The Palimpsest

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

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

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH
Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

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

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

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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Misrepresentative Fiction

Those of you who are old enough to look back with clear vision on conditions in the Middle West thirty years ago know something of the literary dearth, the literary stagnation, that then prevailed in this section of the country. Professor Barrett Wendell, whose *History of American Literature* came out in the opening years of the twentieth century, was often taken to task for assuming that no literature of any value was then being produced in the United States west of the Alleghany Mountains; but, so far as fiction is concerned, the assumption was not far wrong. About 1900, let us say, the eastern States had a cluster of novelists like Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins-Freeman and the southern States could claim a group of story-writers like Thomas Nelson Page and George

[This critique of contemporary fiction pertaining to life in the Middle West, particularly Iowa, is the address delivered at the Mid-year Convocation by Professor Sloan of the School of Letters at the State University of Iowa. — THE EDITOR.]

W. Cable; but all, or virtually all, we were doing in fiction at that time was represented by H. B. Fuller, Octave Thanet, and Hamlin Garland. It is true that William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, both Middle Westerners by birth, were still living and still writing; but both were in their dotage, with all their successes a long distance in the past. I think I am divulging no secret when I tell you that *The Midland,* the little magazine run by my good friends, John T. Frederick and Frank L. Mott, owed its inception, in large measure, to the conviction of a few men like themselves that the Middle West was dormant in fiction, and that it needed an oracle or a voice to make it spring to life.

Most of you know what a remarkable, what a decisive, literary transformation has taken place in a single generation. Within our own time, we have seen the literary grip of the eastern States and the southern States loosen, and the place in fiction they once proudly held has been passed on to the Middle West — the Middle West that used to be thought of as the home of hogs and hominy, and only hogs and hominy. The States that extend from Chicago to Denver, east and west, and from Minneapolis to Little Rock, north and south, are now definitely on the literary map, and, in fiction at any rate, their names are written in letters that are large and distinct. H. L. Mencken — the H. L. Mencken who so abominates the Middle West that he dreams of it in terms of the hinterland, the cow

country, the Methodist belt and the like — frankly concedes that the best fiction the country has produced since the World War has come from the great prairie States; and E. J. O'Brien, famous for his anthologies of the short story, has only recently been telling us that the literary center of the United States is Iowa City.

Most of what is original in American fiction, penetrating in American fiction, and significant in American fiction the last fourteen or fifteen years has emanated from Iowa and the surrounding States. Booth Tarkington, Willa Cather, Zona Gale, F. Scott Fitzgerald, O. E. Rölvaag, Herbert Quick, Rupert Hughes, Henry K. Webster, Sherwood Anderson, Robert Herrick, Carl Van Vechten, Josephine Herbst, Ruth Suckow, Cornelia Cannon, Sinclair Lewis, Janet Fairbank, Floyd Dell, Edna Ferber, Susan Glaspell, Margaret Ayer Barnes, and Bess Streeter Aldrich have all "arrived", as we say; and, without exception, they belong to the Middle West either by birth or by adoption. The same thing is true of a group of younger novelists — younger novelists who still have their laurels to make — like MacKinlay Kantor, Roger Sergel, Walter Muilenberg, and Nelson Antrim Crawford, who are just as native, just as indigenous, as the hogs and the cattle, the corn and the wheat, that constitute our basic or material wealth.

Nobody but a fool or an ignoramus would unreservedly condemn a group of writers as distinguished as

this, and I want it distinctly understood that that is not my mission, not my intention. I have the same respect, the same admiration, for most of the work done by these men and women that I presume the rest of you have. Novels like *Alice Adams, My Antonia, Miss Lulu Bett, The Great Gatsby, Giants in the Earth, Vandermark's Folly, The Web of Life, Red Rust, Dodsworth, So Big,* and *Peter Whiffle* have all taken a place, a deserved place, in contemporary American literature; and that I have no grudge against them will be clear when I say that I have used most of them in my classes time and again. They have all demonstrated the right to live by living, and there is no other test for fiction, or for any other kind of literature, for that matter, than the test of permanence, or relative permanence, that they have managed to meet.

