

The  
**PALIMPSEST**  
MARCH 1927  
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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

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

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

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

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

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## A Trip to the Bad Lands

### I

I had gone to seek my fortune in Saint Louis, the great city of Missouri. In turn a commission merchant, a pedlar, and a mule driver, I was also following the current of emigration toward the promised land of California, when I met an American geologist who was ready to leave that very day for a long exploring trip through the American continent. I obtained permission to accompany him as artist. I was granted two hours in which to prepare myself for the trip, that is to say, to buy a pair of buckskin breeches, two flannel shirts, a revolver and a gun; and I started out on the steamboat *Iowa*

[This account of the experiences of a French artist, E. de Girardin, who accompanied a geological expedition into the Black Hills and the Bad Lands of Nebraska Territory during the summer of 1849, is reprinted from a longer article in a French travel magazine, *Le Tour du Monde*, 1864, pp. 49-64. The translation, which follows the original very closely, was made by Miss Elizabeth Conrad.—THE EDITOR]

in the midst of such turmoil and noise as was deafening. The friends of the passengers overwhelmed us with a hail of oranges and shouts of enthusiastic good-bye; the officers were beating the drunken sailors and the crowd was quarreling and swearing in every language of the old and new world, to the accompaniment of the whistling of our steamboat and the roaring of our powerful engines as the smoke enveloped us in a thick cloud.

It is well known that American *steamboats* do not resemble in the slightest the frail craft of our rivers. These are immense structures three stories high surmounted by tall chimneys; they are really caravansaries where the traveller finds all the luxury and comfort of a first-class hotel. In fact a Saint Louis woman, wishing to give a high idea of a house furnished and decorated with great luxury, said: "It is almost as elegant as a steamboat!"

We were about two hundred passengers, mostly steerage passengers, poor adventurers engaged for a year with the American Company, which trades in furs from the Far West. There were types from every country in the world; bearded Parisians, some political victims, and others deserters from the colony of Cabet; Danes, Germans, Spaniards, English, Irish, negroes, mulattoes, Indians, and half-breeds. The most numerous, however, were Canadians. Endowed with iron constitutions, used to travel and dangers, these are excellent hunters and indefatigable seekers after adventure.

In the cabin, we had three geologists, a botanist, two officers from the American army, and a young German prince with his staff. The Indian race was represented by two women, pure blooded savages. The one, a daughter of a Black Foot chief, and married to a director of the Fur Company, is well known in the upper Missouri region because of the happy influence which she exercises there.

Only at the moment of leaving do I learn the destination of the *Iowa*. This boat, belonging to the American Company, makes each year one trip to the upper Missouri, stopping at different trading posts situated on the river, and leaving there the newly employed men, provisions and merchandise.

It is a long trip of forty days to go up stream to Fort Union, an establishment situated at the confluence of the Yellowstone, six hundred and seventy-five leagues from Saint Louis and eleven hundred from New Orleans. However, since steamboats of heavy tonnage can, during four or five months of the year, go up as far as Fort Benton, situated in the land of the Black Feet and ten leagues from the great falls of the Missouri, one may say that the great river is navigable for twelve hundred and sixteen leagues.

Going with difficulty up stream against a current of from four to five kilometers an hour, we pass in front of the slopes of Gasconade, remarkable for their beautiful cliffs covered with verdure; then come Jefferson City, the capital of Missouri, and

Independence where the Mormons in their hegira had established their new Zion, and from which they were driven by the Missourians.

To-day this little town is filled with emigrants on their way to California, and a steam *ferryboat* continually crosses the river, transporting from one shore to the other a great number of wagons, many herds of cattle and horses, as well as thousands of emigrants, men, women and children.

After a period of interruption caused by many deceptions, a new epidemic of gold fever has just broken out. The farmers are selling their lands for nothing; lawyers are abandoning their studies; merchants, ministers, presbyterians, methodists, or baptists, all are donning a red flannel shirt; and, a revolver in their belts, a carbine over their shoulders, they are going in long caravans toward the new Eldorado.

The wagons of emigrants, covered with a large canvas, are arranged on the inside with much order and neatness. It is a rolling cabin in which the owner must live for six or seven long months, and which he makes as comfortable as possible.

The pistols and guns, indispensable arsenal for the adventurer into the Far West, are hung on the interior walls of the wagon. In one corner is attached the cast-iron stove which is set up at each camp in order to cook biscuits; here and there are also hung household utensils and equipment. One finds in almost all these rolling tents some works of

history and geography, and always a Bible, the inseparable companion of the American emigrant.

Some emigrants write their name and profession on the outside of their canvas. I read on one of these wagons:

J. B. Smith, Dentist from New York  
Ask the teamster.

The teamster was no other than the dentist himself. After having unhitched his oxen and cooked his dinner he put on a black coat, and, like the charlatans of our fairs, he had his victims get into the wagon, and he pulled their teeth, *without pain*, for the modest sum of one *piaster*.

They show me a large wagon covered with a white canvas with blue stripes and hermetically closed. It is inhabited, they tell me, by six young girls who are going to the gold mines to seek husbands and an independent position. They are said to be very pretty, and especially very *respectable*, and the proof of this latter assertion is that each evening they bolt their calico door with pins which shuts up their wagon.

Leaving, not without regret, the encampment of the emigrants, we pass rapidly the mouth of the Kansas River, Fort Leavenworth, the military establishment of great importance because of its position on the frontier of Indian territory, and Saint Joseph, a city founded yesterday and already rich and commercial.

