

The **P**ALIMPSEST

JUNE 1924

CONTENTS

Michel Aco — Squaw-Man 161

JOHN C. PARISH

A Colored Convention 178

RUTH A. GALLAHER

The Pacific City Fight 182

DONALD L. McMURRY

Comment 190

THE EDITOR

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

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

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

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

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

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

VOL. II

ISSUED IN JUNE 1921

NO. 6

COPYRIGHT 1921 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Michel Aco—Squaw-Man

The history of white men in the Upper Mississippi Valley runs back approximately two hundred and fifty years; and even in the first distant quarter century of that long period there are figures which stand out clear and distinct against the background of prairie and stream and forest. High lights rest upon the black gown of Marquette and upon the energetic explorer Jolliet, upon the restless La Salle, full of visions, and upon Henri de Tonty with his iron hand. The Jesuit Allouez passes from village to village, and the mendacious Friar Hennepin moves about in the foreground.

The background of the picture is indistinct. One gets glimpses, among the dusky Indian camps, of bearded Frenchmen bartering for the peltry of the region. One sees them again packing canoes over portages or joining the Indians in the hunt or occasionally on the war path. One even sees, now and

then, among the more southern tribes, a man naked and tattooed who once was a Frenchman but has reverted to the life of the wilds.

They are the lesser breed who follow their leaders into the West, or make their way apart. Some are faithful and fine representatives of the land of the lilies, and some are only knaves, but though as individuals their ways may be checkered and their paths almost lost in the Valley, nevertheless they deserve more than obscurity for they are France itself on the far edge of the New World.

The record of those early times, a hundred years before the Revolutionary War, is voluminous. The wandering priests made long reports to their superiors; the explorers wrote many and detailed letters to their patrons and friends, and beguiled numerous hours telling of the lands and peoples they visited, the hardships they endured, and the adventures of themselves and their comrades. So out of these thousands of pages of records one can often piece together into a somewhat connected whole the story of an obscure but persistent priest, or the adventures of a French fur trader — little known to fame — who trailed the woods and prairies and paddled along the streams of the Upper Mississippi Valley back in the time when Peter Stuyvesant with his wooden leg was still stumping about the streets of the little village of New York.

Michel Aco — writers variously spell his name Accault, Accau, and Ako, but Aco he himself signed

it — came into the Valley in the employ of La Salle. A vigorous and adventurous fur trader and explorer, he appears again and again for nearly a quarter of a century. And his experiences in the Valley and his associations with its people were so vital and intimate that they reflect vividly the life of both white and red inhabitants.

When La Salle and Tonty made their memorable trip into the Illinois country in the winter of 1679–1680 they brought with them a motley group of men. There were priests and artisans, courageous woodsmen and arrant cowards. Early in January, the party landed at the village of the Peoria Indians. La Salle was on his way to the sea, but he must make haste slowly. He commenced the building of a fort below the Peoria village and beside it on the shore of the Illinois River his men began the construction of a ship with a forty-two foot keel and a twelve foot beam. With this he hoped ultimately to reach the ocean at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

In the meantime there were preliminary trips to be made. La Salle determined to reconnoitre the upper Mississippi, and on the last day of February, under his directions, three men embarked in a canoe loaded with provisions and trading goods and started down the Illinois River. He had chosen Aco as leader of the expedition and with him were Antoine Auguel, called by his comrades “the Picard” because of his home in Picardy, and Friar Louis Hennepin, grey-robed brother of the Recollect order.

Hennepin was a man of big frame and high pretensions, and time was to show that his boastfulness ran easily into mendacity. His account is almost the only source of information about the important voyage upon which he was embarking and as he chose to represent himself as the leader of the expedition and to refer to his companions as "my two men", the real position of Aco has been much misunderstood.

But La Salle has been sufficiently explicit in his writings as to Aco's leadership and the reasons for his selection. He chose Aco to ascend the Mississippi, he said, because he was versed in the languages and customs of the tribes which lay in that direction. He knew not only the tongues of the Iroquois and the Illinois tribes but he could talk with the Iowa, the Oto, the Chippewa, and the Kickapoo. He had visited these Indians on La Salle's orders and had been successful in his mission and well received by the villagers. "Furthermore", said La Salle, "he is prudent, courageous and cool."

