

# The PALIMPSEST

SEPTEMBER 1939

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY  
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA  
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912



### 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.

PRICE—10c per copy: \$1 per year: free to members of Society

ADDRESS—The State Historical Society      Iowa City Iowa



# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. XX

ISSUED IN SEPTEMBER 1939

NO. 9

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## Public School Beginnings

In the evolution of local government, visions and realities are frequently at wide variance: things are not what they seem. The statute laws alone are not a reliable guide to the history of the growth of local institutions, for many political customs are not incorporated in formal legislation. Paradoxical as it may seem, the real social, religious, and educational usages of the early settlers were not always recorded in the statute books, and many of the institutions described in the statutes never came into being.

The pioneers of Iowa needed homestead protection; and presto, they organized claim associations and provided homestead regulations in each neighborhood. They needed roads, and built them without benefit of authority or engineers. When a crime was committed, the community administered such punishment as seemed just and wise. In the field of education, this mode of development was particularly prevalent. Private



schools were established before a public system was provided.

Yet the foundations of the public support of education were laid long before the first settlers came to Iowa. The Land Ordinance of 1785 stipulated that the sixteenth section in each township of the government-surveyed lands should be reserved "for the maintenance of public schools, within the said township." Two years later the Ordinance of 1787 declared that "Religion, morality and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." Though the national government did not assume the function of education, a means of support was provided for local use and an obligation imposed to give every child an opportunity to obtain an elementary education.

Between 1827 and 1833 the Territory of Michigan, to which Iowa was later attached, provided for the organization of school districts, the employment of teachers, the levy of taxes for the erection of school buildings, and for "school trustees" to take care of school lands. These early laws apparently remained in effect while the Iowa country was included in Michigan and Wisconsin Territories (1834-1838) and even after the Territory of Iowa was established. Most of the



provisions, however, were not well adapted to conditions in Iowa, and so were not utilized for the establishment of the first schools. Nevertheless, as the government surveys progressed, the land granted by the United States for the support of public education had to be selected. For example, in December, 1839, the Federal land office at Dubuque published a notice in the *Iowa News* for school committees and trustees to select school lands and cautioned them to choose "good lands, as required by law".

Meanwhile, schools had been established, but they were private, neighborhood schools, not supported by land or taxes. The teacher usually "boarded round" and received his meager pay from the parents of the pupils. Like Berryman Jennings, who taught the first school in 1830, early schoolmasters incidentally instructed the children of a community while preparing themselves to practice medicine or law. A little later in the larger towns a few professional teachers opened private schools that were supported by tuition. These were usually at the residence of the teacher or in rented rooms, but in the villages and rural settlements a schoolhouse was commonly provided by the community. The pioneer schoolhouses were usually constructed of logs and equipped with only the rudest kind of furniture.



The building was erected and paid for not by means of local taxation, but by the coöperative efforts of interested neighbors.

Thomas H. Macbride described a typical establishment of a pioneer school in his book *In Cabins and Sod-Houses*. One Sunday after church Father Blew spoke to the men of the congregation about "a matter of great importance to the whole community."

"Friends and neighbors," he began, "I have as you know no children of my own, but I notice that all — or most all — of you are men of family; this is a most salubrious climate and God has given us many children. They are like prairie-chickens in a buckwheat patch in fall; and yet so far they are learning nothing. They are ignorant children. They know nothing except the wild freedom of these great meadows and the skill for the little daily tasks which you assign them. How shall these children become citizens of the great Republic unless they learn to know its history and can read its law? We must have a school. All of you who are in favor of a school for this community raise your hands!" Every hand went up, except that of Peter Mitchell, but he was deaf.

The next problem was to provide a schoolhouse. One of the neighbors donated a site, another furnished stone for the foundation, and all aided in



bringing logs to the site. On the following Saturday there was "a raising-bee", and by night a new log schoolhouse stood on the prairie.

