

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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THE PALIMPSEST

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Hard Times in Early Iowa

The pioneers from the older settled regions of the East and South who came to the Iowa country during the thirties, forties, and early fifties were hardy folk. The uncertainties and even dangers of the trip westward, in many instances of several weeks' duration, did not deter them. They were desirous of founding homes, and the broad prairies west of the Mississippi were particularly attractive. So anxious for land were these sturdy adventurers that the presence of Indians, the lack of preëmption privileges, and even the patrolling of the great river by the dragoons to prevent settlement in Iowa served but to increase their desire to locate upon the frontier.

Uncomfortable conditions in this frontier country were endured with a rather marked degree of tranquility. Hard times were expected. The pioneers did not rend the heavens with their complaining but

accepted the isolation, severe weather, crude living quarters, hard work, crop failures, sickness, and even famine as a part of the inevitable routine. Such conditions were looked upon not as unbearable hardships but as necessary evils — the precursors of better days ahead.

The hardships of the early settlers began in most instances with the breaking of home ties and the beginning of a journey the outcome of which was at best uncertain. The possessions of these pioneer families were loaded into a covered wagon drawn by a team of horses or a yoke of oxen. In many instances a cow was led behind the wagon, and sometimes a small crate of chickens was included among the live stock. The overland journey stretched out interminably; men, women, and children grew weary of the monotony and the hastily prepared meals; horses or oxen became lean and shaggy; roads were often very bad; the general supplies — both money and provisions — ran low; and it was with a feeling of joy and relief when the Mississippi was reached. With the river safely crossed the former eagerness returned and once more anticipation of the new life the emigrants were about to enter caused their enthusiasm to be kindled anew.

The first business of the settler on reaching the place where he intended to locate was to select his claim and mark it off. The usual method was by “stepping and staking or blazing the lines”. Since the land had not yet been surveyed it was “neces-

sary to take the sun at noon and at evening as a guide by which to run these claim lines. So many steps each way counted three hundred and twenty acres, more or less, the legal area of a claim."

Having selected and located his claim, the next important duty of the settler was the preparation of some ground for planting. If the season were somewhat advanced his choice of crops was limited to vegetables of late maturity. Since a tract of land with some timber upon it was usually selected by the early settlers the first planting was done in the edge of the timber. "Here the sod was easily broken, not requiring the heavy teams and plows needed to break the prairie".

The first year's farming generally consisted of a "truck patch" planted in corn, potatoes, turnips, and other vegetables. These products furnished a welcome addition to the food supplies which the settlers had brought with them "such as flour or meal, bacon, and coffee or tea." In many instances, however, even with the most rigid economy there was not enough food.

Methods of farming in the early days were very crude and laborious. Agricultural machinery, even in the older regions, was not very highly developed and the pioneer's supply was scanty. Even the plow which had served so well "back home" was not suited to the prairie sod of Iowa. The corn was hoed; small grain was cradled; threshing was at best a slow and primitive process. The wooden harrow

and the tongueless cultivator were later developments.

The cradle, a kind of improved scythe, was used to cut all small grain such as wheat, oats, rye, barley, and flax. It consisted of a set of four or five wooden slats fastened to a stick and attached to the "snath" of the scythe. This attachment made it possible to lay the grain in such a way that it could be more readily bound into bundles for stacking and subsequent threshing. To swing a cradle from morning till night was a hard day's work for any man while he who followed, binding the grain into bundles with wisps of straw, had need indeed of a strong back and dexterous hands.

Threshing and cleaning the wheat crop was a vital affair, for the family's bread supply in a large measure depended upon it. The usual plan was to clean off a plot of ground of the desired circumference and, if the earth was dry, they dampened and "beat it so as to render it somewhat compact". The sheaves of wheat with the heads outward were spread in a circle and unbound. In the center sufficient space was left for the person whose duty it was "to stir and turn the straw in the process". Then as many horses or oxen "as could conveniently swing around the circle" were brought in and kept "moving till the wheat was well trodden out." After several "floorings" or layers were threshed, the straw was carefully raked off and the wheat shoveled into a heap to be cleaned. This process

was continued day after day until the season's crop was threshed.

