The Palimpsest

NOVEMBER 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

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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Land of the Fire Makers

Worshippers of the sun and thunder were the warlike Mascoutens. French explorers were wont to call them the *Nation du Feu* or the "Fire Nation". Their Indian cousins, the Chippewa and the Foxes, were inclined to designate them as the "little prairie people". From the day when Champlain first heard of them in 1616 the Mascoutens were continually at war with their neighbors: in 1640 they fought the Iroquoian Neutrals; in 1712 they were almost annihilated by the Potawatomi at Detroit; by 1728 they had been driven across the Mississippi. The journals of such men as Radisson and Perrot, Hennepin and Marquette, all bear testimony to the courage and belligerent character of the Mascoutens.

It was while sojourning near the mouth of the Iowa River that the Mascoutens probably became identified with a low, flat, sandy tract of land containing nearly forty thousand acres known to-day as Muscatine Island. Returning to their old

homes on the Fox River in Wisconsin, the Mascoutens were last mentioned in the white man's annals in 1779. After this they mysteriously vanished from history: incessant warfare had so depleted their ranks that they were probably absorbed by stronger tribes, the Sauks and Foxes in the north and the Kickapoo in southern Illinois.

Although the "fire people" or "little prairie people" had disappeared, the early American explorers continued to associate their name with the region around present-day Muscatine. When Major Thomas Forsyth journeyed up the Mississippi in 1819, he pitched his camp at the "upper end of Grand Mascoutin" within the modern limits of Muscatine. The following year Stephen Watts Kearny passed "Prairie Island", which he reported to be ten miles long. In the spring of 1823, when Giacomo C. Beltrami ascended the Mississippi in the steamboat *Virginia,* he estimated that the head of "Grande Prairie Mascotin" was thirty-three miles above the mouth of the Iowa River. By 1836 Lieutenant Albert M. Lea was writing with easy familiarity of "Muscatine Slue" and the "swamps" of "Muscatine Island".

On December 7, 1836, Governor Henry Dodge approved a bill of the Wisconsin Territorial legislature dividing Demoine County into eight counties, one of which was named "Musquitine". The

same act provided that district court should be held "in the town of Bloomington, in the county of Musquitine, on the fourth Monday in April and September in each year." On January 18, 1838, the modern spelling of Muscatine was used when the present-day boundaries of Muscatine County were established.

A Muscatine editor asked Antoine Le Claire in 1852 for a definition of the word Muscatine. The swarthy French-Indian replied that Muscatine "is a sort of combination of an Indian and French word: mus-quo-ta, the Indian word, means 'prairie'; the French added the termination *tine* to mus-quo-ta, and the compound word musquo, or musquitine, means 'little prairie'. The Indian word menis means 'island', ashcota means 'fire', musquaw means 'red'. The Indians used to call the island Mus-quo-ta-menis, which means 'prairie island'."

Muscatine antiquarians preferred a more realistic interpretation, pointing out that "fire island" more nearly fitted the spectacular prairie fires that yearly swept the island. Muscatine — whether it means fire island, prairie island, makers of fire, or prairie people — should invoke a kaleidoscopic panorama of color and action in the mind of any one who knows the origin of the name.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

A Town of Many Names

When the steamboat *Red Rover* churned past the Grand Mascoutin Prairie on her way to Fort Armstrong in 1829, the passengers were "enraptured at the numerous and beautiful situations for dwelling houses" along the western shore. "Nature had done all — man nothing", Caleb Atwater recorded in his *Western Antiquities*. "Princes might dwell here, within a mile or two of each other, fronting the Mississippi and along it, and possess handsomer seats than any one of them can boast of in the old world."

Europeans lavished equally extravagant praise. Charles A. Murray, an English traveler and vitriolic critic of the mushroom settlements in the Black Hawk Purchase, was delighted with the land of the "Fire People" as he glided by on the steamboat *Heroine* in 1835. The Mississippi flowed in "one vast body unbroken by islands" along low-lying bluffs "clothed in all the majesty of the forest." According to Murray, "Autumn was here decked in all its glory, and in every variety of hue; the deep and solemn foliage of the nobler trees was relieved by the brilliant colours of the scarlet creeping-vines which were twined

round their mighty limbs, and hung in festoons forming natural bowers, wherein poets might dream, or dryads repose. Over all this enchanting scene, and over the wide expanse of water, the setting sun had cast his rosy mantle and bathed it in a flood of crimson light."

By June 1, 1833, the red man departed from the Black Hawk Purchase and the American pioneers came to stake out claims. During the summer Colonel George Davenport sent a Mr. Farnham and two assistants to establish a fur trading post at Sandstone Bluffs or Grindstone Bluffs, as the present site of Muscatine was then known. Farnham erected a two-room log cabin on the bank of the Mississippi at the foot of what is now Iowa Avenue. A prospector in 1834 declared Davenport's trading post was the only building in what is now Muscatine. Indeed, only two other cabins had been erected in Muscatine County that year: Benjamin Nye had located his claim at the mouth of Pine Creek, and Err Thornton erected his cabin on Muscatine Slough in Township Seventy-six.