There all traces of civilization stop. Farther up the river, the banks are desert, navigation becomes more difficult, and steamboats must give up travelling at night, in order to avoid the sand bars which often bar the river and necessitate continual soundings.

The bed of the river becomes more and more winding and the current so rapid that we take four hours to pass the mouth of the Sioux River. They were using full power, however, the boat was trembling in its whole frame; sometimes the forward end would disappear completely under the water which covered the deck; we would have advanced a few inches, but the current seemed to double its force and we would drop back again. Our captain, furious, has a barrel of resin thrown into the furnaces. It is a solemn moment for the passengers, who, while they dread an explosion, are keenly interested in the struggle.

What most impresses the traveller going up the Missouri, is the immense number of enormous trees, carried by the current and sticking in the muddy bed of the river, showing often only a point at the surface of the water and causing numerous and terrible disasters to boats. Sometimes these trunks of trees, tangled together and piled upon each other, form little islands covering an extent of several miles, and it is with difficulty that the boats can make their way by a thousand zigzags. Therefore it is impossible to navigate at night, and at sunset the boat



is solidly tied up at the shore. Since the country is totally uninhabited and since one finds there neither coal nor wood cut in advance, our eighty men of the crew, armed with axes, work great havoc in the old forests of cedars and poplars which grow on both banks.

The companies which engage in fur trading on American territory are only two in number: the American Fur Company, and that of the Opposition. The most inveterate hate exists between the employees of these two companies, and they do not hesitate before any means of doing each other mutual harm, when the occasion presents itself.

One day when we were passing in front of a *blokhaus* or winter post belonging to the Company of the Opposition, our captain took pleasure in sending his whole crew ashore to demolish houses, fortifications, and palisades. The whole was brought on board and provided fuel for a day's journey. A few days later, the boat belonging to the other company took vengeance by repeating, at another point, the innocent joke of our captain and completely destroying a winter post of the American Company.

This long trip becomes tiresome and monotonous. Day after day we go up stream and the volume of water which rolls on its bed of mud seems to augment under our keel, the islands of tree trunks are less numerous, the heavy growth of cottonwood trees which border the banks gives place to prairies as far as the eye can reach, and, sometimes, a column of

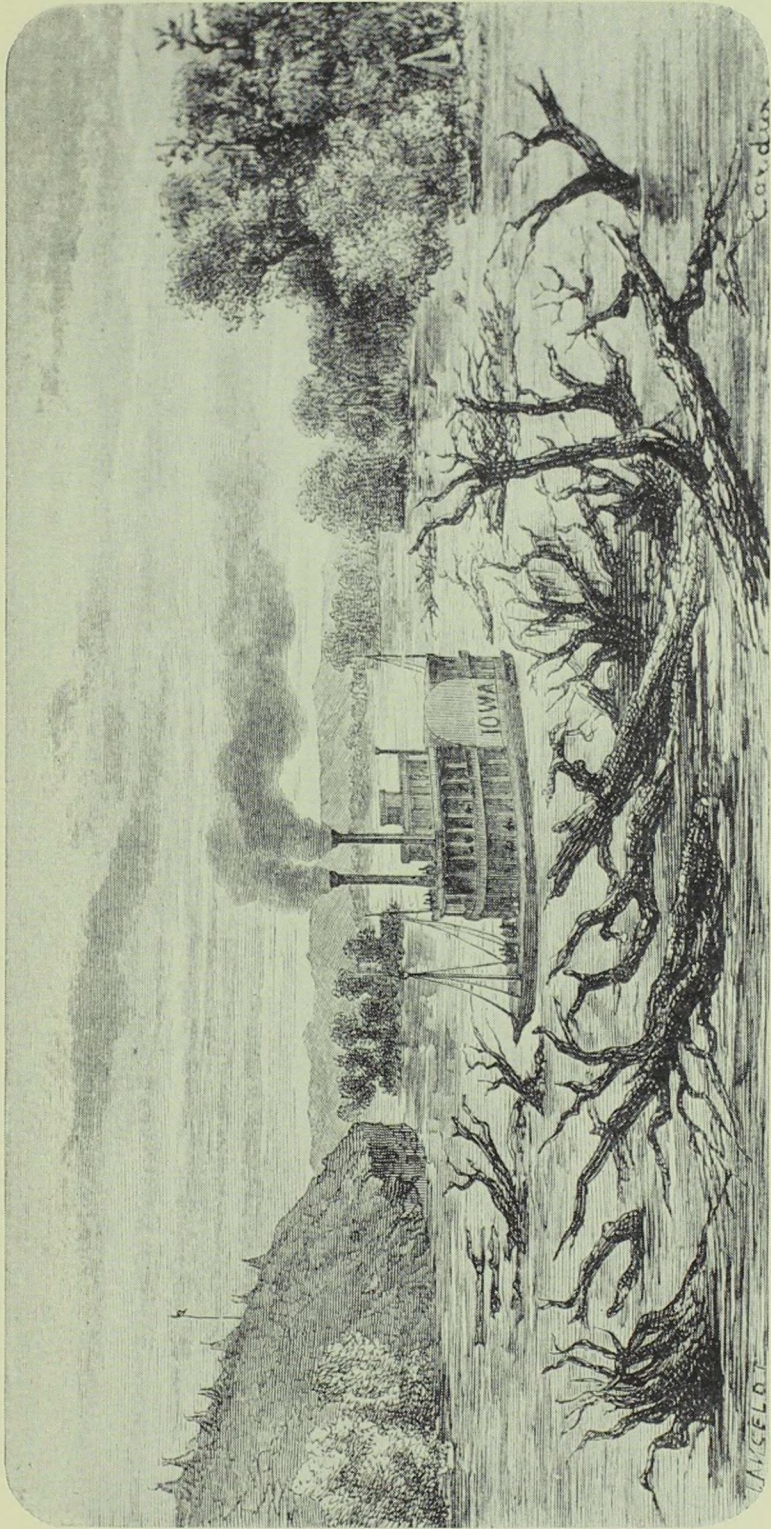
smoke visible on the horizon indicates an Indian camp.