Cleaning the wheat was usually accomplished more quickly, due in part to the fact that only the amount sold or used for flour was so treated. For this work a rather windy day was considered best — the chaff being easily removed when the grain was poured from one receptacle to another. On quiet days this “was sometimes done by waving a sheet up and down to fan out the chaff as the grain was dropped before it”. Such methods served well enough perhaps for the removal of chaffy matter but after all “it is not surprising that a considerable amount of black soil got mixed with it, that unavoidably went into the bread.”

As soon as the first crop was planted the next concern of the pioneer was to build a house. Until the cabin was inhabitable the family had “to camp on the ground or live in their wagons”. Camping equipment was not infrequently rather crude — a shelter being made of “poles stuck in the ground, with an old quilt stretched over the top”. The cooking had to be done over an open fire — a method of uncertain results. Since the pot-hook or crane was rarely used more than one meal was overturned with the settling of the fire. Furthermore, the presence of charcoal improves the flavor of few dishes.

The early cabins were not pretentious dwellings. Indeed, the settlers did not have the means or the help to erect other than “the cheapest thing imag-

inable". Some of the more primitive structures were of the sort known as "half-faced" sheds, but usually the claim cabin was about fourteen feet square and "made of round logs light enough for two or three men to lay up". These pioneer houses were commonly "roofed with bark or clapboards", though thatch was not unknown.

The cabin as a rule consisted of a single room with but one door and one window. One end was used for sleeping quarters while the other near the fireplace was employed for cooking and eating. The furniture was mostly of the rude, hand-made variety designed entirely for its utility, the beds, chairs, and table being all the product of pioneer handicraft. Kitchen utensils having been for the most part brought from the East were few in number but of the most substantial kind. It was considered a rather well-stocked kitchen that was equipped with an iron pot or kettle, a frying pan with a long handle, and a coffee pot. In fact, considering that cook stoves were almost unknown, these articles were about all that could be used to advantage. The habit of using "make-shifts" and of "getting along somehow" was strong among the pioneers. The leaky dishpan repaired with a bit of rag was typical of the times.

Conditions of living in the average home were not such as would have won the enthusiastic approval of a modern sanitary engineer. "Cooking, eating, sleeping, washing, dressing, nursing the sick, laying

out the dead"—all of these duties were performed in the one-room cabin. Wet "socks or jean britches were given preference to the coffee-pot and meat-skillet on the hearth", while the owner was relegated to bed during the drying process. At times the dressing of game was a fireside occupation.

Screen doors were unknown and the "common house fly and the big blue bottle" had free access to the cabin. At meal time they settled upon the food in such numbers "that one of the family was kept busy with a shooer". Then, too, the system of ventilation left much to be desired. In the winter the fireplace provided the only avenue of fresh air and even its wide capacity must have been taxed with a "sleeping contingent of from ten to twenty" people.

The pioneer cabins were infested with mice which "scurried about the floor and cupboards" and, though "slaughtered by the score", there appeared to be no marked reduction in their numbers. Mosquitoes abounded and their humming at times "sounded like the approach of a coming storm". Day and night the "smudge-pot" was kept going until everything "about the cabin acquired a smoky look and smell." At night the repose of many an early settler was made hideous by the ravenous appetite of the "crimson-rambler". The extermination of these pests was practically hopeless on account of the nature of the houses so the women confined their efforts to measures of "reasonable restraint".

The menu of the average household was meager indeed. The staples consisted of corn dodger, black wheat bread, meat of wild animals such as bear, deer, fowl, rabbit, and squirrel, and wild honey. Sometimes there were the additional luxuries of sugar, coffee, and tea. Most of the streams abounded in fish of all kinds and furnished the pioneer a welcome change of diet. Vegetables were usually raised in sufficient quantity to supplement the more staple supplies, but not infrequently the early settlers were hard pressed for food when crops were scanty and the winters long and severe. If the supply of ammunition was exhausted a very necessary source of food supply became unavailable. More than one family in the early days was forced to subsist upon bread made from powdered bark or upon ground "bark fried in deer's tallow." Nobody bothered to "count calories", while the beneficent properties of vitamins were completely ignored.

