

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## Historic Iowa

Visitors in Boston, it is said, need to be told what to see and how to find it. They may wish to visit Bunker Hill Monument, the Boston Common, and the homes of Paul Revere, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William H. Prescott. They may wish to see Faneuil Hall and Old North Church. But how to find them in the labyrinth of winding streets and tangled byways!

In Iowa it is quite otherwise. Here the thoroughfares are straight and smooth and long, stretching like waving ribbons across the great "Mesopotamia of the New World" from the Mississippi on the east to the Missouri on the west. Dotted along the highways and byways that project from these main thoroughfares are historic monuments and parks and churches and homes, comparable to those of New England and more readily accessible. If they are less renowned it is because of their proximity to us both in time and

distance. Remove them from us a few days' journey, wrap about them the lore of a century, cover them with ivy and moss, and interest in them will be increased many fold. New England has a rich historical background, but Iowa's historic sites are not without interest and beauty.

Bunker Hill Monument was erected in honor of those who went forth at the sound of the bugle, and fell in the heat of a great battle. But in Iowa there is a monument erected in honor of those who went forth in pursuit of friendly relations and for the advancement of peace. Floyd's Monument on the banks of the Missouri, in Woodbury County, marks a lonely grave. It is dedicated to members of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and especially to one of that party — Sergeant Charles Floyd — who fell in the westward march of 1804, and was perhaps the first white man buried in the Iowa country.

The original monument was a solitary cedar post which stood for many years to tell the tale of grief — "grief that was keenly felt and tenderly, but long since softened in the march of time and lost." Almost a century passed. Then, in 1901, contributions of a grateful people made possible the supplanting of the cedar post, and the erection of a sandstone shaft which towers a hundred feet above the mound. The scene is at once historic

and beautiful — a lofty hill, a place “where Heaven sheds its purest light and lends its richest tint.”

Sergeant Floyd will long be remembered as having served faithfully and well in that historic expedition of more than a hundred years ago. In the years to come, when his monument shall have become weathered and worn, his resting place will doubtless be recognized as one of the significant historic spots of Iowa.

But in Iowa there are also monuments dedicated to those who fell in the struggles of war. Standing tall and stately on the summit of capitol hill in the city of Des Moines is a granite shaft erected in honor of the 84,000 Iowa soldiers and sailors who served in the Civil War, and especially to the 15,000 who lost their lives in that great conflict. The base of the monument is sixty feet square and its height is more than one hundred and thirty feet. At the summit a wingless goddess of victory waves branches of palms signifying victory and peace. The monument was designed by an Iowa woman — Mrs. Harriet A. Ketcham of Mount Pleasant — and was erected at a cost of \$150,000. It was dedicated in 1894, James Harlan being the principal speaker at the dedicatorial program.

Historic sites have frequently been dedicated as

historical or memorial parks. This custom has not been confined to any one age or one area. It prevails in Iowa as it does in New England. In 1840 the Winnebago Indians came from Wisconsin into Iowa. They were accompanied across the border by Brigadier-General Henry Atkinson, and a fort which was established in Winneshiek County was appropriately named Fort Atkinson.

Four long rectangular barracks were erected. Provision was also made for a hospital, a chapel and schoolroom, a storehouse, a powder house, a guard-house, and two blockhouses. A picket fence twelve feet high made of substantial logs enclosed the buildings and a parade ground of more than an acre. At the end of the parade ground stood a tall flagstaff.

For a half dozen years troops were maintained there. Finally the Winnebagoes moved on into Minnesota and the fort was no longer needed. Accordingly, one morning in February, 1849, the troops were moved to other quarters and the old fort was abandoned. Attempts were then made to have the federal government give the fort and two sections of land for the site of an agricultural school which should be a branch of the State University. This request was denied, however, and the buildings were sold at public auction.

Half a century later the scene at the old fort

had greatly changed. Evidences of waste and decay were apparent. The buildings which had once been occupied by men of military poise and dignity now sheltered only the beasts and the birds. But there was something about the old fort which the ravages of time could not efface. A sentiment, akin to pride, clustered around the scenes of those early years. The weatherbeaten appearance of the old barracks might detract from their aesthetic value, but the historical significance of the place became more clearly apparent with each succeeding year. Iowa would not permit this historic shrine to be completely destroyed. In 1921 the site of the old fort was purchased and made into a State Park. There now on a summer day a visitor may enjoy a pleasant outing and read the history of the past as it is indelibly written in the walls of the old barracks. The powder house, too, still stands to tell its story of adventure, while the old well and the well curb are unique historical landmarks.

During the period of the Civil War another Iowa fort was erected, the site of which like that of Fort Atkinson has now become a State Park. The Sioux Indians under the leadership of Little Crow had become hostile in Minnesota and the Northwest. Fearing that depredations might be committed in Iowa, Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood

authorized the raising of troops and the erection of a fort at Estherville. Logs of black walnut and oak were used in the construction of substantial fortifications. The buildings were surrounded on three sides by an eight-foot plank wall four inches thick, the top of which was well studded with heavy spikes. The south wall was constructed of sod, eight feet high and very thick at the base. Within the fortifications a well was dug and walled to the top so securely that in later years, when time had wrought destruction to all else, the old well remained to furnish water fresh and cool for visitors at the site of the old fort.

