

The  
**PALIMPSEST**  
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THE EDITOR

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by The State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

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

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN C. PARISH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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## A Geological Palimpsest

Iowa is very, very old — as old as the hills, and older. So old, in truth, is this fair land that no matter at what period the story is begun whole eternities of time stretch back to ages still more remote. Seasons without number have come and gone. Soft winds of spring have caressed a dormant nature into consciousness; things have lived in the warmth of summer suns; then the green of youth has invariably changed to the brown and gold of a spent cycle; and winter winds have thrown a counterpane of snow over the dead and useless refuse of departed life. For some creatures the span of life has been but a single day; others have witnessed the passing of a hundred seasons; a few giant plants have weathered the gales of four thousand years; but only the rocks have endured since the earth was formed. To the hills and valleys the seasons of man are as night and day, while the ages of ice are as winter, and the millions of years intervening as summer.

Through stately periods of time the earth has evolved. Mud has turned to stone, the sea has given place to land, mountains and molehills have raised their heights, and tiny clams have laid down their shells to form the limestone and the marble for the future dwellings of a nobler race. Since the first soft protozoan form emerged in the distant dawn of life, myriads of types from amoebas to men have spread their kind through endless generations. By far the greater number have lived true to form; but a few have varied from the normal type the better to maintain themselves; and slowly, as eons of time elapsed, old species died and new ones came into existence. Thus mice and mastodons evolved.

“All the world’s a stage” for the drama of life wherein creatures of every kind — large and small, spined and spineless, chinned and finned — have had “their exits and their entrances” along the streams, on the plains, among the mountains, in the forests, and on the floor of the ocean. The theme of the play has been strife, and all through the acts, be they comic or tragic, two great forces have always contended. The one has aimed at construction, the other has sought to destroy. The air and the water were ever at odds with the earth, while the principal objects of animal life have always been to eat and escape being eaten. No one knows when the play began, no one knows the end; but the story as told by the rocks is as vivid as though it were written by human hand. This drama of life is the history of Iowa before the advent of man.

The record begins at a time when Iowa was under the sea. The only inhabitants were plants and animals that lived in the water. Very simple in structure they were: it was the age of the algae in plant life while in the animal kingdom the noblest creatures were worms. The duration of time that the sea remained is altogether beyond comprehension. Slowly, ever so slowly, the dashing waves crumbled the rocks on the shore and the rivers brought down from the land great volumes of sand to be laid on the floor of the ocean. Ten millions of years elapsed, perhaps more, until at the bottom of the sea there lay the sediment for thousands of feet of proterozoic rock. This is the story as told by the Sioux Falls "granite" in northwestern Iowa.

After a great while the sea over Iowa receded. Then, for possibly two million years, the rocky surface of the land was exposed to wind and rain. Over the vast expanse of barren territory not a sign of life appeared. No carpet of grass protected the earth from the savage attacks of the water; no clump of trees broke the monotony of the level horizon: the whole plateau was a desert. As the centuries passed deep gorges were carved by the streams, and at last the down-tearing forces succeeded in reducing the land almost to the sea level.

Gradually from the south the sea encroached upon the land until all of Iowa was again submerged. Its history during the next ten thousand centuries or more is told by sandstone cliffs in Allamakee County.

All sorts of spineless creatures lived in the water. Crab-like trilobites swam to and fro, ugly sea worms crawled in the slime of Cambrian fens, the primitive nautilus "spread his lustrous coil" and left his "outgrown shell by life's unresting sea", while jellyfish and sponges dwelt in quiet places near the shore.

At last a new age dawned. The all-pervading sea still held dominion over nearly all of North America. So small was the area of land that the sand carried away by the streams was lost on the bed of the ocean. The principal upbuilding forces were the primeval molluscs that deposited their calcium carbonate shells in the shallow arms of the ocean. By imperceptible accretions the Ordovician limestones of northeastern Iowa were formed. Gradually the water receded and the newly made rocks were exposed to the weather. As the floods from summer showers trickled into the earth during the ages that followed some of the minerals were dissolved and carried away to be stored in cavities and crevices to form the lead mines for Julien Dubuque. That was millions of years ago.

Centuries elapsed while the Iowa country was a desert-like waste. Then again the sea invaded with its hosts of crabs, corals, and worms. Thousands of years fled by while shell by shell the Anamosa limestone grew. But as the world "turned on in the lathe of time" the sea crept back to its former haunts and the land once more emerged.

No longer was Iowa a desert. The time had arrived when living things came out of the water and found a home on the land. The ferns were among the first of the plants to venture ashore and then came the rushes. Forests of gigantic horsetails and clubmosses grew in the lowlands. Slimy snails moved sluggishly along the stems of leafless weeds, while thousand-legged worms scooted in and out of the mold. Dread scorpions were abroad in the land.

It was the age of the fishes when the ocean returned and the process of rockmaking was resumed. Endless varieties of fish there were, some of them twenty feet long, and armed with terrible mandibles. Enormous sharks infested the sea where now are the prairies of Iowa. The crinoids and molluscs were also abundant. It is they, indeed, that have preserved the record of their times in the bluffs of the Cedar and Iowa rivers. He who will may read the chronicles of those prehistoric days in the limestone walls of the Old Stone Capitol.