Such a school was not the product of legislation. Schoolhouses were built and teachers hired according to the initiative of each community. Many settlements afforded no opportunities for elementary education. There were no public schools created by law, supported by taxation, and open to all children. Governor Robert Lucas perceived the need for stimulating a greater interest in education. In his first message to the Legislative Assembly in November, 1838, he advocated most emphatically the establishment of "a well digested system of common schools".

In accordance with the will of the Governor, the First Legislative Assembly promptly authorized the creation of public schools. This enactment was approved by the Governor on New Year's Day, 1839. It declared that there should be established in each county a common school or schools, which should "be open and free for every class of white citizens between the ages of four and twenty-one years". The county board was directed to form districts when petitioned to do so by a majority of the voters residing within a proposed district. Three trustees, a clerk, a treasurer, an assessor, and a collector were to be elected at



an annual meeting of the voters of the district. The annual meeting was also responsible for building a schoolhouse and levying a school tax.

Upon the trustees devolved the duties of superintending the district school, examining and hiring the teacher, leasing the land belonging to the district, and reporting the number of children in the district, the number sent to school, the "actual time" the school was in session, and the "probable expense of the same". The tax "to do all and every thing necessary to the establishment and support of schools" could not exceed five mills on the assessed value of the property in the district, or more than ten dollars a year for any one person, payable "either in cash, or good merchantable produce at cash price".

This legislation seemed to provide sufficient authority and means to develop a system of free public schools. Indeed, Governor Lucas expressed the opinion that the law "might appear to be in advance of the times". Perhaps it was. Few communities took advantage of the act. Edward Langworthy "as one of three school trustees was engaged in organizing our district schools" at Dubuque in 1839. No record of the establishment of similar public schools in other towns has been found, but two rural areas in Lee County, congressional townships seventy-six in



ranges five and six, were organized as school districts in February, 1840. Action in forming public school districts was probably retarded because the counties had not yet been subdivided into civil townships.

Whatever the reasons may have been, the first public school act did not result in much expansion of educational facilities. Even the legislators who made the law were skeptical of its efficacy. Two days after its approval by the Governor, the House of Representatives authorized the appointment of a special committee to study school legislation. Information was to be collected through correspondence with the Governors of the several States, as well as with presidents of colleges throughout the United States. The committee was instructed to consult with "literary gentlemen and others conversant with the subject" in order that full information might be presented at the next session of the Legislative Assembly.

Members appointed to this first Iowa School Commission were "the Governor and Secretary of the Territory, Charles Mason, Joseph Williams, T. S. Wilson, W. W. Chapman, and P. H. Engle, with the honorable J. B. Browne, President of the Council, and W. H. Wallace, Speaker of the House of Representatives". There is no evidence that this committee, as such, ever made a formal



report. But Governor Lucas as chairman of the committee seems to have studied carefully the existing laws on the subject. In his second annual message he declared that "the act passed at the last session, is too limited in its provisions to serve as a foundation for a well regulated system." Accordingly, he recommended a revision of the school law based upon the laws of Michigan, from which, he said, "much useful information may be obtained".

Acting in accordance with the Governor's recommendation the Legislative Assembly by an act approved on January 16, 1840, adopted the Michigan school law section for section. However desirable this legislation may have been in Michigan, it was not well adapted to frontier conditions in Iowa. Some provisions were far more elaborate than necessary. Moreover, the governmental structure of a State did not correspond to that of a Territory. For example, certain reports were to be filed with the "superintendent of public instruction", notwithstanding the fact that there was, at that time, no such officer in Iowa. Thus, if the law of 1839 was, as Governor Lucas had feared, ahead of the times, the act of 1840 was even more premature. It was designed for a complete educational system in a State with a relatively stable population.



Whereas, the first school law contemplated districts no smaller than a congressional township, for that was the smallest area that would have any school lands to lease, the act of 1840 authorized the division of townships into as many districts as necessary. Moreover, the new law made the township instead of the county responsible for creating school districts and further associated school and township government by providing for the election of three school inspectors in each township. Fortunately, a week before the school law was approved, the legislature had authorized the establishment of civil townships. The school inspectors were responsible for establishing the school districts, apportioning school funds among the districts, examining the "moral character, learning and ability" of teachers, and visiting the schools twice a year for the purpose of examining the pupils and advising the teachers.

