

The **P**ALIMPSEST

JUNE 1940

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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. XXI

ISSUED IN JUNE 1940

No. 6

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The Census of 1840

Just a century ago, on June 1, 1840, the first federal census in the Territory of Iowa was started. Due to the sparsely populated areas and slow transportation, that census was not taken as rapidly as the one of 1940. Instead of collecting the population statistics in one month, the sixth United States enumeration was to be "completed and closed within five calendar months thereafter", that is, November 1, 1840.

Then, as now, the newspapers informed the people about the questions to be asked. Since Iowa was primarily rural, many questions pertaining to agriculture were published. "In taking the census for 1840," wrote the editor of the *Dubuque Iowa News* on June 16th, "the persons employed for that purpose, will ask of every farmer questions to the following effect: What is the number of your horses, neat cattle, sheep, swine? How many bushels of wheat were produced on your farm in 1839? How many of barley, oats, rye,

buckwheat, potatoes, Indian corn? How many pounds of wool, hops, wax, tobacco, rice, cotton, silk cocoons, sugar? How many tons of hay, of hemp, and flax? How many cords of wood have you sold during the year? How many gallons of wine have you made? What is the value of the products of your dairy — of your orchard — of your home made or family goods?"

Some sections of the press were opposed to this "prying" of government into private affairs. Critics a hundred years ago rivaled those of the current census. One prominent newspaper declared that it was unworthy of "the dignity and high functions of the Federal Government to pursue such petty investigations". No trace of such opposition, however, can be found in the Iowa papers of that time. Instead, the *Iowa Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser* on February 6, 1841, commented favorably on the questions. "The census of 1840", in the opinion of the editor, would mark an era in the history of American agriculture and would "furnish a more correct view of our country — our whole country, in this respect than has ever been given. . . . There can be no doubt that the tables which are provided from these returns will furnish abundant matter for the consideration of the statesman as well as the agriculturist; and probably the example now

first set of such an enumeration of the products of labor, will be followed at each succeeding census of this great nation."

Iowa was growing rapidly. On October 20, 1840, about the time the whole census was to be completed, the *Iowa News* reported that "Ten years ago this most beautiful territory was unsettled by white population, and known only to the Indian Trader." Four days later the *Burlington Gazette* announced that in 1838 Iowa Territory, when it broke away from Wisconsin, had a population "a little rising of 23,000. Since then (within two years) it has more than doubled and now comprises quite if not more than fifty thousand people." Fifty thousand seems to have been the goal of local promoters, but it was a little too high. When the enumeration was finished, Iowa Territory was reported to have a population of 43,112. Wisconsin had only 30,945. The four most populous States were, in order, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia. In the whole United States, there were 17,069,453 inhabitants.

United States marshals were responsible for collecting the census data in 1840. In Iowa that office was held by Francis Gehon. He received \$250 for supervising the enumeration. To make the actual count he was authorized "to appoint one or more assistants in each city and county" who

were required to perform their duty by visiting "every dwelling house, or by personal inquiry of the head of every family." The law stipulated that the census takers should list the population according to sex, age, color, and whether negroes were free or slave. Indians were not counted at all. "Two copies of the returns of the enumeration and statistical tables" were delivered to the marshal and he, within a month, had to transmit one copy, together with the totals of the different classes for the Territory, to the Secretary of State and file the other copy with the clerk of the Supreme Court of the Territory. The enumerators were paid two dollars for every 100 persons counted. "Each and every free person more than sixteen years of age" was required to answer the census questions "to the best of his or her knowledge", or be subject to a fine of twenty dollars.

The enumeration in the Territory was made by counties, of which only eighteen of the twenty-two that had been established by law were included. The boundaries of Fayette, Buchanan, Benton, and Keokuk had not yet been definitely prescribed nor had the government of those counties been organized. For political purposes they were attached to adjoining counties on the east. None of them was reported to have any inhabitants in 1838, and if any settlers had made claims

there by 1840 they were either ignored by the federal census takers or counted in the population of the counties to which they were attached.

