

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

JUNE 1939

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WALTER E. KALOUPÉK

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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*

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### 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.

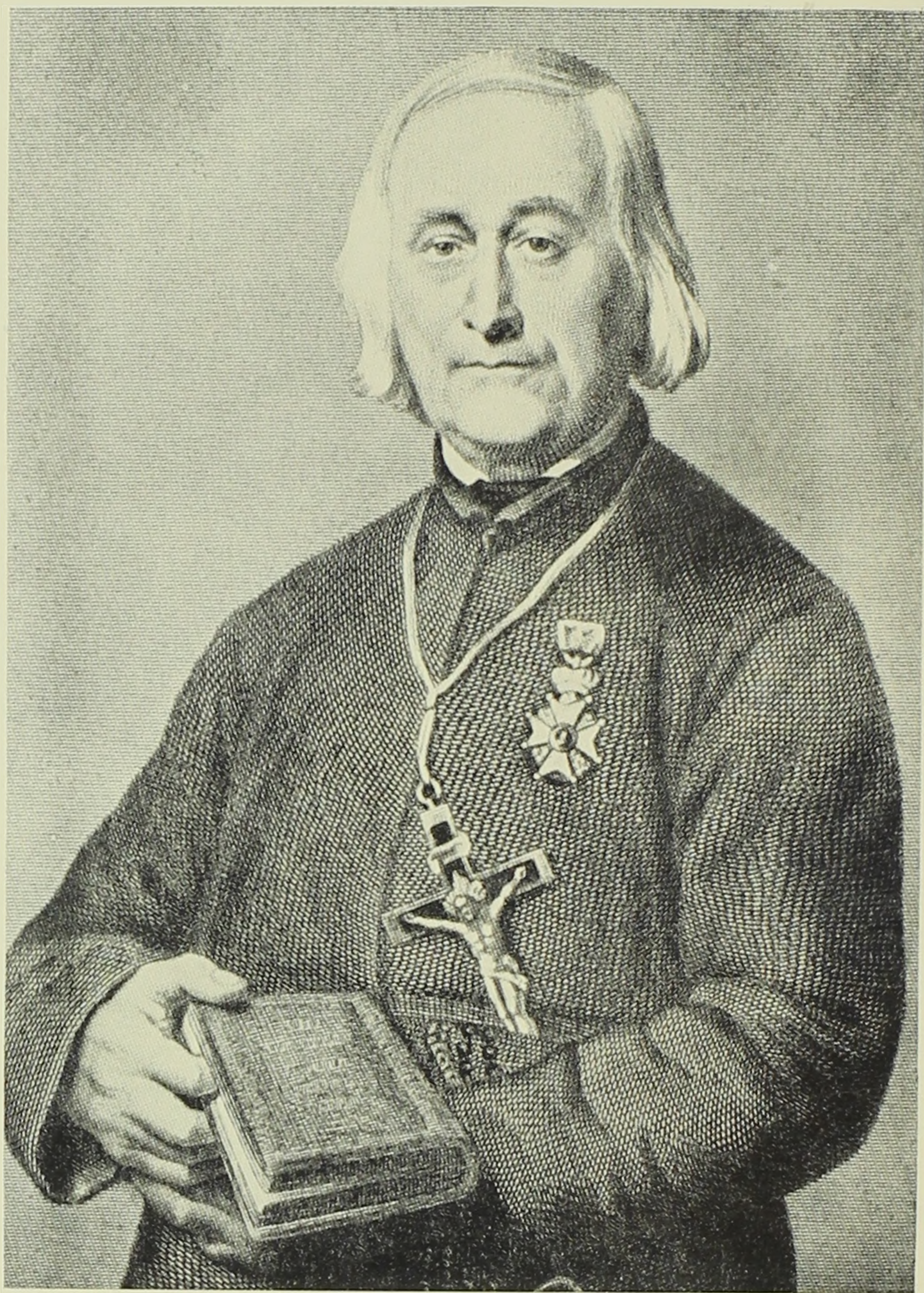
The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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FATHER PIERRE JEAN DE SMET



# THE PALIMPSEST

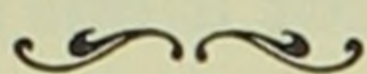
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## Father Pierre Jean De Smet

Robust, laughing, with the adventurous spirit of a buccaneer, Father Pierre Jean De Smet inherited little from his Jesuit predecessors save a love of God and Indians. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the spirit of Catholicism, as expressed by the *Muero porque no muero* of Santa Teresa, had been replaced by an enthusiastic affirmation of life; and the priests who played such an important part in the development of the western United States were strong-minded, active, practical men.