Two settlements were made within the present limits of Muscatine in 1835. James W. Casey staked out a claim just below Davenport's trading post at the head of Muscatine Slough, intending to build a town called Newburg. He was the first actual settler in what is now Muscatine. Travel-

ers on the Mississippi knew his place as "Casey's Landing" or "Casey's Woodyard". In the fall of 1835 Lieutenant Albert M. Lea, who had laid out the town of Iowa at the mouth of Pine Creek, wrote the following account of "Kasey's" townsite. "The place possesses the advantages of an excellent landing, and of a fine back country; but the bluff, probably 200 feet high, approaches the river very abruptly, allowing little room for building below it, and rendering difficult the ascent to the level ground above. The contiguity of the swamps of the Muscatine Island and of Sturgeon Bay, will have a tendency to create much disease at this point. Notwithstanding these disadvantages, it must be a place of considerable trade; as it is the first place above Burlington, where a town can be built on the west bank of the Mississippi, thus leaving an interval between these two places of forty miles on the river."

A second settlement was made just above Casey's Landing. On February 20, 1836, Colonel John Vanatta and Captain Benjamin Clark bought George Davenport's trading post and claim for $200. Situated in the heart of present-day Muscatine, the claim was one-half mile square, extending along the river a quarter of a mile on each side of Davenport's trading-post cabin.

In May, 1836, Colonel Vanatta employed

Major William Gordon of Rock Island, a graduate of West Point and a civil engineer, to survey a town on their new claim, starting from the stick chimney at the west end of the 32-foot trading-post cabin. Measuring eighty rods southwest from that point, Gordon encroached about twenty feet on Casey's claim, but this conflict was later settled by arbitration according to the claim laws. In 1840 a second survey of the town was made by George Bumgardner, the Muscatine County surveyor.

Originally the proprietors planned to adopt Casey's paper-town name of Newburg but finally agreed on Bloomington, probably in honor of Colonel Vanatta's birthplace in Indiana. In August, 1836, John H. Foster and Suel Foster paid Captain Clark $500 for his remaining one-sixth interest in the townsite. About the same time Moses Couch, Charles H. Fish, T. M. Isett, Adam Funck, Robert C. Kinney, William St. John, G. H. Hight, and J. W. Neally bought claims. Meanwhile, the rivalry that had sprung up between Casey's Landing and Bloomington was cut short by the untimely death of Mr. Casey.

At the close of the tenth year of the corporate existence of Bloomington, on June 6, 1849, about two hundred citizens filed a petition with Richard Cadle, clerk of the district court, asking that the

name of the municipality be changed from Bloomington to Muscatine. Several reasons were given for the reform: the frequent miscarriage of mail to towns of the same name in Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois; the confusion between Burlington and Bloomington by postal authorities; and finally because the new name fitted "one of the most noted and conspicuous landmarks" on the Mississippi and was not duplicated anywhere else. The petition was granted by Judge James Grant on June 7, 1849.

The change from Bloomington to Muscatine met with almost universal satisfaction. "The name we now bear is the aboriginal one for this locality," declared the Bloomington *Democratic Enquirer* of June 9, 1849. "It means Fire Island and was applied to the large island just below the city. It is also the name of our large, rich and rapidly populating county. It has euphony and originality and is peculiar to ourselves, not being found anywhere else on the map of the world."

The *Muscatine Journal* of June 9th expressed similar gratification. "We are aware that it will take some time to familiarize every one with the new name — but we think one year will suffice to obliterate the name of Bloomington as associated with our town from the mind of almost every one. The truth is, the town should never have been

called by the name of Bloomington. There is a Bloomington in seven or eight of the States, we are confident, and in how many more we know not. Our citizens have been continually perplexed and disappointed at not receiving their letters and papers from abroad at the time they ought to reach here by due course of mail, and many important letters and documents have been given up for lost — when, lo! they would arrive here — marked 'Missent and forwarded'. Sometimes they would be forwarded from Bloomington, Indiana; sometimes from a town of the same name in Illinois — from the Bloomfields, the Burlingtons, the Bloomingdales, Bloomingtons, and every other town in the United States that was in 'Bloom'. This great source of difficulty is now, we trust, removed. Muscatine is an Indian name — there is nothing else like it that we know of in any other state. It is euphonious, easily remembered, easily spelt, and very appropriate. It is the name of our county, and we predict that Muscatine, Iowa, will yet make a figure in the world."

In the years that followed Muscatine was "easily remembered" for the picturesque charm associated with the name. The famous English statesman Richard Cobden was delighted as his steamboat approached Muscatine one bright summer afternoon in 1855. "When the boat came

around that point above, and the amphitheater of your town appeared in view, with the sight of those beautiful residences suspended by the high bluff above the river, I thought the picturesque Rhine had not the equal of that picture."

Just as Charles A. Murray reveled in the beauties of a Muscatine sunset, so Mark Twain recalled the remarkable benedictions at the close of day. "And I remember Muscatine — still more pleasantly — for its summer sunsets", he wrote years after he had left the town. "I have never seen any on either side of the ocean that equalled them. They used the broad smooth river as a canvas, and painted on it every imaginable dream of color, from the mottled daintiness and delicacies of the opal, all the way up, through cumulative intensities to blinding purple and crimson conflagrations which were enchanting to the eye but sharply tried it at the same time. All the Upper Mississippi region has these extraordinary sunsets as a familiar spectacle. It is the true sunset land. I am sure no other country can show so good a right to the name."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

The Wheels of Government

On November 16, 1838, Chauncey Swan, an energetic Dubuque lead miner, arose in the House of Representatives of the First Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa and moved "that a standing committee on incorporations" be appointed by Speaker William H. Wallace. The motion having been carried, Representative Swan was appointed chairman of the committee that included James W. Grimes of Des Moines County, George S. Bailey of Van Buren, S. C. Hastings of Muscatine, and Robert G. Roberts of Cedar County, who also represented Jones, Linn, and Johnson counties.