The nights are burning hot. As soon as the boat is tied at the shore, millions of mosquitoes invade the lounges and the cabins. Then, in spite of the heat, we must put on gloves and wrap up face and neck heavily in kerchiefs and mufflers.

## II

After a period of thirty-two days we see through the fog of the morning the immense American flag which floats over Fort Pierre Chouteau. The river is almost entirely closed by moving sandbars and we advance slowly, guided by soundings. Suddenly the wind springs up, the mist is scattered and gives place to a charming landscape which we greet with three cheers, and a volley from our small artillery. Before us stands Fort Pierre with its fortifications and its white walls. All around rise hundreds of habitations of buffalo skin, some dazzlingly white, others striped and covered with fantastic and primitive paintings.

A few steps from us on the shore, a group of Indians in holiday costume, their faces painted red, yellow and white, as motionless as statues, leaning on their guns, examine us with a somber and restless air. Undoubtedly, they are asking themselves what this fire boat holds, which, last year, brought them cholera, and if this time it is not the bearer of some even more terrible scourge.



FROM A SKETCH IN LE TOUR DU MONDE

STEAMBOAT NAVIGATION ON THE MISSOURI RIVER

We have scarcely landed when some fifty young warriors and women swarm upon our deck, enter the lounge, the kitchens, everywhere in fact, examining, touching and tasting everything, and in spite of the remonstrances of our negro cooks, a huge kettle filled with boiled corn is emptied in an instant. The rest of the provisions would undoubtedly have suffered the same fate, if one of the chiefs had not arrived in time to disperse this band of hungry wolves with his whip.

Order is soon reëstablished, and a dozen savages well armed and uniformly dressed by the Company, play the part of guards and police officers in a dignified and worthy manner.

Fort Pierre is an immense square formed by four walls in the form of palisades five meters high and two hundred long. It is protected on the north, on the east, and on the southeast by three bastions armed with cannon.

The Company buildings are constructed parallel to the palisades. These are the houses of the employees, directors, clerks, interpreters, then immense storehouses filled with provisions, with merchandise and with furs, a smithy where they make axes, tomahawks, and knives for the Indians, carpenter shops, a tin-smithy, and finally the sheds and stables and the powder magazine.

The governor of the fort receives us in the most gracious fashion, and has one of his wives prepare for us a most excellent dinner, in which are included

buffalo tongues, pemmican or dried buffalo meat, and excellent corn bread.

Having lived for a number of years in this Sioux territory, he has adopted certain Indian customs and among others polygamy, not, he tells us, with an unworthy motive but simply as good policy and in the interest of his business. Surrounded by seven wives belonging to seven different tribes of the Dakota nation, he has thus the advantage of being assured the devotion of an army of brothers-in-law, uncles and cousins, which gives him a great influence and facilitates his relations with the Indians. We repeat this excuse for what it may be worth.

Wishing to celebrate the arrival of the steamboat, the governor gave a great feast followed by a ball. The first consisted of a bottle of whisky, a pound of flour, and a little buffalo lard for each of the guests, composed of travellers, hunters, scouts, etc.

The fires are lighted in the middle of the fort. They make great piles of pancakes over which they pour copious libations. Two violin players, one a Canadian, the other Irish, perched on the top of a barrel, recall to me country weddings in my own land.

All take part in the dance: employees, hunters, half-breeds, negroes, mulattoes and Indians; and all these figures, white, yellow, black, copper colored and brick colored, lighted by the reddish flame and excited by a new distribution of whisky, have about them something really diabolical. Heads become

hot, old quarrels reappear upon the carpet, fisticuffs rain from all sides, half-breeds reply with knife thrusts, the Indians brandish their tomahawks. They make threats with their guns for the next day, then they begin again their dance without noticing that all the women have escaped during the fight. Such are the intermissions in the festivals at Fort Chouteau.

The day after our arrival at the fort, I was in the Sioux camp occupied with making a drawing of Warhorse, a famous warrior whose unusual costume had struck me. The finished sketch circulated from hand to hand when suddenly my valiant model takes possession of it, dashes off on his horse and escapes at full gallop, leaving me more mystified because the young warriors and the girls were laughing uproariously, doubtless finding the joke excellent.

During my residence among the Sioux it was almost impossible for me to do the portrait of the warriors or even a sketch of their camp, because they imagined that once master of their likeness I would have the power to destroy them as easily as it. The Sioux, who had been cruelly decimated by cholera and smallpox, diseases brought into their midst by the white men, are excessively superstitious and believe that the Americans make use of diseases as a weapon to exterminate them.

The Indian cemetery is situated at one kilometer from Fort Pierre, on a plain where a great many wild horses graze. The Sioux never bury their dead.

