

# The PALIMPSEST

FEBRUARY 1939

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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

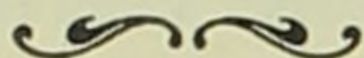
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## The First Territorial Assembly

When Iowa Territory was established in 1838, it was incumbered with a body of laws which had been adopted from Wisconsin, Michigan, and the eastern States. The problem of revising, coördinating, and adapting these statutes to conditions in the new Territory and enacting new legislation was the gigantic task which confronted the First Territorial Assembly of Iowa.

This Assembly was composed of thirty-nine members — twenty-six in the House of Representatives and thirteen in the Council. These members were, for the most part, young men. Almost one-third of them were less than thirty years of age. In the House of Representatives the youngest member was twenty-two, and the oldest was fifty-one. The median age was thirty-four, and only five members were more than forty years of age. In the Council, too, youth was "in the saddle". The youngest member there was twenty-five, and the median age was thirty-two.

Although one member of the Council had attained the age of sixty years, only three members were more than thirty-six.

The nativity of the members of the first Iowa legislature may be taken as an index of the sources of the population of the Territory at its inception. Virginia and Kentucky contributed the most — nine and eight respectively — more than two-fifths. Four each came from New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The three States of Vermont, New Hampshire, and North Carolina contributed two apiece, while Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, and Tennessee each contributed one. Thus twenty were from the South and nineteen from the North. None was born west of the Mississippi, nor in Indiana, Michigan, or Wisconsin.

In occupation, the members of the Assembly were predominantly farmers. Of the twenty-six Representatives, eighteen were tillers of the soil. In the Council there were four more farmers. For legal wisdom the Assembly had to depend upon only four lawyers. Representing other occupations and professions were six merchants, two physicians, two surveyors, a gunsmith, a miner, and a tailor.

Both the Council and the House were composed of typical frontiersmen. They had had little experience as lawmakers, but they were resource-

ful and knew what they wanted. Coming from many parts of the nation they brought a wide variety of customs and political attitudes. In their new environment they were committed to the task of weaving the various threads of previous experience into a useful fabric of legislation for Iowa. Some of the members of the first Assembly were men of great ability who there began distinguished public careers. James W. Grimes and Stephen Hempstead became Governors of Iowa; S. C. Hastings served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of both Iowa and California; and W. H. Wallace was later Governor and Delegate to Congress of both Washington and Idaho.

On the first day of the session, November 12, 1838, Governor Robert Lucas read his first message to the legislature. Lucas had previously served for four years as Governor of Ohio, and his experience there gave him confidence in directing the legislation of the new Territory. Many of his recommendations were ahead of the times.

"There is no subject to which I wish to call your attention more emphatically," he declared, "than the subject of establishing, at the commencement of our political existence, a well digested system of common schools." He was thinking of the time, not far in the future, when children would constitute a large part of the population.

In opposition to vice and crime, Governor Lucas maintained that gambling and intemperance might "be considered the fountain from which almost every other crime proceeds." In his opinion they had produced "more murders, robberies and individual distress, than all other crimes put together." To the legislators he said: "Could you in your wisdom devise ways and means to check the progress of gambling and intemperance in this Territory, you will perform an act which would immortalize your names and entitle you to the gratitude of posterity."

Perhaps the most important suggestion in the message was the codification of laws particularly adapted to the local situation. Realizing the magnitude of the task, he said, "experience has taught us, that it is impracticable to digest, report, and enact a complete code of laws during the session of a Legislative body". Accordingly, for the preparation of this code, he recommended the appointment of an interim committee of three persons, "of known legal experience and weight of character", to draft and submit proper laws for consideration and enactment at the next session of the legislature. "By pursuing this method," he said, "in the course of two years we will be released from the ambiguity of existing laws, and our system of jurisprudence will be established

upon a firm foundation". The youthful and ambitious legislators, however, had another plan, one that would not delay the work of codification until the next session of the legislature.