In another letter La Salle remarked that Aco had spent two winters and a summer among these tribes. On the basis of these comments it is not hard to identify Aco's experience. In the fall of 1678 La Salle had sent out from Fort Frontenac — his post at the east end of Lake Ontario — an advance party of fifteen men with supplies and orders to proceed to the Illinois country, trade for furs, and collect provisions. A year later when La Salle him-

self arrived at Mackinac in the Griffon — the first ship on the upper lakes — he found that his advance party had been sadly demoralized. Some of the men were at Mackinac; some had deserted and he sent Tonty to round them up at Sault Ste. Marie; and some he found at the entrance to Green Bay. These last had been doing some real trading and had collected a quantity of furs which La Salle loaded upon the Griffon and despatched on an unlucky voyage to Quebec. The ship and its crew were never again heard from.

With his force increased by the reassembled advance party La Salle had come down into the Illinois country. It seems exceedingly probable that the years of experience with Indian tribes which La Salle credits to Aco came to him as one of the more faithful members of the advance party of 1678. Even in Hennepin's biased account there may be found indications of a sturdiness and independence in Aco's character, but in what the friar says of the Picard there is no evidence of such qualities. One only gets the impression that the Picard was a timorous soul.

Such then were the three men who embarked in the spring of 1680 on an expedition into a largely unexplored country. They found adventures almost at once. As they neared the mouth of the Illinois River they spoke with a band of Tamaroas who shortly afterward sought to ambush them from a jutting point of land. But the smoke of the Indian

camp fire gave them away and the French were able to elude them.

Soon they were pushing their canoe with difficulty up the current of the Mississippi River. They were the first white travellers who are known to have ascended the Mississippi River above the mouth of the Illinois — for Marquette and Jolliet seven years before had turned aside into the Illinois River on their return trip; and above the mouth of the Wisconsin they passed shores which no French voyageur before them had seen and described.

As they paddled northward they feasted on the fat of the land. There were wild turkeys to be had in abundance and they varied their diet with fish and with the meat of buffalo and deer and even with the flesh of a bear which they killed while it was swimming across the river. It is impossible to tell just what spots they visited on the Iowa and Illinois shores, but they must have made many camps — by night to sleep and by day to hunt and cook their food — for they were weeks upon the way.

One afternoon the three men were on shore, somewhere between the mouth of the Wisconsin and Lake Pepin. Aco and the Picard were cooking a wild turkey over a camp fire. Beside the water's edge Hennepin was busy repairing the canoe, when he looked up to see a fleet of thirty-three canoes full of Indians coming rapidly down the stream. The Indians began to let fly their arrows while they were some distance off, but soon they caught sight of the

upraised calumet in the hands of Hennepin. Surrounding the Frenchmen, however, they took them captives and after some parleying turned back up the river with them toward their own country.

They were Sioux, and Aco could not speak their language. La Salle had counted on there being always an intermediary through whom Aco could talk if he came upon an unfamiliar tongue, for the prevalence among all Indian tribes of slaves or adopted members of other tribes made it seem likely that Aco could find one whose tongue he knew. But these warriors were all Sioux. The sign language must serve, therefore, for the present, but it was not long before Aco had added another Indian language to his repertoire.

Up the Mississippi for nearly three weeks the Indians and their captives paddled with few rests. For many days the French constantly expected death at the hands of the Sioux, and the stores of cloth and nails and pocket knives with which they had hoped to buy furs were doled out in increasing quantities to save their own skins. Not far from the Falls of St. Anthony they left the river and struck out across country to the Sioux villages in the Mille Lac region. They travelled rapidly, too rapidly for the friar in spite of his big frame, and he relates that to keep him going they set fire to the grass behind him and then taking him by the hands hurried him along in front of the flames. He was forced to wade and swim the streams and break the

thin ice sometimes with his priestly shins, while Aco and the Picard being smaller and unable to swim were carried over on the backs of the Indians. One day they painted the face and hair of the frightened Picard and forced him to sing and rattle a gourd full of pebbles to keep time to his music.

As they neared the villages, the bands prepared to separate; and the three captives were parcelled out each to a different village. The Picard came to Hennepin for a last confession before they parted, but Aco would have none of the friar's religious offices. He apparently had not fared badly at the hands of the Sioux and probably preferred their company to that of the boastful friar.

The adventures of Aco while apart from the friar have not been related. It was not many weeks before the various bands came together again and Hennepin found the Picard somewhat friendly but Aco still surly and aloof. The friar secured permission to go down the Mississippi to the mouth of the Wisconsin to look for messengers whom he said La Salle had promised to send him at that point. The Picard accompanied him, but Aco stayed with his new Indian friends who were then just starting out upon a buffalo hunt.