In 1920, many years after the wooden defenses had vanished, the site of this frontier post was reclaimed and dedicated as an historic landmark and State Park.

Visitors in New England want to see Faneuil Hall and Old North Church. But Iowa, too, has its "Cradle of Liberty" and its famous old church. The Old Stone Capitol was the seat of government of the Territory of Iowa from 1842 until 1846 and the capitol of the State until 1857. It was the scene of three constitutional conventions — the place where our present State constitution was framed. There for a decade and a half Governors, Legislators, and Supreme Court Judges transacted official business. As a majestic and

interesting building of other years it is an historic landmark. As the administration building of the State University it continues to represent the best interests of the Commonwealth, and bids fair to become the center of much history that is still in the making.

At the almost deserted village of Bradford, near Nashua, in Chickasaw County, stands the Little Brown Church. No lanterns have been hung in its belfry tower to convey belligerent messages, but the song which has made it famous has been sung in many lands and has carried a message of peacefulness around the world.

There's a church in the valley by the wildwood,  
No lovelier spot in the dale.  
No spot is so dear to my childhood,  
As the little brown church in the vale.

And what shall we say of the homes of prominent Iowans — homes like those in New England that have become historic? Iowa, too, has had dexterous horsemen and men of renown in the field of letters.

Near the town of Le Claire in Scott County was the boyhood home of William F. Cody. At the age of eight Cody moved with his parents to Kansas. There a few years later, engaged as a buffalo hunter, he won the sobriquet of "Buffalo Bill". Going upon the stage in Chicago in the play

*Scouts of the Plains* and in New York in *Lost and Won*, he displayed his skill as an Indian fighter.

Believing, however, that it was not "fine acting" but the appearance of real Indians, guides, scouts, cowboys, buffaloes, and bucking broncos that the people wanted to see, Cody spent his last dollar to assemble a group of these for a show at the fairgrounds in Omaha in 1883. The show was a phenomenal success. From Omaha he went to Chicago, and from there to Madison Square Garden in New York. The following year he took his Indians and Wild West show to London, where he played before vast crowds and where upon invitation he appeared at Windsor Castle for the entertainment and edification of Queen Victoria, herself.

Meanwhile Cody's little old boyhood home in Iowa was becoming weatherbeaten and worn. Finally the house was advertised for sale. Shrewd purchasers bought it and removed it to Cody Memorial Park at Cody, Wyoming. At the little town of Le Claire, however, a monument has been erected in honor of this Iowa youth who became one of the world's greatest showmen.

The boyhood home of Emerson Hough may still be seen at Newton. Though the author of some of the best pioneer stories, including *The Mississippi Bubble*, *The Way to the West*, and *The Covered*

*Wagon*, spent most of his life elsewhere, he always counted himself a native of Iowa.

Hamlin Garland, too, was once an Iowan, living near the town of Osage. That was many years ago but he still recalls those early days.

Often now,  
When seated at my writing,  
I lay my pencil down  
And fall to dreaming, still,  
Of the stern, hard days  
Of the old-time Iowa seeding,  
When the prairie chickens woke me  
With their chorus on the hill.

The Harlan Home at Mount Pleasant recalls a relationship with the family of Abraham Lincoln. In the decade of the fifties James Harlan, President of Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, was elected to the United States Senate. Subsequently he was Secretary of the Interior in the cabinet of President Lincoln, and the Lincolns and Harlans became close friends. In 1868 this intimacy blossomed into romance when Mary Harlan, daughter of the Senator, was married to Robert T. Lincoln, the only surviving son of the martyred President. In the years that followed, Mary Harlan Lincoln resided for a time at the Harlan Home in Mount Pleasant. On an old door that has been preserved at the famous home, marks are still visible indicating the names, ages,

and heights of three of the grandchildren of James Harlan and Abraham Lincoln.

We admire the New England poets and would travel far to visit their homes. But Iowans should remember that at the little town of Delhi, in Delaware County, a boulder and bronze tablet mark the former residence of J. L. McCreery, a pioneer who is credited with having written at least one poem which for beauty and grandeur is comparable to the works of the New England poets.

There is no death! the stars go down  
To rise upon some other shore,  
And bright in heaven's jewelled crown  
They shine for evermore.

There is no death! the leaves may fall,  
The flowers may fade and pass away —  
They only wait, through wintry hours,  
The warm, sweet breath of May.

Thus "Historic Iowa" is not an idle boast nor an apt expression of a poet's dream. Rather, it is an ever-present reality. Within the borders of Iowa are historic monuments and parks and churches and homes conveniently located and worthy of consideration. New England is renowned for its many points of historical value, but Iowa's historic sites are not without interest and value.

J. A. SWISHER