The following summary by counties according to color and sex is computed from the *Compendium* of the sixth United States census.

Counties	White Persons		Negroes		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Cedar	717	536	—	—	1,253
Clayton	771	323	3	4	1,101
Clinton	472	339	3	7	821
Delaware	106	62	—	—	168
Des Moines	3,052	2,519	3	3	5,577
Dubuque	1,742	1,245	36	36	3,059
Henry	2,016	1,740	13	3	3,772
Jackson	802	599	5	5	1,411
Jefferson	1,515	1,258	—	—	2,773
Johnson	963	525	2	1	1,491
Jones	289	182	—	—	471
Lee	3,351	2,731	4	7	6,093
Linn	795	577	1	—	1,373
Louisa	1,069	841	8	9	1,927
Muscatine	1,074	843	15	10	1,942
Scott	1,217	915	4	4	2,140
Van Buren	3,412	2,732	2	—	6,146
Washington	893	701	—	—	1,594
<i>Totals</i>	24,256	18,668	99	89	43,112

It is apparent that settlement was developing most rapidly in the interior counties, indicating that most of the immigrants were farmers interest-

ed in claiming the best land available. The total population of the Territory increased over eighty-five per cent between 1838 and 1840, but the population of Jones, Linn, Cedar, and Johnson counties increased 370 per cent. According to the Territorial census of 1838 the most populous counties were, in order of size, Des Moines, Van Buren, Henry, and Lee — the four southeastern counties. Two years later the same counties led in population but the order was changed. Van Buren was first, followed by Lee, Des Moines, and Henry. The sixth county in number of inhabitants in 1840 was Jefferson, established in 1839, just west of Henry. It included three townships that had formerly belonged to Henry, which no doubt accounted for its immediate importance in population. Moreover, both Henry and Jefferson were inland counties, subject probably to the same influences that contributed to the rapid settlement of similarly situated counties farther north.

Of the 43,112 persons living in the Territory of Iowa, 24,355 were males and 18,757 were females. This proportion was approximately four to three, as it had been in 1838. If adults only are considered, however, the ratio of men to women in 1840 was about seven to four. Over half the white inhabitants of Iowa were under twenty years of age — 23,448 of the 42,924. These were almost even-

ly divided between the sexes, 12,172 being boys and 11,276 girls.

As might be expected in a pioneer country, the largest age-group of men was between the ages of twenty and thirty (6207) and the next largest between thirty and forty (3310). Women, though less numerous, followed the same age pattern — 3789 between the ages of twenty and thirty and 1865 between thirty and forty. The number of both men and women in the next two decennial age-groups declined sharply. There were only 2210 men and 1473 women between the ages of forty and sixty. The frontier was not attractive to persons beyond the prime of life. Relatively few white persons were over sixty — 357 men and 245 women — parents and grandparents probably who had come west with their children. No men in Iowa were over ninety, but one old lady in Dubuque, living with the family of Alexander Butterworth, was over a hundred. Perhaps she was the "Old Lady in Dubuque" for whom the *New Yorker* is not edited.

The negro population of the Territory of Iowa was not large — 172 "free colored persons" and sixteen slaves. In 1838, however, there were only 112 free negroes in Iowa. Perhaps the influx of colored persons from the slave States was already well started. Dubuque, Muscatine, Louisa, and

Henry counties contained most of the colored population. There were no negroes in Cedar, Delaware, Jefferson, Jones, and Washington counties. Though Iowa was free territory, six male and ten female persons were held in servitude. Of these a boy and a girl were under ten years of age. All of them lived in Dubuque County. George W. Jones owned three slaves; F. K. O'Ferrall, Thomas McKnight, and [S. D.] Dixon owned two each; while John Thompson, [P. A.] Lorimier, Maria Garteell [?], William Roberts, John Smith, Mary La Saude, and one whose name was torn off the original record owned one slave each. Mary La Saude was a free colored woman. Her slave was listed as male.

