

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

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material 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.

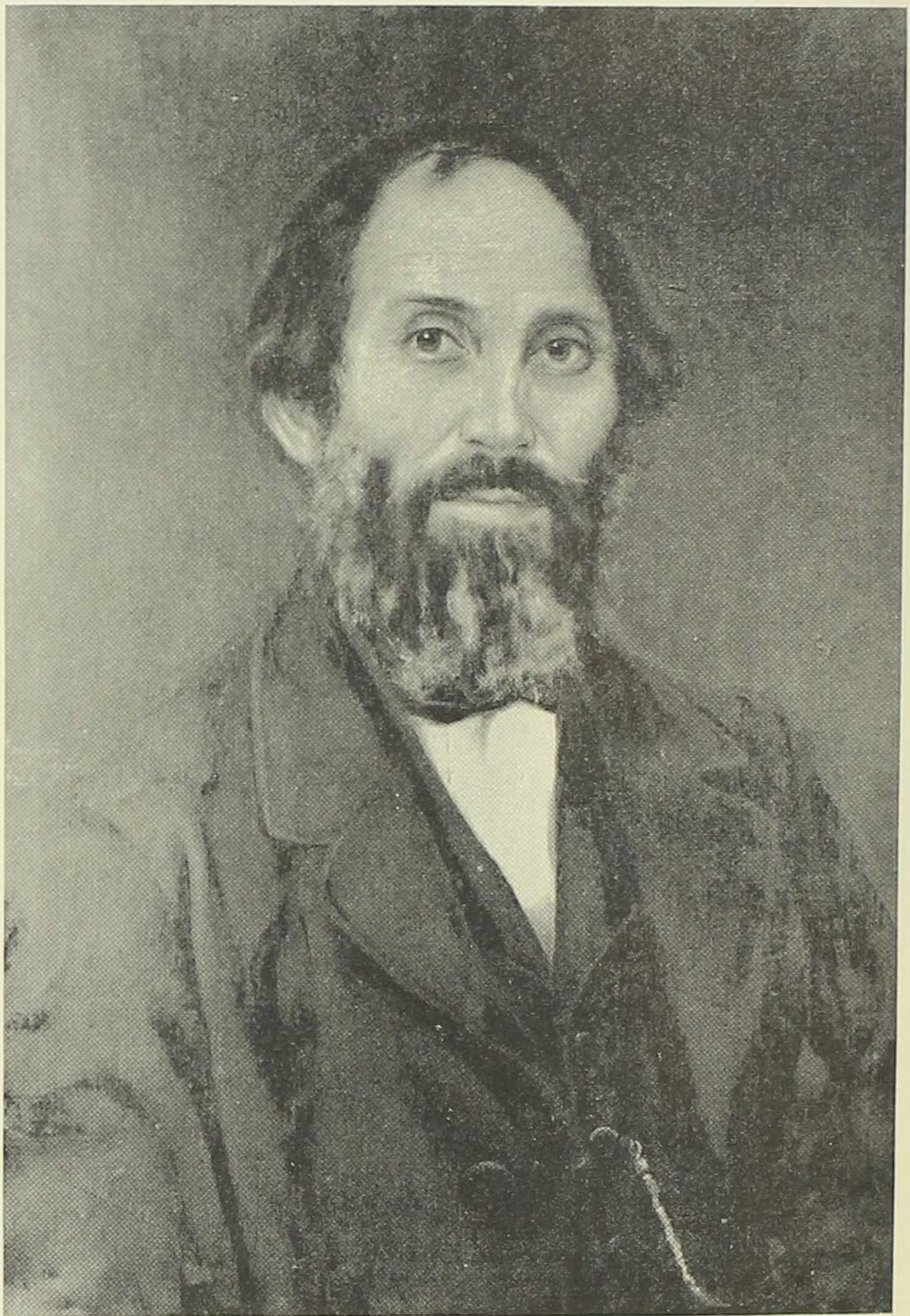
The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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SUEL FOSTER



# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## Suel Foster

In 1836 a New Hampshire farm boy packed his few belongings and headed westward. At the age of twenty, having obtained a common school education, he forsook the New England hills for Rochester, New York, where he worked for several years on a farm and as a traveling merchant. Then, in company with his brother, Dr. John H. Foster, he undertook the long river journey to the frontier. After stopping at St. Louis and Rock Island, the brothers finally landed on the western bank of the Mississippi, thirty miles below Davenport, at a settlement of two log cabins bearing the name of Bloomington and now known as Muscatine. There Suel Foster cast his lot and, except for the interval between 1849 and 1851 when he worked in California as a post-office clerk and a census taker, he continued to reside at Muscatine for the following half century.

His first investment was in land. Shortly after their arrival the Foster brothers paid five hundred



dollars for a one-sixth interest in the town site of Bloomington. Then Suel entered the grocery business with J. W. Richman, and this affiliation continued until he left for California. In the meantime he had married Sarah J. Hastings, who came from a prominent pioneer family. His love for the soil was deep and abiding, and upon returning from California he dedicated himself to horticulture. This interest took tangible form in the establishment of the "Fountain Hill Nursery".

