minor calamity was noted.

"H. Dunn broke our skillet handle, through rashness." We are left to wonder if Dunn merely dropped the skillet, or did he use it for a hammer?

After crossing the wide fertile bottoms of the two Nishnabotnas, they ascended a high hill, "on the summit of which stands Sidney, which is a thriving town, though not very large, and contains a very respectable court house. Here we bought our fitout very cheap, receiving at the same time a present of 4 gal. of good ale, on which we had a jollification."

The company camped at the foot of the bluffs, "certainly a glorious place to camp and spend the Sabbath, on such a trip as this. Good water and wood in abundance, also great natural scenery. At our feet is the margin of a wild fertile bottom, extending to the Missouri river. Above our heads are high, picturesque bluffs peering far above us, terminating in sharp points. Having time, we ascended one of the principal [peaks] and took a telescopic view of Nebraska City, ten miles in the distance. In the evening some hard cases camped with us and gave the camp a bad appearance."

On April 16th they moved on to the Missouri, opposite Nebraska City. "The river is low. Here I viewed for the first time, Big Muddy. I have no eulogy to pass upon it. It is a muddy and homely stream, full of sand bars." In camp "Hiram Dunn

is baking bread for the future, while I am writing a letter to Wm. T. Willis; Smith is writing to his lovely woman." They were at the port of the great plains. "All creation is here on their way to the Infernal regions. A great deal of sport going on in camp, with free tickets to the pit."

Crossing the river, they camped in Nebraska Territory and took time to explore Nebraska City. The town, being a place for outfitting miners, had "several extensive stores", but the steamboat landing was limited. "Here is the site of old Fort Kearney, nearly gone up. A battery here, well worked, the river being normal, would deal death to an enemy's fleet."

Willis recorded that many people were coming and going daily. In his journal for April 18th he described their own means of travel. "Robert Willis and John Dunn took their leave of us to-day, and started for Kansas. A. M. Smith exchanged his horse team for two yoke of oxen." John Dunn and Robert Willis also had a team of horses which they drove on, to Kansas.

Though hints of loneliness began to creep into the diary, the party of three moved on. Soon they joined a company from Dodgeville, Iowa, also bound for Pike's Peak. By noon of the second day out of Nebraska City they came to "a rapid, clear and beautiful little stream called Weeping

Water." "When a youth, I read an account of this creek in Lewis and Clark's Journal, but was not then aware that I would today [April 20th] eat my dinner on its banks. It took its name from the crying sound which it makes when running over the pebbles."

The next day in camp the "cattle stampeded, while feeding, but fortunately no harm was done beyond a chase." Timber and grass were becoming scarce and the soil thin. Cottonwood Creek had only a few cottonwood trees on its banks. Traveling was monotonous and slow. In six days they went only a hundred miles from Nebraska City to the Platte Valley.

Finding wood, grass, and water became more of a problem every day. Whenever possible they camped near a slough. Sometimes they dug for water, and found plenty within three feet. Guarding the cattle became an organized chore. The nights were cold and the wolves howled.

By April 28th, the weather had changed, so they made a windbreak of cedar brush, under the bluffs of the Platte, fifty miles east of Fort Kearney, beside a deserted Indian encampment. While waiting for the wind to subside, some of the company went exploring on the islands in the Platte. "Trees 20 inches in diameter are to be seen, cut down by the beaver", reported Willis. The river

itself "is a curiosity, it is full of islands of all sizes, frequently several in a breast. The timber is almost invariably on islands."

Four days later they were in Fort Kearney which was on the south side of the Platte, several rods from the river, "at the convergence of three inclined planes". At Kearney City, two miles west, a bit of frontier difficulty was adjusted by the party. "Here we were detained, to try two hard looking young gents, who had this morning, left by the wayside, a man and his wife, and a part of their baggage, who and which they were to carry to Denver city, having received the transportation fee." The result of the trial was that "the trespassers should give up to the injured all things belonging to them, and refund the money paid for conveyance."

Cottonwood Springs was "the most noted place" west of Kearney. It contained "two respectable trading houses". About three o'clock the wind began to blow hard from the northwest, "raising clouds of dust". The travelers found shelter on a heavily wooded island and "secured plenty of dry wood for morning." This was a wise provision, for when they awoke on May 8th, the air was full of flying snow, "equaling the worst of Iowa snow storms." While two of the men searched for the cattle, the others prepared

breakfast. The storm abated about nine o'clock, the sun shone brightly, and the snow soon disappeared. Nevertheless, a few miles farther they helped bury a young man who had perished in that storm.