Then came a time when the climate of Iowa was tropical. Vast salt marshes were filled with rank vegetation. Ugly amphibians, scaled and tailed, croaked beneath the dripping boughs and left their trail in the hardened sand as they fed on the primitive dragonflies millions of centuries ago. Cockroaches and spiders were plentiful, but not a fly or a bee had appeared. Giant trees, enormous ferns, and ever-present rushes stored up the heat of summer suns and dying, fell into the water. As thousands of

years went by, the reedy tarns turned into peat bogs and slowly decomposition continued until little but carbon remained. Such is the story the coal mines tell.

But the old earth heaved amain, the Appalachian mountains arose, and here and there a great salt lake or an inland sea was formed. The supply of fresh water was exceeded by evaporation and so at the end of a long period of time only a salt bed remained or an extensive deposit of gypsum. So it has come to pass that in the age of man stucco comes from the Fort Dodge gypsum mines that were prepared at the end of the Paleozoic era.

Enormous segments of geologic time elapsed during which the sea had receded and Iowa was exposed to erosion. At first the climate was arid so that plant life was scarce, but as humidity increased vegetation developed apace. In the animal kingdom the reptiles were dominant. Crocodiles, lizards, and queer looking turtles were here in abundance. Gigantic and ungainly monsters called dinosaurs roamed over the land, while from the flying Jurassic saurians the birds were slowly evolving.

During countless ages the wind and water were engaged in their persistent work of destruction. Gradually the land was reduced to the sea level and the ocean crept in over Iowa. This time the water was muddy and shale and sandstone resulted. As sedimentation progressed great marshes appeared by the seashore and finally the ocean receded, never

again to encroach upon Iowa. In the west the lofty peaks of the Rockies were rising.

Permanently disenthralled from the sea and possessed of a favorable climate Iowa became the abode of the flora and fauna of Tertiary times. To the east the Mississippi River probably followed its present course, though its mouth was much farther north, but the streams of interior Iowa were not in all cases where we find them at present. The valleys were young and the drainage was very imperfect. Luxuriant forests of oak, poplar, hickory, fig, willow, chestnut, and palm trees covered the hills, while moss-mantled cypresses grew in the marshes. There were flowers for the first time in Iowa, and with them came the bees and the butterflies. The ancestors of squirrels and opossums busied themselves among the branches while below on the ground there were creatures that took the place of beavers and gophers. Giant razor-back swine and something akin to rhinoceroses haunted the banks of the streams. In the open spaces there were species that closely resembled cattle, while from others deer have descended. An insignificant creature with three-toed hoofs passed himself off for a horse. All sorts of dog-like animals prowled through the forests and howled in the moonlit wastes. Stealthy panthers and fierce saber-toothed tigers quietly stalked their prey, while above in the branches large families of monkeys chattered defiance to all. Bright colored birds flitted in the sunny

glades or among the shadowy recesses. Snakes, lizards, and turtles basked on half-submerged logs or fed upon insects.

The majestic sweep of geologic ages finally brought to an end the era of temperate climate in Iowa, and after hundreds of thousands of years ushered in the era of ice. It may have been more than two million years ago that the climate began to grow rigorous. All through the long, bleak winters the snow fell and the summers were too cool to melt it. So year by year and century after century the snow piled higher and higher, until the land was covered with a solid sheet of ice. The plants and animals suffered extinction or migrated southward.

As this ponderous glacier moved over the surface of Iowa it ground down the hills and filled up the valleys. Slowly the ice sheet moved southward, crushing the rocks into fragments and grinding the fragments to powder. At length there came a time when the climate grew milder and the ice was gradually melted. Swollen and turbid streams carried away the water and with it some of the earth that was frozen into the glacier, but much of the debris was left where it lay. Even with the slow movement of glaciers, still there was time during the ice age for huge granite boulders to be carried from central Canada to the prairies of Iowa.

The first glaciation was followed by an interval of temperate climate when vegetation flourished and the animals returned as before. But the age of the

glaciers was only beginning. Again and again the ice crept down from the north and as often disappeared. Twice the glacier extended all over Iowa, but the three other invasions covered only a part of this region. Rivers were turned out of their courses. At one time an ice sheet from Labrador pushed the Mississippi about fifty miles to the westward, but in time the river returned to its old course, and the abandoned channel was partly appropriated by the Maquoketa, Wapsipinicon, Cedar, and Iowa. Again, as the ice retreated great lakes were formed, and once for hundreds of years the waters of Lake Michigan flowed into the Mississippi along the course of the Chicago drainage canal.

The earliest glaciers laid down the impervious subsoil of clay while the later ones mingled powdered rock with the muck and peat of the inter-glacial periods to form the loam of the fertile Iowa farms. Probably a hundred thousand years have fled since the last glacier visited north-central Iowa, but the region is still too young to be properly drained, so nature is assisted by dredges and tile. It was during the glacial period that mankind came into existence, but no man trod Iowa soil until after the last glacier was gone. Compared with the inconceivable eons of time since the first Iowa rocks were formed, it was only as yesterday that the ancient mound builders flourished.