They roll them in their best woolen blankets and enclose them in a kind of bier sometimes made of cedar boards roughly hewn, though most often of branches of trees. Five poles driven into the ground support this kind of coffin, which is thus raised eight to ten feet above the ground and protected from dampness and wild beasts.

The relatives are careful to place by the side of the dead man a pipe, a little tobacco, a bow and some arrows, a few provisions, and various articles of which the dead may have need during his long trip into the other world.

But in time, the poles rot, the whole construction falls down and the wolves and the *coyotes* or little wolves, which prowl ceaselessly around these cemeteries, scatter afar the bones of the poor Indians.

Sometimes also the Sioux content themselves by enveloping the dead man in a blanket of scarlet wool, and suspending him in the high branches of a cedar or cottonwood tree. The Sioux have by way of religion only vague and ill-defined ideas. It is true that they generally pray to the great Spirit in moments of danger, and that they offer to it sacrifices of furs and sometimes also a feast of fat dog but they seem to believe that the good and the evil are equally happy in the other world.

Like all the Indian tribes, the Sioux regard women as very inferior beings which the great Spirit has given to them to put up their tents, saddle their horses, etc.

As for the old men they are even more mistreated. In times of abundance, they eat the left-overs, in days of famine, they die of hunger and are often abandoned in the desert when they are too weak to walk.

E. DE GIRARDIN



## One More River to Cross

A river is a challenge to man, either to follow the stream up or down or to cross it and explore the land which lies beyond. For the most part the Iowa pioneers crossed the rivers, for here the stream of migration moved from east to west rather than north or south along the rivers. Thus, crossing the Iowa River was one of the earliest problems of travellers and settlers who passed through the capital of the Territory of Iowa.

The Indians had paddled their dugout canoes across the river, and the first white man used the same method. If a canoe were not at hand, the Indians swam the stream or, in the winter, crossed the ice on moccasined feet. The white man, wearing civilized clothing, demanded some more reliable means of crossing. Just down the Iowa River from the site of Napoleon was an Indian village and travellers, it is said, were sometimes ferried across the river by the Indians in canoes. In the winter of 1838-1839, Benjamin Miller established a flatboat ferry at the little town of Napoleon, about two miles south of the site of Iowa City.

It was at this ferry that an incident occurred which is illustrative of the hardships of the early settlers. The ferry keeper lived on the west bank of the river but had a tin horn hung up on the east side

for people to blow to attract his attention. Bryan Dennis, it happened, reached the east side of the river one night at dusk. He blew the horn for the ferryman but a strong wind from the west prevented the sound from reaching the opposite side of the river so there was nothing for Mr. Dennis to do but spend the night on the river bank. Sometime in the night a group of Indians appeared and gave a scalp dance around a fire. Dennis was not discovered, however, and the next morning the ferry came for him and he was carried across the river.

Not long after this first ferry was established the county took a hand in the matter of ferries. Under date of March 6, 1840, the following entry appears on the records of the county commissioners of Johnson County: "On application of Sturgis & Douglass ordered that license issue to Sturgis & Douglass for to keep a ferry across the Iowa River at Sturgises Ferry for the space of one year from this date at the rate of five dollars per year." The location of this ferry is uncertain. Possibly it was north of Iowa City, where William Sturgis had a small tract of land on the east side of the Iowa River just below the bend.

A license was also granted to Andrew D. Stephen & Company to keep a ferry across the Iowa River at the point "where the National Road crosses said River on sections fifteen and sixteen in township seventy-nine North and Range six west of the fifth Principal meridian". A pencil note has been added

to this record explaining that this ferry was just south of the mouth of Ralston Creek, where Benjamin Miller had established his ferry, but a map of Iowa City, dated 1839, shows that the "National Road" was supposed to cross the river approximately where Iowa Avenue now intersects the river. This was apparently considered a desirable site, for the fee was fixed at fifteen dollars.

The commissioners also established the following rates of ferriage: for a single footman,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents; for one horse and wagon,  $37\frac{1}{2}$  cents; for one yoke of oxen or one team of horses and wagon, 50 cents; for one horse and man, 25 cents; each additional horse or yoke of oxen,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents; for each head of neat cattle in droves,  $6\frac{1}{4}$  cents; and for sheep and hogs per head, 3 cents.

These ferries and rates seem not to have been entirely satisfactory, for in October, 1840, the commissioners proceeded to reorganize the ferry business. On October 12th they granted a license to F. A. A. Cobb to keep a ferry at Napoleon for one year on condition that he pay a fee of ten dollars and give bond for \$200 with freehold security. The ferry rates were reduced. For a man on foot the ferryman might charge  $6\frac{1}{4}$  cents; for a man and horse,  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cents; for a horse and carriage, 25 cents; for a team or yoke of oxen and wagon,  $37\frac{1}{2}$  cents; for each additional head of horses or cattle,  $6\frac{1}{4}$  cents; and for each head of hogs or sheep, 3 cents.

It appears also from these records that Andrew D. Stephen had "neglected an unreasonable time" to establish his ferry, and on October 13, 1840, his license was revoked, his fifteen dollars refunded, and a new license was issued to John Able. The fee was fifteen dollars and the rates were approximately the same as for Cobb's ferry at Napoleon. That freighting had become somewhat important is evident from the provision that the charge "for all freight over and above a two horse wagon load" was to be 6½ cents for each hundred pounds.