On May 11th they traveled about twenty miles — a record day for ox locomotion. "At sunset an old gray headed man, rolling a wheel barrow, came to us, bound, he said, 'for Deniver'."

It was Saturday evening, May 12th, when they arrived at the lower crossing of the South Platte, where the Salt Lake and California road crossed the river. A French trading house and an Indian lodge marked the spot. Bands of Indians were more numerous. Several war parties aroused considerable apprehension, for the men spent half a day cleaning their guns and revolvers. But apparently their fears were allayed by a visit with Chief Good Bear, who had "all the appearances of an intelligent and humane man". He and his daughter "ate supper with Smith, Dunn and me."

Their route was by way of St. Vrain's Fort and Fort Vasques. After more than seven weeks of constant travel, they reached Denver, "the metropolis of the Rocky Mountains and center of all trade." In the opinion of James Willis, the site of the city could scarcely be excelled for salubrity and beauty, though the surrounding country was

"poorly adapted to agriculture". Hundreds of people were continually arriving and leaving for the diggings.

The Iowa prospectors did not tarry in Denver, however. They were anxious to reach the gold fields and so moved on to the foot of the mountains where "proud nature stands aloof and unveiled." Following the Platte up into the mountains, they came to South Park. There, on the first of June, they left their cattle at a ranch and prepared to begin prospecting in earnest. Hundreds of people were camping in the vicinity of the Terryall diggings.

Leaving H. Dunn with the wagon because he had sore eyes, Smith and Willis, in company with several others, "shouldered our grub, blankets and tools, and set out for the Blue River diggings beyond the snowy range, over all kinds of road except good." Following up ravines, climbing hills, plunging through deep snow drifts, having to halt occasionally to catch their breath in the rare air, they reached the summit of the snow-capped ridge by noon. The cold wind soon drove them down the western slope and late in the afternoon they reached the miners' fort on the Blue River. "We are now in the field of action, and *will* or *wont*", wrote Willis.

Just two months from the date of starting to

seek a fortune in the golden west, they "prospected a claim in Three Nation Gulch", but without success. Many leads were followed during the next few days. A claim was purchased in the Hamilton district for $20, and $30 was paid for 200 feet of lumber for a set of sluices. But after setting the sluices and working the prospect, they accepted an offer of $160, and sold the claim to T. P. Wilson of Columbus City, Iowa, "and glad of the chance". Next they tried prospects in Nevada Gulch, near Gregory, but to no purpose. On June 21st they ranched their cattle, looked for work, "but found none, at any price. Tried to sell some surplus clothing, at cost. Gulch mining here does not pay board."

This hint of discouragement soon became a conviction. Hopes of finding a gold mine took a decided slump. On Monday, June 25th, William McPherin and C. H. Hall of Burlington, Dunn, and Willis "determined to return to the states, and made preparations accordingly." They bought a good wagon the next day for $20, and Hall traded his blacksmith tools for a yoke of cattle. Retracing their steps, they reached Denver on June 29th, where they spent a few hours "for perhaps the last time" and then, proceeding by way of the "cut off", camped out on the plains four miles east. Another day's journey took them

past the first stage station on the road, near which appeared a provision train of forty wagons, headed west.

Sunday, July 1st, was a memorable day. "As Dunn and I, during the forenoon were going up the ravine, to look after our cattle, myself in advance, a very large timber rattle snake sprang toward me, with all its venom. I perceived it in time and evaded the stroke. We gathered some stones and bruised its head, according to the scriptural injunction. Had 19 rattles. It was about five feet in length, and thick in proportion. In the evening, I trod close by another not so large. However, I shall remember the place and the day, by two narrow escapes." About midnight, a large wolf approached the wagon. Dunn shot at it but missed completely.

The homeward road presented various difficulties, such as lack of water and grass. Added to this, one of the party, McPherin, decided to go back to work at the carpenter trade in Denver and the others reluctantly bade him adieu. Having decided to reach the Platte before sleeping, they urged Buck, Berry, Bright and Brandy steadily along the trial to the end of the cut off by ten o'clock that night.