Two days after the legislature listened to the advice of the chief executive, James W. Grimes introduced a resolution in the House providing that the Judges of the Supreme Court submit to the Assembly such laws as they thought should be adopted. A week later a joint resolution similar to that proposed by Mr. Grimes passed both houses, requesting the Judges "to furnish this Legislative Assembly, during its present session, with such bills, as will, in their opinion, form a proper code of jurisprudence for Iowa, and regulate the practice of the courts thereof." That very day Judge Mason submitted a bill regulating court procedure in criminal cases.

The employment of the judges and their payment for legislative services was a matter of considerable debate during the session. When, on December 20th, the House passed a resolution to pay each of the judges three dollars a day for such time as they "may be" employed in this capacity, the Council amended the bill to make it apply only to such time as they had already served. Later the terms of payment were changed. Judge Wilson was paid for the service he had

rendered before December 28th, Judge Williams until December 25th, and Judge Mason was paid until January 11th.

The first session of the Iowa legislature was notorious for the conflicts between the Assembly and the other Territorial officers. First the famous "penknife quarrel" with Secretary Conway disturbed deliberations. Before that was settled the legislature and the Governor disagreed over their respective powers. According to the Organic Act all statutes had to be approved by the Governor. Though the session lasted only fifty-nine days, Governor Lucas vetoed eight bills, which so incensed the pioneer lawmakers that they declared he was "unfit to be the ruler of a free people".

Notwithstanding the strife and turmoil among officials, the First Territorial Assembly, aided by the Judges of the Supreme Court, rendered a highly valuable service in instituting, modernizing, classifying, and compiling the laws of the Territory. The book which contains the acts passed by this Assembly became known as the *Old Blue Book*, because it was originally bound in blue cardboard covers.

Although the first volume of Iowa session laws was, strictly speaking, not a code, for it contained much special and temporary legislation and the whole body of law was not completely system-



atized, nevertheless the *Old Blue Book* may properly be regarded as a forerunner of all later codifications and compilations of Iowa law. Not only did it serve for four years as the basic reference, but in 1843 it was adopted as the law of the Territory of Oregon.

The first document in the *Old Blue Book* was the Declaration of Independence. This was followed by the Constitution of the United States, the Ordinance of 1787, and the Organic Act of Iowa Territory. In the appendix were to be found the Congressional regulations concerning naturalization of aliens, and the Articles of Confederation.

The statutes enacted by the First Territorial Assembly, which constituted most of the volume, were grouped under seventy-four headings arranged alphabetically, commencing with Abatement, Amendments, Apprentices, Arbitrators, and Attachments, and ending with Waste, Water Crafts, Weights, Wills, and Worshiping Congregations. Between these extremes were laws dealing with banks, courts, education, ferries, Indians, mills, public lands, roads, steamboats, town plats, and many other subjects.

In some respects the work of the Assembly was primitive in character, yet on the whole progressive and forward looking. One act was designed

to prevent selling spirituous liquor to Indians, and another was enacted to prevent the practice of duelling. A calendar of crimes, drafted no doubt by the judges, contained definitions of most of the public offenses and prescribed penalties. The statute classified the subject in ten divisions, such as offenses against persons, habitations, property, public justice, peace, morality, and swindling. Some of the crimes have gone out of fashion — duelling, embracery, barratry, and rout — but that statute enacted a hundred years ago still constitutes the heart of the Iowa criminal code.

Local and temporary acts occupied much of the attention of the Assembly then as now. Licenses were granted for ferries and mill dams, roads were established, towns were chartered, boundaries were fixed, county seats were established, and an act was passed to locate the capital of the Territory at a place to be named Iowa City.

Typical of these early statutes was one dealing with apprentices. This measure provided that any person who, by his or her own free will and with the consent of parents or guardian, was bound by indenture to serve as an apprentice until the age of twenty-one, "shall be bounden to serve for the term in the indenture specified" as fully as if the apprentice were of full age. Provision was made for punishment in case the apprentice

failed to serve in accordance with the terms of indenture, and for legal action in case the master mistreated the apprentice. Either party could appeal to the district court, and if the apprentice were delinquent the court might extend the term of indenture as a method of punishment.