A year later Mr. Able sold his "ferry, Boat, Rope Canoe, & so forth" to Pleasant Arthur and on October 4, 1841, the commissioners issued a license to Mr. Arthur for another year, but raised the fee to twenty-five dollars. The ferry charges were to remain the same. In April, 1844, Enos Metcalf established a "skiff ferry" at the "Dubuque Ford", paying a license fee of one dollar. He was permitted to charge 6¼ cents for each person carried across.

For the next ten or twelve years there were frequent changes in the ferries, their operators, and rates. The license fees were usually five, ten, or fifteen dollars, sometimes to be paid by work on the roads leading to the ferry. The rates on these later ferries show a change in the money used. The ferry charges of the early forties include 6¼ cents — the fippeny bit or picayune; 12½ cents — the bit, levy, or 'levenpence; and various combinations, such as 25 cents or two bits, 37½ cents or three bits, 50

cents or four bits. The rates fixed in the fifties were in modern denominations — 25, 20, 15, 10, or 5 cents.

For the ordinary travel across the Iowa River the skiff and flatboat ferries seem to have been fairly satisfactory, but the great westward exodus which began in 1849 emphasized the need for bridges. Popular demand for a county bridge caused a vote to be taken on the project at an election in October, 1851. The proposal carried by a majority of twenty-nine votes. Perhaps the voters counted the cost during the winter months. At any rate an election was held the following April to rescind the vote for the bridge and this also carried.

The proposal to build a free bridge having failed for the time, a number of men became interested in building and operating toll bridges. In March, 1853, Enos Metcalf obtained a license to build a toll bridge across the Iowa River at the "Dubuque Ford" where he had earlier operated a ferry. This seems to have been between the present Rock Island Railroad bridge and Burlington Street, but the bridge was apparently not built at that time.

In May, 1853, Gilman Folsom secured a license to build a toll bridge at the Iowa Avenue crossing where he was already operating the ferry he had taken over from Pleasant Arthur, his father-in-law. For several years the traffic had been heavy and during periods of high water, the flat-bottomed boat had to be propelled across the stream by means of long poles. The license was similar to that granted

to Enos Metcalf. It was to be good for fifty years and the bond was fixed at \$500. A license fee of \$10 was required and \$20 a year was to be spent on improving the roads leading to the bridge. A provision was inserted that the bridge must not obstruct navigation, for Iowa City still hoped to become a river port.

The rates to be charged for the first ten years were fixed in the license as follows: for each person on foot 5 cents, for each person on horseback 10 cents, for each vehicle drawn by one animal 15 cents, for each additional animal 10 cents, for each head of cattle or horse driven or led 5 cents, for each sheep 2 cents, and for each swine 3 cents. Fifty per cent additional charge might be made for use of the bridge between nine o'clock at night and daybreak. The first bridge constructed under this license is said to have been a pontoon bridge built in 1854. Two years later a wooden structure took the place of the temporary pontoon bridge.

At least two additional licenses were granted in 1855. One was to George S. Hampton, who planned to bridge the Iowa River at the point where Front Street strikes the river on the south. This seems never to have been built. In December, 1855, Enos Metcalf secured a second license for a toll bridge. The provisions of this license were much like those of the Folsom license and the rates were the same. Just when this bridge was opened for traffic is not apparent, but on June 23, 1856, an item in the *Daily*

*Evening Reporter* of Iowa City refers to the finding of a body near "Metcalf's bridge".

It was not long, however, before the people began to demand a free bridge. Perhaps taxes were less irritating than tolls. At any rate L. B. Patterson and "many others" submitted a petition for a free bridge to the county commissioners on September 7, 1857, and an election on the question was called for the thirteenth of October. The proposition included a two mill tax levy to pay for the bridge. The method of voting was prescribed as follows: "each elector desiring to vote on said question will present his ballot on which shall be printed or written the words 'For a Free Bridge & Tax' or 'Against a Free Bridge & Tax' ". The election resulted in a vote of 1218 for the bridge and 795 against it.

For some reason which does not appear in the county records there was some delay in constructing this Free Bridge and it was not until June, 1859, that County Judge Geo. W. McCleary let the contract for a new bridge across the Iowa River on a line with Burlington Street. A firm by the name of Prather and Ealy was given the contract for the sum of \$8688. The bridge was to be of wood with two spans, each one hundred and sixty feet in length. At the east end was an extension three hundred and thirty-five feet long for which the contractors were allowed \$1450 additional compensation. The structure was to be completed by November 1, 1859.

For a few years the traffic crossed the new Free Bridge and the toll bridges were neglected. Then on the last day of October, 1863, while some cattle belonging to Le Grand Byington were being driven across the wooden bridge they were startled by the appearance of a footman crossing from the other side. The cattle stopped, tried to turn back, and suddenly the east span of the bridge collapsed, throwing some fifty or sixty of the cattle and the footman into the river along with the debris from the bridge. The man was seriously injured and many of the cattle were either killed or so severely crippled that they had to be killed, the loss amounting to about \$500. Blame for the collapse of the bridge was attributed to the engineer who designed it, for it was claimed that the spans were too long.

This accident, of course, put the Free Bridge entirely out of use. The Metcalf Bridge had been carried away by high water and the Folsom Toll Bridge a short distance above the Free Bridge had not been kept in repair because with a free bridge so close people naturally did not care to pay toll. This was now repaired and used for traffic.