No word came from La Salle, but in the meantime another Frenchman — the famous *coureur de bois* Du Lhut — who with four companions had come into the Sioux country from the region of Lake Superior, had heard with astonishment reports from the In-

dians as to the friar and his two companions. He came to investigate and late in the summer of 1680 he found the three Frenchmen returning with their captors to the Sioux villages.

Du Lhut was a man of much influence with the Sioux and made vigorous and wrathful protest when he learned how the three men had been held during the summer. In fact he seems to have ransomed them from their captivity; and together the eight Frenchmen set out down the river bound for Canada. They ascended the Wisconsin, crossed the portage into the Fox, and made their way to the Mission of St. Ignace at Mackinac where they spent the winter. In the spring, Aco and the Picard, together with the friar, passed on eastward through the lakes. At Fort Frontenac Hennepin was able to refute the story that the Indians had hanged him with his own priestly cord. When they approached Montreal, Aco and the Picard, having valuable furs with them, took leave of the friar who entered the town alone to recount his many adventures to Frontenac, the Governor of New France.

It was now the summer of 1681. For several years there appears no trace of Aco. He was not a member of the party which with La Salle in 1682 paddled down the Mississippi to the sea; nor was he with La Salle's unfortunate expedition by sea from France to the Gulf of Mexico. But the lure of the West brought him back to the Valley of the Upper Mississippi, and he joined Tonty's forces in the

Illinois region. By the year 1694 he had evidently been for some time in the Valley for he signed in that year a statement drawn up by Tonty and the Illinois Indians to the effect that since 1687 the Illinois had killed or made slaves of 334 men and boys and 111 women and girls of the Iroquois tribes.

But it was the preceding year which was perhaps the most important in Aco's life. By 1693 he had become more than a mere trader. He had apparently become a business associate of Tonty and La Forest. After the death of La Salle, his two faithful lieutenants, Tonty and La Forest, were granted by the King of France a trading monopoly in the Illinois region on the same conditions which had applied to their leader. Thereupon Tonty, who had been commanding Fort St. Louis on what was known later as Starved Rock, moved down the Illinois River and built a new fort near the outlet of Lake Peoria.

This fort — called also Fort St. Louis or Fort Pimitoui — was the center of a busy fur trade, and connected with this traffic was Michel Aco. That he was successful is apparent, for there is still in existence an ancient deed signed by La Forest and "M. Aco" by which the former ceded to Aco one-half of his part of the trade monopoly held by himself and Tonty. Aco was to pay for this concession the sum of "six thousand livres in current beaver".¹

¹ This manuscript is in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society.

The new Fort St. Louis was not only the center of fur trading interests. Like most of the frontier French posts it was also closely associated with Indian missionary enterprises, and this fact became one of great significance to Aco. In the same month of April that La Forest and Aco signed their deed of sale, Father Jacques Gravier, a Jesuit priest who had been long associated with Tonty, dedicated near the new fort a chapel and beside it a cross which rose nearly thirty-five feet in the air. The French garrison at the fort fired four volleys with their guns in honor of the occasion, and the Indian looked on with interest as the black-robed priest performed the ceremonies of sanctification.

The Indian village, near which the fort and chapel had been placed, was inhabited for the most part by the Peorias, but there were also a good many Kaskaskias under the chief Rouensa. The efforts of Gravier soon bore fruit. Rouensa was disinclined to accept the teachings of the Jesuit, but the chief had a daughter seventeen years old, who became a devout convert to the faith of the French. She took for herself the name of Mary, after the mother of the white men's Christ and in the work of Father Gravier she became an enthusiastic helper.

And it so happened that as she went about from chapel to village Michel Aco saw her and fell in love with her. He went to the Kaskaskia chief, Rouensa, and asked for the hand of his young daughter. Rouensa was delighted. What a fine son-in-law this

man would make. Here was no common Frenchman but a woodsman of great renown, for fifteen years a wilderness rover and a man after an Indian's own heart. Furthermore was he not now a great white chief associated with Tonty and La Forest in the control of the fur trade?

That Aco had led more or less of a wild and reckless life meant little to Rouensa. There was much of this recklessness among the French who spent their years so far from the refinements of civilization and Gravier at his chapel beside the Illinois found this a handicap to the success of his mission. He had not found encouraging response from the Indians in the village. Particularly did the medicine men fear and hate him and oppose his teachings. Every convert meant less power and influence for them. If this priest's teachings spread, there soon would be no call for them to suck from the body of the sick the tooth of the evil spirit that plagued him. Soon their incantations would be no more to the people of the tribe than so much whistling of the wind among the lodges.