In addition to population figures, the census takers were required by law to collect "all such information in relation to mines, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, and schools, as will exhibit a full view of the pursuits, industry, education and resources of the country". This data was separated from the population enumeration and published in another part of the census "Compendium". Some of these industrial statistics did not correspond with figures pertaining to population in another place. For example, the number of persons employed in various occupations did not agree with the totals listed in the population

tables. Perhaps the information was inadequately or erroneously tabulated by the marshals.

The predominant industry in Iowa was, of course, agriculture. In 1840, nearly eighty per cent of the people listed as being employed (10,469 out of 13,126) were farming. The major crop was "Indian corn", of which 1,406,241 bushels were produced in 1839. Potatoes must have been an important item in pioneer diet because 234,063 bushels were raised in Iowa, ranking next to corn in bulk. The third largest crop was oats, 216,385 bushels being produced in 1839. Wheat was next with a yield of 154,693 bushels. Though other crops were probably not as essential, all contributed to the economic welfare of the Territory. Production in 1839 was as follows: 17,953 tons of hay, 6212 bushels of buckwheat, 3792 bushels of rye, 728 bushels of barley, 41,452 pounds of sugar, 23,039 pounds of wool, 8076 pounds of tobacco, 2132 pounds of wax, 83 pounds of hops, and 7304 cords of wood sold. The population of Johnson County must have been concentrated in the capital, for corn, potatoes, wheat, and wax were the only crops reported. Iowa produced no wine, cotton, rice, or silk cocoons.

More swine were raised on Iowa farms than any other kind of livestock, probably to consume the corn and provide pork and lard for domestic

use. Hogs numbered 104,899. "Neat cattle" were next, of which the census takers counted 38,049. There were 15,354 sheep, 10,794 horses and mules, and the estimated value of poultry of all kinds was \$16,539.

Manufacturing and trades furnished the livelihood for 1629 persons, next to agriculture the most available form of employment, yet less than one-sixth as important as farming. Among articles manufactured in Iowa a hundred years ago, candles figured prominently. Besides innumerable home-made tallow-dips and other varieties, 4718 pounds of candles were made for market. Soap was another pioneer product, though only 9740 pounds, or about a fifth of a pound per person, were manufactured — all in Clayton County. Evidently the housewives of 1840 had to make their own soap or depend upon the storekeeper to get a supply from the East.

Milling was the most extensive manufacturing industry, employing 154 men. There were two flour mills in Cedar County, two in Dubuque County, and two in Scott County, of which the four latter produced 4340 barrels of flour. Thirty-seven grist mills and seventy-five sawmills were reported, though strangely none was found in Delaware and Lee counties.

Apparently the statistics are inaccurate, but at

least sixty-seven men earned their living from the "products of the forest". Lumber valued at \$50,280 and furs worth \$33,594 were produced in 1839. Most of the furs came from Clayton County, as might be expected, and Jackson County led in lumber, though Cedar was a close second. Building flourished on the frontier. According to the census, 324 men built 483 wooden houses and fourteen houses of brick and stone, which is probably too few because eight counties furnished no statistics on house construction.

While manufacturing was in its infancy the printing trade was also being established. The four weekly newspapers employed fifteen persons in the summer of 1840. In October, about the time the census returns had to be filed, two more newspapers were started in Bloomington, but the published report included only the *Iowa News* at Dubuque, the *Iowa Sun* at Davenport, the *Territorial Gazette* and the *Iowa Patriot* at Burlington. During the following century the printing and publishing industry has become one of the most important in the State.

Other forms of manufacture began a hundred years ago. Thirty-nine men were employed in brick and lime works; three tanneries were operated by four men; seven men working in four potteries produced earthenware worth over \$1050.

There were no breweries in Iowa, but two distilleries, one in Dubuque and the other in Scott County, made 4310 gallons of liquor. A Burlington furniture factory employed eleven men; and two gunsmiths in Burlington made forty small arms but no cannon. The census schedules for machinery, hardware, textiles, gunpowder, glassware, paper, cordage, musical instruments, and ships were blank in the tables of Iowa statistics.

