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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DRAWN BY E. J. SAWYER COURTESY OF IOWA BIRD LIFE

A PASSENGER PIGEON

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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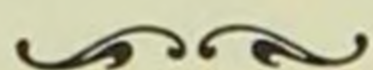

Vanished Hosts

John Bradbury, an English naturalist who accompanied Wilson P. Hunt's expedition up the Missouri River in 1811, observed large numbers of passenger pigeons near the mouth of the Nodaway River. In a few hours he shot two hundred and seventy-one.

"This species of pigeon associates in prodigious flocks," he wrote. "One of these flocks, when on the ground, will cover an area of several acres in extent, and the birds are so close to each other that the ground can scarcely be seen. This phalanx moves through the woods with considerable celerity, picking up, as it passes along, everything that will serve as food. It is evident that the foremost ranks must be the most successful, and nothing will remain for the hindermost. But that all may have an equal chance, the instant that any rank becomes the last, it rises, and flying over the whole flock, alights exactly ahead of the foremost. They succeed each other with so much rapidity,

that there is a continued stream of them in the air; and a side view of them exhibits the appearance of the segment of a large circle, moving through the woods. I observed that they cease to look for food a considerable time before they become the last rank, but strictly adhere to their regulations, and never rise until there is none behind them."

The migrations of the passenger pigeons were determined by food supply instead of seasonal changes. Although they seem to have been most numerous in the forests of the Ohio Valley, huge flocks visited the wooded portions of Iowa. E. D. Nauman, writing in *Iowa Bird Life*, has described these vanished hosts as he observed them in Keokuk County many years ago.

A well known ornithologist said, "The passenger pigeon was in some respects the finest pigeon the world has seen." Many careful observers have considered it, in its day, as the most numerous bird in the world. Now it is extinct. The writer of these lines has the fortunate distinction of having seen hundreds of thousands of these birds with his own eyes. And this was in our own State of Iowa.

The passenger pigeon was about the size of our domestic pigeon, but it was longer and very graceful in form, and was most handsome in coloration.

In the sunshine the feathers of its head, neck, and back showed about all the colors of the rainbow. The specimens in museums give but a meager impression of the appearance of the live bird.

These pigeons inhabited the timbered area of eastern North America. However, when nuts, acorns, and the seeds of trees, which constituted their natural food, became scarce, they made excursions into fields of grain; and, by reason of their immense numbers, they did considerable damage to farm crops. At the time of the earliest settlements, and for many years thereafter, the great multitudes of wild pigeons, as they were commonly called, made such an impression upon the minds of men that the extinction of the species seemed an impossibility. Nevertheless, it occurred. They lived, migrated, and nested in and over these great forests in enormous colonies. Their roosts and nesting areas were anywhere from a few miles to fifty miles in extent and located mostly in the larger hardwood forests of the Middle West. Single trees have been found supporting over a hundred nests. The rule with the wild pigeons was to lay only two eggs at a nesting, but to nest three or four times a year.

I have examined the writings of about fifty observers, and they all agree in statements declaring that the numbers of the wild pigeons were vast

beyond the comprehension of man. Some careful observers have placed estimates of single flocks or colonies at from twenty million to two billion birds. When destruction came, however, it came by the hand of the white man, and in a hundred different ways. The great forests were mostly destroyed; the pigeons were enticed into open fields by proffered food and were netted by thousands; their nests were robbed; they were shot, clubbed, and trapped in every conceivable way. Their nesting colonies were broken up by squab hunters, and when the pigeons moved a hundred miles or more to try again, they were immediately set upon by other hunters. Any bird thus systematically prevented from raising its young will soon become extinct from that cause alone.

My own observations of the passenger pigeon were confined to southeastern Iowa. This being mostly a prairie State, I do not know that the pigeons ever found enough forest area here to establish a nesting colony. We saw them in their migrations. These were largely irregular. In some seasons we would see them flying northward for two or three days in April or May. Perhaps the next year they would not be seen in the spring at all, but in October or November instead.