Two first class Iowa cities — Davenport and Muscatine — trace their civil beginnings to the work of this committee. Davenport was incorporated on January 25, 1839; Bloomington (now Muscatine) two days earlier. The movement to organize a municipal government for Bloomington probably began in the campaign for the election of members of the first Iowa Legislative Assembly. The little community had not adopted the simple form of town government provided by the Wisconsin Territorial legislature. As a member of the

committee on incorporations, S. C. Hastings was in an admirable position to see that his town obtained a special charter.

On Tuesday morning, December 18, 1838, Chauncey Swan reported from his committee a bill "to incorporate the town of Bloomington". After the holidays the bill was considered and passed without controversy. The Council discussed the proposed charter on January 16, 1839, and accepted it with an amendment to which the House readily agreed. Thereupon, on January 23rd, Governor Robert Lucas approved the act to incorporate the town of Bloomington.

The first section declared that "all that part or tract of land in township seventy-six north, and range two west, and township seventy-seven north, range two west, which has been surveyed and laid off into town lots for commercial purposes, in which is embraced the village of Bloomington, be and the same is hereby constituted a town corporate, and shall hereafter be known by the name or title of the 'Town of Bloomington'."

A president, a recorder, and three trustees, to be elected annually, constituted "a body corporate and politic" capable of holding property, appearing in court, and ordaining rules and regulations for governing the town. They could provide for the election of a treasurer, two assessors, a mar-

shal, "and other subordinate officers which may be thought necessary for the good government and well being of the town".

The method of holding elections was simple. According to the charter, the "free male inhabitants" having the "qualifications of electors" were "to meet at some convenient place, in said town of Bloomington, on the first Monday of May, and annually thereafter, and then and there proceed, by plurality of votes, to elect, by ballot," the officers named in the act of incorporation. Failure to hold the first election on the day designated would not dissolve the corporation.

In the first election two judges and a clerk were to be chosen *viva voce* by the electors present. At all subsequent elections the trustees, or any two of them, were to serve as judges while the recorder acted as clerk of the election. Polls were to be opened between the hours of nine and ten o'clock in the forenoon and close at five in the afternoon. This was almost twice as long as provided in the Davenport charter.

When the polls closed the votes were to be counted and the results proclaimed by one of the judges to the electors present. The clerk was required to make a "true record" of the vote and inform the successful candidates within five days after the election. The town council was to notify

citizens of all subsequent annual elections by posting up notices in three of the most conspicuous places in Bloomington at least five days before the election.

The duties of the town officials were not arduous. All had to take an oath or affirmation to support the constitution of the United States and the organic law of the Territory of Iowa. The president presided at the meetings of the town council; the recorder kept an "accurate record" of all proceedings; and the council consisting of the president and trustees made the ordinances, granted licenses, levied taxes, and made a semi-annual report of revenue and expenditures.

Some of the most important powers, however, were assigned to the voters themselves, in the traditional manner of New England towns. They determined the width of the sidewalks, regulated the improvement of lanes and alleys, and ordered the removal of "all nuisances and obstructions from the streets and commons". Moreover, the levy of all taxes had to be authorized by the electors "in legal meeting assembled", though the president and trustees were responsible for recommending the amount within a month after their election. The amount could not exceed one-half of one per cent of the "aggregate amount of real and personal estate" within the limits of the town.

If a citizen did not pay his taxes, the marshal could sell either personal or real property, but no real estate could be sold unless very elaborate notice of the tax levy and proposed sale had been given in one or two newspapers. Neither could property be taken for public use without fair compensation "ascertained by twelve disinterested freeholders, to be summoned by the marshal for that purpose".

Among the important functions of the pioneer community was the improvement of thoroughfares. The "streets, lanes, and alleys" of Bloomington were declared to constitute "one road district," including the several roads leading for one mile from the corporation limits, and a road "overseer" elected by the citizens was in charge. His position could be refilled by the president and trustees in case of "death, removal, or other inability". To promote the health, safety, and sobriety of Bloomington, provision was made for the abatement of nuisances and licensing retailers of ardent spirits. Proceeds from the liquor licenses were to be used for the benefit of the town.

The last section of the original charter of Bloomington declared that the act could be "altered, amended, or repealed" by the Territorial legislature. As amended on four subsequent occasions the charter was destined to serve as the

organic law of the town until 1851 when a new one was granted to Muscatine by the State legislature.

The first election of Bloomington officials was held at the home of Robert C. Kinney on Monday, May 6, 1839. John Marble served as clerk of the election and Moses Couch and Arthur Washburn acted as judges. The forty eligible voters cast their ballots for thirteen candidates selected from their ranks. Joseph Williams, Associate Justice of the Territorial Supreme Court, received thirty-eight of the forty votes cast for president. Arthur Washburn, Henry Reece, and B. P. Howland led a field of nine candidates for the office of trustees. Moses Couch was elected recorder with twenty-nine votes, and Giles Pettibone became the first overseer of the road district with the support of ten friends.

The town officials held their first meeting at the office of Arthur Washburn on May 10, 1839, when they were sworn in and qualified. On the following day they met at Washburn's office, only to adjourn for lack of a quorum. Five days later they appointed Moses Couch as treasurer, John Marble as marshal, Charles H. Fish as assessor, and John Reece as street overseer. Apparently Pettibone did not want the job.