Important policies were decided by the voters of the district at the annual meeting. They determined the location of the schoolhouse and authorized taxes to pay for it — though not more than \$500 a year. They could also levy taxes to repair the schoolhouse, to buy a bookcase and not more than ten dollars worth of books a year, and to raise as much as ninety dollars a year to pay the teacher if money apportioned to the district by the



county and township was insufficient for the salary promised. Parents were charged with the cost of supplying fuel in proportion to the number of children sent to school and the length of time they attended. The annual meeting also decided how long school should "be kept", though a minimum of three months was fixed by law.

The schools were under the direct supervision of a moderator, an assessor, and a director who constituted the district school board. They were elected by the voters at the annual meeting. Each had specific duties. The moderator acted as chairman of district meetings and signed all warrants for the payment of bills. The assessor listed the property subject to school taxation, posted the amount due from each person, and collected the taxes. The director hired the teacher with the advice of the moderator and assessor, took an annual census of the children of school age in the district, listed the number who attended school, kept the schoolhouse in repair, and made an annual report to the township school inspectors. Together the moderator, assessor, and director acted as a board to perform the functions authorized at the annual meeting, such as raising funds by taxation, buying a schoolhouse site, and building the schoolhouse.

Although this elaborate plan may have been far beyond the needs of pioneer Iowa, it did provide



an effective means of establishing public schools. As Governor Lucas explained to T. S. Parvin, he was anxious to "start out right and build up a good system as fast as the population and wealth of the territory would warrant." William Reynolds, the first Iowa Superintendent of Public Instruction, reported in December, 1841, that the progress under the new law was "highly gratifying" to those interested in education. "The flood of emigrants that is so rapidly settling our territory", he said, "seems to bring with it the right spirit, and there are very few neighborhoods where there are a dozen or twenty children that can be collected, in which there is not a school, and if it is not the best kind it is the best they can get, and consequently creditable to them."

As soon as civil townships were organized school inspectors were duly elected. The development of public education thus depended upon the local demand for township government. Within two years school inspectors had been elected in nine Des Moines County townships. Van Buren County complied with the law and the inspectors had established school districts in several townships. Four townships in Lee County reported to the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1841. There was "no want of zeal" in Louisa County; while public school districts ap-



pear to have been organized in the larger towns of Dubuque, Bloomington, Burlington, Fort Madison, and Mount Pleasant. No doubt there were many school districts which were not reported to the Territorial Superintendent.

It is to be noted, however, that taxes for school purposes were still very meager. In Denmark Township, Lee County, there were five school districts. District Number One, which contained forty-five persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years, had voted to have school "four months during the summer and three during the winter", and had "voted a tax of \$103.21," of which \$90 was "for the support of schools, the balance for library purposes". Districts Number Two and Three made no report. In District Number Four sixty persons were of school age. There a tax of \$70 had been authorized "to defray the expense of building a school-house, and \$5.00 for library purposes". In District Number Five there were twenty-six persons of school age, but no reference was made to taxation.

A school district in Washington Township, Lee County, in which there were twenty-six persons of school age, had maintained a school for three months, and had "raised \$18 for support of schools". Another district in which there were eighteen persons of school age had "kept a school



three months", and had "raised \$15 for support of schools and \$5 for library purposes".

Notwithstanding these humble beginnings, the Superintendent was hopeful. He said there was a "natural repugnance against taxation" — inherited perhaps from our forefathers. Citizens, he declared, would pay five dollars for any other purpose rather than one in taxes. Nevertheless, taxes spent for school purposes would not "make us a whit poorer. It would be but putting our money out of our hands into our pockets for safer keeping", and he advocated the creation of a permanent school fund.