Perhaps it was this law or one similar to it that prompted Charles Swift of Dubuque to display notice of the disappearance of "a servant girl about eleven years of age". The girl had "short black hair and black eyes" and when last seen was wearing "a small figured blue calico dress". The public was cautioned against "harboring or trusting" such a person, under penalty of the law.

The immigration of negroes was carefully regulated. After April 1, 1839, no "black or mulatto person" was permitted to settle in Iowa without a certificate of freedom. Moreover, any such person had to give a bond of \$500 as surety against becoming a public charge. Failing to establish his status in this manner, the negro could be hired out by the county commissioners for six months "for the best price in cash that can be had." No one, except travelers and visitors, was allowed to keep slaves in the Territory, and any one who hired a negro who did not have a certificate of freedom or give bond of self maintenance was subject to a fine of as much as \$100. Courts

were required, upon presentation of satisfactory proof, to order the arrest and return of runaway slaves.

It may be noted that the public school system did not become thoroughly established in Iowa until the decade of the fifties. Schools prior to that time were private or semi-private. Yet an act of the First Territorial Assembly was designed to give public education to all white citizens between the ages of four and twenty-one years. The free public school "was a plant of slow growth", but the foundation was laid substantially by these early lawmakers.

The early Territorial statutes of Iowa, as a whole, reveal how well thirty-nine pioneers succeeded in devising a body of law to suit their purpose. Obviously they borrowed generously from the statutes in other States with which they were familiar. In some instances the acts derived from these sources were far in advance of actual needs.

Thus it may be noted that most of the statutes passed by the first legislature of Iowa "are not merely formal acts which had made their way into the records and been forgotten; they are real living laws, prepared with great care". The work of the First Legislative Assembly may still furnish a model for emulation.

J. A. SWISHER

## Parker for President

By 1840 party allegiance had become a prominent factor in the outcome of elections in the Territory of Iowa. Men were supported more for their partisanship than because of their personal qualifications. In some communities rivalry between the Whigs and Democrats was keen. For example, Jonathan W. Parker was elected to the Territorial Council from Scott County in 1840 by a majority of only four votes over James Grant. The next year close contests were recorded in many districts. Thus, when the Fourth Legislative Assembly gathered in Iowa City at Butler's Capitol in December, 1841, there were sixteen Democrats and ten Whigs in the House of Representatives, and in the Council six Whigs opposed seven Democrats.

This narrow Democratic majority (although one of the Whigs, James Hall, had been detained by sleet and high water) resulted in a bitter controversy over the selection of the President of the Council. The Whigs decided in caucus to concentrate their support on a single candidate in the hope of winning the election. The Democrats, however, were on guard against division of their

ranks and prepared to nominate only one candidate. On the second day of the session, therefore, Councilman Edward Johnstone of Lee County nominated Jonathan W. Parker for the Democrats, while Francis Springer named Mortimer Bainbridge for the Whigs.

On the first ballot Parker received six votes, Bainbridge gathered four tallies, while one ballot was blank and one was marked for George Greene, a Democrat. Since a majority of all members of the Council was necessary to elect, no one had received the requisite number of votes. The voting was secret, and so it is impossible to determine certainly who voted for Greene and who left his ballot blank. Assuming that the alignment of members was strictly partisan, one of the odd votes was cast by a Democrat and the other by a Whig. If Parker voted for Greene he acted contrary to the Democratic caucus pledge to support himself. Perhaps he cast the blank ballot. If so, who voted for Greene? Maybe the Whig candidate, Bainbridge, reluctant to vote for himself, had cast a vote for a Democrat in the hope of dividing his opponents on the second ballot between Parker and Greene. That alternative does not seem entirely probable, however, because Bainbridge was extremely partisan. On a later occasion his Whig loyalty led him to make a fistic

attack upon the editor of the Democratic *Capitol Reporter*.