The census takers of 1840 reported 365 persons in Iowa engaged in the "learned professions" or as "engineers". Some of the enumerators must have been more zealous than others in finding doctors and lawyers or more liberal in classifying persons as professional. Twenty-seven per cent of this group was located in Clayton County. Perhaps this number included some of the army personnel at Fort Snelling. But according to the printed summary no one was professionally employed in Delaware, Jackson, Jones, or Louisa counties.

Almost as many persons were employed in commerce as in the learned professions. Though the 355 were distributed about as might be expected, with Des Moines and Dubuque counties leading, Delaware, Jackson, Jones, and Louisa counties were again blank in this category, yet six "dry goods, grocery, and other stores" were listed in

Jackson County. There must have been some merchants or traders in the other areas. The detailed summary was even more misleading, inasmuch as the total number employed in commercial pursuits was stated to be twenty-nine.

Transportation by water was apparently not included under the heading of commerce, for 78 persons were listed as being engaged in the "navigation of canals, lakes, and rivers". Fifty-four of these were in Clayton County and seventeen in Lee County. Thirteen more gave their occupation as "navigation of the ocean".

According to the population summary of employment, practically all the mining was done in Clayton and Dubuque counties. The lone miner in Washington County must have been prospecting or retired. In the industrial section of the census, however, no mining statistics at all were included for Clayton County. How the twenty-eight miners were omitted is a mystery. And instead of 188 miners in Dubuque County only thirty were accounted for, and they produced a half million pounds of lead. Two men in Scott County "raised" 10,000 "bushels" of coal!

The census of 1840 showed that Iowa had made only a meager beginning in education. Sixty-three primary and common schools were counted, and one academy and grammar school.

There were no colleges or universities. The number of students in these schools was not great — 1500 in the common schools and twenty-five in the academy — yet there were 15,006 persons between the ages of five and twenty living in the Territory. No “scholars” were receiving their education “at public charge”. White persons over twenty who could not read or write were listed as 1118, or 5.7 per cent of the adult population. In recent years Iowa has boasted of having the lowest percentage of illiteracy in the nation — less than one per cent.

The enumeration of 1840, under the supervision of the Department of State, was characterized by several innovations which marked a new era in the history of the federal census. It was the first attempt to gather educational and health statistics, and in general the sixth census contained information that served as the basis for a better knowledge of some characteristics of the American people. While the wider scope of the census of 1840 was laudable, the execution was faulty. Errors were so numerous and falsifying that many organizations sent protests to Congress against its publication. The American Statistical Association declared that its members “conceive that such documents ought not to have the sanction of Congress, nor ought they to be regarded as containing true

statements relative to the condition of the people They believe it would have been far better to have had no census at all, than such an one as has been published".

Several statements appear relative to Iowa which must be erroneous. For instance, under the heading of population no colored persons were listed in Jefferson County, while under the heading of deaf and dumb at private charge, two colored persons were enumerated. Again, in Jones County, no colored persons were indicated under population but three were listed as deaf and dumb; in Linn County one colored person was listed in the general summary, but two blind colored persons were found. The total number of defectives in Iowa appears to have been fourteen deaf and dumb, six blind, and eleven insane or idiotic.

Only two persons were listed as receiving pensions for "revolutionary or military" services in the general population statistics, but in a separate volume six pensioners were named. George Perkins, aged eighty-nine, lived in Lee County; John Lepper, aged seventy-nine, lived with George Parker in Clinton County; Charles Shepherd, aged eighty-two, was a resident of Henry County; Daniel Baine, aged seventy-one, and John McDonald, aged eighty-six, made their homes in Des Moines County; and Sarah Hensling, aged

eighty-two, lived at the home of John Dawson in Dubuque County.

Considering the scope of the count, the inexperience of the enumerators, and the limited facilities for tabulation, the Iowa census of 1840 contained much valuable information and provided an interesting background against which to study the development of the Commonwealth during the last one hundred years.