As a rule, during the migration, flocks would pass over all day long. They would form in great

"windrows" of pigeons across the sky from horizon to horizon, sometimes in lines not so long, but always at right angles with the direction in which they were flying. Between these windrows of pigeons a strip of the sky could usually be seen. The flocks were frequently so dense they obscured the sun like passing clouds. When the weather was calm, the pigeons maintained a very nearly level and uniform elevation throughout their lines, but in windy weather the lines would twist and writhe like huge serpents in the sky. At such times one could best see their remarkable colors scintillating in the sunshine. At night they settled down in the trees along the streams to roost.

A tract of forest several hundred yards south of our cabin home was a favorite roosting place for the pigeons. In this timber stood an immense red oak tree that had weathered the storms of four centuries. This gigantic tree, the patriarch of all the surrounding forest, was the center of the roosting place, and many of its great limbs were broken down by the weight of the pigeons.

At every migration their numbers became smaller, until about 1880 we saw the last of them. The final known survivor died in the Cincinnati Zoological Gardens in 1914. No one will ever again see a live passenger pigeon.

E. D. NAUMAN

The College of the Pioneer

Being a pioneer in fact, a scholar at heart, and a poet by nature, Thomas H. Macbride was able to interpret the character and significance of early Iowa colleges from careful observation and with inimitable charm. These pages have been selected from his second series of addresses, On the Campus.
— The Editor.

On all the prairies of Iowa in the early fifties there was not a railway, hardly a common road. Vast portions of the country were unoccupied, trackless, save as wandering herds of cattle made trails from hilltop to hilltop and from meadow to meadow. In the summer there stretched away a land of flowers, the tillage of millenia, beautiful beyond all compare, everywhere wild gardens watered by lazy unbridled creeks and plethoric rivers. Fleece-like mists marked out the vast, undrained, miry swamps and marshes. The mists followed the sluggish drainage in long, winding clouds, sometimes by sun undried, by winds unlifted, for days and weeks together. In winter, a blizzard-swept field of ice and snow made all the plains impassable.

Along the Mississippi River half a dozen towns were set, here and there, to welcome the incoming

tide of immigration; but the multitude of the people was scattered in the village-like settlements, far and wide. Cabins were the usual homes of men, — plain log cabins standing by the banks of the larger streams and rivers, more sparsely dotting the hilltops of the prairies in the ever-widening fringe of progressive occupation toward the west. Public buildings were small and cheaply built, courthouses and churches insignificant. The everywhere present log schoolhouse served in many communities for school and temple. Money was none; wealth was none; personal property none, save such as came in an ox-drawn cart or wagon from some eastern home, or such as might be estimated in the value of tools and cattle.

Yet these people built colleges! How might Carnegie or Rockefeller have smiled at such a place for such investment, even on the familiar basis of "we'll give one if you'll give two"; and yet here also, doubtless for purposes we dream not of, God had spread one of the seedfields of time! These men built colleges, built them in numbers, one at least in every county, structures of brick or stone, standing in many cases to this day. How did it happen? How did they do it? Who were these people, what impelled them to such a labor, and what did they mean? They are all quiet now; possibly here or there an aged man

survives, with memory dim, dreaming of earlier years; how shall I picture for you the people of his day?

Well, in the first place, the pioneers of Iowa were optimists, they were happy people. They lived much out of doors; they were mostly young and full of lusty life. They knew what they were doing. They knew the goodness of the land, upon its fertility they relied, its beauty they enjoyed. In spring wild orchards filled the landscape with glorious bloom; in autumn a wealth of ripening fruit awaited the user. The mother cared for the simple duties of the house; the father tilled a limited field; the children tumbled amid the wild flowers of the meadow. In winter, severe enough betimes, roaring wood-fires in the throat of a widened chimney filled the cabin with warmth and cheer. Men and women alike were brave.