When the Democrats failed to elect a President on the first ballot, the Whigs attempted to delay the decision, probably in the hope of stimulating dissention among the Democrats and thus gaining a temporary balance of power. Francis Springer, one of the tellers, moved to adjourn until the next morning. The Council, however, promptly voted seven to five against it. The division was on strictly party lines. Mr. Springer then proposed that the election of a President be postponed until the next day. If the Whigs could gain time for negotiation, they might be able to persuade some of the Democrats to compromise on a more acceptable candidate than Parker. Perhaps the lone vote for Greene pointed toward such a compromise. Indeed, some of the Whigs might have hoped to win enough Democratic votes to elect Bainbridge.

Again, however, the Council refused to delay the election of a presiding officer. This vote was eight to four, J. S. Kirkpatrick, joining the Democrats in defeating Springer's motion. He may not have been a very ardent Whig, for he had been appointed to act as a teller in the election. Though the temporary President, Jesse B. Browne, was a Whig, he would scarcely have selected another

teller as positively identified with Whig interests as Springer. Kirkpatrick represented the same district as Bainbridge, and therefore might have been expected to support his colleague for territorial as well as partisan reasons.

On the second ballot for President the result was exactly the same as on the first — six for Parker, four for Bainbridge, one for Greene, and one blank. The Democrats were steadfast in their support of Parker, yet he still lacked one vote of being elected. His feelings may be imagined as he gazed at the bright new walls of Butler's Capitol and contemplated his political opportunity. Perhaps his future career in politics would depend upon the result of the next ballot. To vote for himself did not seem to comport with parliamentary etiquette. But if he refrained from casting the decisive ballot in his own favor he and his party might lose the coveted office.

The members of the Council wrote their choices on a third ballot. The tellers began their count — one for Bainbridge — one for Parker. There was a hush of expectancy in the Council chamber. The tabulation was soon completed. Jesse Browne rose to announce the decision. Seven votes for Parker, four for Bainbridge, and one for Greene. Jonathan W. Parker was conducted to the President's platform.



To some, the inaugural remarks of the new presiding officer seemed a little ironical. "Gentlemen", he said, "I tender you my most sincere and grateful acknowledgments for this flattering testimony of your confidence in me. Entrusted, by you, with so honorable and so responsible a station, it becomes my duty, and, I assure you, it will be my pleasure to exert my utmost powers to discharge its duties faithfully, promptly and impartially." Referring to the potential greatness of the Territory, he observed that the members of the legislature had a solemn responsibility to promote the general happiness and prosperity. "I doubt not you will meet it like men, and act not for yourselves, but for the welfare of the whole people."

The incident, however, was not closed. Whig partisans protested that the Democrats, and particularly Parker, had acted unscrupulously. Whereas, Councilman Bainbridge had voted for some one else, apparently for Greene, Parker had refrained from voting at all on two ballots and then elected himself to the office of President.

"It is with deep mortification and regret," wrote William Crum in the *Iowa City Standard*, "that we are called upon as impartial journalists, to record the humiliating action of the present Legislature. Never since the establishment of our

Government, or the incorporation of social order, by conventional arrangement, in an intelligent and enlightened community, has there been a greater disregard to the feelings of men, or the principles of party, in any State or Territory, than has been manifested in the recent action of our Territorial Legislature. To accomplish the object of a *mid-night caucus*, an honorable member of the Council, so far surrendered his claims to respect, as to *vote for himself*, to secure the office of President of the Council." The dictatorial action of the Democratic caucus was commensurate with the activities of the "Star-Chamber" and the "doings of the Jacobins of the French Revolution". And because of the caucus action, continued Editor Crum, "not one Whig has been elected to any office by this Legislature".

In order to support his condemnation, Crum cited Jefferson's *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* and concluded that if "Mr. Parker has the feelings of an honorable man, we are at a loss to know how he must have felt — knowing, that he voted for himself. In the language of Mr. Jefferson, he has violated the laws of 'Decency' and a 'fundamental principle of the social compact'".