Such is the geological history of Iowa. No one can say when the first record was made, but the

story through all of the ages is indelibly carved in rock by the feet and forms of the mummied dead that lie where they lived. Age after age, as the sea and the land contended and the species struggled to live, the drama of the world was faithfully recorded. Sometimes, to be sure, the story is partly erased, sometimes it is lost beneath subsequent records, but at some place or other in Iowa a fragment of each act may be found. The surface of Iowa is a palimpsest of the ages.

JOHN E. BRIGGS

## The Iowa Home Note

Hark! the meadow-lark is singing  
From the weathered haycock's ledge,  
And the robin in the orchard  
Blithely carols forth his joy;  
While the turtle-dove is calling  
From the tangled osage hedge,  
And the cardinal is whistling  
Like a happy barefoot boy.

And the song that floats triumphant  
From the meadow and the lane  
Is the song of rustling cornfields  
Where the winds of midday sigh,  
'Tis the song of Iowa prairies —  
Gilded seas of waving grain  
When the round red sun is setting  
In a glowing opal sky.

'Tis the song of Iowa rivers  
With their sunlit wooded hills,  
And of roadsides decked with blossoms  
That would grace a hallowed shrine.  
'Tis the throbbing Iowa Home Note  
That reverberates and thrills  
In the farm and village echoes —  
Just as in your heart and mine.

BERTHA M. H. SHAMBAUGH

## Through European Eyes

An exiled Italian traveller, an English master of the Queen's household, a Swedish novelist, and a Scotch writer known the world over, are among the many who have visited the Iowa country and written their impressions. And since it is well to "see ourselves as others see us", we are presenting here the comments of Giacomo Constantino Beltrami, Charles Augustus Murray, Fredrika Bremer, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

GIACOMO CONSTANTINO BELTRAMI — 1823

Of these four, Beltrami was first upon the scene. In 1823 he came into the Upper Mississippi Valley by the route best known in those days — down the Ohio River and up the Mississippi. His Latin imagination was stirred and in his writings he waxed eloquent over the Mississippi River, even while he was voyaging along that stretch of water lying between Cairo and St. Louis which Charles Dickens later spoke of as "the hateful Mississippi" and "a slimy monster hideous to behold".

William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, was a boat companion as far as St. Louis, and Major Taliaferro, Indian agent at Fort St. Anthony, accompanied Beltrami up the river to that pioneer post. After brief sojourns at St. Louis and Fort Edwards the travellers reached the rapids near the

mouth of the Des Moines River and began their observation of the edge of the land that was to be Iowa, but whereon at the time there was not a solitary white settlement. Beltrami's account follows:<sup>1</sup>

"The next day we ascended, though not without difficulty, these rapids, which continue for the space of twenty-one miles, when we saw another encampment of Saukis upon the eastern bank.

"Nine miles higher, on the western bank, are the ruins of the old Fort Madison.

"The president of that name had established an *entrepôt* of the most necessary articles for the Indians, to be exchanged for their peltry. The object of the government was not speculation, but, by its example, to fix reasonable prices among the traders; for, in the United States, everybody traffics *except* the government. Fearing, however, the effect of any restraint on the trade of private individuals, it has withdrawn its factories and agents, and left the field open to the South West Company, which has been joined by a rival company, and now monopolizes the commerce of almost the whole savage region of the valleys of the Mississippi and the Missouri. Its two principal centres of operations are St. Louis and Michilimakinac, on lake Huron.

"At a short distance from this fort, on the same side, is the river of the *Bête Puante*, and farther on, that of the Yahowas, so called from the name of the

<sup>1</sup> Beltrami's *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, Vol. II, pp. 150-152.

savage tribes which inhabited its banks. It is ninety-seven miles from Fort Edward, and three hundred from St. Louis.

“The fields were beginning to resume their verdure; the meadows, groves, and forests were reviving at the return of spring. Never had I seen nature more beautiful, more majestic, than in this vast domain of silence and solitude. Never did the warbling of the birds so expressively declare the renewal of their innocent loves. Every object was as new to my imagination as to my eye.

“All around me breathed that melancholy, which, by turns sweet and bitter, exercises so powerful an influence over minds endowed with sensibility. How ardently, how often, did I long to be alone!

“Wooded islands, disposed in beautiful order by the hand of nature, continually varied the picture: the course of the river, which had become calm and smooth, reflected the dazzling rays of the sun like glass; smiling hills formed a delightful contrast with the immense prairies, which are like oceans, and the monotony of which is relieved by isolated clusters of thick and massy trees. These enchanting scenes lasted from the river Yahowa till we reached a place which presents a distant and exquisitely blended view of what is called Rocky Island, three hundred and seventy-two miles from St. Louis, and one hundred and sixty from Fort Edward. Fort Armstrong, at this spot, is constructed upon a *plateau*, at an elevation of about fifty feet above the level of the river,

and rewards the spectator who ascends it with the most magical variety of scenery. It takes its name from Mr. Armstrong, who was secretary at war at the time of its construction.