Nor were the Superintendent's hopes in vain. In September, 1841, Congress granted to each State in the Union, and to each State that should later enter the Union, 500,000 acres of public lands for "internal improvements". According to the Constitution of 1846 Iowa's share of this grant was appropriated "to the support of common schools throughout the State". Meanwhile, in 1845, Congress, in accordance with the Ordinance of 1785, had specifically ordered that section sixteen in each township in Iowa should be devoted to school purposes. These resources, however, were insufficient to support the schools. Some money was raised by taxation, but families directly benefited customarily aided in paying the



teacher as they did in supplying fuel. In 1853 this practice was legalized by adding a "rate bill" to the Iowa law, whereby parents were required to contribute to the cost of instruction in proportion to the number of children sent to school and the length of attendance. From that time forth the support of public schools was securely established.

With the passage of the century, while educational practice and school legislation have developed apace, the gap that once existed between the theoretical and the actual in school facilities is now virtually closed. For many years Iowa has ranked first among the States in literacy, a tribute to pioneer support of common schools open to every class of people.

J. A. SWISHER



## The Bloomers in Iowa

She stood at the back parlor entrance, a gracious old lady of seventy-two. Placid in black satin with its grey damascene front and frill of lace at the throat, Amelia Bloomer greeted Council Bluffs neighbors come to her Golden Wedding reception. Close by, her husband accepted congratulations. For thirty-five years the couple had occupied the same residence. Friends, calling on this afternoon of April 15, 1890, had almost forgotten their hostess as a militant female reformer who gave her name to a costume she did not originate. Rather, they thought of her as they had known her — “a dignified, serene-faced little woman,” walking on the grassy terrace near her home, plying her needle in the sunny nook of her bay window, and taking prizes for the best currant jam at the county fair.

The Bloomers had come to Iowa in 1855 in order that Dexter Chamberlain Bloomer might further himself as a frontier lawyer and editor. They were a part of that great sweep of people who, caught by the promise of Iowa's fertile prairie land, brought security and settlement to the Hawkeye State. As a river packet carried them



from St. Louis to St. Joseph they must have been astonished at the magnitude of the western country. Perhaps, as the yellow Missouri unfolded new vistas, their thoughts turned back to their marriage in Seneca Falls on April 15, 1840, when Bloomer was the struggling editor of a Whig newspaper and Amelia Jenks was publishing the *Lily*, a ladies' journal devoted to temperance and literature. No doubt they reviewed wistfully their home in Mount Vernon, Ohio, where they moved in 1853 to edit the *Western Home Visitor*.

It may be that Mrs. Bloomer recalled the satirical reception given by coarse male commentators to the novel costume she sponsored in 1851, and was still wearing. A contributor of *Yankee Notions*, however, recommended the new fashion of knee-length skirt over Turkish pantaloons.

For who would hear the scoffs and jeers of boys,  
The old maid's scandal, and the young men's snigger.

Or she might have found comfort in an endorsement published by *The Carpet-Bag*:

The maids were very beautiful,  
With ebon locks and tresses,  
But what so much enhanced their charms,  
Were those short Bloomer dresses.

Even the dour *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* said kindly, "If the question is between the present



skirts and Bloomerism, then we are Bloomerites," and *Bentley's Miscellany* was not too severe.

Down the swaying gangplank at St. Joseph, the travelers moved with their carpet-bags and valises. To their dismay they found that the regular stage for Council Bluffs had left only a short time previously. For two days they lodged at a "very ordinary" hotel. "The waiting was long and tedious", wrote Bloomer years later. "We could not even walk about and view the city because of a high wind which prevailed and blew the dust in clouds into our faces." Finally, they pushed themselves into a lurching stage. Among their fellow passengers was Kit Carson, resplendent in fringed buckskins. Toward dusk of the second day, April 15, 1855, the coach pulled to a halt in front of the Pacific Hotel in Council Bluffs. There was the legendary back-of-beyond come to reality.