The winter of 1856 and '57 was one of unusual severity and the suffering among many families was intense. It was said that the snow was about four feet deep on the level so that the more remote settlers were effectively isolated. Provisions were exhausted. Some people "killed their cattle and subsisted upon them for days after their flour and meal had given out, whilst others lived upon parched corn." During this winter one settler walked to Sioux City, a distance of sixteen miles, "arriving there one day and returning the next to his starving

family with a sack of flour for which he paid \$10.00, and carried it the entire distance on his back." By the time this flour was consumed the snow had increased in depth, the entire family was afflicted with scurvy, and as a last resort a cow "high of bones and poor of flesh" was slaughtered. Fire-wood gave out and, being some distance from the timber, they could not obtain more. Thereupon the walls of the cabin were attacked with the ax in order to secure enough splinters to cook their meat. It is recorded that in many instances the pioneers kept to "their beds a greater portion of the day to avoid freezing."

Money troubles among the pioneers constituted a real difficulty. The panics of 1837 and 1857 were keenly felt even as far west as Iowa. The policy of the Democrats in refusing to grant charters to banking corporations caused the State to be flooded with "wild cat" paper money and added materially to the financial distress. Agricultural produce was difficult to market and brought but little money, while commodities needed by the settlers were relatively dear.

The year 1843 especially, when the panic of 1837 reached Iowa, seems to have been one of hardship, since "corn and oats could be bought at from six to ten cents per bushel, pork at a dollar a hundred, and the best kind of horses the farmers could raise would only bring from fifty to sixty dollars." At this time almost "everybody was in debt, and the sheriff and constable, with a legal process, trying to collect a

debt, were frequent visitors at almost every man's door".

The spring of 1857, following a winter of the utmost severity, "was late and backward". Provisions which the settlers had to buy were unusually high and many were compelled to sell their farms for "a song". "Flour was fourteen dollars per barrel, meat and butter could not be bought at any price". Spurious currency flooded the State and "about all trade was carried on by swapping articles". Three bushels of "white beans would buy a calico dress."

Travel was especially difficult in the early days. It was no uncommon practice to do hauling by oxen for a distance of sixty or eighty miles. The slow mode of travel by ox teams was made still slower "by the almost total absence of roads and bridges". When the frost came out of the ground and the heavy rains descended the sloughs and creeks proved exceedingly troublesome. Wagons which stuck in the mud had to be "unloaded and taken to pieces" and either carried by hand to firmer ground or ferried across the stream in small boats.

A trip to the mill was an undertaking of no small magnitude — a mill forty miles distant being considered "handy". During the summer "when grass was plentiful", the passage of the lonely stretches of prairie could be made "without much difficulty". The farmer travelled till night, then camped out and fed his team on the range. But in the winter when

the prairie became a desert waste such a trip was attended with great danger. The road "was too obscure to be safely followed at night" and it became necessary to time the trip so as to spend the nights with other settlers along the route.

Having arrived at the mill "after a week or more of toilsome travel, attended by more or less exposure", the pioneer was often shocked with the information "that his turn would come in a week." This delay sometimes made it necessary for the settler to "look about for some means to save expenses, and he was lucky" if he could find employment at any wage. Then when his turn came he had to be on hand to help the miller "bolt his flour". When this task was done "the anxious soul was ready to endure the trials of a return trip, his heart more or less concerned" about affairs at home. These trips "often occupied from three weeks to more than a month" and were attended with an expense "that rendered the cost of bread-stuff extremely high."

Clothing, too, was a real pioneer problem — the apparel brought from back East being unsuited to the rough conditions of the West. Most of the clothing was home-made of buckskin and coarse jean for the men and linsey and calico for the women. Little or no attention was given to fashion in those days: utility and lack of skill determined the lines of the finished product. "Store clothes" were practically unknown.

Living conditions in general were hard indeed

among the pioneers of Iowa. Their cabins were small, families were large, and household equipment was scanty. Their work had to be done by the crudest of methods, poverty and dirt were common companions, and the food was coarse and unsavory. Only the indomitable spirit of the pioneer, the hope of better things in the future made living endurable.

The struggle of the early settler was strenuous. At times all things, even nature itself, seemed to conspire against him. The winters were intensely cold, blizzards were uncommonly severe, and the uncharted distances made the life of the first comers a lonely business. Spring brought the rain — perfect deluges of water — to delay the preparation of the ground for planting. Finally, when the crops were in, the pests came — grasshoppers, cut worms, blight, and rust. The newly broken sod seemed to exude ague and fever in the summer, while lack of proper diet not infrequently produced scurvy.