In 1821 Pierre De Smet and five other students ran away from the seminary at Mechlin, Belgium. Disguised as peasants, with borrowed money in their pockets, they persuaded the captain of a sailing vessel to smuggle them on board and bring them to America. The hard, poverty-stricken years that followed, first in the novitiate at White-marsh, Maryland, and later in the Jesuit mission at Florissant, Missouri, failed to temper the merry



spirit of Father Pierre Jean De Smet. He completed his training for priesthood and was ordained in September, 1827. There is nothing in his letters to indicate that he wooed asceticism or a glorious death. There is much evidence that he recognized the value of a busy, well-spent life.

Doubtless, as he stood on the deck of the little steamboat *Wilmington*, which was taking him up the Missouri River to the present site of Council Bluffs, he had pleasant dreams of his future work among the Potawatomi Indians. He did not yet know that the year 1838 was too late to help those natives along the Missouri River who had already been weakened by smallpox and corrupted by liquor.

The two thousand Indians who gathered at the dock on the afternoon of May 31st scarcely noticed the corpulent priest, wearing a heavy crucifix upon his breast, who disembarked, followed by his companions, Father Felix Verredyt and two lay brothers. To the Potawatomi the arrival of a steamboat meant more important things. It meant government annuities, calico, trinkets, gunpowder, and perhaps cached somewhere down the river a shipment of smuggled whisky. At St. Louis the priests had been told that five hundred Catholic natives were eagerly awaiting them. In reality, two half-breeds approached to shake hands; and



a fortnight later one Catholic Indian came to beg for a blessing.

The Indian huts on the river flats and on the clay bluffs towering above were lice-infested hovels, foul from the dung of horses stabled within them, and littered with bones and refuse cast aside for the innumerable wrangling dogs that far out-numbered their masters.

The half-breed chief, Billy Caldwell, whose wife later became a convert, offered the missionaries the use of four cabins that had been built by a detachment of soldiers the year before. Colonel S. W. Kearny gave the missionaries possession of a log blockhouse which was transformed into a church by the simple addition of a cross on the roof. Father De Smet maintained that when he climbed the ladder to put up the cross his companion, Father Felix Verreydt, saw "the devil clap his tail between his legs and take flight over the big hills." The missionaries made the best of the situation. "We have a fine little chapel," wrote Father De Smet, "and four little cabins besides made of rough logs. They are fourteen feet each way with roofs of rude rafters, which protect us from neither rain nor hail, and still less from the snows of winter." Later a small mission house was erected in honor of St. Joseph.

During that summer and the following winter



the missionaries labored, baptizing children and adults, caring for the sick, and explaining the principles of Christianity. If a girl traveled six miles to find the road to heaven, or an old woman threw away her medicine bag, Father De Smet was happy. But many times the natives called the priest for the benefit of his camphor water and popular remedies, while forbidding him to make the sign of the cross or utter a prayer over their ailing children. On such occasions Father De Smet would spread out his bottles, he would recommend his medicines strongly, and while administering the cure he would baptize the child without the knowledge of its parents.

By the spring of 1839, after a long hard winter, the Indians were destitute. The only available food was acorns and a few wild roots. The priests were without shoes. But word had arrived that they might expect a shipment of provisions and clothes on the first steamboat to ascend the river. On April 20th the boat was sighted from the bluffs. Without delay Father De Smet procured two carts for the baggage and reached the dock in time to witness a sad spectacle. The vessel had struck on a sawyer and was rapidly sinking. Although no lives were lost, goods to the amount of \$500, ornaments for the church, a tabernacle, a bell, and provisions were gone.



In a letter to Belgium, Father De Smet, with his customary good humor wrote: "Of our effects four articles were saved: a plough, a saw, a pair of boots and some wine. Providence was still favorable to us. With the help of the plough we were enabled to plant a large field of corn. We are using the saw to build a better house and enlarge our church. With my boots I can walk in the woods and prairies without fear of being bitten by the serpents which throng there. And the wine permits us to offer to God every day the most holy sacrifice of the mass. We therefore returned with courage and resignation to the acorns and roots".

Between the exhaustion of one supply of liquor and the arrival of another baptisms and conversions multiplied. But when a steamboat arrived, one night sufficed to destroy what the missionaries had labored many weeks to accomplish. During the following summer Father De Smet's diary offers a pitiful commentary on conditions in the tribe. On May 25th two Potawatomi were killed in a drunken frolic; two days later three drunken Indians were drowned in the Missouri; the following night another was poisoned while drunk.