What a contrast between that frontier community of two or three thousand inhabitants and the orderly villages of Ohio. In Iowa, observed Bloomer, the buildings were mostly of logs. Sidewalks were lacking and some streets were but beaten paths through fields of sunflowers. The city lay about three miles from the river, added Mrs. Bloomer. She noticed that from the Missouri the land sloped upward until it reached a



chain of high hills. "Among these bluffs", she continued, "are numerous beautiful valleys, some of them sufficiently extensive for large farms, and through which clear and pellucid streams of water flow gurgling down to join the mighty Missouri".

Within a few days Amelia Bloomer found a new house located on Bancroft Street, not far from Willow Avenue. From Bancroft to the river not a single structure obscured her view. As she unpacked her cherished dishes, hung curtains, and set out shrubs and fruit grafts brought from the East, she heard the noises of progress. Several brick and frame houses were going up. A three-story hotel was being rushed to completion in order to catch immigrant trade. Private residences and the United States land office were under construction. She saw gardens being fenced, "trees planted, streets opened and graded, and every preparation made for accommodating the population." Indians camped near her home; daily stages brought news and frontiersmen from south and east; settlers and speculators crowded the land office. Already land within a few miles of Council Bluffs was selling for as much as ten dollars an acre. Shouts from saloons rang in her ears, and she saw games of chance openly played along the streets.

The Bloomers entered into this bustling life



with zest. For a few years the activities of Mr. Bloomer eclipsed those of his wife, though she almost persuaded the Nebraska legislature to adopt woman suffrage in January, 1856. Within a short time citizens knew him as a competent attorney in partnership with W. H. Kinsman. These two molders of local opinion maintained offices in the old Empire Block, opposite the Pacific House. Frequently, the *Nonpareil* advertised their business. Bloomer and Kinsman became known as agents for five eastern insurance companies; they were selecting and entering land in both Iowa and Nebraska; and were giving "particular attention to the Collection of Debts". The firm also was purchasing land warrants and city property, as well as buying and selling improved farms and wild lands. In 1861, Bloomer was named Receiver of the United States Land Office and continued to occupy that position until the Council Bluffs office was closed in 1872.

But D. C. Bloomer exploited other than business interests. He felt a passionate regard for education and the training of the young. In this he was tutored by his wife who, throughout her early years, displayed marked interest in public schooling. In 1861, Bloomer proudly announced his election as president of the board of trustees of the Council Bluffs Female Seminary. When the



annual Teachers' Institute met in January, he lectured on progress. It was, acknowledged the *Nonpareil*, "one of the best addresses ever delivered before a Council Bluffs audience."

When an attempt was made to alter the school laws of the State by abolishing township districts and creating independent school districts, Bloomer vehemently opposed the change. "Let our present school system continue in force," he exclaimed, "and it will cover our State all over with benefits and blessings, and our beautiful Iowa will become as noted for the excellence of its common school system, as it is now for its fertility and salubrity." In 1870, after he had served as president of the school board several times, Bloomer wrote enthusiastically that "no money pays so well in the end, as that which is spent in the education of the rising generation! . . . Our schools should therefore be sustained, enlarged, and improved until the invaluable blessings of education are secured to every child within our city." A grade school was named in his honor. But his concern for education extended beyond his interest in the schools of Council Bluffs. He also gave his time and energy to various philanthropic enterprises. For example, his labors were instrumental in securing donations for Iowa's orphans' home. In 1866, he helped establish the



Young Men's Library Association, the precursor of the Council Bluffs Public Library.

A dramatic interlude in the placid life of Council Bluffs was occasioned by the firing upon Fort Sumter. When chattering telegraph keys brought the news of secession, citizens responded with zeal. No sooner had Company B of the Fourth Iowa Volunteer Infantry been recruited than Amelia Bloomer organized the Soldiers' Aid Society. Her committee, meeting in the Bloomer residence, as it so frequently did, stitched a large silk flag. And on the pleasant afternoon of August 9, 1861, the troop was drawn up in parade formation to receive the colors from Mrs. Bloomer.