And so they had questioned their people. "Why are not our traditions good enough for you," they asked. "Leave these myths to the people who come from afar." And to the women they said: "Do you not see how the white man's faith brings death to the Indian? Have not your children died after this black-robed priest has baptized them? Has this man better medicine than we, that we should adopt

his ways? His fables are good only for his own country. We have our own and they do not make us die."

Many there were who listened. Their children fell ill. Gravier came to their cabins and sprinkled water upon them. Their children died. Was it not his doing? They began to fear his approach. One old woman whose grandchild was sick drove the priest violently from her lodge lest he be the cause of its death.

Slowly, however, Gravier made converts, and the medicine men increased their warnings. Did not the people know that the black-robed priest kept toads from which he compounded poison for the sick? He even poisoned them with the smell of toads whenever he approached. One of the old men went through the village calling out "All ye who have hitherto hearkened to what the black gown has said to you, come into my cabin. I shall likewise teach you what I learned from my grandfather and what we should believe." So Gravier had much opposition and many discouragements.

One day Father Gravier received a visit from the chief Rouensa and his wife, who brought with them their daughter and Aco who had sued for her hand in marriage. The mission of the chief was soon told but the interview did not end as he wished for Mary had risen in revolt. She did not wish to marry. Her heart, she said, was so full of love for the God

of the white men, whose mother's name she bore that there was no room for love of anybody else.

Entreaties proved useless, threats only increased her determination. Rouensa appealed to the priest. Gravier replied that God did not command her not to marry, but that she could not be forced to do so. She alone must decide. Full of wrath the chief departed, convinced that Gravier had prevented Mary from agreeing to the marriage. And Aco, bitter in his disappointment, blamed the priest with no less vigor because he was a white man.

As was his custom Gravier walked over to the village later in the day and passed among the lodges calling the Indians to prayer at the chapel. As he passed the lodge of Rouensa the enraged chief came out and stopped him. "Inasmuch as you have prevented my daughter from obeying me", he said, "I will prevent her from going to chapel", and he continued to scold him and bar the way to those who followed the priest.

Gravier returned to the chapel and held his services. And there with the others, responding to all the prayers and chants, was Mary. At the close of the meeting she came to Gravier and said that her father had driven her in wrath from his lodge. That night Rouensa the Kaskaskia chief called together all the other chiefs and told them that the black gown prevented marriages between the French and the Indians; and he urged them to keep their women

and children from going to the chapel. Most of them were ready enough to agree.

In spite of their efforts there were fifty who gathered in the chapel the next day and Mary was among them. The chiefs redoubled their efforts and at the next service there were only about thirty who gathered with Mary at Gravier's altar. Hardly had the priest begun to chant the mass when a man entered armed with a club. Seizing one of the worshippers by the arm he said to the gathering:

"Have you not heard the chief's orders? Obey them and go out at once."

The girl he seized stood fast. Gravier walked up to him.

"Go out, thyself", he said, "and respect the house of God."

"The chief forbids them to pray", spoke the man with the club.

"And God commands them to do so", replied the priest.

Finding his efforts in vain, the man finally withdrew and the chants and prayer continued. For two days Rouensa alternately wheedled and threatened his daughter, and Aco joined in maligning the priest.

"I hate him", said Mary of her suitor, "because he always speaks ill of my father the black gown."

But at the end of two days she came to Gravier. "I have an idea", she said, "I think that if I consent to the marriage, my father will listen to your words and will induce others to do so." And Gravier

agreed to her suggestion though he cautioned her to make it clear to her parents that it was not their threats which had brought about her consent.

She told her parents of her new determination. And they and Aco came to the chapel to find out from the priest if it were true. And so the arrangements were made; and sometime apparently in the late summer or early fall of 1693, the Indian maiden and the French fur trader were married by Father Gravier according to the rites and ceremonies of the Catholic church.

It might be easy to draw the curtain here and assume that they lived happily ever after. But Gravier's account in the *Jesuit Relations* is so full of details that one is able to add much to the account. The priest relates with great joy that Michel Aco, moved by the gentleness, the innocence, and the devotion of his wife, and ashamed that a young and almost uninstructed child of the woods could teach him so much that was good, gave up his evil ways. He hardly recognized himself, he told the priest.

And the chief Rouensa and his wife, persuaded by Mary and her husband, came asking to be baptized. It is true that not long afterwards Mary found her mother, armed and revengeful, setting out like an Amazon, in company with her husband, to take death vengeance upon her brother who in a spirit of anger had killed one of her slaves. "I shall go to the church", she said, "if I am revenged". But even in the face of this plain and evident call to the

duty of vengeance, the mother finally gave up to her daughter's entreaties, let her brother go in peace and came to the black gown to confess.