We are reminded that this was war time by the following announcement of Mr. Folsom in an Iowa City paper on November 11, 1863: "The proceeds of my Bridge on Saturday the 21st of November inst., are set apart for the benefit of the soldiers from Johnson County. All tolls received will be paid to the Soldiers' Aid Society of Iowa City. Let all who



can make it convenient to cross that day." The tolls amounted to \$40.50 and Mr. Folsom gave the Aid Society a check for \$50.00. Benefit toll days were kept up for some time, the proceeds of one Saturday in each month usually being donated to relief work.

In the meantime the county supervisors were busy with the problem of repairing the Free Bridge. Removing the wreckage alone cost the county nearly \$150. It was decided that the broken span should be rebuilt on the "Improved Howe Principle", and on January 16, 1864, a contract was let to Finkbine and Lovelace for \$4290. The sum of \$3000 was borrowed from the Branch of the State Bank at Iowa City. At the same time a contract for repairing the west span was let for \$1200. Thus the repairs cost more than half as much as the original bridge.

Early in 1868 the long span on the east leading to the bridge was removed and a causeway with riprapped sides was substituted. For this work the supervisors paid Wilson and Bush \$3900. Lest teams drive off the embankment along the sides of this causeway, wires were stretched from the east end to the bridge and in addition the supervisors adopted the following resolution: "That we consider advertisements or signs of any kind stuck on either end of Free Bridge a nuisance calculated to confuse or distract the attention of the public from the *Bridge Notice*, and stopping teams on the bridge."

About this time there was much debate as to the safety of the Free Bridge, especially the west span. Bridge committees differed as to the need of a new span, but finally, in January, 1869, the committee reported that they had been compelled to provide emergency supports for the west span and it was decided to replace the wooden structure with one of iron. A contract was made for the installation of a "Z. Kings Combination Bridge" on the west half of the Free Bridge, the price fixed being \$7,012.50. While this change was being made the Folsom Bridge was again opened for traffic.

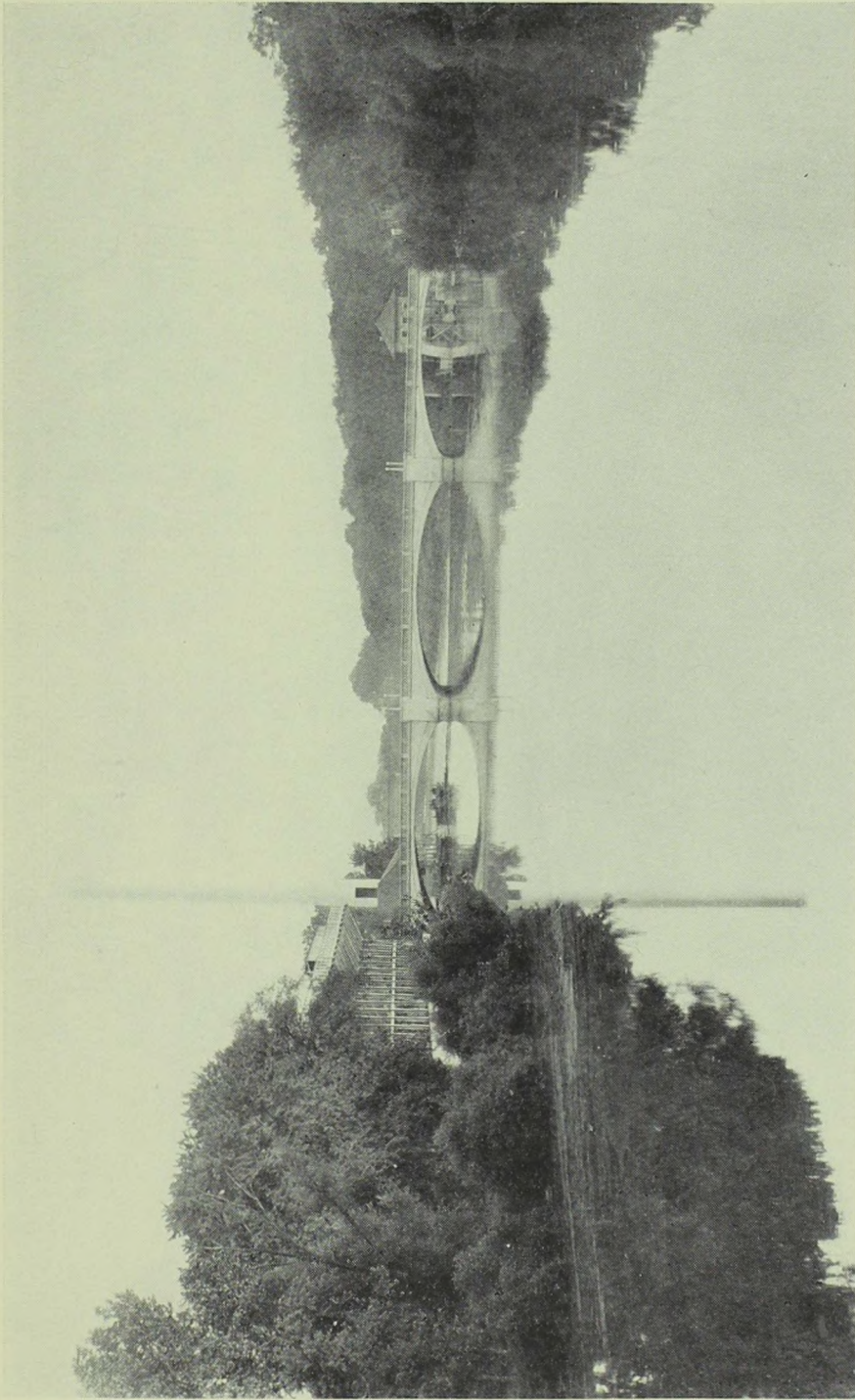
Perhaps the incongruity of a bridge half wood and half iron attracted attention to the condition of the old part. "The wooden span of the Free Bridge at this place is reported dangerous", said one of the Iowa City newspapers in July, 1870. "The man who put up this span of the bridge by contract, when it fell before and cost the county \$2000 costs and damages, *economically* put in old and decayed timbers that are just now ready to drop out and cost the County some more."