"You are now going forth to sustain and defend the Constitution", she told Captain Craig's command, "against an unjust and monstrous rebellion, fermented and carried on by wicked and ambitious men who have for their object the overthrow of the best government the world has ever seen. To this noble cause we dedicate this flag."

The volunteers, commented the local press, listened with deep emotion, and "many a brawny breast heaved, and tears trickled down many a manly face." Then Lieutenant W. H. Kinsman, responding in behalf of his captain, accepted the flag in words which seemed moderate as com-



pared with those of Mrs. Bloomer. The company, he began quietly, was not imbued with the spirit of revenge, nor was it motivated by vindictive malice against the South. Rather, it was taking the field to "preserve inviolate the institution for which our fathers fought". He had no doubt that "the members of our company are as brave a band as the sun ever shone upon, and under their rough shirts beat hearts as true and loyal as ever throbbed beneath the tattered garments of our fathers at Valley Forge." A crash of drums and the saucy "Yankee Doodle" echoed over the parade grounds as the command passed in review. Within a few minutes Mrs. Bloomer and her ladies heard cheers in their behalf. Truly, it was an exciting occasion!

By September, 1861, the Soldiers' Aid Society, working diligently, had put up 122 havelocks, 174 towels, and twelve needle books fitted with thread, needles, buttons, pins, and tape. A month later, twenty bed sacks, fifty pillow sacks, fourteen cotton and feather pillows, and many pillow cases were packed carefully in the Bloomer parlor and shipped to Rollo, Missouri, where Company B was encamped.

D. C. Bloomer, not to be outdone by the war activities of his energetic wife, opened his office as a recruiting station, and served as chairman of the



Committee in Charge of Donations to Soldiers' Families. Over a thousand dollars in cash was collected, as well as stove wood and groceries. Almost a hundred families were cared for during the fall and winter. Bloomer's committee, as well as the Soldiers' Aid Society, supported the activities of both the Christian Commission and the United States Sanitary Commission. So interested, indeed, was Mrs. Bloomer that she attended the great Northwest Sanitary Fair held in Chicago in June, 1865. She exclaimed over the booths and exhibits, and declared boastfully that Iowa made "a very creditable appearance in fancy articles and curiosities."

After the war, when the colors were furled for the last time, Bloomer continued his interest in the veterans. He advertised that he was prepared to collect promptly "all arrearages of bounty, pay or pension." The *Nonpareil* referred to him as a reliable claim agent and suggested that veterans entitled to bounty could do no better than be served by Bloomer. There was little need for this plaudit, for soldiers had known Bloomer for years. When in the field they frequently expressed to him large sums of money, drawn from their pay, for him to turn over to their families. In June, 1865, for example, Bloomer received \$1700 from men of the Twenty-ninth regiment.



And they remembered him as the individual who planned a huge homecoming reception.

The Bloomers, indeed, loved to organize community affairs. For years they played a major rôle in planning the typically American Fourth of July celebrations. In 1861, quite in keeping with the times, Bloomer proposed that the festival be designated as a "Union Celebration". His proposal was accepted. Four years later, as chairman of the day, Bloomer staged an elaborate program. A daylight gun marked its beginning, and it closed late that night with a dinner burdened not only with food but also with innumerable toasts and responses. A parade with military bands, the glee club, citizens on foot, on horseback, and in carriages, and returned soldiers occupied the forenoon. Music, group singing, and speeches delighted afternoon crowds. So successful, indeed, was the fete that citizens requested Bloomer to serve again the following year. In addition, he agreed to deliver the oration of the day.

While her husband was thus engaged in patriotic affairs, Amelia, not forgetting her early reform interests, took the lecture platform. Although she had ceased wearing the Bloomer costume before 1860, she still retained her liberal viewpoint. More and more, as the decade came



to a close, she spoke upon women's rights. A Good Templar meeting in the spring of 1866 heard her give an interesting and excellent interpretation of suffrage for women. The following February she lectured in Burhop's Hall. "We expected to hear her rave and rant", commented the critical *Weekly Bugle*, "but heard none of this. She was argumentative and even eloquent in some of her remarks, and had just enough sarcasm to them to spice them well." High praise, indeed, from an editor not too friendly to the Bloomers! In March, Mrs. Bloomer, wishing to raise funds for the Library Association, spoke in Glenwood. Her lecture was described as well-written and as delivered in a manner which few men could surpass. Chicago audiences heard her in 1869.

