The Palimpsest

DECEMBER 1924

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

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.

PRICE—10c per copy: $1 per year: free to members of Society
ADDRESS—The State Historical Society Iowa City Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. V ISSUED IN DECEMBER 1924 NO. 12

With the Flying Artillery

On a quiet Sunday forenoon in August, 1862, a few Indians deliberately murdered five white people at a farm house in Meeker County, Minnesota. Early the following morning, August 18th, a large party of Sioux Indians attacked the little settlement at the lower Sioux agency on the Minnesota River in Redwood County. Eight white men were killed in the first onslaught and of those who temporarily escaped seven were overtaken and murdered. On the same day other bands of Indians raided adjacent farms and massacred the settlers — men, women, and children. A detachment of troops from Fort Ridgely, hastening to the scene of the tragedy at the agency, was practically annihilated. Some features of the general uprising of the Sioux nation that followed gave evidence of a preconcerted plan to drive the white people out of Minnesota. While detached bands of Indians moved eastward, killing, burning,

and pillaging, larger forces made determined attacks upon Fort Ridgely and the town of New Ulm which were regarded as the key points to the whole Minnesota Valley. Prompt action by the settlers and troops soon put an end to the bloody orgy, though not until several hundred citizens and soldiers had lost their lives. Congress later appropriated $1,370,374 to pay claims for damages incurred by the settlers.

From Minnesota the Indians were eventually driven into the Dakotas by militia and United States troops under General Henry H. Sibley. About two thousand were captured during the conflict in Minnesota, of whom three hundred and ninety-two were tried by court martial. Three hundred and three were found guilty of participating in "murders, outrages and robberies" and condemned to the scaffold while sixteen others were sentenced to prison. President Lincoln, after carefully investigating the evidence, commuted the death sentence to imprisonment for all who were not guilty of wanton murder. In accordance with his order, thirty-eight Indians were hanged at Mankato on December 26, 1862, and the remainder were treated as prisoners of war and imprisoned at Camp McClellan near Davenport, Iowa. The last of them were pardoned in 1866.

News of the Sioux uprising caused great alarm among the scattered inhabitants along the northern border of Iowa, some of them having had sad experience a few years before in connection with the Spirit

Lake Massacre. Many left their homes, seeking protection in the more populous regions to the southward. The few farmers residing in southeastern South Dakota and in northwestern Iowa fled to Sioux City leaving their unharvested wheat and growing corn and, in many instances, their household effects.

The Sioux City Cavalry, a militia organization, was immediately called to arms by Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood and units of it were distributed along the State boundary. Lieutenant Colonel H. C. Nutt, aide to the Governor at Council Bluffs, was directed to proceed to Sioux City with three companies of the Twenty-ninth Iowa Volunteer Infantry, then at Camp Dodge awaiting muster into the United States service. At the same time the Council Bluffs Flying Artillery, a home-guard organization which took part in the expedition to the Missouri State line in July, 1861, was directed to send a detachment with one of its cannon to the same point.

At about nine o'clock on the morning of September 4, 1862, the artillery squad, consisting of Alexander Brown, John Strobele, Inglewood Forrest, John Keller, Joseph Ross, Ervin Dodge, John Horsky, J. T. Papps, S. S. Jamison, Jr., and myself, with Thomas Clifford, Conrad Reiser, and George W. Robinson as teamsters, left Council Bluffs under the command of Sergeant George Fairman, acting as captain, and marched to Lewis Butterfield's place on the right bank of the Boyer River near

where the town of Loveland now stands, about eighteen miles from the starting point. Here the squad encamped for the night.

The march was resumed at an early hour on September 5th, in rain that had been falling nearly the whole night. The outfit lumbered along over muddy roads across the Boyer River bottom, passed the site of the present city of Missouri Valley (then known as the McIntosh farm), trudged on through the old town of Calhoun in Harrison County, skirted the bluffs to Soldier River, and thence floundered on through the deep mud to Little Sioux on the right bank of the river of that name, about thirty miles from Butterfield's. There camp was made almost in the center of the little village.