The sale of nursery stock, however, was almost incidental, for in horticulture Suel Foster saw aesthetic and religious values that far outranked the economic factor. For him, there was "a moral and refining influence in trees and flowers, not appreciated or understood by many". In his presidential address to the State Horticultural Society in 1873, he said, "We are engaged in a good cause, the planting of fruits and flowers, trees and hedges, to make comfortable and happy homes for those now living in our beautiful State, and for the coming millions who are hereafter to inhabit it. The work of horticulture, the cultivation of trees, fruits, and flowers, is the best and noblest work we can engage in. Man in his purity, was placed in the garden of Eden, and directed by God himself to dress it and keep it." Foster's was also an inquiring mind and much of his time



was devoted to the testing of new varieties in search of replacements for the eastern sorts which had proven ill-adapted to this new country.

He gave much attention to public affairs. In 1839 he enlisted as a dragoon, hoping to see action in the border controversy between Iowa and Missouri, but his troop got only as far as Burlington when the war was forestalled. He was a town trustee in Muscatine, a deacon in the Congregational Church, one of the founders of "The Society of First Settlers of Muscatine County", a member of the Muscatine Academy of Science at a meeting of which he once read a paper on "Design in Creation", an officer in the Farmers' Mutual Fire Insurance Company, a charter member of the Muscatine County Agricultural Society, and an active participant in the County Grange and Farmers Alliance. He was a ready speaker and his services were in demand at agricultural gatherings. The trips he made, without recompense, often involved journeys over well-nigh impassable roads, and prying his stagecoach out of the mud was not an infrequent experience. In all these activities, states Earle D. Ross, "he belonged to the chronic agitators of the Middle Period and supported many causes to the good of the community but often to the detriment of the nursery business."



He brought with him from the East the best of his New England heritage. He was kind-hearted and benevolent, but in moral questions he was outspoken and adamant in support of the right. He advocated the abolition of slavery and worked for the advancement of any cause relating to the promotion of temperance, education, or morality. The very oddity of temperament that won him many friends was emphasized by his appearance. Tall and thin, he was sometimes said to be the second homeliest man in Muscatine. His carelessness about the cut of his clothes or the fit of his collar heightened his individuality. But dress, looks, and mannerisms were readily forgotten by those who worked with him for the advancement of horticulture and agricultural education.

The Iowa State Horticultural Society was formed in 1866. In Foster's view, "our society is a corporation of men, rather than money. Our object is public good, rather than private gain; we love the green tree, the flower, and the fruit, the vine, and the purple cluster, the virgin soil, and green grass for our carpet, and the sun and open air, in place of confinement in office and store-room." A record of the charter members does not exist, but Foster was known to be one of the founders. At the third annual meeting he presented a paper, and from then until the year of his



death in 1886 he took a prominent part in its activities. In 1872 he was president of the society, and later, as a director, he made the annual reports on the fourth district. In 1879 he served as president of the Eastern Iowa Horticultural Society. In both organizations he appeared several times on every program, reading papers, making reports, or taking part in the general discussion. He was well versed in all phases of horticulture, but trees were his special love, and he was an early ardent advocate of tree-planting for aesthetic and utilitarian reasons. His interest this early was directed toward the conservation of natural resources and the preservation of the pristine beauties of the State. He deplored the lack of interest of most farmers in horticulture, saying, "I think we need a horticultural missionary, and a colporteur with horticultural books to go among the farmers and give them instruction."

Foster did much for the material advancement of agriculture in his State. "His name was a household word" among persons interested in promoting "industrial progress in the West", wrote Josiah B. Grinnell, with whom he was intimately associated. His outstanding contribution, however, was in the cause of technical education and research in the field of agriculture. In the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist*, Iowa's first agricul-



tural paper, he expressed a modern and prescient view. The farm can not be isolated, he contended, for it is too closely integrated with the world at large, with "markets, commerce, and internal improvements; political affairs, civil and religious; wars at home and abroad; mechanics and all the sciences." Consequently, "study and practice", or "book farming", needed emphasis, and as a means to this end, he proposed that Iowa should establish an industrial school. "Let our sons and daughters be educated for that which brings to them the highest standard of human perfection, *Wisdom and Knowledge and Industry*", he argued, and in his opinion the best method was to "study the properties of the soil, plants and animals and their improvement and use."

To this cause he pledged his influence, and he was, writes Professor Ross, "the earliest and the most persistent champion of industrial education in the state." In his writings and addresses he agitated for the establishment of an agricultural college. The stimulation he received from the examples of other States, and the support of men in Iowa, who also believed in agricultural education, contributed to the success of the movement in 1858.