In the second place, these people were of more than ordinary intelligence. Yale and Princeton and Jefferson were named among them, and even Harvard was not unknown. In those spirited times they well knew all that was going on, and during the long winter evenings, in schoolhouse and cabin, the historian Rhodes might have heard men discuss the repeal of the Missouri Compromise with an acumen which would have brought lustre to the pages of his Volume I, brilliant as

those pages are. These men loved learning; all did not possess it, but thousands had in some way felt the sweetness of its power. They knew the meaning of a college, and they loved it.

In the third place, the pioneers of Iowa were thoroughly religious men. They believed in God and his providence in the world. All over these prairies the Sabbath was filled with song. Men sang in their homes.

On Sunday grove or schoolhouse was the meeting place, and in fine weather people journeyed for miles to church. The songs of Zion filled the aisles and stirred the leafy ceilings in the temples of God's planting, temples not made with hands. In autumn, when the hillsides were red with sumac and the maples in the valleys were gold, what more appropriate than to sing:

> There is a land of pure delight,
> Where saints immortal reign.

And so on the way they sang; so that it is literally true that the prairies were sometimes filled with the music of religious song. One who knew these people well was wont to say that ninety per cent of the early population of Iowa were members of our various democratic churches.

Better than all, in all these forming counties, the unwearied circuit-rider, of whatever faith, rode his familiar round; by every track, by every trail

he passed, bearing his message of courage and good cheer. You may see him yonder on his pony, outlined on the hilltop against the evening sky, as low descends the summer sun. From that hilltop the view is glorious, but does not include the prospect of a hotel; and, saddlebags for pillows, the traveller will spend the night alone, beneath the stars!

As days shorten and grow colder, the pony finds tether near some lonely cabin; its owner made welcome within. The neighbors gather. "They round the ingle form a circle wide," and in the fire-log's ruddy light they talk the evening hours away. They talk of the republic and its dangers, of the new commonwealth and its possibilities, of their children and their hopes; and the fire-log falls to embers gray.

But as they talked they became men of vision. They saw the children of the prairie coming to manhood and womanhood without the sweetness they themselves had known. The eastern schools were far away; there was but one solution: colleges must be; Christian culture must be; and so these men built the colleges and secured the culture that they sought.

How did they build their colleges? They builded them themselves. How did they build their colleges? They had no money; but they had

zeal and faith and vision. They gave their labor and their time. All winter long you might hear the axes ringing in the forest, the sledges plying in the quarries. You might see on the horizon smoke ascending from the furnace, as plain men, with purpose high, hewed the beams and quarried the stone and burned the brick and lime to build the college. Had not God given them health and hands? And so they laid the foundation, and the corner stone, and at length they brought forth the "headstone with shoutings, crying: Grace, grace unto it!"

Even so the men of Iowa builded for themselves Wesleyan, and Penn, and Cornell, and Upper Iowa, and Lenox, and Pella, and Tabor, and all the colleges and academies between, over the whole face of the land. For these buildings, thus erected, they found teachers, consecrated men and women, who also gave what they had; nay, they gave more than the others' all! These gave their lives; they gave themselves, that the youth of Iowa might learn the more enduring joys of human life.

And so young men and maidens went to college and learned of the things of the spirit. The hillsides still blossomed as before, but for young men and women there opened far vistas of the fair fields of literature and history, with flowers and

harvest and the shadows of passing clouds. The birds still sang in the budding thickets, but at college young people learned the music of immortal song, cheering, consoling the troubled hearts of men from century to century. The mists still hung in the valleys, but young people learned to look upon them without fear, — symbols of those other clouds that everywhere gird us round, dimming the vision of our keenest insight, but yielding to the progress of knowledge as mists melt before the sun. The intellectual life opened, and Iowa was transformed!

But this is not all; these colleges set in motion those forces which insured the success of the public schools; nay, the State University itself is but the culminating crest of that impulse for learning started by the people who in their poverty would have colleges, eighty and ninety years ago.

