

# THE PALIMPSEST

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VOL. LII

ISSUED IN JUNE 1971

No. 6

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## Kelly's Army Comes To Iowa

Kelly's Industrial Army, made up of unemployed laborers from the San Francisco area, grew out of the Panic of 1893. The so-called "Army" numbered about 1,500 men when it left California in a train of 24 boxcars at the insistence of the California police. After some harrowing experiences in Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming, the Union Pacific finally reached Omaha but the train was "not permitted to enter the town" and consequently dropped the Industrial Army off at Council Bluffs. At this point Kelly's Army became a problem for the State of Iowa and for every community it was likely to pass through. It was generally agreed that the simplest thing to do was to feed the men and get them across the State as quickly as possible by train.

Unfortunately, four railroads—the Milwaukee, the Rock Island, the Northwestern, and the Burlington—refused to carry Kelly's Army across the State when urged to do so by Governor Frank D. Jackson. The Milwaukee declined to transport



them upon any other basis except in "passenger cars upon payment of regular rates." The Northwestern felt it could not assume the responsibility of carrying them at "nominal rates" in boxcars. "Permit me respectfully to suggest," President Marvin Hughitt concluded, "that the cure of the evil which now exists in the vicinity of Council Bluffs is not to transfer to some other locality, the unlawful assembly which subsists by intimidation and travels by the forcible appropriation of rail-property, but should disband."

President R. R. Cable of the Rock Island advised Governor Jackson:

I am advised that a body of 1,000 or 2,000 men are on their way from Omaha to Weston, Iowa, for the purpose, we understand, of enforcing the demands of Kelly and his men. We shall expect protection to our property and employees against the unlawful acts from these men of Kelly's army.

C. E. Perkins of the Burlington Railway wrote Governor Jackson as follows:

I am advised by Mr. Blythe, our counsel, that our company would subject itself to heavy penalties should we carry the body of men called Kelly's army into an adjoining state. I regret to refuse any requests from you, but it is impossible for us to assume the responsibility of complying in this instance.

It is interesting to reflect that had the four major trunk lines each carried 400 to 500 of Kelly's men they would normally have discharged them at



Dubuque, Clinton, Davenport, and Burlington. The four units would then have had to reassemble at some agreed upon rendezvous in Iowa. In the event they determined to make Keokuk their final rendezvous, as ultimately transpired, scores of communities in eastern Iowa would have been visited by contingents of the Industrial Army moving south from Dubuque, Clinton, and Davenport. Since the railroads did not agree to transport Kelly's Army across Iowa it is not likely that they would have carried the men to Chicago.

Since Kelly's movement eastward was thwarted by the railroads' refusal to transport his men to Chicago, the only alternative left was to walk, aided by wagons to carry their food and supplies, as well as their sick and footsore. Jack London was a prime example of the latter.

On April 21, Gen. Kelly issued the following appeal from Council Bluffs:

*To the People of Iowa:* Desiring to move eastward as fast as possible, and desiring also to abide by the laws of the land, I am forced to ask on behalf of the industrial army for aid in obtaining horses, wagons and harness sufficient to help us across the country, all other means of locomotion having been denied us save those of nature. I will make this my appeal to the citizens and liberty loving people of the great states of Nebraska and Iowa. Will you assist us in obtaining this aid?

Yours respectfully,

Charles T. Kelly,

General of the Industrial Army.