The chief gave a great feast and announced his allegiance to the priest and his teachings, and scores of his followers came to be baptized at the wilderness chapel beside the fort and the river. Mary helped the priest in teaching the children and the mission flourished.

A register of baptisms in the Kaskaskia mission completes the story of Aco and Mary. In the year 1695 there was born in the village a half-French papoose whom Father Gravier baptized on March 20, 1695, and to whom the proud parents gave the name Pierre Aco. The records show numerous entries in which Aco and Mary acted as godfather and godmother at the baptism of children, and in 1702 the records note the baptism of another child of Aco and Mary, a son born on the 22nd of February and given the name Michel after his father. With these records (which are themselves beginnings) comes to an end the known history of Michel Aco, Frenchman, and Mary Aramipinchicoue, Kaskaskia maiden.

JOHN C. PARISH

A Colored Convention

In February, 1868, a series of amendments eliminating the word "white" from five sections of the Iowa Constitution was under consideration in the legislature, having already been adopted by the Eleventh General Assmby in 1866. Naturally the colored residents of Iowa — the beneficiaries of the proposed amendments — were interested in the success of the resolution, and a call was sent out for what was probably the first convention of colored people held in Iowa. This invitation was signed by twenty-two representatives of that race, led by Reverend J. W. Malone of Keokuk and the Reverend S. T. Wells of Des Moines. It read as follows:

FELLOW CITIZENS: In the exercise of a liberty which we hope you will not deem unwarrantable, and which is given us by virtue of our connection and identity with you, as an oppressed and disfranchised people, the undersigned do hereby, most earnestly and affectionately, invite you, *en masse*, or by your chosen representatives, to assemble in Convention, in the City of Des Moines, on the 12th day of February, 1868, at 10 o'clock A. M., for the purpose of considering the question of our enfranchisement, which is now before the Legislature and will soon be submitted to the voters of Iowa for their votes. All in favor of equal rights, come! Strike for freedom whilst it is day!

The date set for the convention was the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, patron saint of the freedmen; and on that day over thirty delegates appeared at Burn's Chapel in Des Moines where the meeting was

to be held. Each delegate was taxed one dollar to defray expenses. While a few failed to make this contribution, it appears that five delegates not only paid their own share but added two dollars as the amount credited to the towns from which they came.

The convention organized in due form with J. W. Malone of Keokuk as president. Two vice presidents, a secretary, and two assistant secretaries were likewise chosen. A resolution in honor of Abraham Lincoln and a code of rules for the government of the convention were adopted; and a committee of three was appointed to prepare an address to be presented to the people of Iowa.

This address, it appears, was delivered before the assembly by Alex. Clark, the chairman of the committee. It was a plea for the enfranchisement of colored men by the striking of the word "white" from the Constitution of the State. "Having established our claim to the proud title of American soldiers", reads part of the address, "and shared in the glories won by the deeds of the true men of our own color, will you not heed and hear our appeal? We ask, in the honored name of 200,000 colored troops, five hundred of whom were from our own Iowa, who, with the first opportunity, enlisted under the flag of our country and the banner of our State while the franchised rebels and their cowardly friends, the now bitter enemies of our right to suffrage, remained in quiet

at home, safe, and fattened on the fruits of our sacrifice, toil and blood."

At the evening session on the first day of the convention Alex. Clark — apparently considered the Demosthenes of the assembly — addressed the delegates "by special request". Mr. Henry O'Connor, the Attorney General of the State, also made a speech which was described as "clear, strong, pointed and eloquent". Among the resolutions adopted, the first two read as follows:

RESOLVED, That we still have confidence in the Republican Congress of the United States and the Republican party of Iowa, and rest in the hope that they will do all that can be done to secure us our full rights and protect our friends in the South from wrong and oppression.

RESOLVED, That the tendency toward enlarged freedom which distinguishes our age, which in England bears the name of Reform, in Ireland the title of Fenianism, in Europe the name of Progress, and in this government the name of Radicalism, impresses us with the firm conviction that our claims to universal suffrage and impartial justice at home and abroad will soon be secured to all.