“The eastern bank at the mouth of Rocky River was lined with an encampment of Indians, called Foxes. Their features, dress, weapons, customs, and language, are similar to those of the Saukis, whose allies they are, in peace and war. On the western shore of the Mississippi, a semicircular hill, clothed with trees and underwood, encloses a fertile spot carefully cultivated by the garrison, and formed into fields and kitchen gardens. The fort saluted us on our arrival with four discharges of cannon, and the Indians paid us the same compliment with their muskets. The echo, which repeated them a thousand times, was most striking from its contrast with the deep repose of these deserts.”

A day was spent with the polite “gentlemen of the garrison” and in visiting the Sac Indians on the Illinois shore. As the voyagers proceeded northward, they passed a Fox village on the western bank. At one point Beltrami went ashore and succeeded in shooting a rattlesnake. He visited Galena and then passed on to “the mines of Dubuques”.<sup>2</sup>

“A Canadian of that name was the friend of a tribe of the Foxes, who have a kind of village here.

<sup>2</sup> Beltrami's *A Pilgrimage in Europe and America*, Vol. II, pp. 163-165.

In 1788, these Indians granted him permission to work the mines. His establishment flourished; but the fatal sisters cut the thread of his days and of his fortune.

“He had no children. The attachment of the Indians was confined to him; and, to get rid as soon as possible of the importunities of those who wanted to succeed him, they burnt his furnaces, warehouses, and dwelling-house; and by this energetic measure, expressed the determination of the red people to have no other whites among them than such as they liked. . . .

“The Indians still keep exclusive possession of these mines, and with such jealousy, that I was obliged to have recourse to the all-powerful whiskey to obtain permission to see them.

“They melt the lead into holes which they dig in the rock, to reduce it into pigs. They exchange it with the traders for articles of the greatest necessity; but they carry it themselves to the other side of the river, which they will not suffer them to pass. Notwithstanding these precautions, the mines are so valuable, and the Americans so enterprising, that I much question whether the Indians will long retain possession of them.

“Dubuques reposes, with royal state, in a leaden chest contained in a mausoleum of wood, which the Indians erected to him upon the summit of a small hill that overlooks their camps and commands the river.

“This man was become their idol, because he possessed, or pretended to possess, an antidote to the bite of the rattle-snake. Nothing but artifice and delusion can render the red people friendly to the whites; for, both from instinct, and from feelings transmitted from father to son, they cordially despise and hate them.”

CHARLES AUGUSTUS MURRAY — 1835

A dozen years later the Honorable Charles Augustus Murray, who announced his English blood in every line of his charming “Travels in North America”, came up the Mississippi. According to Thwaites, Murray was a “grandson of Lord Dunmore, last colonial governor of Virginia, and himself master of the Queen’s household”. At the foot of the rapids which Beltrami had noted, he found a white settlement. He comments as follows:<sup>3</sup>

“This village of Keokuk is the lowest and most blackguard place that I have yet visited: its population is composed chiefly of the watermen who assist in loading and unloading the keel-boats, and in towing them up when the rapids are too strong for the steam-engines. They are a coarse and ferocious caricature of the London bargemen, and their chief occupation seems to consist in drinking, fighting, and gambling. One fellow who was half drunk, (or in western language ‘corned’) was relating with great satisfaction how he had hid himself in a wood that

<sup>3</sup> Murray’s *Travels in North America*, Vol. II, pp. 96-97.

skirted the road, and (in time of peace) had shot an unsuspecting and inoffensive Indian who was passing with a wild turkey over his shoulder: he concluded by saying that he had thrown the body into a thicket, and had taken the bird home for his own dinner. He seemed quite proud of this exploit, and said that he would as soon shoot an Indian as a fox or an otter. I thought he was only making an idle boast; but some of the bystanders assured me it was a well-known fact, and yet he had never been either tried or punished. This murderer is called a Christian, and his victim a heathen! It must, however, be remembered, that the feelings of the border settlers in the West were frequently exasperated by the robberies, cruelties, and outrages of neighbouring Indians; their childhood was terrified by tales of the scalping-knife, sometimes but too well founded, and they have thus been brought to consider the Indian rather as a wild beast than as a fellow-creature.”

At Keokuk three-fourths of the cargo was transferred to a keel boat to lighten the load so that the boat could ascend the rapids. Murray continues:

“The rapids are about fourteen miles long, and at the top of them is a military post or cantonment called Fort des Moines.<sup>4</sup> This site appears to me to have been chosen with singularly bad judgment; it is low, unhealthy, and quite unimportant in a military point of view: moreover, if it had been placed at the

<sup>4</sup> Murray's *Travels in North America*, Vol. II, pp. 98-100.

lower, instead of the upper end of the rapids, an immense and useless expense would have been spared to the government, inasmuch as the freighting of every article conveyed thither is now doubled. The freight on board the steamer, from which I made these observations, was twenty-five cents per hundred weight from St. Louis to Keokuk, being one hundred and seventy miles, and from St. Louis to the fort, being only fourteen miles farther, it was fifty cents.