My particular business here is with a group of Middle-Western novelists and Middle-Western novels for which I confess only a modified respect, and in some instances less than that. Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street,* Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White,* Carl Van Vechten's *The Tattooed Countess,* Floyd Dell's *Moon Calf,* Ruth Suckow's *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl,* and Homer Croy's *West of the Water Tower* are all illustrative of what I have in mind, though it would be easy to amplify the list five-fold or ten-fold. Now let us get into the books and see what they are like.

To the confirmed novel reader at any rate, the most

striking thing about these novels is the dead uniformity that marks them. They are all constructed after a formula, written after a recipe, quite as much as the popular romances of the late W. J. Locke, where a singed cat is always metamorphosed into a great hero. At bottom — stripped of non-essentials, that is — the stories are as much alike as two green peas or two derby hats; the beginnings are the same, the middles are the same, and the endings are the same. The underlying idea is always this : a young man or a young woman, usually of some intellectual distinction or of some cultural aspirations, playing the rebel, the iconoclast, the Ishmaelite, with reference to his or her immediate environment, and nearly always a Middle-Western environment. The brooding young soul, after a bath or two in the works of Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks, finds all surrounding or encompassing life a dance of the galvanized dead; spiritual frustration, spiritual starvation, are so prevalent that they come to be the rule or norm. They want, oh, so eagerly want, to realize their lives, as they are fond of putting it; but their environment is so unfriendly, so hostile, that the soul within can find no expression or fruition.

The little towns in which they grow up — the Gopher Prairies and the Winesburgs — are like the Nazareth of old : centers of all that is restricting, of all that is debilitating, of all that is deadening, where life — essential life — finds itself undernourished, stunted,

balked. The villagers are vulgar because they stick their napkins under their chins, eat their pie with knives instead of forks, and pick their teeth while they balance in their chairs. The villagers are narrow because they secretly line up with the Ku Klux Klan, tolerantly stomach a Hell where the depraved walk about like kittens on hot bricks, and drive out of town Nellie Gray because she is going to have a baby without benefit of clergy. The villagers are hypocritical because they keep up the W. C. T. U., send dry congressmen down to Washington, and then turn their kitchens, their pantries, and, in some cases, their cellars into home-brew establishments. The villagers are bourgeois because they live in parlors with marble-topped center tables, decked out with huge conchshells and family albums, or with crayon portraits of Uncle Ezra trying his best to look like one of the famous Smith Brothers, and because they read the *American Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. In a word, the villagers are as monotonous and as drab as the towns they live in, with one long street, often pretentiously called Broadway, where the drug store, the grocery store, the hardware store, all lead down to the frame hotel that hasn't been painted for a generation or to the little red station where the Rocky Mountain Limited whistles and then rushes on.

This, without much exaggeration, is what Sherwood Anderson's Hugh McVey, Homer Croy's Guy Plum-

mer, Sinclair Lewis's Carol Kennicott, and Ruth Suckow's Marjorie Schoesel find themselves up against — a world where every natural impulse is checked as if it were unholy, a world where mediocrity is enthroned until it becomes the norm of life, and a world where pettiness and triviality are elevated into the regions of a cult and a religion — the only cult and religion that the villagers really know. The great American desert has been misplaced in the geographies and the atlases; its true locale is in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Here is where the great American drama of the superior individual at war with an inferior environment is being played out — the villain, the ugly, frowning Bluebeard, always or nearly always the Middle West.

Nobody who keeps abreast of the public prints can fail to realize the snobbish, the contemptuous, the God-Almighty attitude toward the Middle West that exists among some, not most, Easterners to-day. There have been some striking proofs of it in the last two or three years and they are doubtless fresh in the minds of all of you. Heywood Broun has described us as "the land of the Babbitts". Senator Grundy has been telling us we belong to the "backward states". Senator Moses has been a little franker by dubbing us "sons of wild jackasses".