The supervisors were of the same mind apparently, for in September they ordered the bridge committee to contract with the firm which had just put up the west span for a new iron span on the east. There was an attempt to require the committee to advertise for bids, but the supervisors rejected the motion, although they finally required that the contract must be submitted to the board. During the

following January a contract was made with King for the east span at the price of \$6764, which included lowering the west span that had been built a year or two before. The work was completed early in 1871. "It is good the era of rotten wood bridges is passing away", commented an Iowa City newspaper editor.

It was not long, however, before there was a popular demand for another free iron bridge at or near Iowa City. In January, 1876, a petition signed by two hundred and fifty-five persons asking for a new bridge was submitted to the county board. Various sites were discussed, each having vehement adherents, some of whom wrote letters for the newspapers signing their communications "Pons" or "Justice". Finally the supervisors agreed on the site of the old Folsom Bridge. The chief objection to this location was the curve in the road to the west, the low land on the east, and the hill leading up to the Old Capitol. The prospect of driving a team and loaded wagon up this hill when the mud was deep was not attractive.

Perhaps the supervisors felt that there should be a bridge leading from Capitol Square westward. At any rate this was the site chosen and at their April meeting in 1876 the county supervisors ordered that bids be received for a bridge to cost not more than \$15,000. Contracts were let at the June meeting for a wrought iron arch bridge having two spans, each one hundred and fifty feet long, and providing a



COURTESY OF F. W. KENT

THE BURLINGTON STREET BRIDGE

seventeen foot roadway and a four foot sidewalk on each side. The cost of this structure, according to the contract, amounted to \$11,900.

Work on the bridge, however, seems to have dragged. A newspaper reported in October that the "work on the Centennial bridge after a long delay on account of high water is now rapidly progressing. The click of the hammer and trowel, the creaking of the derrick and the thug of the pile-driver is continually heard, from the rising of the sun to the setting thereof". The stone work when completed was twenty-two feet in height, laid upon a foundation of timber supported by fourteen foot piling. The stone used was of "adamantine quality, from North Bend." The Centennial Bridge, as this structure came to be known, was completed late in 1876. A newspaper for January 3, 1877, published the following comment: "The new bridge, including approaches and all the appurtenances thereunto belonging, cost \$14,300, which is less than the west span of the old bridge cost."

A quarter of a century passed before another bridge was constructed at Iowa City. This was located south of the city near the site of the Ryerson Mill. At a meeting in December, 1901, the county supervisors decided to accept the bid of the American Bridge Company to erect an iron bridge at this point on the Iowa River, the price being \$10,450. Professor A. V. Sims, of the State University, a brother of Admiral William S. Sims, was employed

to draft the plans and specifications and to oversee the work. That the erection was partly due to ambitious hopes of improved transportation facilities is indicated by a note in the supervisors' records that the contract would be signed as soon as the county attorney approved the guarantee of some citizens to furnish an additional \$1500 to convert it from a highway bridge to an electric railroad bridge, should it be needed for that purpose.

The bridge company was dilatory, and in March, 1902, the supervisors declared that the draft for \$500 deposited with the bid should be forfeited since the company had failed to put up a bond. About a month later a bond for \$10,500 was furnished and the resolution forfeiting the \$500 was rescinded. The work, however, progressed slowly and there appears to have been much criticism of the project. One editor objected to the employment of a University professor to oversee the work. "A good many people", he declared, "are tired of Johnson county and Iowa City being clinical subjects for the civil engineering department of the State university".

That some of this criticism was partisan is evident from another comment published in October, 1902, complaining that the bridge had been ordered in "by the old Democratic board of supervisors to favor the American bridge trust."

A new board of supervisors was elected that fall and in June, 1903, this board adopted a resolution annulling the contract for the bridge on the ground

that the company was "not proceeding with the construction of said bridge as speedily as it should under said contract and the quality of the work done is not satisfactory to the Board."

A representative of the bridge company hastened to Iowa City, promised the supervisors some better materials and completion of the work within four weeks of the arrival of this material, so the annulment of the contract was rescinded and the work was continued. Early in 1904 the bridge committee of the board of supervisors reported that \$10,311.07 had been paid the American Bridge Company. This iron bridge, which still stands, is popularly known as the Ryerson Bridge or the Benton Street Bridge.