By the end of that month a steamboat arrived with "fifty large cannons" loaded with "the most murderous grape shot, each containing thirty gallons of whisky, brandy, rum or alcohol." Before



the boat was out of sight the skirmishes began. "In all directions", Father De Smet wrote, "men, women and children were seen tottering and falling; the war-whoop, the merry Indian song, cries, savage roarings, formed a hideous medley. Quarrel succeeded quarrel; blow followed blow. The club, the tomahawk, spears, butcher knives, brandished together in the air. . . . A squaw offered her little boy four years old to the crew of the boat for a few bottles of whisky." The next day the Potawatomi were selling horses, blankets, and guns for liquor.

Before the first week of June had passed, six Indians had been murdered in drunken brawls and one forcibly prevented from killing his aunt. A few days later a savage returning home from a night's debauch tore his infant son from the breast of his mother and crushed him against a post of the lodge. Whisky did not last long in the tribe, and July may have been a quieter month, but more liquor was landed on August 4th and the diary continues to reveal tragedies.

Under such conditions St. Joseph's Mission could not prosper. Yet with inexhaustible physical energy and a buoyancy of spirit born from his unquestioning faith, Father De Smet continued his work. A trip up the Missouri resulted in a new peace between the Potawatomi and the Sioux — a



peace which was concluded during a feast when the Indians sat with chins upon their knees and legs drawn close to their bodies, but Father De Smet, because of his corpulency, had to sit like a tailor with his legs crossed. "If you ever build a new house," he wrote to his niece, "give the door of my chamber six inches extra width, because I don't like to be bothered in getting into a room."

Men more austere, men like Fathers Jogues and Lalemant, might have continued a fruitless struggle against the indolence of the Potawatomi, against the liquor trade and the increasing degeneracy. Father De Smet was not of that sort. With characteristic common sense, he knew the futility of working against odds so great. Consequently, when delegates from the Flathead tribe came to St. Louis in the autumn of 1839 to beg for missionaries, he was eager to try a new field. The Flatheads of the Bitter Root Valley, like other Rocky Mountain tribes, were peace-loving, mystical, and intelligent. Isolated as they were from contact with civilization, hidden in the recesses of the mountains, Father De Smet saw in them the possibility of establishing a Christian community as idyllic as that which once existed in the Jesuit missions of Paraguay.

But even there the priest was to meet with disappointment. True, within a decade the Oregon



country was dotted with missions. The nomadic tribes had become agricultural, the children were learning their prayers in Latin. But white civilization was slowly pressing westward. To Father De Smet that movement of immigrants was the one great danger, and the one force over which he had no control. Yet so fervent was his desire to keep his Indians beyond the reach of the Oregon trail, beyond the corruptions of white traders and merchants, that when he discovered gold he kept the secret in his heart. At a dinner party in St. Louis, when he announced with a twinkle in his eye that he had found a rich mine in the Black Hills, all the entreaties of merchants and business men could not prevail on him to reveal its location. He merely stated that he did not want to spoil the peace of his children.

In 1846 he was back in St. Louis. He had lost five companions in the waters of the Columbia River. He had crossed the mountains on horseback, by dog-sled and snowshoes. He had tramped over plains piled up with avalanches of snow and had walked waist-deep through icy water, so that his legs swelled and all the nails dropped off his feet. Yet he had displeased Rome. The letters that he wrote were believed to be exaggerated. The dreams of an Indian utopia seemed fantastic to his superiors. There were bickerings



about money. And so with his heart and his ambitions in the Oregon country, Father De Smet was destined to spend the last twenty-seven years of his life as Procurator of St. Louis University, fighting the cholera plague, helping the poverty-stricken emigrants along the levee, and keeping the account books of the university.

"I have been several years a wanderer in the desert," he wrote to a friend. "I was three years without receiving a letter from any quarter. I was two years in the mountains without tasting bread, salt, coffee, tea or sugar. I was for years without a bed, without a roof. I have been six months without a shirt on my back and have passed whole days and nights without a morsel of anything to eat, not even a drop of water to quench my parching thirst."

It is significant and tragic, that after his fight to save the Indian tribes from civilization, Father De Smet was henceforth to use his energies in effecting conciliations between the natives and the United States government. During his few years of active missionary labor he had become the most beloved white man in the West. He had made his word to the Indians as certain as the recurring seasons. "His tongue is not forked", they said of him. Consequently, the government asked him to attend the Great Council of 1851, to accompany



the expedition against the Mormons, and later to visit the western tribes in the hope of negotiating a peace during the Yakima War.

Father De Smet accepted such duties without recompense, because he believed that in this way he could best serve his Indians, so hard-pressed by the encroachment of the whites, so embittered by broken promises. On such journeys across the plains, he saw the country lately uninhabited now converted into cultivated fields and villages and cattle lands. He must have realized with deep sorrow, and long before it happened, that the little tribe of Flatheads, still clinging doggedly to their belief in peace and in Catholicism, were doomed to the fate that had overtaken the eastern tribes.