Two years earlier, a resolution favoring an agricultural college passed the House of Repre-



sentatives but failed in the Senate of Iowa. Governor Ralph P. Lowe, in his inaugural address of 1858, recommended schools in conjunction with experimental farms, for he thought the General Assembly ought to carry out the constitutional provision for encouraging "intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement". The Seventh General Assembly passed the bill which Foster had originally helped to draft. It became the organic act of the Iowa State Agricultural College and Model Farm, "to be connected with the entire Agricultural Interests of the State". In recognition of his labors, Foster was named in the act as a member of the original Board of Trustees, in which capacity he served for eight years. With much to do and little to do with, Foster labored unceasingly to get the program started. Buildings had to be erected, the land drained and put under the plow, a faculty hired — and these were but a few of the preparations that were preliminary to the opening of the college.

The first important decision the Board had to face was selecting a location for the college and farm. Proposals had been received from several counties, among them Story and Polk. In his own words, it was Foster's vote that "brought the committee to favor" Ames over Des Moines. There were a few regrets over this choice at the



time, but no one who has seen the college as it is today can doubt the wisdom of Foster's preference. In 1860 there was a movement in the General Assembly to rescind the organic act establishing the college, but the adroit strategy of the friends of the college frustrated this effort.

Foster served as president from 1862 until his retirement from the Board in 1866. During this time another storm gathered when an effort was made to combine the Agricultural College with the University. Foster vigorously opposed this measure, stating that such a plan would weaken the program of technical education. The committee appointed by the legislature to visit the college decided the proposal was impracticable. In a short time the threat disappeared.

The college did not open its doors to students until 1869, three years after Foster's retirement from the Board. But in the decade following the legal establishment of the agricultural school, the Board worked hard to lay a sound foundation for agricultural education. The visiting committee of 1868 lauded the work of the trustees, who "have moved slowly and cautiously . . . and have performed their duties faithfully . . . with an earnest desire to make this institution an object of pride to our people." Foster's interest in the welfare of the college remained unabated. In the ensuing



years, he actively supported policies of which he approved, and when the situation was otherwise, his voice was equally pronounced. For example, in 1873 he stated in his presidential address to the Horticultural Society, "I labored earnestly and as faithfully as I knew how, for many years, to get this institution [the college] started, and whilst we ought to give it much credit for its valuable services in most of its departments, we have been disappointed in the management of its horticultural experiments."

This criticism was partially answered when a separate department of horticulture and forestry was established in the following year, but if horticulturists gloried in the prestige of a departmental status, they were handicapped by the feeble financial support. In 1876, Foster could still say that the college had "almost ignored" horticulture. His advice was sought in relocating the nursery. The department, however, lacked a horticultural laboratory and a propagating house. Indeed, it was said, "not a fourth-class nurseryman in the state but has superior advantages for successful work in this line over our State Agricultural College." Foster became chairman of the committee appointed by the Horticultural Society to discuss this problem with the college Board. In 1878 the report of the Agricultural College still complained



about the inadequate support provided for the department by the State legislature.

Although he continued to show his interest in college affairs, Foster's last years were devoted largely to things horticultural, and his fame spread beyond the boundaries of his own State. He labored to impress upon people the virtues and joys that were to be found in the cultivation of fruits, flowers, and trees. In his addresses and papers before horticultural gatherings he stressed these points. The catalpa tree and the Wealthy apple were favorites whose virtues he never ceased to laud. He became an authority on pears. He was happy in his work because he loved it, and he remained active and useful to the day of his death.

Though unable to attend the sessions of the State Horticultural Society in January, 1886, he sent two papers to be read for him. He died on January 21st while the Society was still in session, and the news brought sadness to the members. Josiah B. Grinnell, speaking to the Society, said, "Truly one of our historic personages has fallen, worn with dutiful toil and crowned with honor". Grinnell then spoke of Foster's work in connection with the State college, and the promotion of horticultural and agricultural interests. "He won the favor of true gentlemen in the ranks of ad-



vanced science and progressive thought." He is "commemorated by ten thousand fields which may sing his praises by the soft breezes in the branches of the arboreal blessings he above all others has brought to our state."

In recognition of his zealous pioneering of the movement for technical education in this State, the Iowa State Horticultural Society, at its annual meeting in 1941, presented the Iowa State College with a placque bearing this inscription.

SUEL FOSTER

1811-1886

PIONEER HORTICULTURALIST

A PRIME MOVER IN THE FOUNDING  
OF THE IOWA STATE COLLEGE  
AND PRESIDENT OF  
FIRST BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A. T. ERWIN



## The Rockwell Cooperative

By the pale light of a harvest moon, back in the year 1888, a small group of farmers wended their way across the rolling prairies of northwest Iowa in horse-drawn wagons. They were going to J. B. McGaheran's granary, five miles east of Rockwell, to listen to William Barragy discuss the need for a grain elevator operated coöperatively. There, sitting upon sacks of grain, the men heard Barragy outline his plan for the establishment of an elevator in which the farmers would have a share in the management and the determination of grain prices. The originator of the idea denounced the line elevators which he accused of paying a uniform price for grain and later splitting the profits among the supposedly "rival" grain dealers. This secret agreement, he said, had cheated Iowa farmers out of thousands of dollars.