The convention also expressed its gratitude to Attorney General O'Connor "for his independent and manly opinion, as given to the Legislature, upon the legality of submitting the question of suffrage by the present Legislature to the people at the next general election." Likewise the activities of one of their own number in behalf of the colored people was recognized by the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That, having watched with much diligence and deep interest the course pursued on all questions affecting the well being of the colored people of Iowa by our friend and fellow citizen, A. Clark, that he has, as he must ever have, our full confidence and grateful thanks, but more especially in this last great and noble act in defending the rights of our children to be admitted into the public schools of the State, as the Constitution warrants.

This convention may be commended for economy. The finance committee reported a total of \$38.44 in cash collections; the expenses were \$11.73; and the balance was appropriated for printing the proceedings of the convention.

A number of ten minute speeches marked the closing session on the evening of February 13th, although an exception was made in favor of J. W. Malone, the president, who was allowed thirty minutes. At the close of the meeting the members marched around the room shaking hands and singing "Blow ye the trumpet, blow!"

In due time the amendments were adopted by the Twelfth General Assembly, ratified by a popular vote of 105,384 to 81,119 on November 3, 1868, and proclaimed a part of the Constitution on December 8, 1868. Thus the colored men of Iowa secured the coveted political equality two years before the adoption of the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

RUTH A. GALLAHER

The Pacific City Fight

In his article on "The Rise of Sports" Professor Paxson has pointed out that prize fighting in the United States suffered a decline after the famous Sayers-Heenan fight in 1860, when the London spectators broke into the ring to prevent the American from knocking out the English champion. Boxing did not regain its popularity until the early eighties, when John L. Sullivan fought his way to notoriety with his bare fists. In the two decades that intervened pugilists seldom knocked each other out to the complete satisfaction of the sporting public. But there were champions in those days, and challengers who coveted the title, and it was during this period that an Iowa village became the scene of a championship "mill", under circumstances that help to explain the obstacles to be overcome before the sport could flourish.

The contrast between the fight in Iowa in an improvised ring on the turf before a few hundred fugitive "roughs", and its present day descendent, with its elaborate preparations, its wide publicity, and its enormous stadium, shows a growth almost as great as the transition from the prairie schooner to the transcontinental Pullman train. The change in public sentiment toward affairs of this kind is equally noticeable. In 1873 the contestants met only after an arduous series of journeys to elude the vigilance of the constituted authorities. For the serious minded people of the Missouri Valley demanded

that every effort be made to prevent the desecration of the soil of their States by such a scene of brutality. The day when society ladies were to patronize the "pugs" was far distant.

In November, 1873, a steamboat with an unusual assortment of passengers headed upstream from St. Joe, Missouri. On board were Allen, who held the belt for the heavy-weight title, and Hogan, the challenger, with their trainers and backers, the newspaper reporters, and the fans who were anxious to see the fight and bet their money. After the challenge had been issued and accepted, the legal inconveniences attendant upon an affair of this kind in the Eastern States had led to the conclusion that it should be held in the West. Promoters in St. Joe had promised "a fair field and no favor" and immunity from interference by the officers of the law. But the special train from the East brought the followers of the manly art to a scene of disappointment. The lid was on in Missouri, and the governor was sitting upon it. An attempt to stage the "mill" across the river in Kansas ended in failure.

Nothing daunted by these untoward circumstances, the crowd chartered a steamboat, and these strange argonauts started up the river in search of a convenient spot upon which to determine the championship of the world. Nebraska proved inhospitable. The governor of that State borrowed some United States troops to maintain order while the fighters sojourned in Omaha, and their stay was

brief. Thus it transpired that the pugilists sought the soil of Iowa as a last resort.

On the morning of Monday, November 18, 1873, Governor Cyrus C. Carpenter received a telegram signed by a number of the prominent citizens of Council Bluffs: "The Allen-Hogan prize fight is to take place Tuesday in Iowa, and the men are here. We are powerless to prevent it." Fifteen hundred roughs were reported to be in Omaha, where the local authorities were unable to cope with the situation. Governor Carpenter was requested to send military companies from Des Moines to prevent the impending disgrace to the city of Council Bluffs and the State of Iowa. He immediately notified the prominent citizens that if the sheriff would inform him officially of his inability to enforce the law without military assistance, the troops would be sent. He received the prompt response:

I am advised that the prize fighters will come into the State at this point tomorrow. From their number I know that I am not able to arrest them. If the fight is to be prevented it must be done by stopping them here. I ask the aid of the State in doing so. There is no armed military company here.