By 1867 the railroads were in use as far west as Omaha. In that year the Secretary of the Interior asked Father De Smet to be envoy extraordinary to the hostile Sioux tribes of the upper Missouri. The priest took a train from St. Louis to Chicago, and from Chicago for Omaha. Arriving at Boonsboro, Iowa, he learned that melting snows had carried away the bridges. After a delay of three days he obtained a train which took him to Denison. Beyond Denison the tracks were washed out. It was necessary to hire a wagon which carried him to Sioux City, where he took a steamboat for the Yankton Reservation.



Father De Smet was now an aging man, sixty-six years old, and in poor health. The peace council exhausted him and he returned to St. Louis ill with the midsummer heat. Yet in the following year he repeated his efforts to make peace between the government and the natives. With Generals Sherman, Harney, Sanborn, Terry, and Sheridan he traveled by train to Cheyenne and thence to Fort Rice. At that point the Indian chiefs told him if he approached the Sioux he would not return alive. "Before an image of the Blessed Virgin, Mother and Protector of all nations, six lamps are burning day and night during my absence, and before these lamps more than a thousand children implore heaven's protection for me. I intrust myself with all my fears to the hands of the Lord."

Accompanied by an old Indian trader, his wife, a Sioux, and several Indian chiefs, Father De Smet set out across the plains in search of the Sioux. For a week they hunted in vain. Finally four scouts were sent out to look for the camp of the enemy, each of them taking a small charge of tobacco. Six days later the scouts returned. The tobacco had been favorably received, indicating that the Sioux were willing to talk with him. They sent word, however, that no other white man would escape with his scalp.

Father De Smet with his Indian guides started



at once for the rendezvous. Not far from the mouth of Powder River a band of five hundred warriors came to meet them. The priest had his standard of peace hoisted with the name of Jesus on one side and the image of Mary on the other. The Indians mistook it for the United States flag. The cavalcade halted, seemed to enter into consultation. Then four chiefs came forward at full speed and rode around the banner. Finally they came forward and shook hands with Father De Smet. The air resounded with shouts of joy. In Sitting Bull's camp five thousand warriors received the priest. By the penal code in force among the savages every native who had lost a member of his family at the hands of the whites was obliged to avenge himself on the first white man he met. Yet no hand was raised against the Jesuit. On July 2nd a great council was held, at which fifty thousand Indians were represented, a treaty was signed, and Father De Smet returned to St. Louis believing that peace was assured.

Two years later the United States had forgotten the debt it owed to this quiet, unassuming missionary from St. Louis. In 1870 the government determined to divide the various Indian agencies among the different religious denominations, but no attention was paid to the preference of the natives. Eight thousand Catholic Indians were pro-



vided with Protestant preachers. Father De Smet protested to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs who owed his success to De Smet's work among the Sioux, but the Commissioner failed to answer the letter. Then he wrote the Secretary of the Interior, but received no reply.

Meanwhile, Father De Smet's health was failing. As early as 1869 he had written to a friend: "Please pray much for me. I am fast going down the ladder. My right leg or foot is no longer able, when in bed, to scratch his companion. My right arm is benumbed. My teeth are no longer able to perform their masticating duties. My appetite is gone. My sight is going. In my slumber at night I can hardly catch a deep snooze, and then nightmares pay me their visits, and when I walk my underlimbs are shaking and staggering." Yet in almost every letter he still looked forward to new trips to the Indians. In 1872 he was having frequent hemorrhages, internal pains, and was unable to take any food but tea. His left eye became paralyzed and he lost the sight of it.

In the spring of 1873 cold rains and hail swept across the Mississippi Valley. Father De Smet was bedridden. On May 12th he wrote his last letter, and the following day his most intimate friend, Captain Joseph LaBarge, begged him to come and bless a new steamboat he had named *De*



*Smet* in the priest's honor. Scarcely able to walk he left his bed, took a carriage, and performed this last service to a friend. On May 23, 1873, he died. Although all his life he prayed to die and be buried among his natives in the Rocky Mountains, his body lies in the little graveyard of the Jesuit seminary at Florissant, Missouri.

Men and women in the East may ask, "Pierre Jean De Smet? And who was he?" In the West they remember only that a South Dakota town bears that name. But the many articles he wrote still rest neglected on dusty library shelves, and thirty-three bound volumes of manuscript letters lie hidden in the archives of St. Louis University. Many great men have lived and been forgotten, leaving no record behind them. Because Father De Smet did leave a rich and beautiful record of his life, perhaps some day he will be rediscovered and his tremendous importance in the development of the West will be recognized.