That this attitude should exist in the New England

States does not strike me as strange; it is, in reality, a normal, a natural outgrowth of the novels written by one-time or expatriate Middle Westerners who are like the birds that foul their own nests. These writers have done their best or their worst to picture Iowa and the surrounding States as places where the stench of atrophied personality cries to the very heavens, and they have been taken at their word by those like Broun and Grundy and Moses who do not know. I say purposely "by those who do not know" because I am convinced, from more than fifty years of actual contact and actual experience, that there is only a modicum of truth, and often not that, in this common representation of the Middle West — a Middle West that is the epitome, the embodiment, the consummation, of what is cowardly, paralyzing, and mean in American life.

John Cowper Powys, the distinguished English novelist and critic who talked to our students a year or so ago, put the matter rather brutally when he said to me : "It is all a damnable libel and a damnable lie. I have been going up and down your part of the country for twenty-five years, and I know what you are like. Lewis started the nonsense in *Main Street* and the rest have been parroting him ever since." I should not care to put the matter as bluntly or as emphatically as Powys does; but I think there is much truth in what he says.

What I propose to do now is to take you to a little town in western Iowa — a town that I have known

ever since I was a baby in my mother's arms — and let you see what it is like. I believe it typifies and symbolizes what goes on in a thousand other towns in the Middle West to-day, and, to that extent, it is a microcosm of the Middle West.

Magnolia, with its lovely and exotic name, lies on the western tier of Iowa counties. Normally the population is three hundred : when a birth occurs, it shoots up to three hundred and one, and when a death takes place, it drops down to two hundred and ninety-nine. There is a post office, a drug store, a hardware establishment, an eating-house, and, quite characteristically, twice as many garages and cream stations as grocery stores. There are five churches that pay their preachers anywhere from four hundred to twelve hundred dollars a year, and, whenever any blasé newcomer suggests a consolidation of these churches, something assuming the proportions of a free-for-all dog fight is precipitated. The old Congregational Church, now degenerated into an American Legion Hall, used to put on movies once a week, every Saturday night, usually releases two years old where Hoot Gibson or Tom Mix licks his weight in wild cats and then rides off with the lovely blonde to everlasting bliss. The Odd Fellows and the Masons, the Rebekahs and the Eastern Stars, determine the social status of every adult in town; if you belong to them, or any of them, you are eligible to the billiard club that has a rendezvous

above the barber shop or to the Happy Hour Club where the women quote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and thoroughly canvass their neighbors. Here, if anywhere, we would seem to have the potentialities of "Main Street", and here, if anywhere, it ought to be possible to find these young people whose superiority complex makes them cry out in revolt against their surroundings, "How weary and stale and flat and unprofitable everything is!"

I have kept abreast of the young men and young women of Magnolia for a generation, a long generation at that; and I am prepared to say unequivocally that I have never seen anything of the sort or known anything of the sort. It is true that a number of these young men and young women have left the place to make their homes elsewhere; but they have left it because of the enlarged opportunities offered by the great cities — nearby cities like Omaha and far-away cities like Chicago — for those who wish to get on in the professional world or the industrial world.

Magnolia happens to have produced a number of men who went out into life to become rather eminent, and it is interesting to note their reactions — their mature reactions — to the place that gave them birth and nourished their growth. Newell Dwight Hillis, born in Magnolia, became one of the country's most distinguished pulpit orators — first in Central Church in Chicago and later on in Plymouth Church in Brooklyn

— and he was, for many years, one of the greatest drawing cards in the chautauquas before they became the drivelling and inconsequential things they are to-day. He came back to the old town almost every year while he was lecturing in the Middle West, and I can vividly recall the joy, the almost childlike joy, he showed when he was allowed, on one of his visits, to ring the bell of the old frame schoolhouse where he acquired his earliest lessons. He preached once in his birthplace when he was in the very heyday of his fame, and I have heard him say that the loveliest music he ever listened to in his life was the singing of an old quartette on that particular occasion — a quartette that used to sing in the church when he was a boy.