After the speaker had outlined his program, the farmers who were attending the meeting lingered to discuss the proposed elevator. They left the meeting that night eager to tell their neighbors of the plan. After the first meeting, other discussions were held and enthusiasm spread. On



January 30, 1889, farmers in the vicinity of Rockwell convened at the town hall for the purpose of organizing the coöperative society. And so the dream of William Barragy became a reality.

As had been previously planned, Thomas Chappell made the motion that the coöperative society be organized. The motion carried un-animously and it was suggested that a committee be appointed by Norman Densmore, chairman of the meeting, to draw up the articles of incorporation. The committee of Thomas Chappell, William Barragy, and L. E. McGilvra decided that the Rockwell society should be established on March 2, 1889. As soon as various other committees had been appointed to make ready for the opening a month later, the group adjourned.

Reuben A. Holman, pioneer coöperative worker, wrote of this first meeting of the organization: "There is nothing to indicate that the Rockwell society was to become the first continuously successful one of its kind in the United States, wielding an incalculable influence in laying the foundation for successful co-operation." It was, as he said, only by a study of the Rockwell society's history that the reason for its success could be grasped.

Through the efforts of William Barragy and Charles Hance, a Rockwell hardware dealer, one



hundred farmers from townships surrounding Rockwell bought stock at ten dollars per share. By March 2nd, a thousand dollars had been raised. On that bleak March day, the farmers again gathered in Rockwell to elect officers for the Coöperative Farmers' Society of Rockwell. Norman Densmore was chosen president and L. E. McGilvra was selected as vice president. The other officers elected at this historic meeting were: J. E. Treston, secretary; Francis McMullen, treasurer; and T. L. Chappell, H. F. Hardman, William Barragy, W. F. Clark, Thomas McManus, Frank Dietrick, Andrew Johnson, Frederick Doderer, C. J. Behr, and William Smith, directors.

All plans for starting the elevator had been completed except the location of a site. This was, indeed, one of the most difficult problems confronting the officers. Opposition was unusually strong in Rockwell for some of the town's merchants and many farmers scoffed at the idea of an elevator run on a coöperative basis with inexperienced management. On March 23rd the directors finally acquired the elevator of John Inman for the sum of two thousand dollars. Thomas Chappell, who had been elected manager by the board of directors, obtained a loan of a thousand dollars from H. I. Smith, a Mason City banker, with which to begin the buying of grain.



The first coöperative elevator in Iowa entered the business world on April 1st when the manager started buying grain. On the first day, Manager Chappell found the two rival line elevators offering four and five cents more per bushel for grain. Naturally the society could not afford to meet these high prices of its competitors. To the dismay of the coöperative manager, some of the members of the newly-formed society unloaded their grain at the line elevators down the street in order to obtain the higher prices.

The crisis which accompanied the opening of the new elevator was immediately brought before the board of directors by Mr. Chappell. After he had explained the opposition's method of raising the price of grain in an attempt to force the new elevator out of business, the directors decided upon the course to be followed. Chappell was told that the coöperative society would pay little heed to rival elevators and would continue to function as usual. "It is immaterial whether you buy a bushel of grain or not," declared one director, "so long as you can keep prices where they belong in order that the farmers will receive the benefit of the advanced rates." This incident illustrated the high principles upon which the first coöperative elevator was founded. Its aim was simple: To give every member the full local value



of his grain with a minimum deduction for handling charges.

Though the members of the Rockwell society were allowed to sell their corn, oats, and wheat to other elevators they were compelled to pay a certain percentage to the society for business which they transacted with the line elevators. This was termed the protection clause and usually amounted to a half cent per bushel. Needless to say it was this clause that largely paid the coöperative elevator's expenses and the manager's salary during the first few months.

Imagine the chagrin of the line elevator managers in Rockwell when the "co-op" failed to wither under the barrage of high prices. The downfall of the Rockwell society, which they had predicted would come in six months, failed to materialize. Because the line elevators were losing heavily by offering excessive prices for grain, they were forced to reduce their prices to the level paid by the coöperative elevator.

After winning this "battle for existence", the society began to prosper and it was not long before most of the farmers around Rockwell realized that here was the "emancipator" of the farmers. The fight did not end, however, by the withdrawal of high prices of the line elevators. The opposition could not forget the "good old days" when



the grain dealers met regularly in Mason City to fix the price of grains from three to five cents per bushel below the actual market value. They were not content to watch the coöperative elevator fix a price which allowed only a modest fee for handling charges in lieu of fat profits. It did not take much argument by the line managers to convince the railroad men and commission men in Chicago (where most of the grain was shipped) that the coöperative elevator was an evil to the business world which ought to be exterminated.

Confronted with obstacle after obstacle during its first year, the Rockwell elevator nevertheless handled approximately 100,000 bushels of corn and oats which amounted to a business of \$145,000. Some machinery was sold by the elevator, and later livestock was marketed and coal and lumber sold to the farmers.