The first ordinance, designed to preserve "good

order" in Bloomington, was adopted on May 28, 1839. The sale of "Spirituous liquors" without a license was declared unlawful. The fee for liquor licenses was fixed at $100 and a fine of $100 could be assessed for violating the liquor law. If the fine was not paid the goods and chattels of the violator could be appropriated and the money put in the town treasury. Drunkards were not allowed to "quarrel, fight or wrangle" in the town; the license of a liquor dispenser could be revoked if his establishment became the scene of such a brawl. This was the only ordinance adopted by the first Bloomington city council, and apparently very little public business was transacted because no taxes were levied to provide revenue for town improvements.

The growth of Bloomington is attested by the fact that eighty-two votes were cast at the courthouse on May 4, 1840. John Lilley was elected president and Henry Reece, Ralph P. Lowe, and John W. Richman were named trustees. Matthew Matthews was selected "street engineer" and Edward E. Fay recorder.

The year 1840 proved to be a very active one for the president and trustees. On May 15th the new officers were sworn in by retiring trustee Arthur Washburn. Four days later the council met at the post office and notified the citizens to

"assemble at the school room on Saturday evening next between the hours of 2 and 5 o'clock P. M. for the purpose of voting the amount of Corporation tax which shall be laid this current year." At the appointed time the town meeting "unanimously voted a tax of ¼%" on the personal and real estate within the corporation limits.

On May 26th the president and trustees appointed Suel Foster and Lyman C. Hine as assessors, Hiram Matthews as marshal, and D. I. Snyder as treasurer. Ralph P. Lowe then moved that a tax of ¼ per cent (two and one-half mills) be levied on all real and personal property. With the adoption of this motion the town officials were able to accomplish some of the functions for which Bloomington had been incorporated.

One of the most serious problems facing the trustees was that of liquor regulation. On May 26, 1840, Ralph P. Lowe's ordinance regulating "grocery" or liquor licenses was passed unanimously. In the following July, Henry Reece submitted another ordinance for the preservation of good order which declared that any person "who shall maliciously willfully or knowingly disturb the peace or quiet of any person or family or any congregation assembled for religious worship or any other laudable purpose within the limits of said town either in the day time or the hours of the

night, by offensive behavior, threatening, quarrelling, Swearing, challenging to fight or fighting within the limits of said town, Shall upon conviction thereof be fined" not less than $5 or more than $50.

The ordinance contained a number of other provisions. Any person guilty of "lewd vulgar or unbecoming language" or "exhibiting himself to public view in an indecent or vulgar manner" would be fined from $2 to $20. Citizens were prohibited from exhibiting a "stallion or Jackass" or "let the same to any mare in a public place within the limits of the town". Any person running a horse, mare, or gelding, or shooting off a gun or other firearm within the town limits could be fined as much as $5. Heavier penalties were inflicted on any one who assisted a criminal to escape. The ordinance provided that the fines could be collected by an action of debt before any magistrate in Bloomington. The need of such an ordinance is attested by the fact that as late as March 12, 1845, Recorder Thomas Crandall posted three written copies of it.

There were other problems with which bustling Bloomington had to cope. On July 7, 1840, an ordinance was passed regulating billiard tables and nine-pin alleys. Barton Ise appears to be the first affected by this ordinance: on September 26,

1840, he paid twenty-five dollars for permission to retail liquor and keep a billiard table. The annual tax for operating such amusement resorts could run as high as $50, which was rather more than some could afford, for on June 25, 1841, the council had to allow Jonas Clark time to collect funds to keep his nine-pin alley in operation. A month later the president and trustees passed an act prohibiting "nine pin rolling" between 10 P. M. and 4 A. M.

Still another ordinance regulated exhibitions and shows. On May 10, 1841, the trustees decreed that "any person wishing to exhibit any shows of animals, wax figures, or paintings or perform any feats such as circus riding, Rope and wire dancing, Slight of hand, or any exhibitions or performance of any kind whatever for charge or compensation" must receive a permit from the treasurer and pay not less than $3 or more than $20 for each exhibition. Failure to comply might draw a fine of not less than $10 nor more than $50.

One of the most vexing problems was the maintenance of streets and sidewalks. Like his fellow officer at Davenport, the Bloomington street overseer was confronted with many onerous duties for virtually no compensation. Hence the office was not a popular one. The first man elected apparently refused to serve, perhaps because he did not

expect any financial support. With revenue provided in 1840, however, the trustees adopted Overseer Matthew's plan for a culvert "over papose [Papoose] creek on second street" and asked for sealed bids. Later C. B. Leavitt was allowed $24.35 for timber and Osborn Mackobee $35.05 for labor on the Papoose Creek culvert. This culvert was frequently washed out and was the subject of continual expense. All citizens were required to work two days a year on the roads in the Bloomington district. When S. C. Hastings reported for road work with a hatchet, a sly citizen suggested that the dapper, loquacious attorney contribute a couple gallons of whiskey instead. Delighted with this opportunity, Hastings promptly settled for his road work in this manner.