But President Parker's action was not without defenders. Ver Planck Van Antwerp of the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* pointed out that the voting had

been by secret ballot and so the members who actually voted for Parker could not be known. Speaking of "the modern Cato" of the *Standard*, "the organ *par excellence* of Whiggery", Editor Van Antwerp insisted that the action of the Council was merely the result of "the maneuvers of the 'Whig' members to *embarrass*" the Democratic majority. He acknowledged that the "seven Democratic members being a majority of the body, had agreed among themselves that one of their number, *and not one of their opponents, who constituted the minority*, should be the presiding officer of the body; and the five others, *composing that minority*, had determined apparently, to thwart them in the effort."

The editor of the *Capitol Reporter* declared that Jonathan W. Parker had pursued a course of "*moral courage and firmness*" and had not acted for mere self-gratification nor to appease fellow members of the Council. Instead, insisted Editor Van Antwerp, he had comported "IN CONFORMITY WITH A SOLEMN DUTY WHICH HE OWED TO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY THROUGHOUT THE TERRITORY; every true member of which, had he been present, would sternly have DEMANDED IT OF HIM, rather than have witnessed the thwarting of a majority by a stubborn and factious minority."

The history of the legislative session in Butler's Capitol gives no evidence that President Parker acted with prejudice or displayed favoritism. Nor does his career indicate that he was other than a man of sincerity and honesty. In 1841 he was thirty-one years old, a lawyer by profession, a botanist in avocation, a pioneer by nature, and a politician with considerable experience.

Born in Vermont, one of seven children, Jonathan W. Parker soon migrated to Pennsylvania with his parents Jonathan and Naomi Parker. After studying law under Judge Kidder of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, he decided in the autumn of 1836 to seek his fortune near Galena, Illinois. Probably he was lured westward by the opportunity of success in the lead region.

When the young prospector neared his destination the boat upon which he had taken passage from St. Louis became ice bound at Davenport. Attracted by the beauty of Scott County, he decided to make that place his home. At once he became a leader in community and Territorial affairs. According to an early historian, Parker was the orator of the day at the first Fourth of July celebration held at Davenport in 1837. He was admitted to the bar by Judge Joseph Williams at the first term of the Iowa Territorial district court held in Davenport on October 4, 1838.

At the first general election in the Territory of Iowa, Jonathan W. Parker was chosen to represent Scott and Clinton counties in the Council of the First Legislative Assembly. He was a member of the Judiciary Committee which coöperated with the Justices of the Supreme Court in drawing up a code of laws for the Territory. When the question of the executive veto was raised, Parker was strongly opposed to Governor Lucas.

The death of Secretary William B. Conway early in November, 1839, placed upon Jonathan W. Parker and J. M. Robertson the melancholy duty of accompanying the Secretary's body to Davenport on the steamboat *Ione*. In January, 1840, Parker's name appears prominently in the list of Democrats who signed a call for a constitutional convention. Later that year his constituency elected him to a second term in the Territorial Council. But Parker's interest was not confined to politics because in November, 1841, he was elected to the vestry of Davenport's "Trinity Church Parish".

In local affairs Jonathan W. Parker was popular. "He held at various times" the offices of justice of the peace and judge of probate. In April, 1840, he was chosen a town trustee with George L. Davenport, Seth F. Whiting, John Forest, and William Nichols. And, according

to an early account, he was elected mayor of Davenport for the next year.

Thus, Jonathan W. Parker had achieved some political distinction and won popular favor when the Iowa City newspapers engaged in a battle of words over his being elected President of the Council in 1841. Through the legislative months the *Standard* continued its attacks upon the Democratic majority. And with equal insistence the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* praised "the true Democrats" and advocated "the execution of the Whigs". At the conclusion of the session, Editor Van Antwerp wrote that "Rarely has it happened, we imagine, that such general satisfaction has been given by presiding officers, as that which has resulted from the manner in which Generals Parker, and Lewis, have presided over the two houses of our Legislature".

Jonathan W. Parker left Davenport in 1844. After traveling extensively in various parts of the United States and studying medicine intensively as a profession, he began practice in Cincinnati, Ohio. But when the specter of cholera cast its shadow over the country he fell a victim to its ravages in the fall of 1850, dying at the home of Dr. Gatchel, "much lamented for his many social and moral virtues."