On June 7, 1890, the society adopted at one of its regular meetings the "penalty clause" or maintenance provision which proved to be the salvation for coöperative societies organized throughout the middle west. It was aimed at the selfish member who failed to pay the commission due to the society. The provision stated that "a member failing to pay an outside commission within 30 days was to be notified by the board of directors; and, if at the expiration of 60 days, such commis-



sion were still unpaid, there would be issued a second notice that carried with it suspension of said member from the benefits of membership until the commission was paid." This clause was rigidly enforced and was responsible for the sound finances of most of the coöperative elevators established after the Rockwell society.

In the year 1893 Chappell resigned from his managerial capacities of the society to take a cashier's position in a new bank in Rockwell. He was succeeded by Frank Campbell who had formerly been his assistant. At the same meeting in which Campbell was elected manager, the society decided it should extend its business to selling lumber. The newly-elected manager was immediately sent north to buy a supply of lumber. Upon his return he discovered that the competing lumber yards in the community were ready to underbid the "co-op" society. The battle was waged bitterly for a time but it was not long before the opposition was bought out by the society. During the years of strife, many society members were so imbued with the coöperative ideals that they refused to deal with competitors irrespective of price advantage.

The notable success of the Rockwell coöperative society served to make it a model in the founding of other coöperative elevators. By 1904,



thirty coöperative societies were functioning in Iowa alone. When a few members of the Rockwell society attempted to organize a new elevator at Dougherty, they encountered many barriers, the chief of which was from the railroads. The railroad officials of the line running through Dougherty refused to permit them to buy ground on which to build an elevator, or to let them make an extension of the switch to the site finally decided upon for the elevator some distance from the main tracks. The matter was not settled until the farmers threatened punitive legislation against the railroads.

Another practice indicative of the tribulations of the early "co-op" elevators was the refusal of Chicago grain commission houses to handle their grain. This action was instigated by Iowa line elevator operators who had organized to drive the coöperatives out of business. E. G. Dunn, the young manager of the Dougherty coöperative, shipped several carloads of grain to Chicago only to discover a few days later that the commission house was "unable" to dispose of the grain. Dunn went to Chicago and found the grain still in the freight cars on a lonely side track. Upon investigation he learned that the Chicago buyers had been warned by the combine not to buy Dunn's shipments or they would "sever business



connections". He finally sold the grain at a heavy loss to his society.

While societies were springing up all over Iowa and adopting the original coöperative elevator's by-laws, the Rockwell organization was expanding. In February, 1898, Norman Densmore resigned as president of the group and was succeeded by J. H. Brown, who had long been a faithful "co-op" convert.

Under Manager Campbell the elevator's gross income reached \$624,251.42 in 1901. Each year the stockholders braved the blustery March wind and almost impassable roads to attend the annual stockholders' meeting and listen to long reports on the society's business for the year.

During the early 1900's Manager Campbell started obtaining work clothes for his family and the elevator employees at wholesale prices. Presently one and then another of the society's members, learning of the new practice of selling clothes, were also accommodated. Almost any day, according to Holman in his *Forty Years of Co-operation*, an "initiated" member might be seen going stealthily up the steps from the back room to the loft over the office, where the supplies were kept, and, coming down again with a bundle under his arm, slip out the side door. At the annual meeting, transactions totalling several hun-



dred dollars were reported as "a little business upstairs"!

After the reports, Mr. Densmore, who was present for this annual meeting, arose by invitation to comment on the year's progress. "No one who was there will soon forget the humor of his expression as he inclined his head to look out over his glasses, and voiced his disapproval by slowly repeating the words, 'a little business upstairs'." In 1903, however, there was such a widespread demand for a coöperative clothing store which would be open to the public that the members voted to begin immediately.

As this new sideline flourished, so also did the sales of coal, farm machinery, and several staple grocery items such as coffee, flour, salt, and sugar. It was estimated that farmers saved from fifty to one hundred dollars yearly in dealing at the "co-op", and this did not include savings on clothing, lumber, coal, or machinery. Rockwell was certainly living up to its title of "Co-operative Center of the United States"!

The severest blow ever struck at the coöperative elevators in Iowa came in October of 1904. George Wells, secretary of the Iowa Grain Dealers Association, acting in response to the pleas of the "grain trust", issued a memorable circular letter threatening a boycott on all commission houses



in Chicago, Minneapolis, Peoria, and other terminals. He notified them that if the houses continued to receive grain shipments from the thirty "co-op" elevators the five hundred line elevators would withdraw their trade. The two Chicago firms which had been accepting coöperative societies' shipments were boycotted and trainloads of Iowa grain stood idle on Chicago railroad tracks. The darkest hours had arrived for the coöperative movement in Iowa and the middle west. The young societies selected C. G. Messerole, manager of the Gowrie elevator, to appeal to the Rockwell society for aid. In his letter to President Brown he suggested that a meeting be called in order to form a State association of coöperatives to combat the boycott.