The removal of stumps from Front Street and Second Street as well as from Iowa Avenue and Chestnut Street also presented a problem. Almost immediately after assuming office Ralph P. Lowe urged that the trustees contract for their removal but the bids submitted proved unacceptable. The trustees accordingly authorized the president on July 21, 1840, to "employ one or more hands" to dig stumps from Bloomington's wretched thoroughfares. Thereafter, scarcely a council meeting was held at which some citizen was not paid for pulling stumps; for example, George Grossman

was allowed $24.64 on December 21, 1840, for twenty-two days of such labor.

The civic consciousness of Bloomington was further reflected when Mr. Denison was employed on August 25, 1841, to establish the grades of the streets. John L. Lakin was appointed to remove the "nuisances" in Thomas M. Isett's cellar on Front Street. William St. John was given $5 for removing manure from the street in front of Lewis's stable. Thomas Mofford was allowed $1.50 on November 9, 1840, for "hauling a dead horse from the incorporation which has been left by a stranger." Even President John Lilley joined in the clean-up: on December 21, 1840, he was paid for hauling a dead ox from the street. In the following year Marshal Myron Ward received $1 for removing a dead wolf.

If the amount of taxes collected was small, the expenditures were equally niggardly. In 1840 Suel Foster received $19 and Lyman C. Hine $5 for assessing the corporation. The following year Edward E. Fay and Lyman C. Hine were paid at the rate of $2 per day for the fourteen and one half days they put in jointly as assessors. John Marble was allowed $10 for serving six months as marshal. E. E. Fay was granted $8 on November 9, 1840, for making a new tax book for 1840; he also received $10 for "writing out posting up recording

and copying Corporation ordinances up to this date." Six months later the trustees tardily allowed Moses Couch $7 for his services as recorder during 1839, while E. E. Fay was granted $15.00 as recorder in 1840. On March 23, 1841, the trustees purchased a plough from Joseph Bridgman for $35. Henry Reece was allowed $2 on May 25th for the pick axe he furnished the corporation. On the same day the trustees called a meeting of the citizens to consider the "propriety of purchasing Land for a Burying Ground."

Bloomington's increasing population is revealed by the 113 votes cast for town president on May 3, 1841. This was triple the number recorded in 1839; indeed, the 77 votes cast for Thomas Darlington surpassed the total number of Bloomington residents in 1839. John S. Lakin, Suel Foster, and Edward Ballard were elected trustees and Arthur Washburn was named recorder. During this administration William St. John served as street overseer, John W. Weller as treasurer, and John Marble as marshal.

Muscatine was also growing in civic enterprise. On May 15, 1841, the citizens unanimously voted to increase taxes from two and a half to five mills. Subsequently the council adopted as its temporary seal "the eagle of a dime impressed on paper of a diamond shape, lain on a wafer."

The need of maintaining an unobstructed levee was recognized on May 10, 1841, when an ordinance was adopted which demanded that Front Street and the wharf between Iowa Avenue and Pine Street must be kept clear of all obstructions "except goods to be shipped or unloaded" from steamboats. These could be left on the wharf no more than three days. The ordinance further provided that no boat, canoe, or raft should be permitted to obstruct steamboats at the wharf. Finally, log rafts could not be taken from the water to the wharf between Iowa and Pine streets.

Such were the problems facing the trustees of the "Town of Bloomington" a century ago. Great changes have transformed the pioneer community into the modern "City of Muscatine" with its four-mile river front, its municipally lighted streets and boulevards, its public parks and beautiful cemetaries. In 1939 the city occupied an area of 6.75 square miles and levied a tax of 13.485 mills for such public services as sewers, fire department, parks, garbage disposal, police protection, and the public library. A total of $124, 764.96 was collectible to operate the "Port City of Iowa" during the year 1939. Muscatine is still governed under a special charter.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Bloomington Comes of Age

Early in January of 1839 a traveler from Michigan jogged into the "much talked of" town of Bloomington, then better known as the "Town of Pinch 'em Slily". Despite the contemplated Cedar River Canal and the immense water power rushing by its door, Bloomington's prospects did not impress the Wolverine. "The famous town", he recorded, "is tastefully gotten up on a gentle acclivity bound in by lofty" bluffs on one side, "a stagnant pool and inundated swamp" on another, and encompassed by "some tilable lands", but mainly "consisting of broken fragments of hills and precipices, that look as if formed for pasturage and shaken to pieces by a fit of the ague before it got dry".

The traveler awoke the next day to watch numerous inhabitants go to the river to "obtain water from holes cut in the ice". With the rising sun he sallied forth, "and found some of the houses stuck up against the hills on high blocks like stilts, and others dug into the bluff, so as to place the one end entirely below the surface of the ground. The town includes a great deal of broken, irregular ground, many of the lots stand precisely on one

end, others *hang a little over*; — such are bought and sold, it is said, by *'perpendicular measure'*."

Although he had made glowing reports of other Iowa towns, the Wolverine found little to praise in Bloomington. "To attempt an enumeration of the improvements of the Bloomingtonians, would be rather an idle business", the dispeptic visitor wrote. "I will tell you, *not* what they *have,* but what they have *not* — They have no *Church,* no Prison, no Court-House; each of which are especially essential, if the people intend to serve their God, or the officers of justice their country. The absence of the first is justified on the ground of *no religion* — the latter on that of *no law,* which, in all these *sun-down* countries, means *no will to enforce it*. They have no printing establishment — no school house, or seminary — and no manufactories, save one for converting brick-dust and molasses into 'Sappington's pills,' an improvement invaluable in all ague countries."