The pioneers were a rugged race. Hard work, coarse food, and the outdoor life left little opportunity for a doctor to practice. Ailments of a minor character were treated with home remedies. All sorts of concoctions were prepared — sulphur and sorghum, boneset and burdock bitters, sassafras and smartwood tea, lard and turpentine ointment, slippery-elm salve, mustard plasters, skunk oil, and goose grease. Either burdock bitters or sulphur and molasses was taken as a spring tonic by everyone, sick or well. The bitters were made by stewing cer-

tain "roots, herbs and barks". At the proper time the liquid was "drained off and mixed with maple-syrup and whisky". Whisky formed the base of all bitters and was indeed the "all around remedial rejuvenator"—being "taken as an eye-opener before breakfast and a victual settler after meals, an exhilarator between them, and as a nightcap at bedtime." The early settlers learned from experience that whisky was without a peer as a cure for snake bites, a preventative for ague, and it worked equally well in restoring one who had been overheated in summer or chilled in winter. It was the pioneer's cureall. Hard work and hard liquor were boon companions.

Every member of the pioneer family had his appointed task. The men — and boys became men at an early age — put in and cared for the crops and stock, erected buildings, split rails for fences, cut firewood, cleared timber land, and made long trips to market and to mill. The women folks cooked, baked, spun cloth, fashioned clothing, knit stockings, washed (carrying water from the spring or well), nursed the sick, and taught the children. The boys and girls helped with all sorts of tasks: they herded stock, piled wood, carried water to the men in the field, cracked corn for hominy, did the chores, and performed innumerable odd jobs. Every one contributed his share to this life in which hard labor played the most prominent part.

Pioneer life in Iowa was pretty much "all work and no play". Occasionally two or three families

would get together on Sunday for a day of visiting, but such meetings were conspicuously few, as the distances to be travelled and the fatiguing character of the week's tasks made Sabbath observance more than a formality. On the other hand release from the rather dull routine of their lives in the form of a house or barn "raising", a husking or threshing "bee", or of a "logging" was hailed as a gala occasion. Even hunting and fishing were not regarded entirely as pastimes, being often pursued of grim necessity. In general each family was, for purposes of entertainment, a self-sufficient unit.

Observance of Christmas, then as now, was decidedly a domestic affair. Gifts, though few in number, were of a practical sort, usually consisting of knitted mittens, stockings, mufflers, caps, and hoods. Rarely a little girl found some beads in the toe of her stocking and a boy was made joyous with a brand-new jack-knife. Meager as such presents were, the spirit of Christmas prevailed and true happiness reigned in the pioneer home on Christmas-day.

The Fourth of July was the date universally set apart for a community celebration when the pioneers gathered from miles around for a day of relaxation, visiting, and feasting. A grove was usually the place of meeting, a fiery orator addressed the people, and a dinner for a couple hundred men, women, and children was spread on the ground. Such celebrations were very different from those of more recent

times: their spirit survives in the old settlers' picnics.

Such were the conditions in Iowa only two or three generations ago. Now the "old pioneer days are gone, with their roughness and their hardship, their incredible toil and their wild, half-savage romance" — but the "need for the pioneer virtues remains the same as ever".

GEO. F. ROBESON

Peter in the Pumpkin

The biographical sketch of Judge Joseph Williams in the March PALIMPSEST carries my memory back to the third year of my life, at which time my father, Lysander W. Babbitt, was a resident of Marion County, then included in the Second Judicial District of Iowa Territory to which Judge Williams had been assigned.

Organization of the County of Marion was authorized and the boundaries thereof were prescribed by an act of the Territorial legislature approved on June 10, 1845. Section nine of that act authorized the judge to appoint the clerk of the district court in Marion County, and under that authority Judge Williams selected my father and issued to him the following commission in his own handwriting, probably done with a quill pen:

Marion County, ss.
Iowa Territory,

To Lysander W. Babbitt, Esquire.