GEORGE DOUGHERTY

Sheriff of Pottawattamie County

Within three hours after the receipt of this telegram the available contingents of the Olmstead Zouaves, commanded by Colonel F. Olmstead, and of the Crocker Veteran Guards under the command of Captain W. L. Davis, were ordered out for imme-

diate duty, served with ammunition, and entrained for Council Bluffs. They arrived late that night, and were placed in rather uncomfortable quarters, "but", their commander reported, "as most of the men were old soldiers, there was no complaint."

Before the arrival of the visiting sportsmen on Tuesday morning, preparations had been made to receive them. Colonel Olmstead's report to the Adjutant General describes the situation. "We were ready for duty", he said, "at about half-past ten A. M., on the 18th of November, subject to the order of the Sheriff of Pottawattamie County, when the train arrived, loaded in my opinion with 'roughs' and men who wished to see the Allen-Hogan fight. The sheriff should have taken possession of that train and all the paraphernalia of the fight, but he did nothing. He could have arrested, in my opinion, participators in the fight at any rate, and there were evidences enough for him to do that, but he was not backed by the moral influence or the good advice of a single man who induced the Governor to order you to send forward my command. He was therefore weak and wavering. He would do nothing" The sheriff and the troops were unable to find either Allen or Hogan on the train. The stakes, the ropes, the sledges for constructing the ring were thrown into one of the cars in full view of the officers, but the sheriff still hesitated. Colonel Olmstead, whose orders placed him under the command of the sheriff, sent a telegram to the Adjutant General asking for instructions. Various explanations were offered for

the sheriff's dilatory tactics. "The roughs on the train," said a newspaper report, "were respectful and good-natured, and made no secret of saying that the sheriff had 'been sweetened'." Whether that officer acted on account of financial considerations, or (as the governor charitably told the legislature) because of his "confusion as to the law and the 'overt act', owing to the difference of opinion which he had heard among the lawyers," may be a matter for dispute. At any rate the train pulled out unimpeded. The conductor refused to take the sheriff and the troops along unless they had tickets, which no one had provided. The sheriff showed no enthusiasm for Colonel Olmstead's suggestion that a special train be chartered to go in pursuit. Before the Colonel could obtain telegraphic orders from Des Moines to act independently it was too late.

The occupants of the train had shown signs of gleeful amusement when informed that the two pugilists were the only men wanted, for they knew that the principals were not in the vicinity. Early in the morning Allen and Hogan, with their trainers, had left Omaha in hacks, had crossed the ferry, had been driven through the principal streets of Council Bluffs, and had disappeared. No attempt had been made to follow them. Six miles south of the city the train stopped, the fighters boarded it, and the party steamed ten miles further down the line.

The quiet little village of Pacific City, just across the Missouri River from the mouth of the Platte, had been one of those frontier enterprises whose

promoters had expected it to become a western metropolis. A few years of boom had followed its foundation in 1857, but its prosperity had declined: the history of Mills County published in 1881 noted that its formerly numerous churches and Sunday schools had been reduced to a single Baptist congregation of eighteen members, and that its brick school house had a capacity more than ample to meet all demands likely to be made upon it.

The peaceful inhabitants were no doubt both surprised and interested when a train of five coaches pulled in and stopped on the siding, and three hundred sports debouched upon the right of way. A suitable place was selected, the ring was staked out, and the spectators hastened to obtain ringside seats. A diversion was created when the sheriff of Mills County attempted to arrest the wrong men, but he and his small posse were roughly handled by the crowd, and told to go about their business.

The champion tossed his hat into the ring at 11 o'clock. The challenger was not ready to "shy his castor" over the ropes until 1:15. The first round opened with "lively, beautiful sparring by both men." Hogan was the first to reach his opponent effectively. At the end of this round he scored a clean knock-down. In the second round the men clinched, and Hogan got Allen's head under his arm — this was not a foul in those days — which enabled the challenger to belabor the champion's physiognomy at his leisure. Allen was much embarrassed. Unable to extricate himself by fair

means, he suddenly struck Hogan a violent blow below the belt, which doubled him up like a jackknife.

Roars of "Foul! Foul!" came from the excited crowd. The referee ordered the fight to go on. Another blow knocked Hogan down, but he did not take the count, and was able to keep his feet until time was called.

At the beginning of the third round Hogan was evidently groggy from the effects of the punishment he had received, but he fought gamely until the final catastrophe. Allen struck him again below the belt. This was too much for the challenger's overwrought friends. Rushing in with a free display of knives, pistols, and profanity, they broke down the ring, and the fight ended in a free for all struggle. Many of the spectators were knocked down and trampled, but the weapons appear to have been used with discretion, for there were no casualties.