“I landed at Fort des Moines only for a few minutes, and had but just time to remark the pale and sickly countenances of such soldiers as were loitering about the beach; indeed, I was told by a young man who was sutler at this post, that when he had left it a few weeks before, there was only one officer on duty out of seven or eight, who were stationed there. The number of desertions from this post was said to be greater than from any other in the United States. The reason is probably this: the dragoons who are posted there and at Fort Leavenworth, were formed out of a corps, called during the last Indian war ‘The Rangers;’ they have been recruited chiefly in the Eastern States, where young men of some property and enterprise were induced to join, by the flattering picture drawn of the service, and by the advantageous opportunity promised of seeing the ‘Far West.’ They were taught to expect an easy life in a country abounding with game, and that the only hardships to which they would be exposed,

would be in the exciting novelty of a yearly tour or circuit made during the spring and summer, among the wild tribes on the Missouri, Arkansas, Platte, &c.; but on arriving at their respective stations, they found a very different state of things: they were obliged to build their own barracks, store-rooms, stables, &c.; to haul and cut wood, and to perform a hundred other menial or mechanical offices, so repugnant to the prejudices of an American. If we take into consideration the facilities of escape in a steamboat, by which a deserter may place himself in a few days in the recesses of Canada, Texas, or the mines, and at the same time bear in mind the feebleness with which the American military laws and customs follow or punish deserters, we shall only wonder that the ranks can be kept as full as they are.”

Murray made little comment on Fort Armstrong but the lead mines of Galena and Dubuque interested him greatly. Since Beltrami's trip the whites had crossed to the west bank of the river and had begun a vigorous young mining settlement at Dubuque.

“I reached Dubuques without accident, and proceeded to the only tavern of which it can boast.<sup>5</sup> The landlord, whom I had met in the steamer, on ascending the Mississippi, promised me a bed to myself; a luxury that is by no means easily obtained by travelers in the West. The bar-room, which was indeed

<sup>5</sup> Murray's *Travels in North America*, Vol. II, pp. 151-157.

the only public sitting-room, was crowded with a parcel of blackguard noisy miners, from whom the most experienced and notorious blasphemers in Portsmouth or Wapping might have taken a lesson; and I felt more than ever annoyed by that absurd custom, so prevalent in America, of forcing travellers of quiet and respectable habits into the society of ruffians, by giving them no alternative but sitting in the bar-room or walking the street.

“It may be said that I am illiberal in censuring the customs of a country, by reference to those of a small infant village; but the custom to which I allude, is not confined to villages; it is common to most towns in the West, and is partially applicable to the hotels in the eastern cities. They may have dining-rooms of enormous extent, tables groaning under hundreds of dishes; but of comfort, quiet, and privacy, they know but little. It is doubtless true, that the bar of a small village tavern in England may be crowded with guests little, if at all, more refined or orderly than those Dubuques miners, but I never found a tavern in England so small or mean, that I could not have the comfort of a little room to myself, where I might read, write, or follow my own pursuits without annoyance.

“I sat by the fireside watching the strange and rough-looking characters who successively entered to drink a glass of the nauseous dilution of alcohol, variously coloured, according as they asked for brandy, whisky, or rum, when a voice from the door

inquiring of the landlord, whether accommodations for the night were to be had, struck my ear as familiar to me. I rose to look at the speaker, and our astonishment was mutual, when I recognized Dr. M. of the United States army, who is a relative of its commander-in-chief. He is a very pleasant gentlemanly man, from the state of New York, whose acquaintance I had made in my trip to Fort Leavenworth, to which place he was now on his return. After an exchange of the first expressions of pleasure and surprise, I assisted him in getting up his baggage from the canoe in which he had come down the river, and in despatching a supper that was set before him. We then returned to the bar; and after talking over some of our adventures since we parted, requested to be shown to our dormitory. This was a large room, occupying the whole of the first floor, and containing about eight or nine beds; the doctor selected one in the centre of the wall opposite the door; I chose one next to him, and the nearest to me was given to an officer who accompanied the doctor. The other beds contained two or three persons, according to the number of guests requiring accommodation.

“The doctor, his friend, and I, resolutely refused to admit any partner into our beds; and, notwithstanding the noise and oaths still prevalent in the bar, we fell asleep. I was awakened by voices close to my bed-side, and turned round to listen to the following dialogue:—

*Doctor* (to a drunken fellow who was taking off his coat and waistcoat close to the doctor's bed).—  
'Halloo! where the devil are you coming to?'

*Drunkard*.—'To bed, to be sure!'

*Doctor*.—'Where?'

*Drunkard*.—'Why, with you.'

*Doctor* (raising his voice angrily).—'I'll be d—d if you come into this bed!'

*Drunkard* (walking off with an air of dignity).—  
'Well, you need not be so d—d particular;— I'm as particular as you, I assure you!'