The next day was the Fourth of July which they celebrated by trading with some Indians.

"While bartering, the thieving, lying and greasy villains stole my celebrated butcher knife from out the wagon", but they all pretended to be as innocent as lambs; and the knife was not recovered. An old squaw was making off with one of Hall's blankets at a rapid rate, when he espied her entering her wigwam. Seizing his revolver, he gave chase and recaptured the lost blanket.

The real surprise, however, was still in store. "Friend Hall produced a fruit cake for dinner, having saved it for this purpose. It was baked by his wife, in Burlington, Iowa." How much that long-saved fruit cake must have been appreciated!

The route home was practically the same as the one they followed going out. The heat of midsummer was very disagreeable, however, and the "low bottom, along the Platte, beats thunder for musketoes, and other insects." Large herds of buffalo were encountered below Fort Kearney. The wide bottom land along the Platte was "blackened with them, from the bluffs to the river." Many dead ones were lying along the road, having been wantonly killed. On the night of July 17th, the bison "kept up an eternal bellowing all night" and the next morning Willis witnessed the killing of several, merely for sport, prompting him to comment characteristically, "which I think is wicked."

By July 22nd they reached the Platte Valley House, where the good-looking landlady served them a good supper "of which we partook heartily." Real food proved so alluring, that the next day they traded "spare traps for roasted chickens, pies, sweet cakes and bread enough to do to Omaha."

Near Omaha they met two big trains of Mormon immigrants. One was composed of a hundred wagons and the other of forty-eight. These Mormons were "all foreigners and as ugly as soot."

The disillusioned Jasons arrived at Omaha on July 25th. They had no trouble in selling Mike and Brandy for $40 in gold, but parted with them reluctantly, for they had "served us faithfully, going and coming." Willis traded his buffalo robe for "a pair of good pants." Meanwhile, Hall traded his cattle for a good Indian pony and "Dunn bought himself a dress coat."

At Council Bluffs "Dunn and I bade Hall adieu and left [by stage] at 4 o'clock A. M. for Des Moines City. Breakfasted at 7 o'clock. Dined at Lewis, County seat of Cass Co. Here we were re-shipped, into a mud wagon — there being six of us, all Pike's Peakers, we were badly crowded, but had a general good time of it. Lodged on Nodaway River."

The next day they started at two in the morning and passed through Fontanelle at daybreak. They breakfasted at a farmhouse at eight. By ten they were in Winterset, "a respectable town, surrounded by a good country." At five they "arrived in Des Moines city, and put up at the Des Moines House. Enjoyed ourselves exceedingly well during the day, having a jolly old Englishman to spin yarns for us. Dunn left, late in the evening for Boonsboro."

The remainder of the party took the stage to Newton, arriving at noon, July 29th. "Here I parted from my jolly crowd" and "set out a foot and reached Thomas Clossen's at 5 o'clock in the evening, where I intend resting a few days, as I am tired." While resting on his "*oars* not *ores*", he celebrated his birthday by giving "Mary Clossen a two dollar and a half gold piece", notwithstanding his lack of ores.

On Friday, August 3rd, just four months after starting for Pike's Peak, Willis walked to Monroe, took the stage to Oskaloosa, and thence to Ottumwa, where he arrived at noon the next day. "Here we took the cars at 3 P. M. and arrived in Mt. Pleasant at 5 P. M." Setting out on foot for home, he was delayed by bad weather and did not arrive until Monday morning, August 6th.

The final entry in the diary is full of calm phi-

losophy. "Reached home in the morning, and accepted the accustomed hospitalities. Thus ends my wearisome and abortive search for gold, having traveled, the meanderings considered, about 3000 miles, spending four times what I made. And yet the scenery and human nature which I have learned, amply repays me all."

BESSIE L. LYON

Flood Time at Cascade

A group of Cascade schoolboys, tired after a busy evening of harmless pranks, trudged homeward on the night of June 14, 1925. Bright flashes of lightning in the north caught their eyes and illuminated the sidewalk at their feet. On the following morning, these same youthful students fidgeted at their desk seats in St. Martin's as they gazed apprehensively out of school windows: the Maquoketa River had overflowed its banks and was filling the bordering lowlands with a flood of swirling, muddy water! Slowly but surely the water rose and advanced menacingly toward the barns and dwellings which were situated on the outskirts of the little northeast Iowa town.