In the three years since the town was surveyed in 1836, Bloomington had not prospered. When William Gordon arrived on September 28, 1836, he found William St. John, Giles and Jonathan Pettibone, J. Craig, John Champ, Norman Fullington, Moses Couch, Lyman C. Hine, Suel Foster, John Vanatta, James W. Casey, Adam Ogilvie, T. M. Isett, Mr. Norton and wife, and Robert C.

Kinney and wife already there. Gordon erected the first frame building, a structure measuring sixteen feet by thirty feet, containing three rooms below and three rooms above, which was used as a tavern by R. C. Kinney.

In 1837 Adam Ogilvie opened a log-cabin store on Front Street and Joseph Bridgman started in the dry goods business. A. O. and D. R. Warfield built the first sawmill on Mad Creek in the same year. William Gordon, Henry Reece, and H. H. Hine were employed in the carpenter trade. The Panic of 1837 probably stifled expansion, for the town contained only seventy-one inhabitants and thirty-three buildings when it was incorporated in 1839. Muscatine County had only 1218 inhabitants in 1838, increasing to a mere 1942 by 1840.

Failure to secure a newspaper was a factor in Bloomington's slow growth. True, James T. Campbell intended to publish the *Iowa Banner* at Bloomington in 1838. Unfortunately, however, Campbell died at Covington, Kentucky, on September 11th while on his way home to get a press. At last, on October 23, 1840, William Crum began printing the *Iowa Standard,* only to move his press to Iowa City in the following year.

Exactly four days after the birth of the *Iowa Standard,* the Bloomington *Herald* was born in a

wretched cabin no better than a stable. Editors John B. Russell and Thomas Hughes hoped their paper would meet a "hearty reception at the fireside of every farmer in the county" as they took up the cudgels for the "democracy of Muscatine".

On April 19, 1841, the *Herald* expressed delight over the "great increase" of building construction. "Quite a number of frames have already been raised, and in every direction, the heavy timbers for others are seen, ready for the square and chisel. Mechanics of all the building professions, we believe, find ready employment. While times are dull and money scarce, no place in the west offers greater inducements to young mechanics than this." The editor believed in "growing up" with a new community and prophesied that Bloomington would soon become a large commercial city. The town was already the depot for a large district capable of "sustaining a dense population." Wealthy farmers were leaving the "old states" and seeking the "better farms at cheaper rates" around Bloomington.

When the Burlington *Gazette* asserted that "several good buildings" were going up and suggested that Burlington was "outstripping" other river towns, the Bloomington *Herald* demurred. "Don't be too certain, Mr. Gazette — Bloomington is going ahead at a rapid rate", declared the

editor. "'*Several* good buildings have already gone up,' eh? That is not very definite, and if we were going to speak of our place in particular, we should say that *considerably upwards of several* have gone up, besides many that are nearly ready for raising."

Despite such enthusiasm the Bloomington *Herald* had serious financial difficulty. Subscription rates were $3 in advance or $4 at the end of the year. At the close of the first year the editors offered to share the hard times "equally" with patrons if they would promptly pay $6 for the two years. They had labored nearly a year without "dunning" and were in pressing need of a little money. On December 31, 1841, the editor promised to enlarge the paper if subscribers would pay up — otherwise let it die.

When thirteen-year-old John Mahin became a printer's devil on the Bloomington *Herald* in 1847 there were only two printers in the town. Mahin worked for his board and room — a humble beginning for a man who was to become one of Iowa's ablest journalists. In 1852 he took the editorship of the paper, which had assumed the name of Muscatine *Journal* in 1849. Orion Clemens purchased an interest in the firm in 1853 and Mark Twain joined the *Journal* staff for a short time that year. In 1855 the paper began daily

publication. John Mahin retained his interest in the *Journal* until 1903. In 1939 the Muscatine *Journal* had a circulation of 7648 and could count forty employees in a plant valued at $125,000.

The Mississippi River was a vital factor in the early growth of Bloomington. Many pioneers arrived by steamboat and the great bulk of their supplies came up the Mississippi. During the season of 1837 steamboats discharged freight and passengers at Bloomington until mid-December. When the steamboat *Dubuque* blew up a short distance below the town on August 14, 1837, William Gordon served as undertaker and was allowed $136 for making the rough coffins and burying the seventeen horribly scalded victims interred at Bloomington.

Beginning with 1840 such river news as the opening and closing of navigation, spring freshets and summer floods, low water, and high tariff rates were recorded in the weekly press. Thus, on February 26, 1841, the Bloomington *Herald* announced that the first steamboat had reached Keokuk from Saint Louis. The ice was already breaking up at Bloomington and the editor hoped the "puff" of the steamboat would soon be heard. By the middle of March the *Otter* had arrived, followed during the next two weeks by the *Agnes*, the *Chippewa*, the *Illinois*, the *Indian Queen*, the

Ione, the *Iowa*, the *Mermaid*, the *Nauvoo*, and the *Rapids*. The effect on trade was manifested on every hand: H. Musgrave alone received three tons of castings, including ovens, skillets, tea kettles, stew kettles, irons, lids, and miscellaneous equipment. On April 2, 1841, the *Herald* declared that heavy rains had caused the Mississippi to rise a foot a day. Boats continued to discharge heavy cargoes: the *Ariel, Brazil, Cicero, Demoine, Gipsy, Miami,* and *William Penn* being among the new craft that appeared during April.