Charles Fulton, born in Magnolia, went out West when he was a young fellow, and later on became Governor of Oregon, United States Senator from his adopted State, and a great wheel-horse in republican politics out on the coast. He has always considered one of the dominating forces, one of the ennobling forces, of his life to be his early association with the Clarks, the Rices, the Mains, the Harveys, and some of the other fine pioneer families that settled the place back in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century. Whether he is alive to-day I do not know, but, if he is, I am sure he would not O. K. the statement of Samuel Goldwyn, the motion-picture magnate, that "Iowa is devoid of romance".

Two or three other men who have writ their names large in the business life of the United States trace their ancestry back to Magnolia, and, from long acquaintance with them, I know they bear no more relation to the fictional rebels of Sherwood Anderson and Ruth Suckow than alchemy does to science. One of the men to whom I refer — a governing official of one of the greatest of Chicago corporations — has recently made plans to have his body brought back to the old place when Death comes later on, and his long, last sleep will be in the lovely country cemetery that looks out over mile upon mile of hill and dale.

Now I come to what seems to me the heart of the whole matter, and that is the distortion, the falsehood, that vitiates the point of view of these malcontents, these rebels, of fiction. Their tacit assumption that the Middle West is a Vale of Tears will hardly stand investigation, will hardly hold water; and I believe it is high time that we who live in the Middle West resent it, as it deserves to be resented.

The late W. L. George, a novelist who was familiar with every nook and cranny of our country, once told me that the Middle West is the typical part of the United States, and that the foreigner who wants to see the United States at its best, or at its most representative, should seek out, first of all, the region where the grain and the stock that feed the nation are produced. George's statement is very far from being nonsense

when we remember that the States west of Chicago and east of Denver have the lowest illiteracy record in the Union and that they contain fewer immigrants of an undesirable sort than any other part of the country.

It is only natural that our chief accomplishments thus far have been of a material sort because we are so young out here that we have had to spend most of the last seventy or eighty years in conquering the soil, in building our houses, in getting a foothold in life, so to speak. When our youthfulness is duly weighed, our cultural achievements strike me as altogether creditable, especially in the larger cities where wealth and intelligence commonly cluster.

The Civic Opera in Chicago, housed in a great and beautiful twenty-million-dollar building, is comparable to any other organization of its kind in the world; one needs only to contrast it with what is done in London, in Paris, in Brussels, in Milan, to realize how fine it is. The Public Art Gallery in Minneapolis has a collection of Rembrandts, of Botticellis, of Titians, that must be a revelation to the Easterner who thinks of Minnesota simply in terms of wheat and Hunkies. The Community Theatre in Omaha has put on four or five first-rate plays — plays by such men as George Kelly, Sidney Howard, and Eugene O'Neill — every year since it was organized, and it has the backing, financial, artistic, and otherwise, of the leaders in the city's life.

There are great symphony orchestras in Chicago, in Minneapolis, in St. Louis, in Omaha, giving the people a taste of Wagner, of Beethoven, of Mozart; and smaller organizations of the same type are taking root in Cedar Rapids, in Davenport, and in other cities that are considerably under a hundred thousand.

We are waking up to the fact, as the rest of America is doing, that man does not live by bread, and by bread alone. In the past, we may have rendered unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but now we are rendering unto God the things that are God's. Art has begun to flourish out here and will continue to flourish out here; the schoolhouses, the countless schoolhouses, will see to that. A State that spends as much money as Iowa for education does not need to worry about the practical, the utilitarian, the matter-of-fact, swamping everything else in life.

Before I close, may I ask that a wrong construction will not be put upon all this. The kind of fiction that sentimentalizes about life — the sort of fiction that cries out for sweetness and light when there is no sweetness and light — I abhor, and I have struck at it with all the force I could command from the time I started out as a teacher. I do not care for the *Old Chester* of Margaret Deland, the *Friendship Village* of Zona Gale, the other purely imaginary small towns that are the abode of only simplicity, innocence, and virtue, because I know that such idealized creations are born out of

cheerful, easy illusions and lead to cheerful, easy illusions. What is called the "genteel tradition" in literature, associated with William Dean Howells, is dead, hopelessly dead; and none of us who cares for the truth or loves the truth wishes it back again because it shunned reality by shutting its eyes to what is not "nice" in life.