General Kelly found the people of Weston and its vicinity enthusiastic and generous. His reception was so heart-warming that he did not find it difficult to turn down a Union Pacific engine and freight cars that had been stolen in Council Bluffs. His refusal was warmly applauded by the press and all law-abiding citizens. Iowa newspapers reported this story and gave complete coverage on the progress of the Army across the State:

OMAHA, April 21.—General Kelly deserves all the good words said of him and conveyed to the readers, and more. He displayed the rarest of judgment and fortitude when he declined to put his men on board a train stolen at Council Bluffs by the engineers and firemen of the Union Pacific. It was a Union Pacific engine with Union Pacific cars, on the Rock Island track. Kelly declined it because he said he had not yet broken any law and did not intend to start here. There was great excitement here all day and it was intensified at nightfall by the news that a train had been captured to relieve Kelly. Crowds thronged the streets and an immense open air mass-meeting was held. Rumors of calling out of federal troops, of state troops, of deaths in Kelly's camp and of every conceivable nature kept the crowd on a tension hard to understand. But no unusual disorder ensued, and as if by a miracle the clash that seemed inevitable was avoided.

At 10 o'clock next day not a move had been made by the Kelly commonwealers at Weston and the frenzied rescuers from Omaha and Council Bluffs had disappeared completely from view. The wild work of the day before seemed to have wearied the crowds and they were late about congregating. The continued freezing weather also had the effect of cooling the hotheads to a certain



extent, as did the announced determination of General Kelly to move his army east across Iowa by means of wagons.

NEOLA, April 23.—General Kelly has begun his "on to Chicago" movement and camped in a little grove just east of Neola, under a blue sky and the warmest weather which his shivering army had seen for three weeks. He ended his day's march with a spectacular welcome which will be the talk of Pottawattamie county for the next decade. His 1,800 commonwealers were escorted over the winding clay road by the farmers, many of whom came twenty-five miles, with brass bands. It was the strangest spectacle Iowa ever saw. Well in front of the long line of battered humanity rolled the eighteen wagons of provisions, loaded heaping full, and as many more wagons were waiting in front of Neola city hall. They were the substantial evidences of the Iowa farmers' movement to feed and care for Kelly's army until the Mississippi flows across the line of march.

AVOCA, April 23.—Kelly's reception here to-night was fully as flattering as that which was accorded him at Neola. Company C rejoined the army during the afternoon, and after an abject personal apology from each member Kelly mustered them back "into the service." To-day Kelly consented to outline to the Associated Press representative his plans. Should the army be refused an approach to the capitol, Kelly will upon his arrival in Washington, he said, take four of his men and make a personal appeal to Congressmen Pence, of Colorado; McGuire, of California, and Senator Allen, of Nevada. Through their efforts he hopes to be allowed to draw up his men where the law-makers of the Nation "must see them." The two congressmen are already pledged to present a memorial in our behalf.



## OUR DEMANDS

as set forth in the memorial will be about as follows: We will ask that the commission already in existence to look after redeeming the arid lands in the West, be instructed to proceed with the work. We will ask that the men in the great army of unemployed be put to work on irrigation. My idea is that by the time those arid wastes are wrested from the sage brush and jack rabbit, and begun to bloom, the men who have worked there will have saved enough money to carry them through the first year of farming. They can settle on the lands they have reclaimed, and, within a short period, will have developed from homeless wanderers into steady farmers and property owners. That, in substance, is our demand. If we can only get to Washington, if we can let the law makers see we are bread winners, honest and sincere, we will be successful in our mission, for our demands are not unreasonable. We will combine with Coxey if we can reach Washington, but if not we will go alone.

ATLANTIC, April 25.—Special: Peace reigns in the Kelly army again. At a meeting this afternoon the differences between General Kelly and Col. Speed were adjusted satisfactorily to both. Col. Baker was also restored to his former rank and all the leaders are again on good terms. This afternoon the opera house was jammed full of people to hear addresses by General Kelly and Colonel Speed. General Kelly was heartily applauded when he appeared at 3 p.m. He said that his strength in the cause increased as the distance to Washington became shorter, but that his physical strength was nearly used up. He said this movement had two objects: First, the universal hope of every man bettering his condition and that of his fellowmen; second, that he had a 4-year old boy at home whom he wished to have a better chance in



life than his father had. Gen. Kelly said three-fourths of the members of the army are American born, some of the members fought for the country in the sixties, and many sons of veterans were in the ranks of his army. He believes the great voice of the common people would make those in power remedy existing evils and to give every man the product of his labor and an opportunity to labor. In ten years all classes of human slavery will be ended. He said the army wanted to put into effect the golden rule. Col. Speed and Col. Baker made short addresses. At 4 o'clock the meeting was dismissed by the Glee Club singing "Nearer My God To Thee."