HELENE MAGARET



## The Supreme Court in Session

On November 28, 1838, Theodore S. Parvin wrote in his diary: "This afternoon the supreme court of the territory organized, with Judges Mason, Williams and Wilson present." The organic statute creating the Territory of Iowa had provided that "the judicial power of the said Territory shall be vested in a supreme court, district courts, probate courts, and in justices of peace" and stipulated that the Supreme Court was to hold an annual session at the seat of government. In accordance with this requirement, the Iowa legislature provided that "the first session of the supreme court of the Territory shall be held at the city of Burlington, on the twenty-eighth day of November one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight."

Consequently, on the designated day, Chief Justice Charles Mason, and Associate Justices Joseph Williams and Thomas Wilson assembled in Burlington. According to Theodore Parvin, the court met "in the parlor of the home of one of the pioneers, the good lady having put her house in order for the purpose." At this first meeting Thornton Bayless was appointed Clerk and Charles Weston was named Reporter.



The Territorial statute of November 28th provided that attorneys practicing in the district courts might be authorized to plead before the highest tribunal. And so, the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* on December 1st reported that twenty members of the bar had been admitted to practice before the Supreme Court. These lawyers were: William B. Conway, William H. Starr, W. Henry Starr, M. D. Browning, James W. Grimes, David Rorer, Stephen Whicher, G. W. Teas, Stephen Hempstead, Isaac Van Allen, J. B. Teas, S. C. Hastings, Philip Viele, T. S. Parvin, R. P. Lowe, Alfred Rich, J. W. Woods, B. Rush Petrikin, Irad C. Day, and Charles Weston. Besides this preliminary organization, no further business seems to have been transacted.

The first judiciary act was only a temporary measure for the purpose of effecting the organization of the court. On January 21, 1839, the Legislative Assembly enacted a statute definitely "fixing the terms of the Supreme and District Courts of the Territory of Iowa". As a result, the Supreme Court was authorized to meet at the seat of government "on the first Mondays in July and December".

Thus, on Thursday, July 4, 1839, the *Iowa Patriot* of Burlington briefly noted that "the Supreme Court of Iowa commenced its Session in this city



on Monday last. Hon. Charles Mason, C. J. and his associates, Hon. Jos. Williams and Hon. T. S. Wilson, presiding." W. J. A. Bradford was named Reporter because Charles Weston had become United States District Attorney. According to James W. Woods, a contemporary lawyer, Bradford was "a walking encyclopedia of law and had read everything."

The "first *business session*" of the Territorial Supreme Court was not a long one. According to the *Iowa Territorial Gazette*, there "were some 25 causes upon the calendar for argument most of which were not disposed of finally. Many of them were continued to the next term by consent, and otherwise." Consequently the session lasted only four days. Court adjourned on July 4th until the first Monday of the following December.

Bradford's report of the July session, published in 1840, and the later compilation (1847) by Eastin Morris (who was the successor of Bradford) contain only one decision — in the case of *Ralph*. However, the *Iowa Patriot* on July 11th discussed the litigation of the "*Town of Rockingham v. The County Commissioners of Dubuque County*." This case, it seems, was an action for a writ of mandamus ordering the county commissioners to enter into their minutes a record of the vote on August 6, 1838, for the seat of justice of



Scott County. Instead of granting the petition, the Supreme Court ordered an alternative mandamus "to make the record of the votes declared by the Sheriff according to the regulation of the statute, or to show cause if they have not, why they do not make it."

Far more important was the decision of the court in the case of Ralph. This action was so epoch-making that Associate Justice Wilson, when the case was first brought before him in the Dubuque district court, transferred the controversy to the Supreme Court. The two Burlington newspapers, aware of the significance of the decision, apparently competed for the opportunity to print the opinion of Chief Justice Mason. At least Editor Edwards of the *Patriot* bitterly complained that by "some species of locofocoism or favoritism it was placed in the hands of the Gazette editor, who no doubt felicitates himself in obtaining the first publication of this immensely important document."

The decision of the Iowa court in this momentous slavery dispute provided a precedent for Justice Benjamin R. Curtis's dissent in the Dred Scott case. The question was: did a negro slave become free by residing in free territory? Chief Justice Mason stated that, in the unanimous opinion of the court, since slaveowner Montgomery



had permitted Ralph to enter Iowa, the negro was not a fugitive and was therefore free because he was residing in a free Territory.