An anonymous author, writing in the *Weekly Bugle* for February 18, 1869, took her to task for these activities. He characterized her as a failure because she "had failed to convince the women of America that voluminous pantaloons and tight-waisted coats were becoming and convenient." Her friend, Anna Dickinson, was described as a "squatty, pug-nosed, cross-grained maiden lady". Then this colorful buckaroo congratulated Mrs. Bloomer upon taking up cudgels again in support of female suffrage, warning her, however, not to



"get into bad company and take the wrong channel."

Amelia Bloomer, wise woman that she was, ignored the criticism and began urging the appointment of a woman as postmaster of Council Bluffs, if the proper man could not be found. In May, 1869, she attended the stormy convention of the Equal Rights Association in New York as a vice-president for Iowa. There she visited old friends, among them Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who were busy forming the National Woman Suffrage Association. She helped organize the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association in 1870, and served as the second president. In 1890 she was made an honorary vice-president of the American Woman Suffrage Association.

As time went on, the Bloomers consolidated their political and business interests in Council Bluffs. It was only natural that, dynamic as they were, they should seek political office. Bloomer, aided by his wife, had secured recognition as a worthy Republican as early as 1861 when he was named chairman of the county organization. In 1869, he was nominated for mayor and elected with a majority of thirty-three votes. Even the opposition paper described him as a "straight forward, honest man". As mayor, Bloomer also exer-



cised the duties of police chief, and the *Bugle* cautioned him not to "drag to the calaboose the poor man who shall fall in the gutter, while the rich rowdy is allowed to make the night hideous with his yelling and screaming."

Bloomer, however, did not permit his political interests to interfere with his business acumen. He invested heavily in the municipal street railroad company. He subscribed \$500 to further the construction of the Cedar Rapids and Missouri Railroad. In 1866, he had been elected vice-president of the Board of Trade. During the early seventies he edited the Council Bluffs *Republican* and for a time he was editor of the *Northwestern Odd Fellow*. Later he published his "Notes on the Early History of Pottawattamie County." In 1895, he published a biography of his wife.

But prëoccupation with affairs such as these did not prevent this busy couple from enjoying a tranquil domestic life. Their home was the cynosure of social eyes, just as the new Bloomer Block, on the corner of Bancroft and Broadway, was the center of business and professional activity. Their comfortable home was shaded by trees planted when first they reached Council Bluffs. Fruit blossoms made the yard white and pink in spring. Bloomer tended his apple orchard so



assiduously that his fruit took prizes at the county fair, not only for size but also for flavor. Great beds of asters made the lawn a mass of color. Toward the rear of the house, near the barn, currant bushes hung heavy with fruit.

In the airy kitchen, Amelia Bloomer, like any housewife, pulled loaves of the "best" graham bread and jelly cake from her spacious oven. On the broad back of the wood stove she put up sweet pickles, currants, and apple jelly. Here she cooked her clear crab-apple jelly and stirred her plum preserves. On closet shelves she racked cake after cake of homemade hard soap and her special fancy soaps. From cellar rafters hung hams and bacon. Busy with household chores and public duties throughout the week, she found time on Sunday to attend St. Paul's Episcopal Church where her husband was a vestryman.

For years, the Bloomer residence attracted distinguished guests. Susan B. Anthony came to chat reminiscently of a speaking tour through New York in 1853. Both women recalled the cordial reception given them by Horace Greeley. Frederick Douglass, famed almost as much for his leonine head and frizzly hair as for his abolitionist oratory, spent a few days. The indomitable Elizabeth Cady Stanton, reformer and leader in the women's rights movement, was pleased with



Council Bluffs. A noted group of singers, the Hutchinson family, called upon the Bloomers early in 1867, anxious to meet the "promoter" of the Bloomer costume.