This was the most mosquito-infested place I ever saw. Notwithstanding smudges maintained all night and the liberal use of oil of pennyroyal the men were unable to sleep because of the pests. Just at daybreak the camp was thrown into a hullabaloo by an excited citizen attempting to pass the guard line in hot pursuit of a member of the company who, he said, had stolen one of his chickens. After many words of affirmation and denial, Captain Fairman paid the enraged citizen fifty cents for the alleged stolen fowl and he was pacified. After his departure Inglewood Forrest and I halved the bird and each toasted his portion at the end of a willow stick over the camp fire and devoured it for breakfast.

Soon thereafter camp was broken and the march

toward Onawa in Monona County was begun. Our bay horses were converted into roans by the white wings of the mosquitoes that covered their bodies. That was the hardest bit of travel experienced on the expedition. The trail led over the Missouri River bottom land for the entire distance and the mud, though not deep, was as sticky as glue. Accumulating on the wagon wheels and gathering the prairie grass like a rolling ball of soft snow until it came in contact with the wagon body, the tough heavy mass formed effective brakes which had to be chopped away with axes. We arrived at Onawa, twenty-five miles from Little Sioux, late in the afternoon and pitched our tents in the public square. In a short time the national emblem was flying from the top of the village flagpole.

About ten o'clock that night three or four of the men stole out from camp and went on a private foraging expedition to a large barn about a mile from town, from which they returned later with a fine turkey hen and a half dozen chickens. On their return trip these fellows had the scare of their lives. When they were half way back to camp they heard behind them the thudding sound of the hoofs of many galloping horses. Immediately came to their frightened minds the thought of painted warriors riding to a night attack upon the camp. Leaving the road they concealed themselves in the high grass and awaited the passing of the band. The hoof beats came nearer and nearer, the hearts of the

listeners were in a flutter as the troop drew nigh, and then there passed a herd of some forty or fifty loose horses, apparently out for a night joy run. Greatly relieved, the boys went on to the camp and passed the guard with the improvised countersign, "Turkey and chickens".

On September 7th we left Onawa at daybreak and marched about forty miles to Sergeant Bluff, where the night was spent. At a noon bivouac a portion of the foraged poultry was consumed and the remainder disappeared during the supper hour that evening. The night was clear and cool so that it was a pleasure to roll up in our blankets and sleep in the open.

As the end of the journey was near we did not break camp the following morning until rather late. We marched along the bluffs to the Floyd River, on the outskirts of Sioux City, where we were met by Sergeant Samuel H. Casady, of the Sioux City Cavalry, with a squad of his men, a small brass band, a drum and fife corps, and a detachment from the infantry. Thence we were escorted through lines of huzzaing citizens and refugees to a camping place on a hill overlooking the town and the stockade which had been constructed on the lower ground at Pierce Street between Second and Third streets. No small military body was ever more enthusiastically welcomed. Our march of more than one hundred miles was ended and we were ready to meet whomsoever might come against us.

The stockade or corral was about three hundred feet square. The walls consisted of two-by-ten cottonwood planks nailed both on the outside and inside of four-by-four studding and the space between filled with Missouri River sand. The walls of the stockade were pierced with loopholes for small arms. At each corner of the enclosure was a tower several feet square with the sides loopholed for musketry or rifle fire. It would not be a very effective defense in these days of high-power arms, but apparently it was sufficient to afford protection against bow and arrow or the guns at that time possessed by the Indians.

In the center of the stockade was a high, one-story building, probably forty by eighty feet in dimensions, constructed of cottonwood boards an inch thick, around the sides of which were built rows of double bunks for sleeping purposes, while above them was a floor upon which riflemen might stand in case of attack and fire from loopholes overlooking the outer walls of the corral. Also within this building were water wells, cooking appliances, food and fuel, and several long tables. Outside, yet within the stockade, was space sufficient to accommodate temporarily a large number of domestic animals in case of emergency.

The population of Sioux City at that time consisted mainly of the old-time French traders and former attachés of the North American Fur Company, some of whom were quite well off in worldly

possessions. A few days after our arrival a complimentary banquet held in the Emergency Building was attended by many of the leading citizens and the visiting soldiery. A large quantity of most delicious food was served with unlimited supplies of imported French wines. The flow of the latter was too generous because, in some instances, it was quite overpowering.