Sir Having confidence in your integrity and capacity: We do by virtue of authority [of] Law hereby appoint you to $\frac{f}{m}$ the office of Clerk of the District Court in and for the County of Marion in the said Territory of Iowa, to do and perform the duties of said office, and to have, receive & enjoy the

emoluments of said office, according to law. Given under my hand officially this 24th day of July A D 1845 —

J WILLIAMS

Judge of District Court of Marion County
Second Judicial District Iowa Ty —.

This paper, slightly nibbled by mice, is now preserved in the library of the State Historical Society. It was probably executed at Knoxville on the date given and perhaps I then first saw Judge Williams, but as I was only two and a quarter years of age I may not positively say that I remember the fact. However, when the first term of his court was held at Knoxville in March, 1846, I had just passed my third birthday anniversary and I am quite sure that I distinctly remember the Judge for he boarded at our house.

At that time we lived in a double story-and-a-half house, built on the southern plan, with passage between the ground-floor rooms and a "lean-to" across the entire length at the rear. Our house stood just across an alley from the residence of Dr. Luther C. Conrey, in which the court was held, both buildings fronting on the west side of the public square.

As a stop to hold the front door open we had in use a small "Yankee" pumpkin — one of the hard-shell kind — about the size of an average human head. Judge Williams appeared to be fond of chil-

dren and made much of me, so he and I were soon good friends. One morning as he passed out from breakfast he stopped suddenly at the front door and, looking with a semblance of surprise at the little pumpkin, he turned to me and asked, "Did you hear that? There's a little boy inside that pumpkin, and he wants to be let out."

Then I appeared to hear the boy crying and saying that his name was Peter — that he had been a bad boy and was shut up in the pumpkin as a punishment. Encouraged by the Judge I carried on a childish conversation with Peter. After the Judge had gone I determined to let the little fellow out, so I procured a table knife and began an assault upon the pumpkin which I maintained intermittently until dinner time without any material damage to the shell. At noon I appealed to the Judge for assistance in the work of freeing Peter, but he declined to help because, as he said, none but a good little boy might release the prisoner. So I resumed my task and kept at it from day to day until the morning when the Judge was to leave us. He and I then had a conference regarding the condition of Peter and means of effecting his release. During our conversation Peter cut in saying that he had been forgiven and that the fairies were taking him to his home in the big woods out near the Eagle Rock.

Thus ended the story of Peter and his imprisonment in the pumpkin. Peter was gone, never to return, but the little pumpkin, nicked, scarred, and

still unopened, remained as a door stop for many a day. It was a long, long time before the mystery was cleared up to my satisfaction.

I saw Judge Williams a number of times afterward and enjoyed his feats of ventriloquism as well as his performances on the violin. He visited my father's family at Council Bluffs about the beginning of the Civil War, and that was the last time I saw him.

My earliest recollection presents Judge Williams as a white-haired, blue-eyed man, between five feet six and five feet eight inches in height; rather spare of build and wiry, weighing from one hundred and fifty to one hundred and fifty-five pounds. He was less austere in appearance than his portrait indicates and very active. He possessed what might be called a "laughing" countenance, always appearing in a merry and cheerful mood.

CHARLES H. BABBITT

Stagecoach Days

In these days of airplanes and express trains it is hard to realize that great lunging stagecoaches once carried passengers and mail across Iowa. To visualize the big swinging coaches as they rounded curves, topped the hills, and came bowling into town is to recreate the days of Washington Irving and lend the atmosphere of New England to the prairies of Iowa. The spirited horses, the burly, whip-cracking drivers, and the hospitable landlord in his rude but romantic tavern — all contributed to the picturesqueness of stagecoaching.

There was a veritable network of stage lines across Iowa in the forties and fifties. Practically every community was served. The main lines ran east and west, connecting the inland towns with those on the Mississippi. The principal routes were from Dubuque to Cedar Falls, Dubuque to Iowa City, Clinton to Cedar Rapids, Davenport to Council Bluffs by way of Des Moines, Davenport to Cedar Rapids, Burlington to Des Moines by way of Mount Pleasant, Fairfield, Ottumwa, and Oskaloosa, Keokuk to Keosauqua, and Oskaloosa to Council Bluffs by way of Knoxville, Indianola, Winterset, and Lewis. Routes running north and south from Cedar Falls to Cedar Rapids, Iowa City to Keokuk, and from Dubuque to Keokuk by way of Davenport,

Muscatine, and Burlington connected these main lines and served much the same purpose as do the branch-line railroads of to-day.