ADAIR, April 27.—One hundred and twenty one Sacramento men were missing when Kelly massed his industrial army for the march. The men had asserted that they would walk no farther, and as soon as breakfast was over folded their tents and silently prepared to steal rides. They said they would not rejoin the army at Stuart, but Kelly was confident that the seductive influence of the commissary would bring them back. Kelly waited until almost 9 o'clock for teams, and then, discouraged, ordered the army forward telling them to take the railroad instead of the wagon road if they wished.

"But do not interfere with the trains," he commanded. "If you do, you cannot go farther with me."

The bugler blew a faint blast and the companies moved forward. There were no cheers from the townspeople, no flowers for the general. The men tramped silently along the soggy road and at the first turn fully 250 of them reached the railroad and began a tie calculation.

#### *Fight Between Two Men.*

The monotony of the start was relieved by an interesting one-round mill between two of the industrials, who punched one another with marked energy and who pro-



tested loudly when their comrades separated them. One of the Council Bluffs advance committeemen, R. O. Graham, became convinced that further efforts to secure wagons for transportation would be useless and returned home. The farmers in the vicinity are much less inclined to haul the men than those further west, and Graham became convinced that the army is billed for a foot march to Des Moines. Kelly spent considerable time in organizing his base ball team and expects to do battle on the diamond when he reaches Des Moines. A camp artist is preparing a banner for the club, bearing the inscription, "Industrial Nine, Slide, Kelly, Slide! On to Washington!"

STUART, April 28.—Kelly's army began a forced march to Des Moines this morning with smiling skies and full ranks, the Sacramento men having straggled back. The march began with 1,250 men in line. Dinner was served at Earlham, eleven miles from Stuart, and another meal was taken at Van Meter. Shortly after passing Earlham, Kelly announced flatly that he would go no further until wagons were furnished to carry his men.

VAN METER, April 28.—After an hour's work, the people of Earlham succeeded in getting sufficient teams for the baggage and sick, and Kelly ordered the army forward. He was much pleased with his success in compelling the farmers to furnish wagons. The army started on the last stretch of the forty-one miles at 8:30 to-night, with the expectation of reaching Des Moines in the morning. The army straggled into Van Meter during the afternoon, some in wagons, some on the road and others on the railroad tracks. The men were footsore from the hot and dusty twenty-mile journey from Stuart, but were determined to go ahead and urged Kelly to lead them on. A camp was made in a grove on 'Coon River, and within fifteen minutes 500 men were shouting and splask-



ing in midstream. Kelly wired the Des Moines reception committee to send out wagons to meet the men during the night. He said he would make the city by 3 o'clock in the morning, and thus give the men time to rest and prepare for the reception they expected to receive from the laboring men there. The night march is as interesting to the people along the route as it is wearying to the men, and all night long little crowds gathered to see the unique procession go by.

Many people in Des Moines were preparing to greet the Industrial Army. Labor, of course, planned a warm reception, as did the Populist followers of James B. Weaver, who was on hand. City and State officials formed a part of the reception committee that was expected to give Kelly and his men a "triumphal entry" into Des Moines at 11 or 12 a.m. on Sunday—April 29th.

Unfortunately, a heavy rain and a pitch black night served to "so completely scatter" the Army that it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon before half to two-thirds of the men put in a bedraggled appearance at the camp. An immense meeting was held in front of the court house where Kelly and General Weaver spoke. On Monday night Kelly was wildly cheered when he spoke at the Trades Assembly Hall. By May 1 much of the excitement and glitter had worn off and serious thought began to be given as to just how the Industrial Army was to get moving out of Des Moines.