

## In the Name of Free Soil

One day late in October, 1856, an old man, weary and travel stained, rode into Iowa City astride a mule. Seeking the residence of William Penn Clarke, chairman of the Kansas Central Committee of Iowa, the stranger announced that he was John Brown, just come from Osawatomie and the Lawrence foray in Kansas. To Clarke, Dr. Jesse Bowen, and other residents of the State capital who were in active sympathy with the free-state pioneers of Kansas, he related his recent experiences and discussed ways and means of forwarding money, arms, and clothing to Free Soilers in Kansas and Nebraska.

On his subsequent journeys through Iowa, John Brown was generally accompanied by fugitive slaves from Missouri, whom he and his armed band escorted to a haven of freedom beyond Lake Michigan. He could always count on finding at the residence of J. B. Grinnell, in Grinnell, not only rest, food, and shelter for himself and his party, white and black, but money and words of cheer besides. After leaving Grinnell, his next ark of safety was the Quaker

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settlement in Cedar County, where he would quarter his men — having passed through Iowa City in the night to avoid molestation — and then retrace his steps to the State capital to consult with Clarke and other friends. On such occasions Brown generally required the benefit of a clear head and a cool hundred, both of which he never failed to find at the office of Clarke, who often made up any deficiencies there might be in funds or contributed the whole amount himself. There were many others also who gave of their means for this purpose, and even Democrats, while denouncing abolitionists, were contributing their funds toward the escape of fugitive slaves.

On the evening of February 4, 1859, John Brown crossed the Missouri River at Nebraska City, accompanied by a few of his party, together with twelve negroes — one of the latter but a few weeks old. At Tabor, where they arrived two days later, they rested a week and then pushed on for Des Moines, putting up at night successively at three stations on the underground railroad. On February 18th, they crossed the Des Moines River and entered the present State capital. John Teesdale, then editor of the *Iowa State Register*, paid their ferriage. Teesdale and Brown had been old personal friends in Ohio, but until that day Teesdale was not aware that the Osawatomie Brown and his friend were one and the same. On February 20th the party reached Grinnell, where they were entertained most cordially by the

founder of the town, and five days later they gained the hospitable hamlets of the Quaker settlement, having passed through Iowa City the night previous.

The news spread in Iowa City that Brown, with a large party of fugitive slaves, was in the vicinity. As a reward of three thousand dollars had been offered by the authorities of Missouri for the arrest of the negroes, the disinterested advocates of the rigid enforcement of the fugitive slave law, who cared nothing in particular about other laws, began to discuss the propriety of collecting a mob, marching on Springdale, and capturing Brown with his party. Sam Workman, then postmaster at Iowa City, was the captain of the gang organized for this purpose, but Brown returned a reply breathing quiet defiance to Workman's threat of capturing him, so the postmaster, after consulting his friend, Captain Kelly, an Irish gentleman of great eminence, that is to say, six feet and seven inches tall, deferred the undertaking until darkness and the presence of Brown in Iowa City might afford a more auspicious opportunity.

At this stage of the proceedings, J. B. Grinnell, fearing trouble, went to Chicago to secure a box car, in order that the fugitives might be removed quietly and swiftly. But John F. Tracy, the superintendent of the railroad, refused to provide transportation for the negroes, lest the company should be prosecuted under the fugitive slave law. Nevertheless, he gave Grinnell his draft for fifty dollars, and this

draft Grinnell handed to Brown on his return from Chicago.

Meanwhile, the United States marshal, Laurel Summers, announced that he had a warrant for the arrest of John Brown and his party. At this juncture, Brown sought the advice of his friends in Iowa City. He went to the home of Dr. Jesse Bowen on Iowa Avenue, and there in the evening William Penn Clarke and the doctor discussed with him various plans out of the predicament. They finally decided that Brown should leave Iowa City late that night, while Clarke should set out by the early train the next morning to secure a box car at West Liberty in which to ship the negroes to Chicago.

Accordingly, Clarke, in company with L. A. Duncan, the editor of the Iowa City *Republican*, went to the home of S. C. Trowbridge, who had been selected for the delicate duty of piloting Brown safely out of the city. It was midnight when they arrived and Trowbridge was well into his first slumber, but he got out of bed and, hastily putting himself in light marching order, appeared at the door. He readily promised to perform the duty assigned to him, merely stipulating that he should do it in his own way. By four o'clock he was at Dr. Bowen's house and, eluding one of Sam Workman's men who was keeping watch over Brown's horse in Bowen's stable, they rode away by a circuitous route and were soon floundering in the darkness and mud of the upper Muscatine road, bound for the Quaker

settlement among whose quiet cottages, in the gray dawn of the winter morning, Trowbridge parted for all time from John Brown and his band of adventurers.

The most difficult part of the plan was to procure the car from the railroad company, but this difficulty dissolved before the finesse of William Penn Clarke, who proceeded to Davenport where he called on Hiram Price, then secretary of the railroad company, to whom he confided his business and requested aid. Price had no control over the cars, but gave Clarke a note of introduction to J. W. Moak, the roadmaster. With this note from Price and Tracy's draft, which he had obtained from Brown, Clarke returned to West Liberty, where he found Brown waiting with his party concealed in Keith's steam mill.

If the fugitives were to escape a car had to be secured immediately. The agent had just gone to dinner about a quarter of a mile away, but Enoch Lewis, an old man, volunteered to fetch him to the hotel where Clarke and Brown were waiting. To obtain the car, it was necessary for Clarke to make the agent believe that the railroad officers knew and connived at what was being done. So he showed him the note of introduction from Price to the roadmaster and asked him if he knew the signature. Of course he recognized the name of the secretary of the road. In the same manner the draft from Tracy was exhibited, which he likewise knew to be in the hand-

writing of the superintendent. Clarke then asked him if he had a box car and what would be the cost of running it to Chicago. He answered that he had such a car and that the price would be fifty dollars. Thereupon Tracy's check was handed to him, and Clarke told him that the car was wanted at once down at the mill and that it was not his business to know what was going to be put into it. The car was accordingly pushed down the track in front of Keith's mill, and the fugitives were loaded in as freight. All of the men, both white and black, were heavily armed. Afterward, while Clarke and Brown dined at the hotel together, the Iowa abolitionist gave Brown ten dollars to help him on his way, with the advice to go home and take some rest.

When the passenger train came along, Brown got into the car with the negroes. Most of the inhabitants of West Liberty were in sympathy with Brown and had gathered at the station, having heard that a bold plan of aiding some escaping negroes was to be tried. Were any Federal officers aboard? Would the train pick up the freight car on the siding? Clarke and two of Brown's men boarded a passenger coach to be prepared for emergencies. Slowly the train backed down to the mill, coupled on to the box car, and then puffed out of town amid shouts of approval from the crowd.

Brown and his party arrived without molestation at Chicago where they changed cars, taking another branch of the underground railroad to Canada.

Tracy, it is said, swore a little when the negroes were unloaded at the Chicago depot. Clarke afterward apologized to the president of the road for the imposition he had practiced on the agent at West Liberty. And so the affair ended happily without further trouble. But that was not the last shipment on the underground railroad in Iowa.

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