

A Visit to Pella in 1860

[Although Iowans can travel from Des Moines to Pella in a matter of minutes in 1959 the traveler of a century ago had to measure his journey by stagecoach at the rate of "two weary miles per hour." There is a tremendous difference, however, between Pella of yesteryear and Pella of today. The clatter of wooden shoes will ring through your ears as you read the following letter from the *Daily State Register* (Des Moines), March 5, 1860. [THE EDITOR.]

My dear Register: — A wretched road, but a fair sky — a most uncomfortable "jerkey," crowded with passengers, but not a grumbler among them all — two weary miles per hour, but the time enlivened by conversation with one of the most entertaining ladies of our goodly city — these were the rare good fortunes and common misfortunes that befell your correspondent on his journey day before yesterday to this city of Refuge — for that is the signification of its name.

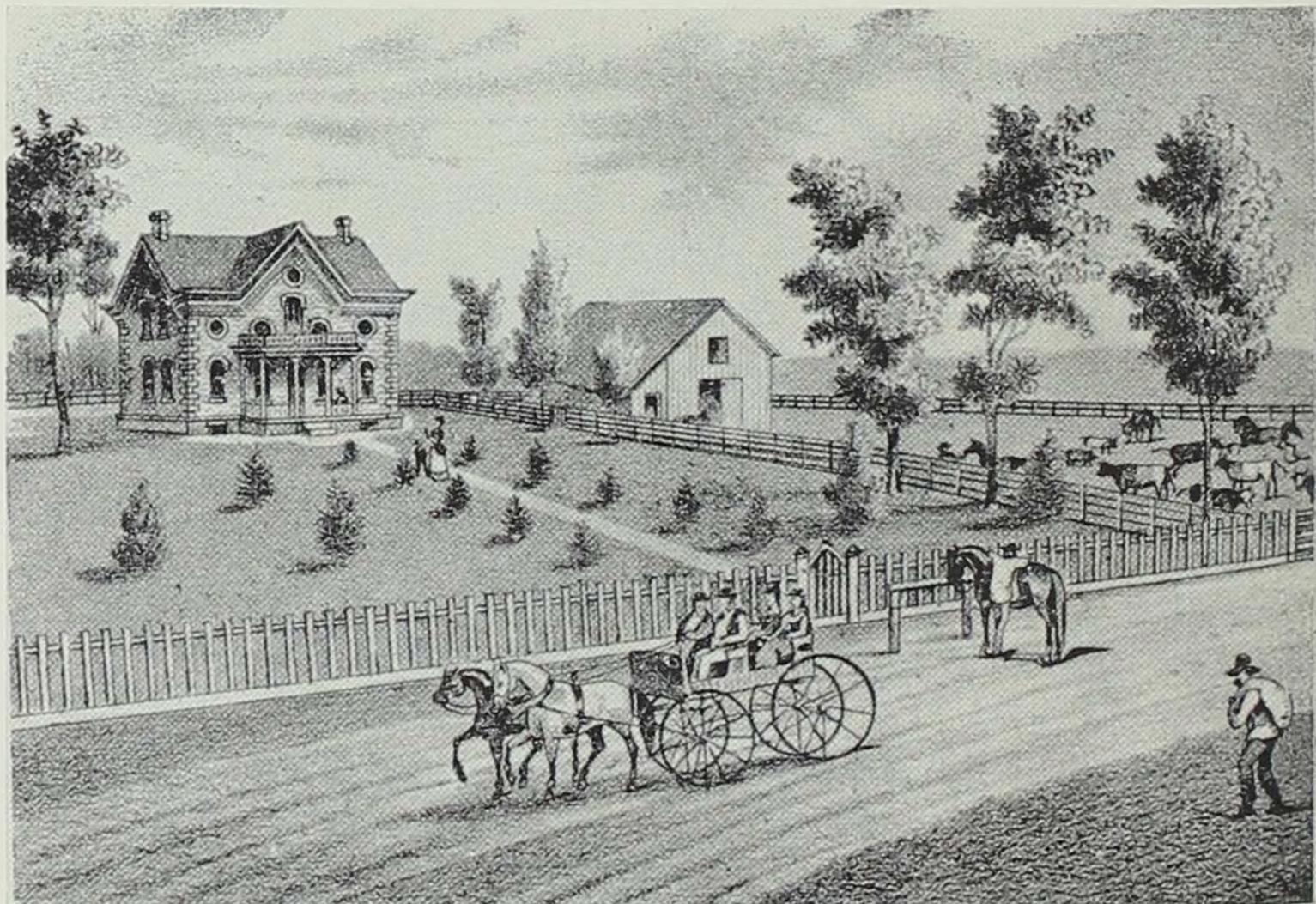
And when I got out here, and a larger man than I got in — no less indeed, than Mr. Curtis, "the gentleman from Marion," — (who was going, with the most cheerful resignation imaginable, to serve our State at the Penitentiary) — when *he* got in and surged down in the narrow seat, already