For thirteen years this opinion in the case of Ralph remained a precedent for the settlement of similar disputes. Not until 1852, did the Supreme Court of Missouri reverse this rule by declaring that Dred Scott did not gain his freedom by residing in a State where slavery had been excluded by the Missouri Compromise. In general, however, both public and judicial opinion clung to the doctrine that slavery was sectional and could not exist legally in free territory. Then, in 1857, the Supreme Court of the United States repudiated the established rule and destroyed the hope of limiting human bondage in America to the region designated in the Missouri Compromise. In spite of the vigorous dissent of two justices, the rule enunciated in the Ralph case was reversed until the question was finally settled by the constitutional abolition of slavery.

The *Iowa Patriot* commenting on the Ralph case had said: "This decision will doubtless secure the approbation of all who profess to be the friends of humanity and law throughout the country, and obtain for the Judiciary of the infant Territory of Iowa a name abroad, which could not, under other circumstances, have been gained."

JACK T. JOHNSON



## St. Raphael's Seminary

It was the summer of 1839 and the little mining town of Dubuque was bustling with raucous vigor. Steamboats were arriving and departing every few days. New residences and other buildings were going up, some of logs, others of frame, a few of stone or brick. Lead mining was flourishing. The taverns were full of travelers, the barrooms were crowded with laborers, mostly miners. Yet, in a year or two, John B. Newhall, the author of *Sketches of Iowa*, was to find this town possessing distinctive claims to culture.

Among the buildings being erected, was a large one of brick and native rock, near the little Dubuque stone cathedral. Its architect and building superintendent was the illustrious Dominican missionary, Father Samuel Charles Mazzuchelli. Its sponsor was Mathias Loras, the newly-arrived Catholic Bishop of Iowa. The building, while serving as the episcopal residence, was to house the diocesan seminary. What made the town of Dubuque a favorable center for a Catholic institution of higher learning was the fact that almost half of the three thousand Catholics in Iowa Territory lived in or near this mining settlement and



the prospects for more inhabitants were exceedingly bright.

Bishop Loras was an experienced college builder: in France he had erected the buildings at the Meximieux and L'Argentière seminaries and had served successively as president of both institutions, and in 1830 at Mobile, Alabama, he had built his third educational establishment, Spring Hill College, and been its first president. To his mother he had then written: "I see from my room, even from my desk, a joyous company of Negroes, naked to the waist, toiling bravely in the broiling heat of the summer sun, at a work whose importance they are far from realizing. What satisfaction it is to see the third seminary rise up before my eyes!" And now in 1839 Bishop Loras saw in Dubuque his fourth college rising before his eyes.

In January, 1838, the legislature of Wisconsin Territory, then in session at Burlington, established with a great flourish a number of academies in Iowa. The first of these to be authorized, on January 15th, was a seminary at Dubuque. Within four days, seven more seminaries and a manual labor college were created by legislative enactment! But most of them failed to materialize, and the few that were started soon perished.

The institution at Dubuque "for instruction of young persons of both sexes in science and litera-



ture" was organized in September, 1838, under the direction of Alonzo P. Phelps. This "seminary" was probably rather elementary and apparently short-lived.

Among the names of the seven incorporators of the Dubuque Seminary were those of two prominent Catholics of Dubuque, Patrick Quigley and Peter A. Lorimier, both of them friends and parishioners of Father Mazzuchelli. They were anxious to establish some local facilities for higher education, preferably under Catholic auspices. The opportunity came in the following spring with the arrival of Bishop Loras.

Thus ran the course of events: on April 19, 1839, Bishop Loras stepped from a steamboat into his tiny see city of Dubuque, "college minded", if ever a pioneer bishop was. His versatile vicar-general, Father Mazzuchelli, one of the most capable architects in the West, was fully as college minded as his bishop, and was prepared for any building venture. Equally college minded were the leading Catholics of Dubuque: Patrick Quigley and Peter Lorimier of the incorporators of the Dubuque Seminary, and Timothy Fanning, who was later added to the list of the original promoters of the seminary.

Of these, Patrick Quigley was the most enthusiastic. He had been a member of the Wisconsin



Territorial legislature which had chosen Father Mazzuchelli as its chaplain in 1836 and had helped to pass the enactments creating the Wisconsin University of Belmont (1836) and the Wisconsin University of Green Bay (1837), both of which never eventualized. He had seen the plans for higher institutions of learning in Iowa, which he had so zealously aided in 1838, sink into failure. A seminary at Dubuque was his hope. His four sons, Daniel O'Connell, Andrew Jackson, Michael, and John, after finishing Father Mazzuchelli's grammar school, should enter some advanced institution of learning. If public aid could not be procured, private assistance would have to be forthcoming. He, himself, donated the ground upon which the joint seminary and bishop's residence was to be erected.

