

THE PALIMPSEST

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Roving Correspondents

Prior to the Civil War scores of writers wrote vivid and frequently detailed letters for the press regarding the rich State of Iowa—a land that was invariably described as “flowing with milk and honey.” Some of these writers were editors and journalists who published accounts in their own papers, accounts that were often reprinted in newspapers scattered throughout the country. Others were written by individuals already living in Iowa. These letters were published locally or sent to editors in their own home towns back East. Still others were by visitors to Iowa, or by roving correspondents writing for out-of-state newspapers. A sampling of these may be found in the following letters written during the 1850’s about various sections of Iowa.

The first and longest letter is one of a series by Henry C. Kelly and appeared in the *Weekly Express and Herald* (Dubuque) during the years 1857-1858. Kelly was a rival correspondent of Jesse Clement (see *Palimpsest* September, 1968)

who wrote a similar series of letters for the *Dubuque Times*. The present letter, which appeared on March 25, 1857, while dated two weeks after the Spirit Lake Massacre, very clearly was written some time before that bloody affair, as it would obviously have been mentioned, more particularly since the Relief Expedition headed by Major William Williams, was made up largely of Fort Dodge and Webster County men. The dangers of a Sioux Indian outbreak were not overlooked by Kelly, who must have been deeply stirred as news filtered into Dubuque about the dreadful holocaust on Lake Okoboji.

The yearning for the arrival of the railroad was deep in the hearts of Fort Dodge citizens in 1857. It was not until 1858, however, that the Dubuque and Pacific reached Delaware County. The Iron Horse did not reach Waterloo-Cedar Falls until the eve of the Civil War. It was not until the close of the Civil War that construction was resumed and the Dubuque & Pacific finally reached Fort Dodge.

A keen observer, Kelly noted the rich soil, the great variety of trees, the coal beds, and the amazing gypsum stratum that was to prove one of Webster County's most valuable assets. The phenomenal growth of Fort Dodge, the favorable land values, and the healthful climate all combined to fix the eyes of many prospective settlers on Webster County.

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