Many visitors were received in the alcove where, surrounded by books and magazines, Amelia spent much of her time. There she frequently turned the yellowing pages of the *Lily*. If her thoughts roamed the past, they perhaps lingered lovingly upon Cortland County, New York, where on May 27, 1818, she was born. Certainly, this aging woman recalled her experiences as governess in Waterloo, New York, and, without doubt, she remembered her courtship with the Quaker lad, Dexter. She dreamed again of the frontier Council Bluffs and she reread her early letters and notes. In 1890, the very year which marked the closing of the frontier, her health began to fail. On December 30, 1894, she died. The *Iowa State Register* spoke of her not only as a woman of national reputation, but also as a gentle woman.

Early in the last year of the century, on February 24, 1900, her husband and companion in enlightenment and civic initiative, joined her in death, honored and respected by citizens of Council Bluffs and a host of friends everywhere.

PHILIP D. JORDAN



## Iowa Anecdote

### *THE PLIGHT OF FIDDLIN' JIM*

The early spring of 1856 saw the completion of a much-needed schoolhouse near the pioneer village of Redman. It was an important and significant event in the little neighborhood. As such, it deserved proper recognition, by a general celebration and dance. Redman and vicinity determined to "do it up right".

Every one in the community, men, women, and children, gathered for the "raising". The men worked furiously, laughing and joking, with a bit of occasional "nipping" at the little brown jug nearby. The women watched, gossiped, and prepared the supper. By late afternoon the work was finished. The little brown jug, loads of good substantial food, and the presence of almost everybody in the neighborhood foretold a night of fun and frolic.

The spring evening was still, the sky clear and filled with stars. Surfeited with food, and warmed by work and "wine", the crowd repaired to a nearby barn. There the floor, a little rough to be sure, had been swept clean. Benches had been



constructed, and lanterns hung about. Everything was ready for the dance.

The men, dressed in tight-fitting suits and "boiled" shirts, or perhaps in clean corduroys, stamped their fresh-greased boots as they "limbered-up" in action and talk. Already a few, with huge colored handkerchiefs, were wiping the perspiration from their foreheads. The women, in alpacas and calicoes, with here and there a figured lawn, stood or sat in little chatting groups. The children were everywhere, running, yelling, and whistling. But there was no music.

"Where's Fiddlin' Jim?" some one asked, impatiently.

The cry was immediately taken up. "Jim. We want Jim. Music. Let's start."

But Fiddlin' Jim was not there. Nor had anybody seen him. Questions flew thick and fast. Finally, some one volunteered that "Jim couldn't come till evenin'. Said he'd cut over through Salt Creek. Should be here by now, though."

"Come on; let's git him", proposed a voice.

Four of the men left the barn and crossed the fields toward the creek. One carried a lantern, although the rising moon cast a generous light. Soon they entered the woods near the creek. As they progressed, they heard sounds that seemed incongruous.



"If I didn't know better, I'd say that was a fiddle", remarked one of the searchers.

"Maybe Jim got all liquored-up, and is playing himself a tune", suggested another.

The quartet moved on. As they advanced, the sound, unmistakably that of a violin, grew in volume. At last they paused, near the edge of a small opening. There, seated on the low swaying roof of a long-deserted "shanty", sat Fiddlin' Jim, with his violin tucked under his chin and his fingers flying. His audience consisted of a half-dozen lean and hungry wolves, squatted in a circle around the shack.

With a great deal of shouting, the four ran forward, each brandishing a hurriedly-snatched club. The wolves slunk away; and Jim climbed down.

"Howdy, boys", said he. "You came in right handy. Them wolves sure meant business, and every time I quit playin', they started movin' up. But", he added, "I sure got tuned up good."

And so the dance in celebration of the new schoolhouse was a great success.

WALTER E. KALOUPEK



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