Although we had an hour of artillery drill each forenoon and another hour of musketry drill in the afternoon, time soon began to hang heavy, inasmuch as all of our squad were business men or mechanics unaccustomed to hours of idleness. Visiting the city became a favorite pastime when permission could be obtained. Discipline was not very strict, however, and sometimes men took leave without the formality of asking. Occasionally they went fishing in the Missouri or Big Sioux rivers and the catfish and pickerel caught by them afforded a welcome relief from the regular rations furnished by the State contractors.

After we had been in Sioux City a week or more our artillery squad was invited to a barbecue at a big ranch, several miles out in South Dakota. Sergeant Casady's scouts having reported the coast clear in that direction, Captain Fairman accepted the invitation. The owner of the ranch had been a fur trader in the earlier days but had retired and was then engaged in the cattle business, running his herds loose both summer and winter in the river bot-

toms where nature usually provided ample feed the year round in the form of rushes and other hardy vegetation. He owned upward of two thousand head, so he informed us, but rarely, if ever, saw them all at one time. He and his six half-breed Indian sons gave the cattle such care as was deemed necessary, one of the principal tasks being to provide salt for them about once a month. On the occasion of our visit a "salting" was demonstrated. Coarse salt was scattered from the tail gate of a wagon on the high bench land just beyond the ranch buildings. A man in the wagon blew a long tin horn and the cattle by hundreds came running with tails up, cavorting on the way, and bellowing loudly. They licked the salt from the ground which had been cleared of grass by burning, and returned to the brake when their craving was appeased.

There were seven residence buildings on the ranch situated close together in a semicircle, a number of large barns, many haystacks, and a corral in which there were a number of horses, chiefly Indian ponies. The middle house was flanked on either side by three smaller houses. In it, a two-story structure of logs, lived the proprietor, while in the others his sons resided. The elder ranchman had several Indian wives and each of the sons had at least two. The number of small children running about was beyond easy estimation.

The barbecue was in the open air and consisted of a yearling steer roasted over a pit of live coals,

many vegetables, coffee, tea, chocolate, milk, and unstinted quantities of imported claret, the latter being drawn from the cask and served by girls of the families from ordinary half gallon and gallon measures. After the feast we did some practice shooting with our old smoothbore six pounder for the edification of our host and his numerous family. The target was a large barn door set up about six hundred yards from the firing stand. Two solid shot were fired which struck near the target and then, with a charge of grape, the old door was shattered to pieces.

Returning to the city in the late afternoon we discovered a great number of large turtles basking in the sun on driftwood just below the bridge over the Big Sioux River. The temptation to try their skill with revolvers was too great for the boys and a fusillade was fired at the turtles. Arriving at camp we learned that our cannon fire and revolver shots had been plainly heard in the city and that the citizens, supposing we had been attacked by Indians, were in a panicky state of alarm.

One morning soon after our return from the barbecue one of our men received a slight gunshot wound. The muskets used by the sentries the night before were stacked in front of the tents and the boys were skylarking about while awaiting the preparation of breakfast when Alexander Brown seized the bayonets of one stack at arm's length and lifted

the three guns from the ground. The butts swung together, one of the hammers struck, and, "Bang", there was an explosion. Brown deliberately set the muskets down and quietly remarked, "Well, I have played hell!" Examination disclosed that the tip of his second finger had been shot away and his hand slightly burned. That was the only casualty suffered by a member of the squad while on the expedition.

The defeat of the Indians at the battle of Wood Lake on September 23rd made it impossible for them to inflict further harm and removed the cause for apprehension among the people, so we were ordered to return to Council Bluffs. We left Sioux City early in the evening of September 26th and drove to the Whiting farms, several miles east of the present town of Whiting in Monona County. There we encamped for the night. On the following evening we arrived at Calhoun in Harrison County. Early in the forenoon of the twenty-eighth (Sunday) a number of citizens, some of whom had never seen a cannon, assembled at our tents, and at their request a shot was fired at a target some four hundred yards away. It was a solid round shot and tore up the side of the hill just above the target. During the following summer the cannon ball was found in the valley beyond the little ridge against which the target had been placed. It had probably ricocheted over the top, but many persons insisted that it had passed

through the hill. Soon after exhibiting our marksmanship we proceeded on our way and arrived at Butterfield's about noon.