The rivalry between Bloomington and Burlington is reflected in river comments. In May, 1841, a Burlington editor boasted of the "booming stage" of the Mississippi at that point. "Wonder what river runs by Burlington?" queried the Bloomington *Herald* sarcastically. "We have a very respectable river running by this place in that direction, but it has not been within six feet of high water mark this season." Three months later, on August 13th, the editor was still grumbling. "The river is so low at this place, that it is beneath our contempt."

Great anxiety was displayed over the closing of navigation. On November 19, 1841, the *Herald* expressed delight when the *Rapids* arrived with upwards of one hundred tons of freight. The editor believed all would be well if the weather re-

mained favorable for a fortnight. Two weeks later the dwindling stock of paper caused the editor to curtail the size of his sheet. Ruefully he lectured his subscribers: "The late cold weather has broken into the calculations of many who anticipated a continuance of navigation. . . . Since boats have ceased running, almost daily we see extra carriages, waggons, or sleighs carrying home those who have been caught out by the cold weather."

Steamboating was still important a century later: in 1938 approximately 5,000,000 bushels of Iowa corn and other grain were shipped from Muscatine to New Orleans on Federal Barge Line boats at the rate of four cents per 100 pounds. According to the Muscatine *Journal*: "Eating places, filling stations and other businesses profited from the influx of truckers. Higher grain prices put thousands of dollars into the pockets of farmers." One man brought corn from distant Odebolt and returned home with cottonseed meal.

Bloomington was slow to acquire adequate ferry service. In 1837 the district court granted Robert C. Kinney the right to operate a ferry "north of the old trading house". Moses Couch was awarded a similar license at a point close to Kinney's. On July 2, 1838, the county commissioners granted James W. Neally a Bloomington ferry li-

cense good for one year. The rates prescribed were: each footman, 25 cents; man and horse, 50 cents; wagon and two horses or yoke of oxen, $1.50; each additional horse, 25 cents; cattle, 25 cents; sheep and hogs, 6¼ cents. These first ferries were crude flat-bottomed skiffs propelled by poles and oars.

On December 14, 1838, the Territorial legislature granted Joseph Williams and Charles A. Warfield the right to establish a "horse or steam" ferry across the Mississippi at Muscatine. Their first ferry was the flatboat *Polly Keith* built in 1839 by D. C. Cloud and George Leffingwell. According to the Bloomington *Hearld* the *Polly Keith* was kept in "the Slough, with ropes to propel it, so that travellers coming to it can ferry themselves, their wagons and stock across without difficulty."

This service was so inadequate that the *Herald* on December 11, 1840, carried an open letter regarding the "approaching forfeiture" of the ferry privilege by Warfield and Williams who, it was prophesied, could not obtain a renewal unless in "open defiance of the unanimous will of our citizens". Since the ferry would soon become a "valuable privilege" the writer believed Bloomington should either be granted the charter or else a stock company of citizens should be organized. In answer to this plea the Territorial legislature passed

an act on December 29, 1840, authorizing the president and trustees to "establish and keep a ferry" across the Mississippi for "one mile above and one mile below" Bloomington. The town officials had "full and entire control" of the ferry and could lease it for any period not exceeding ten years on terms "most conducive to the welfare" of the municipality.

On April 23, 1841, the town recorder advertised in the *Herald* that the ferry lease would be let to any one furnishing a "good and sufficient" steamboat. Captain John Phillips was granted the ferry license when he provided the diminutive steam ferry *Iowa,* a vessel which was condemned and dismantled at the close of 1842. For the next two seasons Captain Phillips had to resort to a flatboat with oars. In 1845 a horse ferry was introduced by Brooks & Reece. It was not until July, 1855, that the steam ferry *Muscatine* was placed in service. With the opening of the high bridge in 1891 ferry service was discontinued.

A century ago the streets of Muscatine formed a quagmire after every heavy rain. In pleasant weather the progress of the pioneers was impeded by ruts, deep holes, and stumps. The country roads were frequently impassible in wet weather. Small wonder that frontier mail service was slow: swollen streams, muddy trails, and drifting snow

were hardly conducive to overland travel. Now, by contrast, half of Muscatine's eighty miles of streets are paved. The city can boast 56.20 miles of sewers — troublesome Papoose Creek is now a closed sewer. In addition there are sixty-one miles of water mains and sixty-two miles of permanent sidewalks. The county has shown equal progress: 116.8 miles of primary roads are maintained by State and Federal funds. Muscatine County has gravelled approximately one-half of her 630 miles of county roads.

Hemmed in by an ice-locked river during the winter and uncertain seasonal highways, the Bloomington pioneers awaited anxiously for news from friends beyond the eastern horizon. There was no post office in town until 1839. County histories declare that Mr. Stowell was the first postmaster appointed but that he left before his commission arrived. If so, this may explain the delay in establishing a post office. Records in Washington indicate that Levi Thornton was appointed first postmaster on December 6, 1839. A little later, it appears, Edward E. Fay became postmaster. When Fay died his brother, Pliny Fay, succeeded him on March 2, 1842, continuing in office to the close of Tyler's administration. Times have changed in the Muscatine mail service: in 1938 postal receipts totalled $93,234.20.

Postmaster Albert S. Barry received a salary of $3500 for directing the work of fifty-four postal employees.