At the Rockwell society's October board meeting most of the members did not favor the association as they believed their own elevator was not much affected by the recent decree of the grain trust. There was some sharp controversy. Finally, the youngest member arose. "Gentlemen," he said, "don't you realize that these other societies have not yet gained the prestige to call this meeting? With our by-laws, they are but sprouts of this organization. The only reason that we have not been thus attacked by the grain trade is that they did not know we would live and spread.



Perceiving that we have done so, they — when they have cut off the sprouts — will strike at the tap root. So, if for no other reason, let us do this for the selfish motive of self-preservation." After this speech the members voted to participate in a State-wide meeting.

The meeting was called and on November 4, 1904, representatives of thirty coöperative societies convened at Rockwell to unite against their common enemy, the "grain trust". As a result of the Rockwell meeting the Farmers Grain Dealers State Association was organized with Norman Densmore as president. This action soon forced the commission houses to lift the boycott, imposed on them by the Iowa line elevators. The slogan of the Association became a motto on many Iowa farms: "A fair deal, stick together, pay your commissions, and when selling elsewhere, look out for the weights."

In 1909 President Theodore Roosevelt, long a champion of the coöperative movement, declared: "The cooperative plan is the best plan of organization wherever men have the right spirit to carry it out. Under this plan any business undertaking is managed by a committee; every man has one vote and only one vote; and every one gets profits according to what he sells, buys or supplies. It develops individual responsibility and has a moral



as well as a financial value over any other plan."

The pattern set by the Rockwell society caused more and more elevators to be organized until in 1910 there were 325 farmer grain companies. Approximately sixty thousand Iowa farmers were banded together under the State Association. In times of distress all societies looked to Rockwell for aid in solving their problems.

Rockwell's fame had spread to all parts of the United States and across the ocean to countries of Europe. George L. McNutt, well-known economist of the early 1900's, was attracted to Iowa for a study of the Rockwell society. Upon his return to the East he wrote in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*: "If you are troubled by the economic and social problems of the present, if you want to renew your faith in triumphant democracy, if you want to see what common men can do in the face of the greatest obstacles, if you want to believe in the social and economic redemption of the world, ask the conductor of the Iowa Central Railway to put you off at Rockwell, Iowa."

Year after year the coöperative elevator and its store continued to flourish at Rockwell. During the first World War the society dealt in livestock on a large scale and also continued to pay the farmer top prices for his grain. By 1924 it became apparent that there was friction between



the new and the old board members of the society, but after a few changes the board seemed to be functioning as in the pioneer days when the society was struggling for existence and dependent upon the harmony of the members who made the decisions.

Though the society had seen more prosperous days, it continued to pay dividends to its many stockholders who by that time had drifted away from Rockwell to various parts of the United States. At the annual March meeting of 1928 it was decided to reincorporate the society whose charter would expire in the following year. A year passed and at the final meeting the members fixed the minimum amount of stock at twenty-five thousand dollars for the new organization. And so the old Rockwell society, which began beneath that harvest moon in the year 1888 and which had overcome all sorts of obstacles during its span of forty years, was reborn.

REEVES HALL



## The Stew Pan and the Spider

Emigrants, trekking over the Alleghanies and laboring along rough trails from Virginia, brought more than brawn, courage, and a passionate love of freedom to the back-of-beyond called Ioway. They brought household utensils as well as visions of a fertile prairie land soon to blossom with waving acres of corn and undulating heads of wheat. The New England Yankee carried his provincial cookery; the Red Horse from Kentucky clung to local recipes; and the Indiana Sucker set store by the foods he knew and enjoyed. A Hawkeye home was not long established before fragrant aromas rose from the stew pan and the frontier skillet or spider.

Many Iowa women learned to cook over the open blaze in a fireplace, tutored themselves in the use of the brick oven, and finally graduated to the wood or coal range. But it made little difference upon what they cooked or what pots and pans they used as long as they prepared tasty and nourishing food. "One of the first duties of women in domestic life", wrote the intrepid Mrs. Sarah J. Hale, author of *Mrs. Hale's New Cook Book* which was generously used throughout Iowa



during the fifties and sixties, "is to understand the quality of provisions and the preparation of wholesome food."

To victual a frontier family with palatable and nutritious food, of course, was no simple matter. Even though Iowa was abundant with game, it was a task to seek it out, kill and dress it, and prepare it for the table. The vegetable garden needed most watchful care. And the picking of berries in season and the collection of nuts, roots, and wild herbs meant exhausting labor. Even the grinding of corn meal left hands calloused and back muscles aching. Yet it was flour ground by hand or at one of Iowa's numerous mills which furnished, to a large extent, the strength of the pioneer menu. Pioneer families had to be practically self-sufficient in the production and preparation of food. The rationing of meat and vegetables by the government, even in wartime, would have been both unnecessary and futile.

