

THE PALIMPSEST

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For Peace and Freedom

The Salem centenary has come and gone. One hundred years ago a group of God-fearing men and women followed the frontier to a fertile spot in Henry County, Iowa. There they found Peace, and true to their liking for Old Testament names, called the spot Salem "which means Peace". There they faced the great issues of the nineteenth century. They paved the way for freedom and for tolerance. They refused to obey man-made laws when these conflicted with the laws of their religion. They had much in common with Emerson and Thoreau in New England; they shared some beliefs and practices with the colonies at Amana and at Lenox.

The purpose of these sketches is to present certain centenary pictures: the genius of Quakerism, the defiance of slavery, and portraits of two pioneer educationists who should not be forgotten — Reuben Dorland and D. Sands Wright. It were ingratitude to pass on and not regard those who

contributed so much to our security and peace. These glimpses are intended to typify the character of a little Quaker community that had a tremendous influence. One truth should be evident to all: religion can not be separated from history. Neither exists in the abstract. The Dorland Seminary is history plus Reuben Dorland. Salem itself is Quakerism plus men and women.

Some forty years ago the eminent historian, Frederick J. Turner, called attention to the fact that "the religious aspects of the frontier" should receive careful study. His was then "a voice crying in the wilderness". The people of Iowa, however, should know that neither the frontier nor the history of the middle west itself can be understood apart from the religious currents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The pioneers concerned themselves far more with religious and social questions than their descendants do.

The village of Salem, whose centenary was celebrated last August, was a typical frontier settlement quite unlike the New England town with its aristocratic churches and its commercial pursuits. In the Territory of Iowa the main pursuit was agriculture; the government was democratic in nature; and the various religious denominations established their churches and worshipped with a

marked degree of tolerance for the tenets of differing faiths. Methodists, Swedenborgians, Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, and Congregationalists began the work which ultimately resulted in an approximate basis of equality. The outcome of this attitude is seen in the School of Religion at the State University of Iowa. For the first time Protestant, Jew, and Catholic coöperate in a religious enterprise in a tax-supported institution. In New England such a School would be unthinkable.

In 1835 most religious bodies were seeking some sort of freedom, many of them in direct revolt against what they considered the tyranny of institutionalism. At this time a certain humanitarian interest showed itself in relief of the poor, in a revolt against slavery, in escape from autocracy, and in the demand for an extension of religious freedom. The new settlers in southern Iowa in the early 1830's came partially from New England, but even more largely from the South — from North and South Carolina, Virginia, and Kentucky. As a protest against slavery the nucleus of the Salem settlement had emigrated from North and South Carolina.

The very name Salem indicates that these settlers were Quakers. A list of Salems in various States establishes the trail of the Quakers from

New Jersey, through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and even as far west as Oregon. The Iowa Salem was founded in 1835 in what is now Henry County, but then in the Black Hawk Purchase in Michigan Territory, by Isaac Pidgeon, originally from South Carolina, and by Aaron Street of Salem, Indiana.

According to a local tradition, some Quakers from Cherry Grove Monthly Meeting in Indiana had come on horseback "to spy out the land". They were pleased with the fertile soil, the location, and the opportunity to develop their own community life as they pleased. Accompanied by a Quaker group "nine families strong", they returned to Iowa in 1835 on "the seventeenth of the sixth month". Other Friends soon arrived, and in the "eighth month" a conference at the log cabin of Isaac Pidgeon decided upon a place for worship. Soon a monthly meeting was granted by the Quarterly Meeting of Vermilion, Illinois, and the Yearly Meeting of Indiana. Salem thus possesses the distinction of being the oldest Quaker Meeting west of the Mississippi River.

Among the earliest members of the Salem Meeting was the Quaker, Samuel Kellum. Born on September 21, 1794, in Rowan County, North Carolina, he "was raised" near New Garden, Guilford County. When he reached manhood he

became a hatter by trade, and married Ann Coffin, sister of Levi Coffin, one of the active agents of the Underground Railway. Because of Samuel Kellum's uncompromising anti-slavery views, his southern neighbors "all got down on him", for when they found out that he permitted negroes to eat with him at his table, they made life so uncomfortable for him that he decided "to go west". Thus he joined the new community of Salem where men could do as conscience dictated. Samuel Kellum's story is typical of several of the founders of Salem.

Other Quaker families came also from the South by way of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The Lewellings, the Hocketts, the Joys, the Hoags, the Garretsons, the Fraziers, and the Jessups were all imbued with anti-slavery attitudes. The Lewelling brothers, both Henderson and William, took a prominent part in social affairs not only in Iowa but also in the nation. William was an early Quaker minister. His son Lorenzo Dow, born in Salem in 1846, was educated at the local Whittier College, and taught school in Iowa. Later he moved to Kansas and was from 1893 to 1895 Governor of that State. The old Lewelling homestead, an imposing stone house, figured largely in the slavery days.