Over these routes the coaches of the Western Stage Company, Frink and Walker, the Ohio Stage Company, and many local concerns, such as Hatch and Company, plied regularly. The Western Stage Company was the largest and operated all over the State so that there was keen competition when any of the other companies ran stages over the same road. This rivalry resulted in races, each driver determined to show that his stage was the fastest. Fares were reduced by the competing companies and at times it was cheaper to live on the road than at home, since transportation cost next to nothing and meals and lodging were thrown in to boot.

There was also keen competition among the companies for contracts to carry the mail. These contracts were presumably let to the most favorable bidder but the intervention of the local Congressman was usually necessary to secure a contract. For transporting the mail between terminal towns a stage company received from three hundred to seven hundred dollars a year, depending upon the distance and time required.

The vehicles used in early Iowa as stagecoaches ranged all the way from a farmer's wagon to the aristocratic Concord coach, the Rolls-Royce of achievement in American horse-drawn vehicles. In the later days of stagecoaching the wagons were

used only in cases of emergency but in newly opened country they constituted the entire rolling stock. Frink and Walker operated two-horse wagons — “wagons without springs and with white muslin tops” — from Des Moines until 1854 when they sold out to the Western Stage Company. Two-horse “jerkies” then supplanted the wagons and were in turn replaced by the Concord coach. The jerky was in type the immediate forerunner of the coach but was not so large or as elegantly furnished.

The body of the Concord coach was approximately oval in shape but flattened on top to make a place for baggage. There was also a triangular, leather-covered space at the rear known as the “boot” to hold such baggage as could not be carried on top. Inside the inclosed body were three seats each designed to hold three passengers. The front seat faced the rear. The driver sat outside on an elevated seat in front of the covered body. The body of the coach was swung on “thorough braces” composed of several strips of leather riveted together and fastened to the bolsters much the same as the cables of suspension bridges are fastened to the piers. As the coach body was oval it rocked to and fro on the flexible thorough braces, subjecting the passengers to a series of rocking-chair oscillations whose violence was directly proportioned to the roughness of the roads. The coach body inside and out was brightly painted, the panels being decorated with landscapes. Each coach bore the name of some

noted personage, a practice which was later transferred to the early locomotives and afterward adopted by the Pullman Company.

The stage driver was considered a man of consequence and never missed an opportunity to impress this fact upon all who came in contact with him. On the road his word was law. If he ordered a passenger out of his stage, reckless was the man who resisted. It was also a bad policy to make derogatory remarks about his horses. The drivers claimed the right of way because they carried the government mail and thus arose many a dispute between the wagon drivers and the stage drivers.

Both the arrival and departure of a stage at a tavern was made with the team lashed into a run. In this exploit the stage driver was greatly admired by the spectators, and many a small boy secretly practiced flourishing a whip so that he too might some day become a driver. Of one such boy it is related that "with wide open eyes and bated breath" he had seen "the great old Concord stage come into town with four prancing horses and was nearly blinded in looking upon the great man who held the lines and the beautiful long whip — the observed of all, the glass of fashion and the mold of form." This boy had seen the stage tavern and had observed how the great people of the village sank into insignificance before the swaggering, tobacco-chewing, and broad-belted stage driver. "He was the man of authority with whom even the schoolmaster would

esteem it a most distinguishing honor to have been found in company or in confidential conversation." One driver, Ansel Briggs, who came to Iowa in 1836 and operated a stage in Jackson County, became the first Governor of the State.

But the work of the stage driver was not all swagger. On the road he was lookout, pilot, captain, conductor, engineer, brakeman, and fireman — in fact the whole crew. It was his duty to read the road and to know every hill, slough, stump, and stone, but skilled as he was he sometimes misjudged the condition of the ground. Where one day he passed safely over, the next day his wheels would break through and find no bottom. Where he encountered a bad piece of road with no way around he had to go through, trusting to luck and his own skill for success. Obstreperous passengers, balky horses, and bandits were also sources of irritation and danger to the driver. Mail robberies, although not unknown in Iowa, were not as common as in the gold districts of the Far West.