"Corn-meal preparations will be found unusually good", said *Miss Leslie's New Receipts for Cooking*, and added that there was scarcely a home in America without a griddle. Indeed, the footed griddle and the Dutch oven (a large, deep, cast-iron pan standing on three or four feet, with a handle and a close fitting lid) were almost indispensable. With these the housewife conjured up



egg pone, common hoe-cake, and griddle cakes. It seemed as if every section of the nation had its local — and very favorite — recipe for griddle cakes. There were the Virginia cakes, as well as Missouri cakes, Carolina corn cakes, and Kentucky flapjacks. Who, indeed, could resist such a listing of geographic griddle cakes!

Girls early learned to mix cakes. When morning saw capricious smoke swirls ringing from cabin chimneys, it was safe to assume that the women of the household were greasing the griddle with salt pork. "Take a quart of warm water, or of skim milk", ordered the old rule, "and add a quart of Indian meal and half a pint of wheat flour, sifted. Put the water into a pan; add a level teaspoonful of salt; and having mixed together the wheat and Indian meal, stir them gradually into the water, a handful at a time. It should be about the consistency of buckwheat cake or muffin batter. Beat it long and hard. If you find it too thick, add a little more water. Bake the cakes on top of the griddle. They should not be larger than the top of a tumbler, or a small saucer. Send them to the table hot, in even piles, and eat them with butter, honey, or molassess." It is small wonder that menfolks said these were the "beatenest" cakes ever baked and smiled like a basket of chips.



The doughnut, cooked in deep fat and sometimes sprinkled with sugar, was another tantalizing delicacy. Not always, however, did this culinary product win applause. "This detestable esculent", scornfully commented an editor in 1826, "sometimes resembles one of your inflexible little soup dumplings; at others it appears to be a kind of mongrel pancake."

Probably no dish was better relished than the ever-present chicken fixins. The backwoodsman must have his chicken-fixins and shanty-cake, and it was said that the first inquiry made of the guest by the frontier landlord was: "Well, stranger, what'll ye take? Wheat-bread and chicken fixins, or corn-bread and common doins?" By the latter was meant bacon, or perhaps salt pork. When James Gardiner Edwards was journeying through the Illinois country before establishing his newspapers in Fort Madison and Burlington, he stopped for lodgings and supper at the miserable cabin of a settler. About the first thing Edwards's host did was to reach up to the cabin rafter, pull down a squawking hen, wring its neck then and there, and give it to his wife for fixins. Chicken prepared any way was called fixins.

A dish quite as popular as fixins was hominy. Hominy, of course, originally was white Indian corn. Shelled from the cob by strong hands, the



kernels first were scalded in hot lye, and then winnowed and dried. The Iowa woman when she was ready to prepare it for the table started the day before. She carefully washed the hominy with several waters, then covered it with boiling water, and let it soak through the night. Then into the stew pan it went. Two quarts of water were added to each quart of hominy. This was boiled until the grits were soft. Then it was drained, put into a deep dish, and sent piping hot to the table. Frontiersmen enjoyed corned beef or pork with this breakfast dish. Unused hominy was saved for another meal when it was made into thick cakes and fried in grease.

Johnny-cake, another corn delicacy, was a simple dish which appealed to common men as well as to aristocrats. And many a kitchen held the indispensable johnny-cake board which was only a piece of shaved clapboard from three to four inches wide and from fifteen to twenty inches long. The dough was spread upon this board and baked upon the hearth. In 1849, a somewhat sophisticated recipe for johnny-cake called for three teacupfuls of cornmeal, one of wheat flour, two of milk, one of cream, and one teaspoonful of saleratus (sodium bicarbonate) dissolved in hot water, to which was added a teaspoonful of salt. A verse commemorated the pleasing result.



Sure there'll be a new creation;  
Sure there won't be no starvation;  
Spirit-aiding; heart up-moving;  
Life-reviving; health-improving;  
New ideal  
Super-Real  
Indian *Johnny-cake*.

Few persons today know of the "Any Thing" cake, a popular substitute for the flapjack. *The Baker's and Cook's Oracle* of 1840 printed the following directions: "If you have cold rice left, you will find it very good to break it up and put in warm milk; add a little salt and mix with flour till thick to pour for fritters. You had better use an egg or so; but it does well without. Fry like pan-cakes. Butter when done, and put on sugar and nutmeg."

It must not be thought, however, that the pioneer menu of Iowa centered about pancakes, chicken fixins, salt pork, hominy, and johnny-cake, although there is little doubt that these were common items of diet. Meat was of prime importance.

The smart and thrifty frontierswoman was expected to know a good deal about butchering and meat cuts. She early learned that when selecting beef 'the best parts are cut from the thick portion, from the shoulders to the rump, and these are the most expensive parts, including sirloin, sirloin



steaks, and first, second, and third cuts of the fore quarter." She knew too that steaks from the round or the buttock were tougher and not as sweet as steaks cut from rib pieces. She was taught in the hard school of experience that a roasting piece cut close to the fore shoulder was always tough and poor. She mastered the art of pounding coarse cuts to render them tender.