WINIFRED MCGUINN HOWARD

An Iowa Anecdote

A TELEGRAPHIC SCOOP

Iowa editors were prompt in using the telegraph to obtain the latest news for their readers. From 1860 to 1865 the enterprising Perkins brothers made the Cedar Falls *Gazette* a dynamic influence upon the thought of the upper valley of the Red Cedar River. In that area they recognized only one nearby rival, W. H. Hartman of the *Waterloo Courier*. Both papers took advantage of telegraphic communication as soon as possible.

The presidential election in the crucial war year of 1864 brought politics to the foreground of all Iowa newspapers. As a delegate to the National Union Convention (Republican) held in Baltimore in June of that year, Peter Melendy of Cedar Falls was instructed to promote the nomination of Lincoln. From the time the *Gazette* was founded, Peter Melendy had contributed generously to its columns. Besides editing an agricultural department called "Field and Garden", he supplied the paper with abundant news from the Iowa State Fair Board, about the Iowa Farm College, and of construction progress on the Iowa Central Railroad. Always a reliable observer of crops, im-

provements, and politics, it was tacitly assumed that whenever he was away from home he would assume the rôle of newspaper correspondent.

Just before Melendy left for Baltimore to attend the convention he dropped in at the *Gazette* office for his customary farewell chat with the editor. As usual H. A. Perkins proffered his customary request for special correspondence. Partly in jest, but more in earnest, Peter Melendy and "Hank" Perkins planned a ruse that would permit the *Gazette* to scoop the news of the presidential nomination before the *Waterloo Courier* could learn the results of the convention.

According to a prearranged plan, Melendy was to telegraph the names of the nominees for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency to H. A. Perkins in a personal message instead of a press report. Strategically they prepared an innocent-appearing code: if Lincoln should receive the nomination, Melendy was to direct an emergency message to H. A. Perkins signed with the name of the successful candidate for the Vice-Presidency.

At the close of a sensational session of the convention in which Lincoln received the unanimous endorsement of the delegates, Melendy sought the "telegraphing department" at convention headquarters. Pushing his way through the dense crowd anxiously waiting to wire the news, he

called for a blank for an emergency message and dashed off the following telegram:

Baltimore, Md.
June 8th, 1864

Henry A. Perkins
Cedar Falls, Iowa

Your mother is very sick. Come at once.
Johnson

With as sad an expression as he could muster in the face of his jubilation over the victory of Lincoln, Peter Melendy handed the blank to the operator. Because of the urgency suggested by "sick" and "mother", the agent preëmptorily brushed aside the accumulated political telegrams and unsuspectingly gave precedence to Melendy's coded message.

Off it went. Within half an hour after H. A. Perkins received this "near-death" message, the *Gazette* issued a one-page broadside displaying in large letters the names of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson as the Union (Republican) candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President. Local newsboys hawked this "extra" through the streets of Cedar Falls and messengers on horseback carried it to the countryside and to Waterloo.

LUELLE M. WRIGHT

Jesse Williams

Land was pioneer gold. To the West came frontiersmen seeking homes and speculators in quest of profits. Associated with these men was the land agent, an individual skilled in the brokerage of the soil. The successful realtor in pioneer times was by nature a promoter, one who had infinite faith in the future of the country, the optimism of a crusader, and the instincts of a gambler. Such a person was Jesse Williams.

When Williams arrived in the Territory of Iowa he was already acquainted with land transactions. It was Governor Robert Lucas who discovered young Williams (then in his twenties) in Surveyor General William Lytle's office in Cincinnati, Ohio. Lucas invited Williams to go with him to Iowa.

At five-thirty on the afternoon of August 1, 1838, Governor Lucas and Jesse Williams left Cincinnati on the steamboat *Tempest*. Bound for Iowa Territory in their company was Theodore S. Parvin. During the slow journey down the Ohio and up the Mississippi rivers, Williams and Parvin, because of the bonds of youth, became close friends. It was soon after the steamboat *Brazil*

arrived in Burlington on August 15, 1838, that the two young men's association with Lucas became known to the citizens of the Territory and they were immediately stamped as the Governor's protégés.

The first task that confronted the Governor upon his arrival was the selection of a temporary capital of the Territory. In order to perform this duty Lucas made a tour of the principal towns, and his two aides went along. It was a gala trip. Everywhere prominent citizens entertained the Governor, and his young friends made the best of their opportunity to make acquaintances and explore the new country.