It is sometimes said that education is to fit men for life. Our fathers thought farther; they said education is to fit men to live well. They emphasized duty, and built their colleges with these things in view. There are those who say that the smaller colleges have had their day, and that there are in Iowa too many colleges, that they can not support themselves, and all that sort of thing. I am not of those who believe any of these things; certainly not if the colleges go forward to do the

office for which they are set, and which they have thus far done so well. Every one of them is needed. Every one of them is a center of inspiration in its own community, an outpost of light which must not be dimmed and against which the powers of dust and darkness should not be permitted to prevail. But let them not attempt more than they can do. Phillips-Exeter has never bethought itself to become a university, nor even a college; Phillips-Exeter is Phillips-Exeter throughout the world.

Education shall teach men to live, to live the best lives that humanity knows. All our wealth and material progress are good, but only as they make all better things more widely possible, by no means as for a moment obscuring these. The success of a college, as of a nation, is measured by what it contributes to the intellectual life and joy of men, to their moral and spiritual force and power, to the consolation and comfort of men. There is no other success. Our fathers knew this, and colleges and schools exist that the nation may live.

The men of the prairie built their colleges as their fathers beyond the mountains had built theirs, albeit on more liberal lines. The schools of New England, the log college of New Jersey, those institutions named of Hamilton and Jeffer-

son, were all for men. The college of the prairie was for men *and women*. Invention born of need, whether for ultimate weal or woe, we know not; the future may determine that. This much we know: the thing was done; the college was built, and used, as we have seen. By way of the college of the pioneer, coeducation came, and came as if to stay.

But however in future this may be, in the college itself the student of the time was not the only gainer. As in all such cases, where the spirit prompts, the founders builded better than they knew. As the quality of mercy, their action twice was blest; in serving their children, themselves and us they served, in that they gave formal and enduring expression to their own ideals, their own judgments, their own sentiments. We know now with absolute clearness what these men thought about certain definite things, which, whether we will or not, are become to-day far less certain; likely to constitute hereafter but a minor part in our more comprehensive schemes of public education.

Be it recalled that our beginnings, though substantial, were not extensive. Be it not forgotten, a single structure, of stone or brick, did for the time suffice. A roof indeed, essential then as now; but no more then than now was this the college.

These were Garfield's times, when, on fair days, at least, a single log sufficed, one end the Hopkins throne!

In those strenuous days, strange as it may appear, neither faculty nor students were organized for dancing, nor for social functions chiefly; the students were organized for debate, and the literary society or lyceum vied with the most popular class-room, while members of the faculty themselves lent every form of assistance and encouragement.

Great modern libraries we had none; each professor had books a few; and, as they might, our societies bought new books as these appeared. But when neither the books of the professor nor any private source could yield the information needed, the professors somehow knew! The mind of the pioneer professor was simply saturated with the history of his country.

The student at the pioneer college studied history; not for credit, for *debate!* For him Macaulay pictured the folly of the Stuarts and Motley the heroism of William the Silent; for him Burke declaimed against the stupid infatuation of English kings, and De Tocqueville eulogized American democracy. For him Story analyzed that wonderful constitution which Washington and the fathers had framed, Hamilton defended, and

the genius of Marshall made plain. These helped him to understand the cost and worth of freedom and the hopeless misery of the slave. The past brought illustration and form; the utterance of the day gave impulse and enthusiasm, the very bread of intellectual life.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all such activity, notwithstanding even the din and turmoil of battle, in the pioneer college the spell of pure literature, its value as such, its surpassing loveliness, was never quite forgot. No; of great libraries we had none; but for all that, we did find literature, found it each for himself; for had not each prairie college its own little collection of books, often of the most interesting sort? Generally the books were a gift, a present from some patient, professional man, some minister or lawyer who at the end of life's day presented to his favorite college the accumulation of busy years; perhaps also *his* inheritance, the books the chosen tomes of those his predecessors who knew and loved!