A night of cloudbursts in neighboring localities to the north was responsible for this flood which was sweeping down the valley of the Maquoketa, carrying with it tangled masses of debris and bits of wreckage. The main point of attack by the turgid avalanche of water was the massive arched bridge which connected the east side and west side of Cascade. The volume of water completely filled the arches of this imposing structure and poured over the deserted footwalks. With the

speed of a mill race the raging current swept over the dam which stood some distance below the bridge. A park pavilion near by was swiftly whisked away by the torrent despite valiant efforts to anchor it securely.

A steep hill east of the bridge offered protection to most of the people living in that area although the water encroached steadily on some of the homes which were located very near the stream. An arm of the muddy invader poured around the picturesque old grist mill but high ground forced it back to the flats which stretched southward along the river channel. The old mill building, supported by a substantial foundation of massive rock, "stood the test". The bridge, although buffeted by tons of floating wreckage, resisted the pressure of what was styled, with more emphasis than accuracy, "the greatest flood of known and unrecorded history."

On the west bank of the river the overflow ravaged the fields and swept southward. Merchants and shopkeepers soon realized that the business section of Cascade was practically an island, just beyond the grasp of the two sinister arms of the frightful invader. Fortunately, however, the high ground, several blocks in extent, which constituted this portion of town offered protection against great damage by submersion. The region included

in the residence district at the west end of town was far less fortunate. As the flood danger became more and more apparent, householders began moving all their portable goods to upper stories. In some cases this task was performed just in time to save valuables from spoliation as the water rose above the level of the cellars and poured into the rooms on the lower floors. Women and children experienced the terrors of the marooned as they cowered fearfully in upper rooms and attics. Below them the water played havoc with furniture and household goods.

Meanwhile, the raging current west of the business section was bent on much more serious destruction. A hardware store collapsed under its furious attack. Coils of rope, pitchforks, and other stock floated away, later to be found in the sand which covered the flats. The Baptist Church resisted immersion for a while but was finally carried away. Photographers ventured into dangerous places to take pictures of houses being torn from their foundations before the fury of the flood.

The main area of inundation presented a strange and desolate picture. Writing desks, porch swings, and pianos formed part of the flotsam which was quickly borne southward. Odds and ends of every description floated on the sur-

face for a short distance and then disappeared in the muddy current. Livestock of various kinds formed part of the tribute exacted by the insistent tyrant, and one person reported that "three chickens atop a coop" had made the dangerous voyage down the turbulent stream. A house built only a short time before the disaster clung desperately "to the west side of its foundations while the East side of the basement, furnace and garage, containing [a] brand new car was swept away."

Most of the citizens of the town were in a state of feverish excitement. Some congregated in little groups at various points from which they watched the destructive course of the torrent. Others paddled about in improvised rafts, water tanks, and makeshift boats, assisting marooned householders whose homes stood outside the path of the dangerous current. The more daring youths of the west side swam around in the muddy water which stood in the houses, rescuing household articles and handing them up to the owners who had fled to upper rooms.

Early in the afternoon the first of two drownings occurred. About two o'clock, Edward Bell, who was employed at a garage situated in the business district, announced that he wished to go home after dry clothing. His house was located west of the main current which was then a raging

whirlpool. With James Casey and "Nic" Cigrand, he set out in a canvas boat to cross the dangerous flood. They had gone only a short distance before the frail craft was caught in the swift current and forced down the stream, despite frantic efforts on the part of the men to change its course. Suddenly the boat capsized, throwing the men into the swirling waters.

Casey managed to grasp the trunk of a tree which still stood upright. A party of rescuers soon dragged him to safety. Cigrand was washed past him downward to the flats and out of danger. Vainly clutching at every object which might impede his momentum, Bell disappeared from sight. It was not until two weeks later that some workmen found his body deeply imbedded in the sand and earth deposited by the high water.

In a small frame house near the path of the current lived Mrs. Phoebe Russel, one of the oldest residents of the town. When the force of the flood became alarming, efforts were made by neighbors to induce her and Mrs. Nellie Cowan, a daughter who was attending her, to leave the building. They refused.