full enough, how I pitied him, and the poor mortals with him, destined to ride in all that discomfort through that dark and dismal night! — "'Pears to me" I heard some little grumbling then, and a few epithets, not suited to ears polite, applied to things in general.

Last night, three hours later than *our* arrival, came down another load of passengers — among them two or three of our Des Moines merchants, *en route* for the east, for goods. They were sensible enough to lie over. There were no less than three of our merchants on the stage the previous day — so I judge our tradesmen generally are ready to face their eastern creditors, square accounts, and prepare for a vigorous campaign the coming season. This speaks well for Des Moines — than which I believe no city in the State stands better with eastern men.

This is a queer old town. It boasts an antiquity of only fourteen years — yet here are houses that look as if the bricks of which they are built, might have been brought over in a Dutch sloop in the early days of "Nieuw Amsterdam," and their plans have been drawn by some portly burgomaster of that renowned city. "*In Deo spes nostra et refugium*" is the motto written on its seal, painted in large letters on the front of "Mr. Scholte's church," and impressed, I trust, on the hearts of the people. I wonder who will write the history of the Von der Dams, the Knickerbockers and Stuy-

vesants, the Vonheernens and Niemandsverdriet, of Marion county, in the age to come? Let me recite a few facts for some quaint genius, like our beloved Irving, to "work up" into veritable history.



A scene from Pella — farm Residence of Peter Van Domselaar.

From the first number of the "Pella Gazette," published by Scholte and Grant, Feb. 1, 1855, I learn that the settlement was begun in 1846, when the claims of all the settlers in two townships hereabout, numbering some forty families, were bought up, partly on account of a colony of Hollanders who had emigrated from the old world, with the

purpose of making their home in the United States. The site where Pella now stands, was then an open prairie, having one enclosed field, and two log houses. The first company of Hollanders came on in August of that year, — and a second company came two years after. They now compose over one half the population of the city — which numbers something over 2000 inhabitants. The Central University of Iowa was located here in 1853. This is a Baptist institution, and although heavily encumbered by indebtedness, the school is in a flourishing condition.

Mr. Scholte is the patriarch of the colony. He acted as the agent of his countrymen in securing the land, laid out this town, and has spent large sums in its adornment and improvement. His extensive grounds are covered by fine, thrifty trees of his own planting, and are handsomely laid out. The Hollanders have identified themselves with our people by effecting their naturalization as early as practicable, establishing English schools, and intermarrying with the natives. Thus Holland solidity is united with American enterprise; making a composition which will endure the severest trials, and prove a benefit to the State, the Union, and the world. The Empire State has given indubitable evidence of the aptitude of the Hollanders to become perfectly identified with the American nation.

Here wooden shoes abound. You can buy a

cord of them for about \$15. Old men and women go trudging along in them with ponderous footfalls. Middle aged men walk in them with the grace and gait of a chain-gang. Little children wear them as though life were a solemn thing. I have bought a pair, and already begin to speak the Holland language with fluency. I took to my bed last night with the firm conviction that I was lying down in "Sleepy Hollow," dreamed I was having a seven years' sleep, and that when I got home I should find my wife a stout old lady in high cap and wooden shoes, and my children grown up and married. (P.S. — I forgot to say that I helped my friends from Des Moines dispose of a bottle of "native wine" last evening — a circumstance which may have had something to do with my lingual proficiency.)

The names of the streets or avenues strike me as singular. Here they are — a regular Pilgrim's Progress of christian experience. Entrance, Inquiry, Perseverance, Reformation, Gratitude, Experience, Patience, Confidence, Expectation, Accomplishment! — And really, when one considers the mud in these streets, he feels as if the "Entrance" to the town were a serious matter, and the exit an "Accomplishment" to be thankful for.

Truly yours, my dear Register,

D.