With this generous gift of land from Patrick Quigley, with helpful donations of money from other sources, with native stone and brick found in the Dubuque quarries and kilns, and with the architectural talent of Father Mazzuchelli to serve him, Bishop Loras launched his first institution of higher learning in the vast Territory of Iowa. The work of construction went on during the late spring and summer of 1839. Quigley and his friends saw their dream of the long-hoped-for seminary of Dubuque evolve into the handsome



brick and stone structure of St. Raphael's Seminary, under the capable hands of the artistic Italian missionary. Funds came in from French, Austrian, and German mission societies, to buttress the rising walls of this diocesan college. On Saturdays and Sundays Father Mazzuchelli served his parish of Galena in Illinois across the Mississippi, but on Mondays was back in Dubuque again in his official capacity of superintendent of construction. By August 15, 1839, the building had advanced far enough to receive its roof. The combined two-story seminary and bishop's home measured forty by fifty feet. Most of the building was devoted to school purposes — class rooms and dormitory — and the basement was fitted up as a dining room and kitchen.

On the following ninth of September, Father Mazzuchelli wrote to Pope Gregory XVI, with whom he had been acquainted in Italy, that the establishment was about completed. "We have accomplished many things in the six months since the arrival of the Bishop," penned the young Dominican on the banks of the Mississippi to the grave, old Pontiff on the banks of the Tiber. "The Bishop has built here the Seminary, recommending to me, both as its architect and as superintendent of works, the greatest economy. We have lived in the meantime in a very wretched and extremely



small log house, having two rooms which served as study, as bed-room, as drawing room and as kitchen."

Father Mazzuchelli, at this time a fluent English conversationalist and orator, served only occasionally as a teacher and lecturer in St. Raphael's Seminary, from 1839 to 1843, and was useful principally to help the foreign college students, studying for the American priesthood, master the language of their adopted country. Of the other members of the original faculty it may be said that it is doubtful if in the Mississippi Valley in 1839 two other men could have been found to surpass them in teaching ability, educational leadership, and experience.

Mathias Loras was the founder and principal professor of the Dubuque college. Distinguished son of an old and aristocratic family of Lyons, France, he became the pronounced champion of American institutions in his sermons and writings. A cousin had preceded him to America to fight for freedom in a regiment under the Marquis de Lafayette during the Revolutionary War; an older brother had been a Bonapartist Republican and, while acting as a division commander's aide-de-camp in Spain, had lost his life there in the Peninsular War. On the other hand, his father and sixteen other members of the Loras family had



been guillotined because of their loyalty to the Faith and the *ancien régime*.

The Abbé Joseph Cretin, the third member of the teaching trio, was the son of a well-to-do bourgeois family of France; his uncle had been executed during the Revolution, and his mother had been imprisoned for a short while during that hectic period for concealing *émigré* priests in her home. Graduating with marked distinction from famed St. Sulpice at Paris, he later won his "Bachelier" in letters from the University of France. He taught for a short time at the Meximieux college and then for eleven years served as the teaching president of the "Pensionnat", the junior college for young men in Ferney — Ferney, that had been the home of Voltaire. The Abbé Cretin was president of St. Raphael's Seminary from 1839 to 1850, when he became the first Bishop of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Fortunate was the Dubuque college to have these distinguished educators as her founders and the nucleus of her faculty. And happy was she in her other instructors. J. J. E. Norman, Philadelphia born, acted both as a professor and as the organist in the Dubuque cathedral for several years. But the most dynamic of all the lay educators in the diocesan college in the forties was Dennis A. Mahony, who became an historic figure in



Iowa of the Civil War days. Educator, lawyer, legislator, he became notorious as editor of Iowa newspapers, and especially of the Dubuque *Herald* which he made an uncompromising foe of Lincoln. His bitter denunciation of the government and disloyal activities caused his imprisonment in 1862.

The student body of St. Raphael's, however, was of a strange quality entirely different from the calibre of the faculty. From his fruitful experience as president of Spring Hill College, Bishop Loras knew that in this new college on the Iowa frontier he could not expect an exclusive theological seminary as in France, nor a strictly maintained college as in the older and more settled sections of the country. He expected — and he was not disappointed — that his students would be of all ages, of all grades of education, a melange of theologians, seminarians, collegians, and high school students.