"I was in the house and saw everything coming", related Mrs. Cowan. "My mother was on a bed and when I felt the house start to shake I put a cover over her. 'Billie' Cooley came into the

house and told us that we should get out. I told him that the house had a good foundation and that it would hold. He begged us to leave saying that the house could not last longer. I told him that I was going to stay and see what would happen. Billie begged us again and then left and just as he stepped out of the house the ceiling and plaster began to fall on us. I went over to see my mother and found that the falling plaster had cut her head. Just as I placed a cloth over the cut to stop the flow of blood the house left its foundation."

The little house collapsed before the eyes "of hundreds who congregated near by". In despair the onlookers searched the swiftly moving current with anxious glances. Finally Mrs. Russel was sighted. The old lady was drifting down toward the flats on a mattress which served as a raft. But the worst fears of the powerless spectators were affirmed when the mattress overturned and the woman disappeared. Meanwhile Mrs. Cowan was afloat on a mass of wreckage which made its way down the stream. In stark terror she clung to her unstable support while beds, tables, and other wreckage crashed together and were whipped about her by the current. Those who viewed the spectacle thought that any moment would be her last. Nevertheless she was finally rescued, distraught and terrified by her harrowing

experience. Her mother's body was found on the following morning.

While these tragedies were occurring, organized attempts were being made to give aid to persons who were besieged by the high water. From Dubuque, Sheriff F. J. Kennedy and Fire Chief Joseph Fisher arrived with a group of assistants. In all manner of water craft these officials performed a great service in releasing many who were imprisoned in their homes by the watery menace. The workers gave no thought to food or rest and after five hours in the water they were taken to the City Cafe "where, as guests of the sheriff, they enjoyed a splendid dinner."

By nightfall the fury of the flood was spent, and citizens of the town congregated to view the scene of the destruction. A gorge, twenty-five feet in depth and from fifty to one hundred feet in width, marked the path of the current and testified to its ferocity. This apparently natural channel extended along Pontiac Street for a considerable distance. The huge ditch invited the interest and wonder of all who gazed upon it. On either side was piled high a collection of debris which, in the words of the Cascade *Pioneer,* was "beyond description" and "appalling to the heart of the beholder." Heaps of wreckage dotted the lower end of the town. Household articles of every de-

scription, cherished keepsakes, and ruined goods from the few stores in the path of the current, were elements in the refuse. The fine gardens and lawns of residents along the once pleasant street which led toward this dumping ground were hopelessly destroyed. The whole area was "a barren waste" of sandbars.

The people of Cascade went to the immediate relief of the individuals who had suffered most from the effects of the flood. The spirit of neighborliness which pervaded the little town was an immense asset in this time of stress and privation. Unfortunates were given food and clothing. Undamaged homes were opened wide to those whose dwellings were uninhabitable. Various community organizations began to collect funds to be expended for the flood sufferers, many of whom faced the prospect of being homeless for a considerable time. "Cascade people did this without any request for outside aid", later declared the Cascade *Pioneer* with justifiable pride.

But the terror of high water was not yet over. At about one o'clock on Wednesday morning a heavy rain storm occurred. The storm area was again north of town. The Maquoketa, which had by this time reached its normal stage, began to rise. Fear again seized the townspeople as they visualized further disaster. Various rumors

sprang up. According to one story a plot was afoot to blow out the dam, thus removing one obstruction in the path of the stream and lessening the flood hazard. This rumor as well as others could not be verified. But the fears of the people were without foundation. The river channel carried the surplus water without overflowing.

The record of the destruction in property is revealing. Fourteen buildings were "totally demolished"; fifteen structures were listed as "partially demolished"; and about seventy houses, barns, and places of business were damaged by water. It was not unusual for a farmer whose place was situated in the flood area to list such casualties as "four cows, barn, 20 hogs." Losses were estimated at $500,000 by the Cascade *Pioneer*.

The task of gathering up the wreckage and general cleaning was soon consuming many busy hours for workmen and householders, although low spirits reduced the efforts of some of the distressed people to a minimum. "We must not be discouraged", declared the editor of the local newspaper. "Cyclones and fires have nearly wiped out smaller towns and they have recovered. . . . The solid citizenry of Cascade is still here ready to help and go ahead. God reigns and the soul of Cascade still lives." Letters from old citizens who had long ago moved to distant States

expressed deep sorrow. One sympathizer stated emphatically that "if aid is necessary I am willing to do my share. My heart is with the good old town of Cascade and her people."