The older settlers in Salem still relate tales of

ante-bellum days when the question of slavery was a rife subject of discussion at pioneer firesides. One of these stories concerns the activities of two courageous Friends, Frazier and Jessup, who at the risk of their lives befriended negroes.irate Missourians had threatened to shoot the two men if they persisted in aiding the blacks across the Missouri line, through southern Iowa, and on to Canada.

One night, they were taking a load of colored men and women toward the Underground Station at Salem, when a distant baying of blood hounds accompanied by shots made it imperative that the band should disperse. Frazier stopped the horses and quietly ordered the negroes to take refuge in thick timber at some distance from the road. That night there in the underbrush a negro boy was born and the colored mother, in an effort to show her gratitude, named the child Frazier Jessup. Many a person in Salem has wondered whether the mother and her babe ever reached Canada and what became of the boy. His savior, Frazier, was especially singled out by the Missouri party to be hanged, but "providentially" he escaped.

Other pioneers tell stories about "Big Henry", a former slave, who sojourned for a long time in Salem, and was there taught to read. It was commonly reported that he had escaped from his slave

master because he could not endure seeing his wife whipped. Evidently he had hoped she would be able to follow him but she never reached Salem. The town of Salem was more than once threatened with fire and several of its inhabitants were informed that hanging was imminent for them.

Still another story is current there, that in the fall of 1844 Samuel Kellum and his son returned to Indiana on account of the serious illness of a relative. This trip gave Nathan Kellum an opportunity to go south and visit the ancestral home. He decided to ascertain for himself whether slavery were really as bad as it had been represented to him by the Salem Quakers. His first sight of it came in Kentucky, where he saw slaves handcuffed and driven to a slave market. One girl especially touched his heart. She was almost white; nevertheless she was sold. The next day he visited a slave market. The closing sale was that of a mulatto mother and her two children, one a boy three years old and the other an infant. The owner had promised the mother that all three would be sold together; therefore, without resistance she came to the block. Without warning, bidding began on the boy. Instantly the mother realized she had been deceived and with a cry of agony she fell unconscious, but immediately was whipped into consciousness.

That evening guests came and after supper all gathered about Nathan to ask what he as a northerner thought of slavery. Sensing trouble, he prayed silently for wisdom; then he told them he would give an honest answer. He explained first that all present honored the Bible whether Quakers or not. This book, he said, taught that "all nations of the earth are made of one blood"; hence they were holding their brothers in cruel bondage. They plied him with questions as to what he thought ought to be done to abolish slavery. Since he was a Quaker, he took the New Testament rule of non-resistance and replied that he thought that the slaves should be freed by peaceful legislation, that the marriage vow should be honored, and that children should not be sold away from their parents. It is said that the whole company cried out together, "Never while the sun shines." He then prophesied that emancipation would eventually come by the sword. As the evening wore on, Nathan realized that his candid statements foreboded trouble. The next morning, upon learning that he was liable to arrest on a trumped-up charge, he escaped the officers by riding for a long distance in the woods. In due time he returned to Indiana and then to Salem.

In disregard of the fugitive slave law the Friends of Salem continued to assist slaves to free-

dom. Sometime before the passage of that act, they divided into two groups on the question of slavery. The orthodox group, while opposed to slavery, were less aggressive than the liberal group. In spite of tolerance for others, which the Quakers taught, each group built its own meeting house.

In June, 1848, so the story goes, nine slaves left a plantation in Missouri for Salem. Being confident they had misled their pursuers, they continued traveling after sun-up. A mile south of the Salem settlement, seeing their masters approaching, they at once divided into two groups and found hiding places. The people of Salem put one old man and his grandson on a horse and helped them escape.

The Missourians, however, found some of the fugitives and started back to Missouri with them. Thereupon the Quakers demanded that the Missourians prove ownership. Court was convened in the meeting house of the liberal Quaker group. The justice of the peace decided the captors had insufficient evidence and therefore acquitted the negroes of being fugitive slaves. This enraged the Missourians, who sent back one of their members for reinforcements. Presently he returned with a number of men and a cannon. The cannon was set up opposite the Lewelling stone house where

the Missourians thought the slaves were in hiding, but the trouble was finally settled in court. The stone residence where North and South opposed each other still stands.

Historically, at least as far as the Underground Railroad is concerned, the Isaac Gibson house demands especial notice. It deserves preservation as one of the best examples of an Underground Station in Iowa if not in the middle west. Shaded by cedar trees, it stands on a side street a little distance from the highway at the east edge of town. In the dimness of the cellar light, several doors can be seen opening into separate cells on the north side. The doors themselves are stoutly made and strongly barred. With the aid of a flashlight the depths of the cell farthest to the left can be explored. Formerly it was a dry cylindrical passage, capable of holding several runaway slaves. The bowl has partially filled with water, but even so the masonry at the extreme west reveals a filling where formerly an underground tunnel led from the cell to the slaves' freedom without. Iron bars at the windows still remain as mute evidence of the protection given by the Friends of Salem.

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