These students were, of course, not numerous in the earlier years. Very few of the advanced students were Americans; the greater number of these (three in 1839) came from abroad — from France, Germany, Ireland, and Luxembourg — to the Dubuque diocese to complete their theological courses before being ordained to the priesthood. The Americans formed the majority of the non-



clerical students, of the younger lads, and of those in the lower classes. In fact, two of these were aboriginal Americans — two Sioux youths from near Fort Snelling, whom Dr. Loras thought he might some day educate for the priesthood and use as missionaries among their savage kinfolk. They were also to teach the Sioux language to the seminarians who were preparing for the Indian missions. Their stay in the Dubuque school was not long enough even to leave their names behind, but it was sufficiently long to excite the interest of the competing Protestant missionary societies in the Minnesota country who closely studied the short-lived experiment. Of students of mixed Indian and white blood there were several at various times. Alexander Faribault and other sons of Jean Baptiste and Oliver Faribault — the founders of the Minnesota city that bears their name — were students at St. Raphael's Seminary. So was Napoleon Brisbois, the son of Joseph Brisbois of Prairie du Chien; and in 1847 his board and tuition at the diocesan school were paid out of Bishop Loras's own funds. Louis Latourelle was another with aboriginal American blood in his veins, for his mother was Charlotte Masello Latourelle, a half-breed Mdewakanton Sioux and prominent member of the Cathedral parish.



Among the youths from Dubuque were Hugh Treanor, Thomas and John Murphy, Dennis Langton, and the Quigley boys. Also educated at St. Raphael's was Daniel O'Regan, the first native-born Iowan to enter the Catholic priesthood.

That the discipline at the college among this wide variety of students must have been very lax at least occasionally is apparent from the explanation by the president, the Abbé Cretin, in 1844, to Bishop Loras, of the reason for the withdrawal of the Faribault sons: they had too much liberty at the Dubuque college; M. Faribault was sending his boys to the Jesuit college at St. Louis (now St. Louis University) where they would be under stricter surveillance.

A student who came to Dubuque from France in 1846, and who in later life recorded a few reminiscences of his college days, was Louis De Cailly. He wrote of St. Raphael's Seminary in the forties: "As to the daily food, which Dr. Loras took with his seminarians in the basement of the house, it was not princely, but of the poorest kind, and we anticipated at one time a great treat by the arrival on the first boat in spring of a barrel of molasses to spread on our daily bread. But alas! the bung having got out in the yard, when the Abbé Cretin perceived it, he requested us to gather from the sand the precious sweetness that was saturat-



ing the yard, and which, being filtered through an old flannel shirt, gave us for a whole winter some kind of consolation, such as it was."

The same correspondent, a grand-nephew of the Bishop, also related that Margaret, the college housekeeper, "had been expressly imported from Alsace, as being old and ugly, so as not to disturb the pious thoughts of the students. She literally filled the bill." De Cailly was inclined to believe that tradition, "because he heard the good bishop at High Mass, in presence of his students, tell the young ladies of the city never to go to the upper story of his house, because the students lived there. Oh, happy simplicity of the Father!"

Bishop Loras wanted to enlarge the seminary. In hope of making the school self-supporting, at least in part, he purchased a large tract of land a few miles south of Dubuque. Two buildings to serve as chapel and dormitory were erected in 1849. To Mount St. Bernard's College, as the new school on Table Mound was called, were transferred the students of St. Raphael's Seminary. By December, 1850, Bishop Loras reported that seventeen students were attending, and work on the main building was begun in 1851. His fifth college was rising before Bishop Loras's eyes!

M. M. HOFFMANN



## Iowa Anecdote

### *APPLIED NAMES*

Pioneers in the conquest of a new country are likely to be indifferent to the rules of etymology. They regard the names of persons and places as purely utilitarian devices of distinction. Neither derivation nor orthography receive much consideration. Usage is the principal criterion of propriety. A boy christened Alexander may be called Joe. Immigrants often Americanized their surnames by simplifying the spelling or dropping syllables.

Typical of the freedom characteristic of pioneer name-changing was the experience of John Skrable — immigrant, banker, and honored citizen of Tama County. Born in Austria-Hungary, he was christened Martin Skrabal. As Martin, he accompanied the family to America in 1855 and helped settle on a farm near the town of Redman in Tama County.

The Skrabals, being newcomers, knew little English. Martin knew none at all. Anxious to learn the language of the community, the boy went to school. Utterly bewildered, he sat through part of the first day listening hopefully, but with-



out comprehension, to the inexplicable jargon around him. He knew no English, and the teacher knew nothing else.

Noon recess brought relief. John Graham, five-year-old son of the founder of Redman, approached the strange boy.

"What is your name?" he asked.

Martin, not understanding, shrugged his shoulders and nodded in a friendly manner. Repetition of the the question brought no better results.

Little John Graham looked at his new playmate for a moment, and then said, "Well, I'll just call you John, too." And then he began "learning him American".

Years later, Martin Skrabal was still "John" to all his friends. He liked the name, and substituted it for his own. At the same time, common spelling of his surname caused him to change it to Skrable. And so, as John Skrable, he entered upon a successful business career in the neighborhood town of Elberon. As John Skrable he lived in his adopted country and in death he carried his adopted name to his grave.

WALTER E. KALOUPEK



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