Professional men were among the earliest pioneers in Bloomington. The first physician in Muscatine County was Dr. Ely Reynolds, an Indianian who laid out the town of Geneva in 1835. Dr. Reynolds liked good whisky and horse racing, was kind-hearted and reliable, but, although he practiced medicine fifty-six years, was never wealthy. When J. P. Walton arrived at Bloomington in 1838 he found Dr. Reynolds was the leading physician for Bloomington as well as the country around Geneva. One of the first physicians in Bloomington was Dr. McKee, a Philadelphia bachelor, who practiced on others "to their sorrow". Another physician, W. H. Blaydes of Kentucky, is said to have been a better pork packer than a doctor.

There were other men with better training. Dr. Benjamin Weed came to Bloomington from New England in October, 1839, to practice medicine in a log cabin on Second Street. George M. Reeder, William L. Smith, Benjamin S. Olds, and James Davis were all practicing medicine in Bloomington by 1841. The grim reaper was no respecter of homes in those days: in September Dr. Olds's four-year-old daughter died of congestive fever.

Patent medicines flourished in Bloomington — J. Lightner, Charles H. Fish, W. Hollingsworth, and J. S. Lakin all sold such drugs as Champion's Ague Pills and Sappington's Pills. Dentists were slow in putting in an appearance, the pioneers generally relying on doctors to pull their teeth. In 1838 there was but one turn-key for pulling teeth in Muscatine County and it belonged to Dr. Reynolds. In October, 1839, Dr. James Weed began the practice of dentistry in Bloomington. A century later, in 1939, there were twenty-four doctors, ten druggists, and sixteen dentists practicing in Muscatine.

The legal profession was represented by some distinguished characters. Joseph Williams arrived in the fall of 1838 to serve as a judge of the Territorial Supreme Court. He was also Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court in 1847-1848 and 1849–1855. His tenure was interrupted in 1848 by S. C. Hastings, whose judicial service in Muscatine began as justice of the peace with the trial of a man who stole $30 from a citizen and $3 from the court. The sentence was thirty-three lashes and banishment to Illinois — a penalty which was inflicted under the eye of the court and before a large crowd of people. The names of David C. Cloud, William G. Woodward, Stephen Whicher, A. J. Leffingwell, J. Scott Richman, and

Ralph P. Lowe are boldly written in Iowa as well as Bloomington annals.

Schools and churches were said to be lacking in the "Town of Pinch 'em Slily". But that was in January, 1839, when there were only a half dozen children in Bloomington. The first school was taught by J. A. Parvin in May, 1839. Classes were held in a small log cabin which Parvin rented for eight dollars. The salary of Muscatine's first school teacher was determined by the generosity and prosperity of parents.

During the next decade several private schools were established. In February, 1841, Suel Foster notified stockholders of the Bloomington Education Society to meet at the "School House" to consider the propriety of selling the school building. In the following September, J. Purinton informed citizens of his intention to start a school and continue it through the winter. His tuition rates were $3 for primary and $4 for the higher branches. Extra charges would be made for room rent and fuel. It was not until 1848 that the first concerted action was taken for public schools. In 1938 there were 124 teachers instructing 3550 students in Muscatine, besides 102 registered in the Junior College. The valuation of public school property was set at $1,078,000.

Bloomington manifested other cultural develop-

ments. On February 23, 1841, T. S. Parvin lectured to the Bloomington Literary Association on the "Objects and Advantages of Literary Associations". During the ensuing months the Literary Association listened to such men as Justice Joseph Williams, G. W. Humphreys, and Dr. Wm. H. Blaydes, the latter speaking on "Empyrecism".

When the Wolverine traveler visited Bloomington in 1839 he was astonished at the amount of drunkenness — the citizens were said to consume enough liquor annually to "float the whole town". By 1841 leading citizens had formed the Bloomington Temperance Society. N. W. Goodrich, J. A. Parvin, S. C. Hastings, and Rev. John Stocker spoke at the spring meetings. The "friends, foes, and neutrals" were "*all* invited" to attend the September temperance meeting to hear Robert Lucas and Dr. Law speak.

In the fall of 1837, the Methodists heard the Reverend Norris Hobert preach at Bloomington. About this time Barton H. Cartwright held services in the barroom of the Iowa House, Bloomington's first hotel. In July, 1839, the first Methodist class was formed. On October 3, 1840, the first recorded Quarterly Meeting was held with such men as Joseph Williams, J. A. Parvin, George Bumgardner, and Charles A. Warfield attending. During the same year the Methodists

and the Presbyterians began to use alternately a house for school and religious purposes. The Presbyterians had been organized on July 6, 1839, by the Reverend John Plank of the American Home Missionary Society.

The Episcopalians organized a church in 1839, the Baptists in 1841, and the Congregationalists in 1843. The Catholics performed their first rituals in a frame house constructed at Prairie du Chien and floated down the Mississippi. Church meetings were frequently recorded in the newspapers. Thus, on November 19, 1841, the Bloomington *Herald* announced that religious services would precede a "downeast" Thanksgiving to be held in the school room on Thursday.

In the years that followed, Bloomington had much to be thankful for: a rich soil, healthful climate, and homogeneous people have been important factors in causing the population to expand from about 1600 in 1846 to 16,778 in 1930. Muscatine still has her sash and door mills, reminiscent of lumbering days. Muscatine still employs almost four thousand pearl button workers, an industry that sprang up in the "Pearl City" in 1891. Muscatine still dwells in the sunset land, enjoying the rich educational, religious, and cultural heritage handed down by the pioneers of yesteryears.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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