Captain Fairman purchased some chickens from Mr. Butterfield, and it was decided that the easiest way to catch the fowls, after designation by the owner, would be to remove their heads with bullets. The writer, then being considered an expert in handling a revolver, was detailed as executioner. While these arrangements were in progress John Keller was talking at the front door of the house with the district schoolmistress who was a boarder there and who had shown her skill at shooting by defeating him in a revolver match on our northward march. The chicken shooting immediately attracted their attention. Now the head of a lively feeding chicken is not the most stable target and misses will occur even at short range. Such was the case in this instance, whereupon the "schoolma'am" remarked to Keller, "Why, I can shoot better than that." So without consulting me they arranged a match.

The revolver which I was using was an ordinary heavy Colt six shooter, which I had possessed for a long time and the "dog" of which had been so shaped by filing as to render it very light on the trigger. It was used on this occasion, and the privilege of leading off was accorded to the challenger. She raised the gun to aim when a bystander interrupted to give her instruction. She dropped her arm to her side, the gun at full cock and her finger

in front of the trigger. There was an explosion and her lawn dress was set on fire. The bullet pierced her foot at the joint of the second and third toes and buried itself deep in the hard trodden earth. A messenger was sent for a doctor, some two miles away, who finally came and dressed the wound.

Notwithstanding the accident we had a fine chicken dinner. Our squad left Butterfield's about five o'clock in the afternoon and reached Council Bluffs about nine that night, having returned from the point of reputed danger much more rapidly than we had advanced.

We had engaged in no battles, and the only Indians we had seen were the women and children on the ranch and a half-breed Indian stewardess on board the steamer *Shreveport* at Sioux City. One result of the expedition of the Council Bluffs Flying Artillery, however, loomed large in the life of the writer. With the wounding of the "schoolma'am" at Butterfield's there began an acquaintance between myself and Juliette M. Younger which rapidly ripened into a warmer feeling. We were married at Magnolia in Harrison County, Iowa, on December 19, 1863, and have "lived happily ever after" during the sixty-one years that have elapsed since that event.

CHARLES H. BABBITT

The School on Yellow River

In the days when white settlers were swarming into the Black Hawk Purchase and year by year dispossessing the Indians of their land in the Iowa country, the United States government was conducting an experiment in vocational education in what is now Allamakee County, Iowa. With a schoolhouse designed and built to serve both as a home and a school, with a curriculum embracing courses both cultural and practical, and with a corps of devout teachers, a paternal government tried to provide the youths and maidens of its Indian wards with the tools of civilization.

By the terms of the treaty of 1832, made and signed at Rock Island by the United States of America on the one hand and the Winnebago tribe of Indians on the other, the former agreed to erect a suitable building, or buildings, with a garden and a field attached, somewhere near Fort Crawford, and to establish and maintain therein, for a term of twenty-seven years, a boarding school for the education of such Winnebago children as might be sent to it. The school was to be conducted by two or more teachers, male and female, and the children were to be taught, according to their age and sex, reading, writing, arithmetic, gardening, agriculture, carding, spinning, weaving, sewing, and such other

branches of useful knowledge as the President of the United States might prescribe. The annual cost of the school was not to exceed three thousand dollars.

To Joseph M. Street, the Winnebago Indian Agent at Prairie du Chien, was entrusted the task of selecting the site for the school. Hoping to draw the Winnebagoes across the Mississippi away from the debauching influence of whisky vendors at Prairie du Chien, Street chose a location on Yellow River about six miles up stream from the Mississippi and approximately ten miles from Fort Crawford. At this point there was "a small rich prairie, and a spring rising in the adjoining timber near the summit of the ridge". The surrounding country was mostly woodland interspersed with prairie.