"Three other tipsy fellows staggered into the room, soon after midnight, and slept somewhere: they went off again before daylight without paying for their lodging, and the landlord did not even know that they had entered his house.

"It certainly appears at first sight to be a strange anomaly in human nature, that at Dubuques, Galena, and other rising towns on the Mississippi, containing in proportion to their size as profligate, turbulent, and abandoned a population as any in the world, theft is almost unknown; and though dirks are frequently drawn, and pistols fired in savage and drunken brawls, by ruffians who regard neither the laws of God nor man, I do not believe that an instance of larceny or housebreaking has occurred. So easily are money and food here obtained by labour, that it seems scarcely worth a man's while to steal. Thus, the solution of the apparent anomaly is to be found in this, that theft is a naughty

child, of which idleness is the father and want the mother.

“I spent the following day in examining the mines near Dubuques, which are not generally so rich in lead as those hitherto found on the opposite shore, towards Galena. However, the whole country in the neighbourhood contains mineral, and I have no doubt that diggings at a little distance from the town will be productive of great profits; at all events, it will be, in my opinion, a greater and more populous town than Galena ever will become.

“The next day being Sunday, I attended religious service, which was performed in a small low room, scarcely capable of containing a hundred persons. The minister was a pale, ascetic, sallow-looking man, and delivered a lecture dull and sombre as his countenance. However, it was pleasant to see even this small assemblage, who thought of divine worship in such a place as Dubuques. In the evening, there was more drunkenness and noise than usual about the bar, and one young man was pointed out to me as ‘the bully’ *par excellence*. He was a tall stout fellow, on whose countenance the evil passions had already set their indelible seal. He was said to be a great boxer, and had stabbed two or three men with his dirk during the last ten days. He had two companions with him, who acted, I suppose, as myrmidons in his brawls. When he first entered, I was sitting in the bar reading; he desired me, in a harsh imperative tone, to move out of the way, as he

wanted to get something to drink. There was plenty of room for him to go round my chair, without disturbing me; so I told him to go round if he wished a dram. He looked somewhat surprised, but he went round, and I resumed my book. Then it was that the landlord whispered to me the particulars respecting him as given above. I confess, I almost wished that he would insult me, that I might try to break his head with my good cudgel which was at hand; so incensed and disgusted was I at finding myself in the company of such a villain. However, he soon after left the room, and gave me no chance either of cracking his crown, or, what is much more probable, of getting five or six inches of his dirk into my body.

“I could not resist laughing at the absurdity of one of his companions, who was very drunk, and finding that his head was burning from the quantity of whisky that he had swallowed, an idea came into it that would never have entered the brain of any man except an Irishman, or a Kentuckian: he fancied that his *hat* was hot, and occasioned the sensation above mentioned; accordingly, he would not be satisfied till the landlord put it into a tub of cold water, and filled it; he then desired it might be soaked there till morning, and left the house contented and bare-headed.

“I was obliged to remain here yet another day, as no steamboat appeared. At length the *Warrior* touched, and took us off to Galena. We stopped a

short time at a large smelting establishment a mile or two below the town: on a high bluff which overlooks it is the tomb of Dubuques, a Spanish miner from whom the place derives its name. The spot is marked by a cross, and I clambered up to see it. With a disregard of sepulchral sanctity, which I have before noticed as being too prevalent in America, I found that it had been broken down in one or two places; I picked up the skull and some other bones. The grave had been built of brick, and had on one side a stone slab, bearing a simple Latin inscription, announcing that the tenant had come from the Spanish mines, and giving the usual data respecting his age, birth, death, &c. The view from this bold high bluff is very fine, but unfortunately the day on which I visited it was cloudy.”

FREDRIKA BREMER — 1850

The Swedish novelist, Fredrika Bremer, made a trip to America in 1849 and spent nearly two years in this country. Her impressions, embodied in letters written at the time, were published in Sweden and also in an English translation in New York under the title *The Homes of the New World*. In the fall of 1850 she took a steamer from Buffalo to Detroit, and reached Chicago by rail. From here she went by steamer to Milwaukee and then travelled by stage across Wisconsin and south to Galena, Illinois. In a letter written from this town she gave

the following hearsay account of the inhabitants of the land on the other side of the Mississippi:<sup>6</sup>

“I heard an interesting account from a married couple whom I received in my room, and who are just now come from the wilderness beyond the Mississippi, of the so-called Squatters, a kind of white people who constitute a portion of the first colonists of the Western country. They settle themselves down here and there in the wilderness, cultivate the earth, and cultivate freedom, but will not become acquainted with any other kind of cultivation. They pay no taxes, and will not acknowledge either law or church. They live in families, have no social life, but are extremely peaceable, and no way guilty of any violation of law. All that they desire is to be at peace, and to have free elbow-room. They live very amicably with the Indians, not so well with the American whites. When these latter come with their schools, their churches, and their shops, then the Squatters withdraw themselves further and still further into the wilderness, in order to be able, as they say, to live in innocence and freedom. The whole of the Western country beyond the Mississippi and as far as the Pacific Ocean, is said to be inhabited by patches with these Squatters, or tillers of the land, the origin of whom is said to be as much unknown as that of the Clay-eaters of South Carolina and Georgia. Their way of life has also a resemblance. The Squatters, however, evince more power

<sup>6</sup> Bremer's *The Homes of the New World*, Vol. I, pp. 650-651.

and impulse of labor; the Clay-eaters subject the life of nature. The Squatters are the representatives of the wilderness, and stand as such in stiff opposition to cultivation.”