After a twelve-day reconnaissance, the Governor selected Burlington as the Territorial capital. Thereupon the citizens of that town tendered the Chief Executive a banquet. Present at the affair on the afternoon of September 4th was Jesse Williams. In the program of toasts Williams proposed: "*Iowa Territory* — Unsurpassed in the fertility of her soil, her resources endless. May her public functionaries be actuated alone by the purest and most elevated principles of patriotism, in preparing her for a *future State*." Already he was exhibiting the enthusiasm of the land agent.

Following preparatory formalities, the new government went into action. Governor Lucas

was also Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory. During his administration there were no uprisings to suppress or land cessions to negotiate, but the payment of annuities and the protection of the Indians against unscrupulous traders and liquor debauchery required constant attention and extensive correspondence for which the Governor needed an able assistant. It was to serve as clerk in the office of Indian affairs that Lucas brought Williams to Iowa. After the Governor quarreled with the Secretary of the Territory, the burden of some of the Secretary's duties fell upon Williams. He kept the *Executive Journal*, attended to some of the Governor's correspondence, and carried messages. His official title, according to Isaac Galland's *Iowa Emigrant*, was Messenger in the Indian Department. For this work the Secretary of the Treasury allowed him a salary of \$365 a year.

Perhaps the most exciting episode that occurred while Williams served as Territorial Messenger was the Iowa-Missouri boundary fracas. In that affair he held the rank of a colonel in the Iowa militia. Apparently, however, he was not in command of a regiment, but acted as a military aide on the staff of the Governor. His duties were still messengerial. A commentator said he stood by his chief "tall as a mast, straight as a bolt".

Political fortunes changed in Iowa, but the lure of the land remained. On January 7, 1840, the Legislative Assembly created the position of Territorial Auditor. To this post, with the consent of the Council, Governor Lucas appointed Jesse Williams. The duties of the Auditor were to "sign all warrants for money on the treasurer of the territory, all tax receipts and all other papers necessary and proper for the auditor to sign." His office was to be at the seat of government and his salary fixed at \$100 a year.

On December 12, 1841, Auditor Williams made his annual report. In it he described an ingenious plan he had adopted for financing the construction of the capitol at Iowa City. Laborers were paid in certificates of indebtedness receivable at the Auditor's office. Inasmuch as many of the citizens of Iowa City had purchased lots from the Territory and still owed a portion of the purchase price, these certificates passed at par. In other words, the laborers received these notes for their services, transferred them to storekeepers for goods, and the local merchants handed them to the Auditor in payment for their lots. One may surmise that Williams was more of a schemer than an accountant, because his successor, John Coleman, complained that the Auditor's accounts had not been kept meticulously.

During the time he was Territorial Auditor, and because of his experience with land affairs, Jesse Williams compiled *A Description of the United States Lands in Iowa*. The one-hundred-eighty-page book, published by J. H. Colton in 1840, was bound in blue paper and contained a detailed map signed by Jesse William, "late a Clerk in the Surveyor General's Office, Cincinnati". According to the author, the volume included "a minute description of every section and quarter section, quality of soil, groves of timber, prairies, ledges of rock, coal banks, iron and lead ores, water-falls, mill-seats, etc." The skill in compiling the information from the records of the United States survey testifies for Williams's training. There was truth in the statement by the author that the "book and map will furnish the possessor with more information concerning Iowa than can be obtained from any other source."

Meanwhile, the Territory of Iowa had authorized a three-man commission to select a site for the permanent location of the seat of government. A section of land was donated by the United States government to be platted as a town and sold to the inhabitants of the capital. Proceeds from the sale of lots would, it was hoped, provide funds for the erection of a suitable capitol.