JACK T. JOHNSON

## A Town That Moved

Sheldahl, Iowa, is located eighteen miles north of Des Moines on a branch line of the Chicago and North Western Railroad. Surveyed and settled early in 1874, in anticipation of the building of a narrow-gauge railroad connecting the capital city with Ames, the little community enjoyed the prospect of becoming a thriving town. The railroad, built by the Polk and Hubbell interests of Des Moines, reached Sheldahl during August of 1874 and was completed to Ames by the fall of that same year.

Sheldahl gave promise of being a prosperous agricultural center. It was surrounded by vast tracts of fertile land, tilled by sturdy pioneers, many of whom had only recently migrated from Norway, Switzerland, and Germany. To be sure there were nearby rival communities, but some were handicapped by lack of railroad facilities. Cambridge, to the east, was a mere center of population. Swede's Point (now Madrid), to the west, was an inland town that did not threaten Sheldahl's potential supremacy. Fifteen miles to the north the growing college town of Ames, by virtue of its distance from the Sheldahl com-

munity, did not loom as a formidable competitor. In fact, about the only rival deserving much consideration was the town of Polk City, located some seven miles south.

From 1874 to 1879 Sheldahl grew and prospered. During this time the North Western company was planning a branch line to Des Moines. When the opportunity of purchasing the Ames-Des Moines narrow-gauge road was presented in 1879 the company welcomed the offer as a comparatively inexpensive method of joining Iowa's capital city with the main line of the North Western between Chicago and Omaha. As soon as possible the newly acquired branch was rebuilt on standard gauge.

With improved railroad facilities, and the growing possibility that Polk City, its principal competitor, might be denied easy access to rail services, the prospects for Sheldahl's future looked bright indeed. Polk City had early agreed to give financial support to the original narrow gauge. As a result of this action, the Polk-Hubbell organization had bound itself by franchise to serve the community for a fifty year period. When the North Western took over the line, the company attempted to avoid the assumed obligations by straightening the line and leaving Polk City several miles from the railroad. A



successful appeal to the courts by the residents of Polk City, however, compelled the railroad company to continue to serve the Polk City area. Although the litigation had not eliminated Sheldahl's nearest competitor from the railroad map, the delays and uncertainties caused by the trial served unquestionably to weaken materially the commercial position previously held by Polk City.

It was not many months later that Sheldahl business men and shippers began having their own difficulties with the new railroad proprietors. The cause of most of the trouble was traceable to alleged discriminations between Sheldahl and other towns. A few of the more prominent residents objected to the rate schedules proposed by the North Western officials.

The possibility of new rail connections in the form of another interstate line served only to increase the demands upon the North Western Company for more favorable treatment. The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul company had long considered the possibility of a line joining Chicago and Omaha, but it was not until 1880 that final surveys through central Iowa were completed. Originally the plan of the Milwaukee called for crossing the North Western at a point about 80 rods north of the central part of the town of Sheldahl. When the news reached the com-

munity it caused no end of speculation. Perhaps, thought some of the town's leading promoters, this was the "break" that would transform the little town into a center of commercial activity.

Disappointment followed closely in the wake of these optimistic prophecies. Later surveys convinced the Milwaukee officials that it would be highly impracticable to include Sheldahl in its central Iowa itinerary. Unfavorable features of topography along the original route, coupled with the fact that the first survey made it necessary to cross both the Skunk and the Des Moines rivers at disadvantageous points, caused the abandonment of the route in favor of locating the junction at a point a mile and a half north of Sheldahl.

Although most of the prominent men of the community had taken an active part in the agitation to secure better rail services for the Sheldahl area, it became principally the task of one man to attempt to obtain a reversal of the final decision of the Milwaukee company. Oley Nelson was well qualified for the job. Not only was he one of the town's leading citizens, but he was without doubt its most prominent merchant. Consequently it was only natural that he was delegated to solicit the chief officials of the railroad in an attempt to secure more advantageous consideration.