For the most part the stage companies in Iowa were big corporations. The Western Stage Company, for example, operated stages throughout eight middle western States. At important crossroads of transportation large stations were established which served much the same purpose as railroad division points. The Western Stage Company had such a station in Iowa City where they kept various supplies and about a hundred mechan-

ics. An army of drivers and agents were employed throughout the State. Stations were established from ten to fifteen miles apart for changing horses. On the arrival of a stage the tired team was quickly unhitched and a fresh four pulled the coach to the next station. Sometimes a tavern was kept in conjunction with the station. All this took a great amount of planning of schedules and distribution of supplies, not unlike the management of the modern continental railroad companies.

Fares per mile by stage varied from station to station and depended somewhat upon the competition. In the summer, when the roads were good, fares were lower than in the winter. Stage fares also varied in some sections of the country according to the size of the passenger, the companies maintaining that the heavy traveller should pay more to ride inasmuch as he took up more room and was harder to pull. A hundred pounds was considered the unit for rate making and all passengers weighing more than that paid excess fare. There is no evidence, however, that the stage companies followed this practice in Iowa. The fare charged by Frink and Walker from Des Moines to Keokuk, where "they made close connections with America", was ten dollars a passenger. In general it may be said that rates averaged from five to seven cents a mile. Free transportation was given to members of the legislature on their way to and from the capital, a practice which was later adopted by the railroads.

The coming of the land seekers to Iowa gave the stage lines a great deal of business: a company which operated between Des Moines and Boone made one hundred thousand dollars in a single year. The success of the Western Stage Company may be judged by the fact that their stock advanced from one hundred dollars to two thousand dollars a share, and at that price it was never put on the market. Although the Civil War tended to decrease immigration it did not decrease the volume of business, for the stage lines transported troops and military equipment. The entire Twenty-third Iowa Infantry and its equipment was carried from Des Moines to Iowa City by the stages in three days, while the Thirty-third and Thirty-ninth and parts of the Second, Sixth, Tenth, and Fifteenth regiments reached their rendezvous in the same way.

When the roads were bad the stages could not run on schedule. Sometimes they were delayed for days. Under such circumstances the first-class mail was sent through by post riders on horseback but the newspapers had to wait for the stage. In March, 1859, the *Vinton Eagle* complained that it had received only "one mail from the East last week, and we expect another this week — that is if Sharp's 'snail-galloping plugs' don't get stuck in the mud somewhere between here and Cedar Rapids." On another occasion the same journal declared that Sharp's plugs "got to town only twice last week with the mail" and were "behind again this week".

It was a mystery to the editor why the contract for that route could not be given to "parties who can make the time at least thrice a week". He concluded with the comment that the "Western Stage Company's coaches arrive punctually every day, and if that company had the contract our Post Office would be regularly supplied."

On the other hand when the roads were good the mails arrived more regularly by stage than later when carried by rail. The Anamosa *Eureka* during the Civil War praisingly recalled the days of the stage mail: "So it is probable that the Federal troops have won a great victory somewhere, but we poor benighted 'cusses' will have to wait until next week, probably, before we learn the particulars. Oh, for the good old times when we had a daily *stage* instead of a bare railroad track!"

The early roads of course did not follow section lines for the country was not yet surveyed. Some followed the river courses while others clung to the ridges. Across the level prairie the trail followed the most direct route, avoiding sloughs and buffalo wallows as far as possible. Even so mud holes developed and river bottoms had to be crossed. When one track wore full of ruts a new one was made.

Although the stagecoaches endeavored to run on a definite schedule, mud and inclement weather often interfered. In the spring it was not uncommon for a stage driver to carry rails to pry his coach out of the mud. Three and a half miles an hour was con-

sidered fairly good speed. The Skunk River bottom was the bane of the Des Moines traveller. There during wet seasons the Western Stage Company used yokes of oxen and wide-tired wagons. Eventually the worst places were corduroyed and then the passengers were almost jolted out of their senses.

Overcrowding of coaches caused the passengers undue hardship. Although from seven to nine was a load as many as twenty were sometimes carried in one stage, some riding with the baggage on top. On exceedingly rough roads the pitching of the coach back and forth fairly disjointed the backs of the passengers. Under such circumstances the corner seats were the most comfortable for there a person could brace himself. Sometimes coaches upset.