By nightfall all the participants were back in Omaha, and the fight had degenerated into a series of desultory verbal skirmishes between the now numerous supporters of Hogan, who considered him unfairly treated, and Allen's adherents. The referee declared that the fight was a draw and that all bets were off. The stake holder said that the men must fight again for the money in his possession and he was arrested for trying to embezzle the stakes. The financial backer of the fight wanted to pay the money to Allen, but a compromise was reached by which each of the pugilists received \$1000.

The determination of the responsibility for the

failure to suppress the bout involved difficulties. The commander of the troops blamed the Sheriff of Pottawattamie County. The sheriff's friends explained his indecision on the ground of inexperience rather than venality. There were editors who thought that the military authorities might have acted more vigorously, and that the affair was a "double disgrace", involving both State and local authorities. The governor, when he told the legislature, in his message, how it happened, absolved the officers and troops of all blame. He informed the lawmakers that the ultimate cause of the fiasco lay in the absence of any law prohibiting prize fighting in Iowa. He urged the passage of a statute that would be preventive as well as punitive. If so salutary a measure should result from this unfortunate occurrence, he said, the State would be well repaid for the otherwise useless expenditure.

Allen afterwards succumbed to "Paddy" Ryan, who held the championship until he was knocked out by the redoubtable John L. Sullivan. Hogan in after years became an evangelist, in which capacity he doubtless fought Satan as gamely as he had fought Allen. And the quiet village of Pacific City, after a brief period of publicity almost as great as the promoters of the would-be metropolis could have anticipated, relapsed into obscurity and pursued the even tenor of its way in a manner more befitting its name.

DONALD L. McMURRY

Comment by the Editor

THE PAST

Those who look back can see the farthest ahead. This has a paradoxical sound but it is none the less true. Only by viewing the past can we tell what is ahead of us and the man of clearest vision is the one who knows well what has already happened. The present — if it can be said to exist at all — is but a knife edge between the uncertain and onrushing future and the irrevocable past. We stand upon that narrow divide and look both ways, and by what we see in the past we determine how we shall meet the future. Our fears and our hopes people the road ahead of us; then in a twinkling they have slipped by and are the regrets and the satisfied memories of an unchangeable yesterday.

It is unchangeable, but how illuminating! Into it slip all facts and all experiences in ordered array. Every color and movement and form that our eyes have noted, every sound that has stirred us as it went whistling or rumbling or singing by into the irrevocable, every smell that has delighted or somnified mankind is a part of the past. Every act or sequence of acts that we and our forebears have been guilty of or proud of, every manner and type of success and failure, and all the multifarious backgrounds of human experience lie ready for our enlightenment — a panorama of life, sordid and sub-

lime, with its interplay of motives and actions, of loves and hates, and envies and sacrifices.

THE HISTORIAN

We reach back for these experiences with faltering memory, sometimes with distorted vision, often with indifference. Here enters the historian. It is his function to refresh our memory, to clarify our vision, to prick us into a keener sense of the tremendous reality of the ages. We are too content to say: let the dead past bury its dead. It is not dead; it is alive and poignant and its personages are real. Why then should any historian, like a black-frosted undertaker, lay away in funereal winding sheets, the immortal figures of the past? Why should dust of the ages obscure the wilderness trails and habitations, and reduce the vivid colors of historic life to a drab monotone?

It is not easy to ascertain and state in orderly fashion the bare facts concerning past events; but it is much more difficult and requires infinitely more research to find the human details that clothe these facts with reality. It is somewhat of a task to unearth and list the articles hidden in an ancient ruin; but it requires long study to investigate those articles with the purpose of learning just how the ancients lived. A natural history museum years ago contained long rows of glass cases of individual animals, each standing beside his printed label and gazing across at another unrelated specimen. To-

day the animals are surrounded with the background they are accustomed to, and the visitor sees natural history in its reality. The recorder of the past may well take note, for the era of vital background in history is at hand, and though research must be more extended the result will be a live history.

J. C. P.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857
Located at Iowa City Iowa

PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

The Quarterly Journal of History
The Palimpsest — A monthly magazine
The Public Archives Series
The Iowa Biographical Series
The Iowa Economic History Series
The Iowa Social History Series
The Iowa Applied History Series
The Iowa Chronicles of the World War
The Miscellaneous Publications
The Bulletins of Information

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in The State Historical Society may be secured through election by the Board of Curators. The annual dues are \$3.00. Members may be enrolled as Life Members upon the payment of \$50.00.

Address all Communications to

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Iowa City, Iowa