Upon reaching the office of the superintendent

of the road, Nelson stated his case. Wouldn't it be possible, he inquired, to build the line in accordance with the original plans. After hearing Nelson's proposition the superintendent called in the engineer in charge of the surveys. Only one important question was put to this gentleman — "Which route is the shorter?" Upon receiving the answer that the final survey had been made, not only to avoid topographical difficulties, but also to reduce the mileage, the superintendent assured Nelson that he could not recommend a change of present plans. After receiving a pass for the homeward trip, Mr. Nelson returned to Sheldahl. The experience had convinced him that if the town was to benefit by both rail connections, a radical plan of action was necessary.

After the final decision had been made, the Milwaukee lost no time in beginning actual construction. In the summer of 1881 the road was graded. By the following January much of the steel was in place on the section north of Sheldahl. The work continued throughout 1882 and 1883. It was not until 1884, however, that the depot and interlocking plant were finally completed. By that time the name of the junction, Sheldahl Crossing, had become a regular station.

Meanwhile the difficulties between the North Western and the shippers in and around Sheldahl

had not materially changed. A few individuals had rather early sensed the import of the appearance of the new rail competitor. Many had appealed to the Milwaukee for decreased rates, particularly on grain and livestock. The new road seemed willing to oblige. As a result, much produce was hauled over the treacherous mud roads to Sheldahl Crossing, there to be shipped to various marketing centers.

Increased rail business at Sheldahl Crossing gave rise to a few commercial enterprises designed to aid the farmers in their search for more favorable markets. A grain elevator was built in 1885 by J. H. Miller and M. Fread. Not long after, a little grocery store was opened by Knute Cleveland. These two places of business served the needs of the new community admirably. Not only could the farmer find a market for his produce and purchase supplies for the family larder, but he was also able to meet and chat with friends and neighbors. Often the conversation at these informal gatherings turned to a consideration of the possibilities of growth and expansion facing the new community.

An interested spectator, if not a vociferous participant at these meetings, was a Mr. Jenks. His position as owner of most of the land adjacent to the railroad junction caused him to manifest

real concern for the future plans for the young settlement. Mounting interest in a new town led Jenks to divide a part of his farm into city blocks, preparing for the expansion that "cracker-box philosophers" thought was inevitable. A part of his holdings, Jenks segregated to serve as a main street for the future municipality. Apparently the only elements lacking to complete the "town" were dwellings, business houses, and people.

These necessary ingredients were not long in coming. Although the early friction between the residents of Sheldahl and the North Western had been lessened considerably, the wound was not completely healed. Many of the members of the community had become convinced that the present location of the town could not offer nearly the advantages that might be had at the railroad junction. The fact that a good share of the shipping business was going to the Milwaukee seemed to guarantee the eventual superiority of the new location. Many of the Sheldahl progressives were convinced that if they were to retain their position as leaders in the commercial field they could do so more securely by locating at Sheldahl Crossing. To remain in Sheldahl might mean extinction.

In order to present the matter specifically and officially a general meeting was called early in 1887. Here again Oley Nelson assumed a promi-

ment rôle. The general argument in favor of deserting the old town site in favor of the new was presented. Many seconding speeches were heard and much enthusiasm for the change was evidenced. As an added inducement to those less favorably inclined to the proposition, Jenks offered to give a free lot to each resident that would move his house to Sheldahl Crossing. Everything seemed to be going well until some one struck upon the old idea of county patriotism. Sheldahl was located in the joining corners of three counties — Polk, Boone, and Story. The new site was in Story. That very fact proved argument enough for some of the residents of Boone and Polk to veto the proposed move.

The idea gained momentum in spite of the dissension that was early apparent. A few daring souls had already made plans to move soon after the general meeting. Apparently Jenks was not satisfied with the growth of his town for he subsequently offered additional inducements. He agreed to give two lots for churches, an acre for a park, and another acre for a schoolhouse site.