It was natural that, when the Legislative As-

sembly on January 14, 1841, created the position of Territorial Agent, a man well informed on public land policy and conditions in Iowa, like Jesse Williams, should be appointed to the post. In addition to his duties as Auditor, Williams as Territorial Agent was responsible for the financial operations involved in the sale of lots at Iowa City and the construction of the capitol. Laborers could be paid with Territorial warrants, but the purchase of material required cash. For this purpose, Agent Williams, upon the authority of an act of the legislature, borrowed \$5500 from the Miners' Bank of Dubuque, pledging as security "the faith of the unsold lots of Iowa City". In spite of diligent efforts, however, the sale of lots failed to produce enough revenue to pay expenses. By December, 1841, Agent Williams reported a deficit of \$10,714.91, and recommended that the minimum price of lots be reduced. Early in 1842 John Coleman replaced Jesse Williams as Territorial Agent. A year later, on January 23, 1843, Williams surrendered the office of Territorial Auditor to William L. Gilbert.

Meanwhile, he had become interested in journalism. On October 1, 1842, he bought Ver Planck Van Antwerp's share in the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*. With Thomas Hughes he continued the newspaper as "the devoted, and uncompromising

advocate of the great principles of the Democratic party." Perhaps he expected the publishing business to be profitable. "Colonel Williams", wrote Van Antwerp, "is favorably known throughout the Territory, not only as a gentleman of great worth, and probably without a personal enemy, among those whose respect is worth possessing — certainly without deserving to have one — but as one possessed of a handsome order of talents, and who has performed with fidelity, and promptitude, a most important public trust, that of Agent for the Territory in the erection of the Public Buildings."

Of his own political affinity, Williams told his readers: "In advocating, to the best of our abilities, the principles and interests of the great democratic party, and supporting, in a fearless and independent manner, the principles of the great party with which it has ever been our duty as well as our pleasure to act, it will be our object to treat our political opponents with that regard which is ever due between gentlemen, however much they may differ in their political principles and opinions."

In his newspaper Williams also expounded some of his theories of real estate. He believed that the increment derived from the increased value of land due to favorable environment was a

legitimate form of wealth. The pioneer might rightfully plan to profit by the settlement of the country. Williams favored preëmption rights and was therefore pleased when Congress gave squatters the privilege of buying their claims at the minimum price without competition. Moreover, as an investor, he thought the creditor who held a land mortgage ought to be fully protected by law.

However else the editorial policies of pioneer editors might be characterized, they certainly were vigorous and candid. In 1843 the *Capitol Reporter* accused members of the legislature of accepting bribes to vote against repealing the charter of the Miners' Bank of Dubuque. This was indignantly denied in the Assembly, but the indictment caused an investigation. Eventually the legislators were exonerated. The House of Representatives discussed a Whig resolution that the charge in the *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, "implicating members with having been influenced in their legislative action, by promises of personal reward and private advantage, as entirely untrue, and highly reprehensible in its character, and, therefore, we deem the editors justly deserving the censure of this house." Such partisan tactics on the part of Williams gave rise to the statement that "as a journalist he had no superior in the management of a political paper."

Journalism and politics, however, never eliminated his primary interest in the development of the Territory. In May, 1844, he served as one of the commissioners to locate the county seat of Mahaska County. With Ebenezer Perkins and Thomas Henderson, he selected the site that was to become Oskaloosa. On June 1, 1844, Williams became the sole owner of the *Iowa Capital Reporter* with the hope of making "his paper a fitting organ of the Democracy, at the seat of government."

That Jesse Williams chose political preferment to journalism can not be doubted. During the summer of 1843 he wrote to his uncle in Cincinnati concerning a rumor that the Secretary of the Territory, O. H. W. Stull, might be removed, and thus create a vacancy in an attractive office. But his uncle responded that no change was contemplated — "none as to the Govr. at least and probably none as to Secretary." This information proved to be erroneous. Before the summer was over Samuel J. Burr became Secretary. Williams bided his time. The national election in 1844 returned the Democratic party to power, and presently Jesse Williams was rewarded with the coveted office of Territorial Secretary. In April, 1845, he sold a share in his newspaper to A. H. Palmer and in June of that year, upon being named

Secretary, he disposed of his remaining interest to his partner and quit the publishing business.