Later, however, when Miss Bremer had crossed the river and travelled in the land of the “squatters”, she wrote her own impressions:<sup>7</sup>

“The journey across the Iowa prairie in a half-covered wagon was very pleasant. The weather was as warm as a summer’s day, and the sun shone above a fertile, billowy plain, which extended far, far into the distance. Three fourths of the land of Iowa are said to be of this billowy prairie-land. The country did not appear to be cultivated, but looked extremely beautiful and home-like, an immense pasture-meadow. The scenery of the Mississippi is of a bright, cheerful character.

“In the afternoon we reached the little town of Keokuk, on a high bank by the river. We ate a good dinner at a good inn; tea was served for soup, which is a general practice at dinners in the Western inns. It was not till late in the evening that the vessel came by which we were to continue our journey, and in the mean time I set off alone on a journey of discovery. I left behind me the young city of the Mississippi, which has a good situation, and followed a path which led up the hill along the river side. The sun was descending, and clouds of a pale crimson

<sup>7</sup> Bremer’s *The Homes of the New World*, Vol. II, pp. 81-83.

tint covered the western heavens. The air was mild and calm, the whole scene expansive, bright, and calm, an idyllian landscape on a large scale.

“Small houses, at short distances from each other, studded this hill by the river side; they were neatly built of wood, of good proportions, and with that appropriateness and cleverness which distinguishes the work of the Americans. They were each one like the other, and seemed to be the habitations of work-people. Most of the doors stood open, probably to admit the mild evening air. I availed myself of this circumstance to gain a sight of the interior, and fell into discourse with two of the good women of the houses. They were, as I had imagined, the dwellings of artisans who had work in the town. There was no luxury in these small habitations, but every thing was so neat and orderly, so ornamental, and there was such a holiday calm over every thing, from the mistress of the family down to the very furniture, that it did one good to see it. It was also Sunday evening, and the peace of the Sabbath rested within the home as well as over the country.

“When I returned to my herberg in the town it was quite dusk; but it had, in the mean time, been noised abroad that some sort of Scandinavian animal was to be seen at the inn, and it was now requested to come and show itself.

“I went down, accordingly, into the large saloon, and found a great number of people there, principally of the male sex, who increased more and more

until there was a regular throng, and I had to shake hands with many most extraordinary figures. But one often sees such here in the West. The men work hard, and are careless regarding their toilet; they do not give themselves time to attend to it; but their unkemmed outsides are no type of that which is within, as I frequently observed this evening. I also made a somewhat closer acquaintance, to my real pleasure, with a little company of more refined people; I say *refined* intentionally, not *better*, because those phrases, better and worse, are always indefinite, and less suitable in this country than in any other; I mean well-bred and well-dressed ladies and gentlemen, the aristocracy of Keokuk. Not being myself of a reserved disposition, I like the American open, frank, and friendly manner. It is easy to become acquainted, and it is very soon evident whether there is reciprocity of feeling or not."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON — 1879

It was nearly thirty years later that Robert Louis Stevenson visited Iowa. In 1879 he crossed the ocean in an emigrant ship, and started across the continent toward San Francisco in an emigrant train, loaded down with a valise, a knapsack, and — in the bag of his railway rug — six fat volumes of Bancroft's *History of the United States*. He left the following record of a day of travel between Burlington and Council Bluffs.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Stevenson's *Across the Plains* (Scribner Edition, 1912), pp. 24-28.

“*Thursday.*— I suppose there must be a cycle in the fatigue of travelling, for when I awoke next morning, I was entirely renewed in spirits and ate a hearty breakfast of porridge, with sweet milk, and coffee and hot cakes, at Burlington upon the Mississippi. Another long day’s ride followed, with but one feature worthy of remark. At a place called Creston, a drunken man got in. He was aggressively friendly, but, according to English notions, not at all unpresentable upon a train. For one stage he eluded the notice of the officials; but just as we were beginning to move out of the next station, Cromwell by name, by came the conductor. There was a word or two of talk; and then the official had the man by the shoulders, twitched him from his seat, marched him through the car, and sent him flying on to the track. It was done in three motions, as exact as a piece of drill. The train was still moving slowly, although beginning to mend her pace, and the drunkard got his feet without a fall. He carried a red bundle, though not so red as his cheeks; and he shook this menacingly in the air with one hand, while the other stole behind him to the region of the kidneys. It was the first indication that I had come among revolvers, and I observed it with some emotion. The conductor stood on the steps with one hand on his hip, looking back at him; and perhaps this attitude imposed upon the creature, for he turned without further ado, and went off staggering along the track towards Cromwell, followed by a peal of laughter from the cars. They were speaking

English all about me, but I knew I was in a foreign land.