But these incidents show the unpleasant side of stagecoach travel. The other side was one of jolly passengers, smooth roads, hearty appetites, bounteous meals — and the coaches were not always stuffy and overcrowded. Stage trips were sometimes made interesting by the presence of Congressmen, writers, and foreign notables as fellow travellers. Chance acquaintances in the coaches spun many a yarn, and probably a nip out of a bottle by those of strong constitutions added to the merriment of stage travel.

Henry Tisdale, who once lived in Iowa, described the pleasant aspects of stagecoach days. "There probably is no more pleasing sight", he said, "than to see, as I have many a time, a fine stage team hitched to a Concord coach, well loaded with passen-

gers", to "hear the driver's horn", and to "see the stage swing along like a thing of life. The horses tramp in unison; the axles talk as the wheels work back and forth from nut to shoulder-washer". To see the "driver, with ferruled whip, and ivory rings on harness, drive up and say, 'Whoa!' unhitch the horses, and see them take their places in the stable like they were human; see the next team started from the stable by speaking to them, and take their places at the coach so the breast-straps and tugs can be hitched without moving an inch, every horse in his place", he declared, was "one of the finest scenes on earth, and the delight of an old stage-man who has staged continuously for forty years."

Though the stagecoach seemed to be at the height of prosperity and efficiency during the fifties and sixties, its end was near. The first sign of death was the shifting of schedules and terminals to make connections with the advancing railroads. Following this the graceful Concord coach gradually receded before the invasion of the iron horse and, though lingering for years in sequestered regions, it finally became extinct. The Western Stage Company, which had flourished for thirty years, dissolved on the first of July, 1870. Their coaches, which cost on an average of a thousand dollars, were sold for old iron as low as ten dollars apiece. The stagecoaching days were ended in Iowa.

ORVILLE FRANCIS GRAHAME

Comment by the Editor

HARD WORK

The democracy of toil is a prominent characteristic of pioneer society. Everybody works, and the tasks are never done. It was so when the Israelites came out of Egypt, it was true of the Pilgrims who founded New England, and hard work was the common experience and expectation of the families who settled in Iowa. The early Iowans brought with them and established here a tradition of general employment without regard for age or birth or creed. Idleness was almost immoral.

Dealers in fine phrases have extolled the glory of work. "Heaven is blessed with perfect rest", they say, "but the blessing of earth is toil." Soft-handed orators have acclaimed the dignity of labor, and poets have sung of "the horny hands of toil". They speak of work as a delight like "a bird feels in flying, or a fish in darting through the water". Little they know of the work of the pioneers.

To the men and women who founded this State hard work meant long hours, utter fatigue, self-denial, steadfast purpose, fortitude, and courageous dreams — all put into action. Up before the stars went out, they hurried all day long; yet darkness came before their stint was done, and the days were all too few. In the scorching heat of a summer noon the settler, working alone in his harvest field, often

raised his "hot eyes to the angry sun" that would "go down too soon", while in the humble cabin his wife was busy from morning till night with her washing and mopping, knitting and mending, cooking and churning, and withal the care of the children. Weak — perhaps with malarial fever — and too weary to fully undress, they stumbled to bed at night and awoke at the first cock crow in the morning, stiff and sore and unrefreshed. Day after day and year after year, early and late, they continued the lonely, monotonous struggle. In time their souls were calloused by the terrible drudgery, but they never lost hope. Debt, pestilence, hunger, and crop failure served only to harden the lines in their faces, for they worked with their eyes on the future.

Wealth has come to the people of Iowa, yet the pioneer tradition of labor persists. Many have no need to work but they are not content to quit. Even the present generation, trained in the ways of their fathers, like Fremont McConkey, feel a sense of guilt when they move to town and sleep after daybreak or wear a white collar to work. Some have gone to live in Los Angeles, but of those who remain almost everyone works — or pretends to. John Hay was wont to "take a lot of historical notes" in his trunk when he went on a vacation journey in order "to escape the envy of the Gods" and to lower his spirits with the thought of neglected work. Apparently the people of Iowa are also ashamed to be care free. Perhaps their employment is often ostensible and

the tasks they create are really devised to prick their conscience with the thought of unperformed duties. Be that as it may, there seems to be scant time for leisure in Iowa. Here idleness is still considered a kind of misconduct.

J. E. B

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