John Chambers was not replaced by a Democratic Governor of Iowa until November, 1845. An anecdote concerning the association of Chambers and Williams was related by William Penn Clarke. Though probably apocryphal, it may be indicative of the personality of the two men. Williams, according to the story, had prepared some documents, as was his custom, and affixed his signature with his usual flourish. Governor Chambers, opposed to ostentation, looked at the autograph and called the Secretary. Pointing to the signature, he said, "Do you know what that stands for, Mr. Williams?" The Secretary merely stammered. "That", said Chambers, indicating the flourish, "means damn fool." Williams, according to tradition, had a more modest signature after that rebuff.

Jesse Williams's tenure as Secretary was brief. The admission of Iowa into the Union as a State in 1846 legislated him out of office. With his political activities interrupted and his newspaper sold, he turned again to his original interest in land and land speculation.

It was during the decade of the forties that Iowa promoted one of its most gigantic schemes of internal improvement — the project of making the

Des Moines River navigable. In 1846 Congress donated land along the river to finance the dredging and construction of levees and dams. Governor James Clarke appointed Jesse Williams, Josiah H. Bonney, and Robert Cock, to select the land. Acting in accordance with the Congressional statute, the committee chose the odd numbered sections in the specified area on each side of the river.

After Iowa became a State, the General Assembly of Iowa created the Board of Public Works to promote the Des Moines River improvement. For a one year term, beginning in 1849, Jesse Williams served on this board and fostered a scheme to secure the necessary funds for the river project.

Work on the Des Moines River improvement plunged Williams into the midst of land speculation. He himself is said to have made thousands of dollars on river improvement lands. Well qualified by temperament, it was to be expected that he made the most of his opportunity. Letters by him and by his friends suggest that he considered investment in land, both direct and in mortgages, an excellent way to make a fortune. This attitude naturally led him to ally himself with other persons whose views were similar.

About 1850, Jesse Williams went to Fairfield

where he joined Bernhart Henn who was experienced in the land office at that city. The two men formed the firm of Henn, Williams and Company. In 1851, with George D. and Edward A. Temple, they organized the first bank in Fairfield — a concern which came to be one of the principal banking houses in the State.

Henn and Williams continued their promotional schemes. In January, 1854, Major William Williams purchased the site of Fort Dodge for the Fort Dodge Company, a majority interest of which was controlled by the Fairfield firm. The purpose of the Fort Dodge Company, and others like it, was to lay out towns at strategic places, sell lots, and, if a railroad came through or immigrants found the place attractive, reap a big profit from the rapid increase in land values.

At the same time that he was involved in these financial adventures, Jesse Williams associated himself with Enos Lowe, S. S. Bayliss, J. A. Jackson, Samuel R. Curtis, W. W. Brown, S. M. Ballard, and J. H. D. Street, to incorporate the Council Bluffs and Nebraska Ferry Company. For twenty years (1854–1874) this steam ferry did a lucrative business transporting emigrants and their possessions across the Missouri River. Meanwhile, Williams was speculating in the development of Council Bluffs, Omaha, and Sioux

City. He and Henn demonstrated their opportunism by organizing the Rocky Mountain Real Estate Company, operating a bank in Omaha, and controlling the Sioux City Land and Ferry Company. Williams was one of the original proprietors of Sioux City. He must have been very active in his agency, for he was a "well known character" in Council Bluffs, Omaha, and Sioux City. His associates remembered him as "a fine portly gentleman" who was "high-minded, clear-thinking and genial".

After his Omaha bank failed in the panic of 1857, Williams's fortune gradually melted away. According to one historian, he "was unfortunate in business during the later years of his life" and, toward the end, was "dependent upon the kindness of friends for pecuniary assistance." He died in Omaha on July 18, 1879, after a week's illness with erysipelas.

Often confused with Joseph Williams, the Territorial Judge, Jesse Williams nevertheless had a distinctive and rather remarkable career. Edward Stiles declared that he "was large-hearted, generous, and had many warm, personal friends. He was a man of high character and strictly honorable. He never married."

JACK T. JOHNSON

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