We missed the great library and so missed much; but were there not possibly compensations? Never was student confused by ten thousand volumes flashed suddenly to vision; never confronted by an officious clerk whose meager attainments sometimes seem to mask pretensions to general omniscience, before which president and professor

alike must flee. But the few hundred volumes in the library of the college, where on a Saturday some kindly instructor, perhaps the president himself, awaited the expectant student, — what wondrous books were there! What beautiful old binding some possessed, damaged perchance by use, or transit, but once how fair, tooled and finished! What odor of the years was theirs, symbolical of memories; the faded bookmark smooth, its pristine brilliance dimmed, pressed in yellow leaves with printing sharp from type unworn.

Applied science by that particular name we did not have; never heard of such a thing. The wonderful flora of a new continent, for instance, we were just beginning to understand a little, through the earlier magnificently serviceable publications of Asa Gray; but the idea that plants might in ways unnoted and obscure seriously interfere with one another, and so hinder those we strove to cultivate, that was as yet concealed, in large measure, from the wisest. The microscope was a toy. Our wheat went down, as it had done in all the world for centuries, in the whiteness of blight; or strange accusing lines of black or red upon the ripened straw and stubble proclaimed the rust, but none of us ever thought of studying these things with a view to their suppression. Our nearest approach to more recent regular procedure came when our

botany and insect men suggested ploughing an adjoining strip of land to prevent chinch-bugs, then a universal pest, from passing from dying wheat to standing maize, and recommended that such wheat be burned rather than gathered by the cradle.

So with physical science. Cultivated largely as a matter of intellectual interest, "*illustrated*" by such experiments as might not involve too much expense, chemistry and physics, under the head of natural philosophy, were presented for cultural purpose only, to proclaim the triumphs of the human spirit which had availed to make discoveries so curious, and the marvellous wisdom of God which had thus established such intricate and beautiful relationships in the whole circle of things otherwise inanimate and dull. Of electricity we heard; the telegraph the latest, and, we thought, the *final* application of that wondrous form of energy. Of electricity we heard; we knew the word derived from Greek, meant *amber*; amber we did not know! So much we knew and dared no more; nor did we dream the time might one day come when, by very familiarity, the surely "incensed" power should find humiliation in the vulgar title "*juice!*"

We studied human physiology. Here was science indeed, and science so far applied, for we

heard lectures on *hygiene*. But our professor of physiology was not himself a scientific man. He talked of the *rules* of hygiene as formulae to be followed, like to the rules of versification or juridical procedure. He was a psychologist, perhaps, albeit in those less ambitious days he did not know it, and remains accordingly unknown to fame. His subject was unpopular, taken in spring at the time sassafras-tea was commonly served in college boarding-houses, and perhaps for similar reasons; but he was a conscientious man and had ideas.

As for the fathers, so for us, the old-time classics formed the basis sure of daily food. But: we studied, not for Latin, some purist may grieve to hear, but for the English into which it must perforce be rendered. Of the author's elegant accomplishment, as creator of fine letters, — of this the pioneer professor said but little.

But he did something better still; he introduced us to history, to political economy, to civil life. Whether democracy, republic, or empire, we followed its fortunes. We knew why Athens triumphed and why she failed; knew it not for Athens but for ourselves. With Cato and Scipio and Coriolanus we became personally acquaint, as with Marius and Cicero and Caesar; we knew *why* the "fierce Carthaginian *almost* won," and

why the patriot Brutus failed. But these were illustrations only: we learned vastly more.

Finally, and essentially, beyond all the arts, liberal or other, beyond all the classics, histories, and philosophies, the pioneer college was a religious college; in its curriculum, whether by text or lecture, religion of a personal sort had everywhere the place of honor.