A competent woman, of course, selected beef that had a coarse, loose grain and which easily yielded to the pressure of finger or knife. She knew that beef which had a purplish red cast and a whitish fat was best. She realized that stall-fed cattle possessed lighter fat than grass-fed beef. When her husband cast a line into one of Iowa's numerous streams and rivers, she urged him to dress his catch of fish at once, sprinkle them with salt, and lay them in a shady place covered with grass or leaves. Too many times he had proudly brought home fish whose meat was soft, the fins flabby, the scales dim, and the eyes sunken.

When butchering season came in late February or early March, the Iowa housewife not only had to set out the huge kettles, listen to the dying squeals of the porkers, and hear the monotonous scrape, scrape, scrape of the hide hoe, but also was obliged to know what to do with the recently killed hog. Shoulders and hams were carted



away to the smoke house which sent the honest odor of hickory into the crisp air. Spareribs, cut with plenty of fat adhering, were roasted. She labored long to boil and corn the shoulders. Sausage was made from odd pieces and what was left she salted down. The head and feet, of course, were reserved for jelly, head cheese, and souse.

Beef and veal necks, under skillful fingers aided by the judicious use of herbs — sweet basil, savory, sweet majoram — eventually came to the table as stew. Such a tasty dish must have had a general appeal. In 1840, a popular cook book printed directions in verse for stewing a knuckle of veal.

Meat pies teased hungry men almost as much as the odor of a well-flavored stew. Frequently the poorer cuts of beef came to the table surrounded by dough and seasoned with herbs grown in the home garden and then strung from rafters to dry. An 1830 recipe for a rump steak pie called for three pounds of meat cut into pieces "half as big as your hand". After the meat had been ground with a chopper, a half dozen minced eschalots were mixed with half an ounce of pepper and salt and added to the beef. A deep dish was filled with the mixture and covered with a gill of catsup and the same amount of gravy. It was then baked for two hours.



A more orthodox manner of preparing meat pies, however, was known to hundreds of women in Iowa from the Mississippi to the Missouri. Cooked in the following manner, such a pie could be made above an open fire, on the hearth of a pioneer cabin, and in the oven of a wood range. A deep dish was greased with butter or lard. In it was placed a layer of potatoes which had been seasoned with butter, salt, pepper, minced onions, or with any other herbs. The pioneer used what she could find. On top of the potatoes was placed a layer of meat. It did not matter much what kind of meat. Beef, pork, mutton, veal, rabbit, pigeon, chicken, turkey — almost anything could and did go in. If possible, however, a few pieces of salt pork were crisscrossed over the meat. After the dish had been filled with alternate layers of potatoes and meat, it was baked until done. Such a dish furnished an entire meal for a frontier family.

Desserts, following substantial stews, roasts, or meat pies, varied greatly during the early period in Iowa. Frequently no sweets concluded a meal. Often wild berries, recently picked, were served. Sometimes, of course, really elaborate cakes, puddings, and pies brought a meal to a distinguished close. Ice cream, although not common during the first years of the nineteenth century, was relished as a dessert and most cook books offered



both simple and elaborate directions for making it. In 1830, Mackenzie's *Five Thousand Receipts* gave minute directions for the freezing of lemon, raspberry, and strawberry ice cream; ten years later another collection listed a dozen different flavors including cocoanut, chocolate, quince, coffee, and peach; and in 1863, Catherine Esther Beecher devoted extended space in her popular book to the making of ice cream and ices.

Flummery, that delicious dessert coming straight from colonial days, has disappeared from the American table. Yet this dainty with the quaint name once was popular and frequently appeared on the menus of the Barrett House in Burlington. Stale sponge cake was cut into thin slices and a deep dish was lined with the pieces. Some superior cooks first moistened the cake with either white or red wine. Then a rich custard was made with the yolks, not the whites, of eggs. When cool, the custard was turned into the dish lined with the cake. The top was covered with the egg whites that had been beaten to a stiff froth. Sometimes the custard was flavored with orange and then the dessert became orange flummery.

Cakes and cookies, of course, were more likely to be found on the table of the common man than rich pastries and fancy puddings. The old-fashioned ginger snap which used to pile in



browned heaps in an earthen cookie jar still teases the appetite. To taste one of these is to bite into the middle of the nineteenth century. To make them as great grandmother did, follow this recipe. Take one cup of molasses, half a cup of sugar, half a cup of butter, half a cup of warm water with the butter melted in, and two tablespoonfuls of ginger. Make a stiff dough, knead it well, roll into sheets, cut into round cakes, and bake in a moderate oven.

Iowans could live well in a State abundant with the cereal grains, with pasturage for stock, and with facilities for milk, eggs, butter, and cream. As time went on Hawkeye tables reflected a growing prosperity and a higher standard of living. The stew pan and the spider, however, symbolized not only the period of settlement, but also the entire history of cookery in the nineteenth century.

PHILIP D. JORDAN



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