On Sunday, June 21st, the little town was visited by another flood, but this time it was a flood of sightseers. Throughout the greater part of the day cavalcades of automobiles moved along the old military road to the scene of the disaster. "There were all classes of cars", said the Cascade *Pioneer,* "from expensive limosines, sedans and touring cars, to the most dilapidated flivvers resurrected from the junk pile, and the people likewise included a variety as cosmopolitan and variegated as their vehicular means of transportation." Many of the visitors harbored the impression that the gorge running along Pontiac Street was the river!

Within the next week a meeting was held by leading townsmen "to formulate ways and means to prevent future floods in the locality." A committee with James H. Devaney acting as chairman was selected to have charge of submitting a program of reconstruction to the board of supervisors of Dubuque County. The Cascade group recommended that the river channel be straightened to the north for a distance of 1500 yards. Other proposals included the removal of the dam which stood below the bridge and the substitution of a

suspension bridge for the picturesque old arched structure.

During the long period of official negotiations, various steps were taken to aid Cascade in its rebuilding program. Dubuque initiated a movement for a fund "to help Cascade come back." Another fund to be used for the same purpose was sponsored by the Cascade *Pioneer*. Toward the end of July the Dubuque collection, which had grown to $1546, was turned over to the reconstruction committee. Even the little village of Bernard made a substantial contribution. Baseball games, dances, and picnics also provided sources of needed funds. A donation of "two days' labor" was made by the Cascade farmers and business men.

During the early summer months groups of schoolboys scampered along the banks of the Maquoketa south of town. Home they came, with pockets full of odds and ends which had been deposited there by the flood. Jack-knives, photographs, and whistles could be found among the collection — treasure trove to these sun-browned lads, but mementoes of disaster to their elders. "The flood" was the absorbing topic of youthful conversations, while Rin Tin Tin playing in "Tracked in the Snow" at the local theater lost much of his usual appeal.

The little town of Cascade is again relatively

prosperous and serene. No signs of the disaster of 1925 are visible. Cars and wagons pass at all hours on Pontiac Street, once the channel for a flood current. Buildings have disappeared, but others have taken their places. A new suspension bridge spans the little Maquoketa River which glides from the northward in a straightened channel. A concrete dike flanks its west bank. Downstream the waters rush over a small declivity formed by the natural rocky stratum from which the village decades ago received its name. The dam is gone. Only the old mill stands as it was on that fearful day eleven years ago. And as the townspeople seat themselves on the lawn of the city park to listen to the music of the waterfall and perhaps watch the youthful fisherman angle for his prize, a glance at the old mill sometimes serves to recall the day when Cascade had its greatest trial by water.

THOMAS C. GEARY

Comment by the Editor

THE UTILITY OF DIARIES

Why do people write diaries? Children, like "Plupy" Shute and Queen Victoria, are sometimes encouraged to keep a daily record for disciplinary reasons; a few never break the habit. Others, like Samuel Pepys and James M. Willis, do not begin until they are twenty-seven. At that age diary writing is a form of self-expression probably induced by interesting experiences or consciousness of self-importance. In either case, it is a revelation of personality. One who confines his observations and opinions to the pages of a private notebook, however, is probably less egotistical than an autobiographer, and far more accurate. Diarists are not much concerned with readers and their entries are not adulterated with second thoughts or modified by subsequent experience.

For a regular diarist such topics as health, the weather, domestic problems, religion, and extraordinary incidents form the substance of life. His chronicle is a microscopic view of ordinary circumstances — "and so to bed". The daily newspaper is a kind of generalized impersonal diary.

But the inspiration of the occasional diarist is derived from unusual conditions. War is so exciting and of such crucial importance that soldiers can not resist keeping a record of what they see and do and think. Travel gives such carefree vagrants as Jack London an itch to describe unfamiliar scenes. Explorers usually record their observations in the form of a daily journal. In the gold rushes to California, Pike's Peak, and Alaska, many a farmer and schoolmaster, like James M. Willis, emulated Lewis and Clark by keeping a log of the journey. The true story of those American argonauts is to be found in their private journals, never meant for publication. A. B. Hulbert used two hundred and fifty diaries to write his chronicle of the "Forty-niners". Of such material is authentic history and biography made.

J. E. B.

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