It was not long before a demand arose for a bridge to the north of Iowa City. On December 3, 1906, the board of supervisors accepted plans and specifications prepared by Professor C. S. Magowan, of the University engineering faculty, for a bridge to be located on or near the north line of section ten of township seventy-nine. The county auditor was instructed to advertise for bids. When the board met to open these bids on December 20th they found several offers ranging from \$27,886.80 to \$20,701.50. All these bids were rejected, but an agreement for a somewhat cheaper bridge was made with the Iowa Bridge Company, the lowest of the bidders. The price is not stated on the supervisors' records. A contract was approved at a meeting of the supervisors in July, 1907, and on January 4,

1909, upon the recommendation of the county engineer, J. O. Schulze, the Park Bridge, as it came to be called, was accepted. Iowa City contributed a thousand dollars and the county issued warrants to the Iowa Bridge Company amounting to \$19,856.

The building of this bridge marks the end of the era of the wrought iron and steel structures with their intricate framework obstructing the view of the river. The Ryerson Bridge and the Park Bridge still stand, rumbling and clattering bravely as heavy motor vehicles rush across them.

Two bridges have been erected over the Iowa River at Iowa City since 1909. Both are of the reinforced concrete arch type with low railings along the sides and graceful arches underneath.

The first of these was built at Burlington Street to replace the wrought iron structure which had taken the place of the old wooden Free Bridge. In April, 1914, the board of supervisors considered a petition for a new bridge and ordered that the question of issuing bonds up to \$50,000 and levying a special tax of one-half mill be submitted to the voters of Johnson County at the primary election on June 1, 1914. The proposition carried in the county by a majority of about 500, though Iowa City contributed a majority of 1069.

On June 24th the supervisors employed Professor B. J. Lambert, of the College of Applied Science, to draw the plans and specifications and to supervise the construction of the bridge. For this he received



four per cent of the contract price. Bids were opened on August 21, 1914, the prices ranging from \$77,890 to \$54,500. An attempt was made at that time to sell bonds for \$50,000 but this was unsuccessful and the board adopted a resolution rejecting all bids.

After much discussion the Horrabin Construction Company offered to build a bridge four feet narrower than the one specified, and with certain other changes, for the sum of \$50,000, taking county bonds bearing interest at five per cent in payment. This offer was accepted, and the first of the new generation of bridges was constructed where the old wooden Free Bridge had once stood.

Before this bridge was completed a demand arose for a similar concrete structure to take the place of the iron bridge built in 1876. The State legislature in April, 1915, had passed a law which was apparently intended to benefit Cedar Falls, but applied equally to Iowa City, permitting certain cities of the second class to have control of their bridge tax levy. Thus the construction of bridges in Iowa City was placed within the jurisdiction of the city council.

At a meeting of the Iowa City council on December 10, 1915, the bridge committee submitted a report recommending that a concrete bridge somewhat wider than the Burlington Street structure be erected in place of the Centennial Bridge and that this be done at an early date since the legislature might repeal the favorable special legislation. It

was estimated that the new bridge would cost about \$75,000. The council voted to build the bridge and B. J. Lambert was again employed to draw the plans and specifications and to supervise the work, his compensation being the same as that paid by the supervisors for the Burlington Street Bridge.

On the twenty-first of January, 1916, the bids for this structure were opened, the highest being \$89,000. William Horrabin bid "\$500 less than the lowest bid offered", which made his price \$77,400. The contract was awarded to him.

The new Iowa Avenue Bridge, completed by the end of 1917, leads west across the Iowa River from the Old Stone Capitol, and marks the fourth stage in the crossing of the river at that point—the ferry, and the bridges of wood, iron, and concrete. To the north stands one of the iron structures, and to the south is another and older bridge of iron, but the ferries and the wooden bridges have passed away. Even the river, it seems, has changed and become more orderly and conventional.

RUTH A. GALLAHER

## Comment by the Editor

### A GAP IN IOWA HISTORY

For adventure, romance, heroic deeds, and epochal events, the annals of the Missouri River are almost without a parallel. From the middle of the sixteenth century, when Coronado and his Spanish cavaliers may have reached the Missouri Valley on their march from Mexico in search of Quivira, to the influx of American settlers just three hundred years later, this longest of North American rivers was the highway for a veritable pageant of explorers, fur traders, missionaries, scientists, soldiers, artists, and even foreign princes with their retinues.

While Louisiana belonged to France a few trading posts were established on the lower Missouri, and French voyageurs probably ventured as far up as Iowa. When the flag of Spain waved over the capital at St. Louis, companies of Spanish traders who worked far up the river past the Iowa country encountered their British rivals among the Sioux and Mandan Indians. During the first half of the American regime heavily laden keelboats, flotillas of canoes, and even steamboats navigated the muddy waters of the snag-strewn stream in ever increasing numbers. Discovery, commerce, and adventure were the principal missions of the daring men who joined

the spring processions from St. Louis to Fort Union and beyond.

Thus the pathway to the Far West formed a boundary of Iowa and the builders of a great empire traversed our western border. More than passing strange it seems then, that the historical records of the Iowa side of the Missouri River are extremely meager. Traders, explorers, and scientists with one accord appear to have neglected the verdant bluffs of the eastern shore from Fort Leavenworth to the mouth of the Big Sioux. Early descriptions of the country are fragmentary and vague. The diary of a man who travelled overland on the east side of the river from St. Joseph to Fort Pierre in 1850, as published in a Smithsonian Institution report, does not begin until he had left the bounds of Iowa. George Catlin's eyes were directed westward as he sat on the hill beside the grave of Sergeant Floyd. And E. de Girardin quite typically has almost nothing to say of the country between St. Joseph and the Big Sioux River.

What can the reason be?

J. E. B.

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