In the spring of 1834, Street let the contract for the erection of the school buildings. He had planned for stone buildings, but the Secretary of War refused to approve anything other than "plain, comfortable log structures at small expense". Street succeeded, however, in securing the main building of stone, a substantial two-story structure with a "ten-foot chimney up the center and a great fireplace in every room". Before the work of construction began, however, he was ordered to take charge of the Sauk and Fox Indian Agency at Rock Island. Consequently the task of supervising the building operations fell to Colonel Zachary Taylor, then commandant at Fort Crawford.

In the meantime Reverend David Lowry, a Presbyterian minister, who had been appointed by President Andrew Jackson as a teacher for the Winnebagoes, had arrived at Prairie du Chien. In the spring of 1835, he opened the school, with his wife acting as his assistant. At first the Winnebagoes did not seem to care for school and few children came. When Street inspected the institution on April 30, 1835, he found only six pupils attending regularly, but he said that the Indians were visiting the school daily, asking questions, and showing a lively interest in both the school work and the adjoining farm. In May, three more pupils enrolled.

During the next two years attendance grew slowly but steadily. A report in December, 1837, showed an enrollment of forty-one pupils — fifteen boys and twenty-six girls. Eleven of these boarded and lodged at the school while the remainder lived in the wigwams of their parents to which they returned at the close of the school day, taking with them rations of pork, salt, and meal which they added to the potatoes and corn of the family larder. The institution furnished clothing to all its pupils, supplying each boy and girl with new garments whenever they were needed.

The increasing enrollment necessitated a larger teaching staff, and accordingly Bradford L. and Patsey Porter of Kentucky were appointed to assist Reverend Lowry and his wife. Superintendent Lowry received $500 as his yearly wage while each

of his three assistants drew an annual income of $300 for their services in attempting to bring the white man's learning to the children of the red men.

But the adult Indians gave only lukewarm support to the project, and some were openly hostile. A year later, in December, 1838, the attendance had fallen to thirty-six — fourteen girls and twenty-two boys. This number, however, was as many as the yearly appropriation would adequately care for, and, although the superintendent felt that he could easily secure more pupils, he had neither the room nor the money to provide for them. Of the thirty-six, eleven stayed at the school and the others lived in the lodges of their parents.

Despite the honest endeavors of himself and his assistants, Reverend Lowry felt that the pupils were not making satisfactory progress. He attributed their slow advancement not to lack of intellect, but to ignorance of the English language and to non-coöperation on the part of the parents. He asserted that the adult Indians, failing to appreciate the advantages of an education, sent their children to school more to get them clothed and fed than for any other reason. The unsympathetic attitude of the parents, too, made it difficult to enforce discipline in the school. Irregularity of attendance also retarded the progress of the children. Two and a half years after the school was opened, however, several pupils were spelling words of three or four syllables, and they had made some progress in writing, in trans-

lating Indian words into English, and in counting. The girls had learned to sew and the boys to farm.

A granddaughter of Reverend Lowry thus described conditions in the school at this time: "Zachary Taylor, then commandant at Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien and his wife and daughter used to come over and have dinner at the mission and once Mrs. Taylor brought my grandmother a setting of turkey eggs.

"My grandmother was quite successful in handling the little savages and when they got unruly with the other teachers they were sent to her. They all loved her and sometimes her room would be so crowded with Indian children sitting on the floor and everywhere there was scarcely room to walk."

The year 1839 marked the peak of attainment in the history of the school on Yellow River. Increased enrollment necessitated the erection of another building and the addition of more teachers to the staff. In July of that year, when Reverend Lowry became sub-agent for the Winnebagoes, he turned the supervision of the school over to John Thomas. Later in the year Abner McDowell became superintendent of the school while Thomas devoted his time to the supervision of the adjoining farm. Joseph Mills and his wife Evalina taught during a part of the year, and other new teachers were Minerva and Lucy Brownson and Nancy McDowell.

The December report of the school in 1839 showed an enrollment of seventy-nine pupils — forty-three

boys and thirty-six girls — but only fifteen of these lived at the school. During the year the girls had made two hundred garments, including shirts, trousers, dresses, skirts, coats, and aprons — all the clothing, in fact, required by the pupils in school. When the girls grew weary of their studies, a piece of sewing would be placed in their hands. This device relieved the monotony of the three "R's" for the girls and, at the same time, served as an aid in discipline. To deprive a girl of the sewing privilege was considered by her a punishment. While the girls sewed, the boys worked by classes in the garden and on the farm. After an hour of work in the fields the boys returned to the classroom in a less mischievous frame of mind.