This was a matter of course. At that date in our history, only the various religious denominations had organization adequate to initiate, and carry forward at all, such an enterprise, even had other people been so disposed. Besides, as a matter of fact, education is a recognized prerogative of the Christian church. Its founder was a teacher, and he bade his followers teach. And so in the prairie college we thoroughly studied the Scriptures, learned their marvellous English, delighting in that, and were moved by the wondrous spirit that, after thirty centuries, so lives and glows above the ancient pages. All the while our fond professors, in season and out of season, sought to inculcate not the tenets of their own particular form of faith, but the beauty of faith itself; and so, in the height of their great argument, continued to

> assert eternal Providence,
> And justify the ways of God to men.

THOMAS H. MACBRIDE

Excelsior

A neglected phase of the cultural life of America is the sudden development and rapid decline of the Swedenborgian, or New Church. This organization, the outgrowth of the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, was first planted in America by James Glen in Philadelphia in 1784. The new interpretation of life caught the imagination of the early nineteenth century. It at that time answered certain definite needs: the relation of religion to the new theories of science, the attitude of organized religion to the economic difficulties of the time, and the ever present problem of institutionalism. Swedenborgianism appealed to New England, engaging the minds of the most thoughtful people. It reached its height when Emerson included Swedenborg as the representative of religion in his *Representative Men*. After 1850, its influence began to decline in New England, but had already taken root in the Old Northwest and had even penetrated Missouri and Iowa.

In 1811 the Reverend Adam Hurdus founded the Swedenborgian Society in Cincinnati. From there missionaries carried the *Writings* throughout the Middle West. Among these the picturesque

figure of John Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed", played a prominent part. In 1839 the Illinois Association was formed, reaching out with "reading groups" to all the region east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio. In 1842 the Reverend T. O. Prescott, sent out by the Cincinnati group, founded the Swedenborgian Church in Saint Louis, believed to be the first Society west of the Mississippi. This influential group attracted many Germans who had already been introduced to Swedenborg through Immanuel Tafel's translation of his *Writings*.

These German pioneers in turn became the founders of the first Swedenborgian colony in Iowa. Unhappy in the state church of the Fatherland, they found a new freedom in the New Church, the result of Swedenborg's revolt against the older institutionalism. Swedenborg became convinced about the year 1745 that the church as then organized had ceased to meet human needs. For this reason he ever after referred to all organized religion outside his own as the Old Church. These same pioneers sought a solution to the economic insecurity which had driven them to America in religious communism. This communal life could flourish in the New Church, whereas the Old Church would have forbidden it as irreligious. It could also flourish on the Iowa prairie.

The New Church colony in Iowa was founded in 1851 and called itself the Jaspis Kolonie (Jasper Colony). The members embraced communism; they accepted the spiritual guidance of the Bible as interpreted by the writings of Swedenborg; and they purposed to keep their mother tongue. The colony acquired about one thousand acres of fertile land in Iowa County during the years 1851 and 1852. Their first settlement of log cabins was at the point where Willow Creek flows into Price Creek, a tributary of the Iowa River. This location later was called Lenox. The investigator can yet dig up bits of broken dishes on the spot where the original log cabins stood.

The first change to come to the colony was the abandonment of communism. Records in the office of the Iowa County recorder show the first transfer of property from the colony to an individual on April 20, 1853. Probably the colony was reorganized just previous to this date. The second change was the building of a school.

Previous to the abandonment of communism, the person, or persons, best qualified taught the children in his or her own log house. The pupils paid for the instruction by a certain sum of money or by produce. The members of the colony all spoke German and hoped it would continue to be the language of their children. In 1855, the Soci-

ety of True Inspiration came to Iowa and established the Amana Colony adjoining the Swedenborgians. They too spoke German and continued it as the language of their children. They too were actuated by religion, but their type of pietism was much more thoroughgoing than was the "Heavenly Doctrine" of the Jasper Colony.