Motivated perhaps by the fact that Nelson had begun actual operations preparatory to moving his general store and grain elevator, many others lost little time in making final preparations for departure. Shortly after the store and elevator were

on the road, the drug store, two buildings belonging to A. W. Anderson, and another owned by Mr. Mikelson, were on the way to their new locations. Later in the same year (1887) others joined the procession.

The following year found many more buildings on the road. Residences, barns, other outbuildings and many of the remaining store buildings that had been located on the north side of Main Street (in Story County) were raised, mounted, and pulled to the new town site. While most of the buildings on the Story side of Main Street were eventually relocated at Sheldahl Crossing, only a very few from the Polk section were moved to the new location.

The practical difficulties of moving were made more hazardous by the uncertainties of roads and weather. The usual procedure was to mount the building on "trucks" and pull the load with the aid of a circular horsepower. Immediately ahead of the building itself the road was planked. It was a laborious task indeed to place those heavy planks. Then, too, it was not possible to proceed far before a resetting of the power apparatus was required. The advantages gained by the device become readily apparent when it is noted that many of the larger buildings, including the grain elevator, were moved the full two miles with only

a single horse. Even with ample power and an adequate labor supply, the job was of comparatively long duration. Often a week was consumed before the task was completed and the records tell of movings that required as long as ten days.

Although a few buildings were moved by the owners themselves, most of the jobs were performed by regular moving contractors. The Meyers Movers of Des Moines and a firm headed by Ferneau of Marshalltown reaped rich financial harvests in the two-year period from 1887 to 1889. Ordinarily these firms furnished both equipment and labor, but often the owner and family were called upon to render needed assistance.

No official count of the actual number of buildings conveyed to Sheldahl Crossing is available. It seems safe to estimate, however, that fifty-two or fifty-three had been moved by the end of the high tide period in the closing months of 1888. After that there were a few buildings still in process of being moved. Most of the transition to the new community had been made by the early months of 1889.

It was an unusual sight that greeted travelers on the North Western trains as they traversed the short distance between the old town and the new location during the last years of the eighties.



Everything was bustling with activity. Men hurried to and fro, laying planks, attaching cables, resetting powers, and encouraging horses to greater efforts. The youngsters, fascinated by the strange work, hung around to see the house move. Occasionally a boy might have been seen hurrying away from the scene of activity, perhaps for a duck in old "Minnie Creek" or perhaps because of the mounting fury of parental wrath at the child's unconsciousness of danger. If the passenger happened to be aboard the "twelve o'clock" he might see a knot of men sitting comfortably in the shade of an old box-elder eating the lunch that had been packed into the old shoe box and hurriedly chucked into the buggy a few hours earlier. It was no occasional group that could be seen from the train window, but rather, during the crest of the rush, a veritable battery of clustered humanity. As many as ten or fifteen different crews were sometimes engaged simultaneously in the moving business.

After the house had been conveyed to its new site, the task of finishing the cellar and foundation was undertaken in earnest. Ordinarily the excavation had been started before the building left its original location. After the foundation was in place necessary alterations were made, fences were erected around yards, and other labor

necessary to put the new home in shape for occupancy was finished.

Expansion at the railroad junction continued throughout 1889. It was in that year that definite plans were made for incorporating the community. In May of 1890 this step was taken and by mid-summer a complete slate of town officers, with C. B. Owen as mayor, had been duly installed.

Prior to the actual incorporation the townsmen had given a great deal of time to a consideration of an appropriate name for the new settlement. Sheldahl Crossing did not seem desirable. A few individuals thought that Jenks, the former owner of the town site, should be honored by giving the place his name. Some felt that, as long as Oley Nelson had been one of the principal instigators of the "move", the town should be named Nelson, commemorating his service. On appealing to Mr. Jenks, the incorporators found him unwilling to agree to any of the pending proposals. He indicated, however, that he had had a good friend back east whose name was Slater and that he would much prefer that to any name so far suggested. As a result of this conference, the townsmen accepted the idea and the transition from Sheldahl Crossing to Slater was thereby completed.

JAMES A. STORING

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