The maximum accomplishment in scholarship was probably attained during the last year the school on Yellow River was maintained, although there was a decline both in teaching force and attendance. Subagent Lowry attributed the decrease in attendance not to an unwillingness on the part of the Indians to send their children to school but to the confusion resulting from the proposed removal of the Winnebagoes to their new home on Turkey River. Out of the fifty-eight pupils enrolled in the summer of 1840, fifty-two attended regularly. The teaching force at this time was reduced to the Brownson sisters and Superintendent Thomas, who replaced McDowell.

At this time the school was divided into four classes. In the brightest group were boys and girls

who studied geography and arithmetic, read fluently, wrote legibly, and could spell with considerable accuracy. In the next class were pupils who studied geography, read in a first reader, could spell words of two or three syllables, and who were learning to write. In the next group were the boys and girls who could read easy lessons, spell words of two syllables, and write a little. The last class consisted of beginners who were struggling with their "abbs".

A visit to the school in August, 1840, by J. H. Lockwood and B. W. Brisbois, prominent citizens of Prairie du Chien, caused them to exclaim in surprise that they had never seen a more orderly and ambitious school even of white children. They were astonished at the progress made by the pupils during the three year interval since their previous visit.

The days of the Indian school on Yellow River were fast drawing to a close, however. On October 1, 1840, the teachers were notified that their services would be needed no longer, as Sub-agent Lowry had received orders to sell the agency and school buildings for what they would bring. This he proceeded to do and the government experiment on Yellow River ended. With the Winnebagoes removed from the vicinity of the whisky shops at Prairie du Chien and with the school relocated in their new domain, it was hoped that more could be accomplished with the Indian pupils than had been possible in the school on Yellow River.

Bruce E. Mahan

Comment by the Editor

THE INACCURACY OF HISTORY

Napoleon the First, that master arbiter of human destinies (H. G. Wells to the contrary notwithstanding), once expressed the opinion that history was nothing more than a fable agreed upon. And no less a scholar than Thomas Carlyle characterized history as "a distillation of rumor". The upshot of such testimony is recognition of the fact that the writing of history is more of an art than a science.

The historian's skill lies in the art of abridgment. There is neither time nor space to state all facts, to describe all events, or to recount the multifarious activities of everybody everywhere throughout the ages. The historian, like other artists, deals in symbols wherewith he seeks to vivify whatever is typical. Whether he writes of a simple experience in pioneer Iowa or surveys the whole history of man, his technique is essentially the same as that of the painter who tints a miniature or who expresses his theme on a mural canvas. Both are guilty of half truths. In the picture, whether it be printed or painted, only those circumstances or objects are included which contribute to unity, balance, and perspective.

Edward Gibbon complained that history is "little more than the register of crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind". Insofar as the pages of history are filled with "the spoils of time" to the exclusion of more worthy exploits they perpetrate falsehood, for most of the people in every period have been less concerned with the gestures of rulers and the trend of public events than they were with the absorbing occupations of making love and money. Dramatists and poets learned that long ago.

Though the writing of history is an art and though the substance of history consists merely of examples which all too often tend to distort actuality, still the historian should strive to approximate absolute truth. To that end the critical dissection and evaluation of the source materials of history is the prime requisite. No expenditure of time and energy is too great to establish a relevant fact, and no fact is too trivial to merit consideration. Yet despite every precaution error will sometimes occur. Positive mistakes may be relatively rare, but misleading statements, inadequate information, and the sin of omission seem inevitable. It is a tremendous task to keep history straight.

J. E. B.

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[NOTE — The names of contributors of articles in THE PALIMPSEST are printed in SMALL CAPITALS. The titles of articles and of all other publications are printed in *italics*.]

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY

JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOLUME V

JANUARY TO DECEMBER

1924

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA CITY IOWA

1924

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THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857
Located at Iowa City Iowa

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