“Twenty minutes before nine that night, we were deposited at the Pacific Transfer Station near Council Bluffs, on the eastern bank of the Missouri River. Here we were to stay the night at a kind of caravanserai, set apart for emigrants. But I gave way to a thirst for luxury, separated myself from my companions, and marched with my effects into the Union Pacific Hotel. A white clerk and a coloured gentleman whom, in my plain European way, I should call the boots, were installed behind a counter like bank tellers. They took my name, assigned me a number, and proceeded to deal with my packages. And here came the tug of war. I wished to give up my packages into safe keeping; but I did not wish to go to bed. And this, it appeared, was impossible in an American hotel.

“It was, of course, some inane misunderstanding, and sprang from my unfamiliarity with the language. For although two nations use the same words and read the same books, intercourse is not conducted by the dictionary. The business of life is not carried on by words, but in set phrases, each with a special and almost a slang signification. Some international obscurity prevailed between me and the coloured gentleman at Council Bluffs; so that what I was asking, which seemed very natural to me, appeared to him a monstrous exigency. He refused, and that with the plainness of the West. This American manner of conducting matters of business is, at

first, highly unpalatable to the European. When we approach a man in the way of his calling, and for those services by which he earns his bread, we consider him for the time being our hired servant. But in the American opinion, two gentlemen meet and have a friendly talk with a view to exchanging favours if they shall agree to please. I know not which is the more convenient, nor even which is the more truly courteous. The English stiffness unfortunately tends to be continued after the particular transaction is at an end, and thus favours class separations. But on the other hand, these equalitarian plainnesses leave an open field for the insolence of Jack-in-office.

“I was nettled by the coloured gentleman’s refusal, and unbuttoned my wrath under the similitude of ironical submission. I knew nothing, I said, of the ways of American hotels; but I had no desire to give trouble. If there was nothing for it but to get to bed immediately, let him say the word, and though it was not my habit, I should cheerfully obey.

“He burst into a shout of laughter. ‘Ah!’ said he, ‘you do not know about America. They are fine people in America. Oh! you will like them very well. But you mustn’t get mad. I know what you want. You come along with me.’

“And issuing from behind the counter, and taking me by the arm like an old acquaintance, he led me to the bar of the hotel.

“‘There,’ said he, pushing me from him by the shoulder, ‘go and have a drink!’”

## Comment by the Editor

### THE MEANING OF IOWA

Why should Iowa mean anything to us? It is not the greatest State in the Union in size, in numbers, or in wealth. It has no large city — no mecca for the pilgrimages of mankind. Its shores are not washed by the sea as are those of California and Florida. Its hills do not rise into the blue like the mountains of Colorado. It does not look out toward the island empire of either Great Britain or Japan. Its people can not talk across the fence to the Canadians or feel the stir of excitement along the prickly border of Mexico.

But it is the heart of America. Its shores are the two greatest rivers of the continent. Its rolling hills and fertile plains smile in the sun — well content with the task of making manna for millions. It has woods and winding streams and blue lakes, and towns with shady streets and green lawns and alert and friendly people.

And it has traditions. We are young in the land, but the land is old. Its story runs back of the days when glaciers slipped down across it; back to the times when the sea covered the Mississippi Basin. Into the long story come the red men, and after many generations the whites. The songs of French boatmen echo upon its streams; Spanish fur traders trail its western shore. Julien Dubuque and Manuel Lisa move through the misty past. Builders of

homes arrive and out of the border land a State comes into the Union. Congressmen, soldiers, and farmers, lawyers, business men, and wide-visioned women play their parts; and so our heritage has grown.

And yet, probably it is the associations of a more immediate past, the memory of more intimate and homely things that makes up for us the thought of Iowa. It is where we live — perhaps where we have always lived. Its people are our people, and Iowa is our State. We frame its laws and try to obey them. It is we who build its institutions and make its history and look forward to the enjoyment of its future. The familiar scenes of the land between the rivers have woven themselves into our lives. And so Iowa means a thousand things to us — the rush of water in the gutters in the spring time, and the smell of burning leaves in the fall; the tang of early frost and the sight of oaks still clinging to their rusty foliage on the hill tops; the sound of birds in the early summer morning, and the stillness graven on the marble of a winter night. It means black mud in the bottom road and red sumac along the fence; small towns and large corn fields; *Wallace's Farmer* and Ding's cartoons; the clack of the mower and the memory of boys going off to war.

Iowa has its faults; but so, perhaps, have our parents, our wives, and our children — to say nothing of ourselves. And after all, we can not explain the charm of the things we love. Let us then not so

much boast of Iowa as be happy in it. Let us look with seeing eyes upon its beauties, and with friendly eyes upon its people — our neighbors. Let us know its story and make sure that we ourselves play in it a worthy part; for what we make it mean to us, that will it mean to those who come hereafter.

J. C. P.

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