Among the teachers in the "log house", before a regular school was built, the Cox girls held the leading rôle. Caroline and Emily made their home and "kept school" in their one-room cabin. Miss Caroline was the real teacher, but she was "slightly hunch-backed and in poor health". Often she was confined to her bed for an entire day; then Emily taught the school and when information was needed went to the bed of the semi-invalid for it. "The Cox girls" taught during the summer and so had no discipline trouble. Their specialty was the beginners. It is said that no one seemed to know whence "the Cox girls" came or whither they went after leaving Lenox.

In 1858 the Jasper Colony decided they should have a school. The election of a county superintendent of schools that year probably brought the matter of a building to a definite decision. Most of the lumber for the frame building, later to be known as the Excelsior School, came from the Amana sawmill. Some special pieces,

however, were hauled from a sawmill at Iowa City by an ox team. Amana workmen assisted in putting up the building. The workmanship was of a superior order.

This, the first building constructed primarily for use as a schoolhouse in Lenox Township, was built by the Jasper Colony though in no sense for a New Church school. The building, which still stands, is 18 by 24 feet in dimensions. One door facing the south leads into a large entry, typical of early country schools. The entry provided a place for coats, hats, and lunch baskets. Another door leads directly into the school room. At the front a wall space about five feet square painted black served for a blackboard. In front of this was the teacher's desk. Facing the desk were two rows of large and heavy hand-hewn seats for the pupils. Each seat had an equally heavy desk joined to it by means of a board resting on the floor. Later these seats and desks were replaced by "store bought ones". Boys sat on one side of the room, the girls on the other. The building was heated by a stove in the middle of the room. Large chunks of wood were used as fuel.

George C. Burmeister was the first teacher in the new school. He taught one year, 1858-1859. It was his personal motto which gave the name "Excelsior" to the school. The second teacher

was Henry Burmeister, a brother of George. Men were preferred in the early days since discipline, especially in the winter when the older boys attended, was no easy matter. The "three R's" were the only subjects taught. It seems impossible to find the names of all the early teachers, but a few stand out in the minds of the descendants of the pioneers with great gratitude and vividness. Some of these portraits should not be forgotten.

George C. Burmeister, the first teacher, was born in Germany and trained in a Lutheran parochial school. Coming to America at the age of ten with his parents, he early sought to learn to speak English fluently and correctly. After clerking in a store in Illinois, he came to the Lenox community in 1857 although he retained his Lutheranism, regarding the Swedenborgian creed as "fantastic and amusing". He preferred the town to the "backwoods", but when the new school began his interest found new expression. Not only was he engaged to teach the day school, but he also opened a night school for the older members of the community. All the teaching in the day school was in English. The night school, however, was conducted in German. Debating societies were at that time much in vogue and one flourished under his care at the Excelsior School. There the

issues of the day were discussed, among them the question of slavery.

When school closed early in the spring of 1859, Burmeister entered Western College, a United Brethren school on the open prairie of Linn County about fifteen miles from Lenox. Opened in 1857, Western College was moved to Toledo in 1881 and later renamed Leander Clark College in honor of its principal patron. Burmeister studied at Western till 1861 when he enlisted in the northern cause with other students. Three months later he was mustered out. Having decided to become a lawyer, he planned to study law in Muscatine. In 1862 he raised Company C of the Thirty-fifth Iowa Infantry and served as captain. He was mortally wounded during the Red River campaign and died in an army hospital in Saint Louis in June, 1864.

The second teacher, Henry Burmeister, received the position, so the story goes, by a joke. Henry was acting as farm hand for the district school director. One day during the vacation a woman called and asked for the school. Since no man had much faith in a woman's ability to teach, Henry jestingly remarked that he could do a better job than she. The trustee told him that he was hired. Henry thought no more about it till time for school to open. Then, when notified to begin,

he protested. Thinking it over, however, he went to Marengo to be examined.

The examination was oral and the questions easy. Burmeister was asked to demonstrate his ability as a penman and as a reader. A number of well-known dates in history were next asked, and a few simple problems in fractions and percentage followed. After spelling a number of words and giving several rules in grammar, he was asked the chief question of the day: How far is the sun from the earth? Henry replied that he didn't know and furthermore no one else knew either. He then dryly added that the scientists claimed it was ninety-three million miles, but how did they know? They hadn't measured it, had they? Apparently little faith was placed in scientists in Iowa County that year. The county superintendent affirmed Henry's answer and gave him the necessary certificate.

But women did teach. Miss Elzora Wilkins, among the first women teachers, was also the first English-speaking teacher. She came with her family to Lenox soon after the Jasper Colony started and kept school in their log home before the Excelsior School was built. She was held in such high esteem that she was permitted to teach in the new school and seems to have encountered no difficulty in the matter of discipline.

Miss Millie Gamble was another early woman teacher. She had studied at Western College. Her "spelling schools" and "exhibitions" attracted much attention and made her popular. Miss Addie Taylor, a niece of Miss Elzora Wilkins, later taught and successfully carried on the tradition of her aunt. She too made much of "spelling bees" then in fashion, and in this way helped to make education popular and attractive to young and old.

It is rather odd that none of the teachers so far mentioned were from the families of the original founders of the Jasper Colony. In the early seventies, however, Ferdinand Junker, son of William Junker, one of the founders, taught for several years.

All this time the Excelsior School had served a dual capacity, being used on Sundays as the Swedenborgian, or New Church. The first to minister in the schoolhouse was Albert H. Schloeman. He divided his Sundays among three New Church congregations all meeting in schoolhouses: Excelsior, Parker's Grove (near Shellsburg), and a third near Solon. In 1863 the Reverend Gerhard Bussman was called as pastor and continued the same arrangement. The Reverend Stephen Wood, the Reverend J. J. Lehnen, and the Reverend Jacob Kimm all preached in the

Excelsior School in the seventies. Funerals were held in the schoolhouse, and children were baptized and instructed in the faith. There, too, George Burmeister began the first Sunday School, a purely secular enterprise at first, to teach those who desired to read and write German. Late in the seventies this Sunday School was revived with the added purpose of teaching the "Heavenly Doctrines" of Swedenborg.

During the seventies many meetings were held there to plan for the erection of a church. Finally in 1880 the New Church was dedicated and the Excelsior School lost its congregation but not the love of the older members of the colony. Till their death the old pioneers kept their tenderest affection for the old school and, it is said, "sighed for the happy days spent there".

CHARLES ARTHUR HAWLEY

Comment by the Editor

HISTORY IS PAST CULTURE

Institutions, wars, rulers, plagues, and accidents: these constitute the normal substance of standard history. The story of the past has emphasized heroics. In the long perspective of the modern view of ancient times, only the deeds of the most audacious tyrants and noblest prophets seem conspicuous enough to notice. Monuments and the remnants of substantial public works direct attention to dynasties and governmental power. Such superficial traces of fame and labor divert consideration from the achievements of the race to the glory of the leaders.

Valid history ought to be more than a hollow shell of circumstantial notoriety. Beneath the ostentatious husk of privilege lies the kernel of general human experience. The daily lives of men and women constitute the true story of our heritage. Remarkable exploits of a few may symbolize the common doings of the many; but the significance of the record is in the reality instead of the sign. War and peace, church and state, school and factory are but the manifestations of prevailing social forces.

The vitality of the past, like life itself, is intangible. Whatever is enduring can be found in the thoughts, ideals, and spiritual resources of the people. If history is to be a dependable guide for civilization, the subtleties of experience must be explained.

Iowa pioneers were more than farmers and merchants. The distinction of the Commonwealth they founded is to be sought not so much in political methods, economic advantages, or military victories as in religious zeal and faith in education. Social and cultural progress, though neglected, is probably more significant than exciting campaigns or financial depressions. Let the character of our people be revealed in the chronicles of our churches, schools, and customs.

To students of social relations belongs the grave responsibility of interpreting the past — for history is what the teachers say it is.

J. E. B.

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