I want the truth about the small town — the small town of the Middle West — in fiction; but (and here is the kernel of the matter) I want the truth divested of prejudice and cynicism — the prejudice and cynicism that always militate against truth and obscure truth for the reader. The idea that the Middle West is the breeding ground, the favorite haunt, of what is cloying and soul-destroying in American life seems to me as false as what we get in *Old Chester* or *Friendship Village,* and that is the reason I am protesting against it, as a long and loyal resident of the State of Iowa. That we have a monopoly on all that is cheap and banal in life, that we are crucifying our young men and young women, does not accord with either my observation or my experience, and all literature has sooner or later to be measured by those touchstones.

Life out here where the tall corn grows is pretty much what it is everywhere else where things are fairly new, and it is that kind of life — a life that gets down to the common, the underlying emotions — that I should like to see our novelists handle. We have our

hopes and our fears, our joys and our sorrows; and any literature that plays up the fears and the sorrows, and ignores the hopes and the joys, is a partial, an incomplete record, and subject to the indictment that such literature must expect and get. All I want is what has been done over and over again, or the sort of thing that Booth Tarkington, Herbert Quick, Cornelia Cannon, Willa Cather, and other true analysts of the Middle West have done. They did not feel and do not feel that the Middle West is "a cultural wilderness", as Mr. Mencken calls it, but rather a place, like all other places in the world, where the great drama of living and dying is going on, where parents have joyed over their first-born and mourned over their irreclaimable dead. It is such things as these that constitute the basic, the pivotal, the true, life of the Middle West, and, in my judgment, any fiction of the Middle West that endures must get down to such essentials.

SAM B. SLOAN

To Market with Hogs

In the spring of 1837 Joel Bailey came to Iowa, working as a government surveyor in the south half of Delaware County and parts of Dubuque and Buchanan counties. That fall he returned to Wisconsin, where he had been surveying, but came back the next spring, accompanied by John and Cyrus Keeler of Delaware County, New York, and built a cabin on the Maquoketa River at the spot since known as Bailey's Ford. There he raised wheat and corn, which he had to take to Dubuque to be ground.

It was not long before these early settlers decided it was more practicable to raise hogs than to haul the corn so far, especially since the market for corn meal was limited and uncertain. Moreover, the woods were full of acorns, nuts, and other good hog feed. The disposal of the surplus swine for cash, however, was about as difficult as peddling flour and meal.

In the fall of 1842, David Lowry, in charge of the Winnebago Indian mission near Fort Atkinson, advertised for fifteen thousand pounds of pork to supply his charges for the winter. Bailey and Keeler had enough hogs to produce that amount of pork and they decided to bid. At the mission, more than fifty miles away, Keeler found competitors, equally anxious to

sell their hogs. Each one put in a bid to sell for $2.25 per hundred pounds dressed. Keeler then reduced his offer to $2.00 and started for home, discouraged. On the way, however, he was told by a man who was familiar with the mission-school contract biddings that he would have to come down to $1.75 if he expected to dispose of his hogs. This seemed much like giving them away, but winter was approaching, when the hogs would no longer be able to feed themselves on "mast" in the woods, so he decided to reduce his bid to $1.75.

The mails were not regular in those days, letters being sent by any one who happened to be going in the right direction, and the answer to this bid came about a week later, when a man who lived near Marion, stopped at Bailey's Ford with a notice that the bid of $1.75 had been accepted and that the pork must be delivered by Christmas day. Keeler and Bailey hesitated about accepting the contract on these terms, but when the messenger offered them five dollars for the contract they concluded that if he could afford to do it perhaps they could make a little profit also.

Preparations were made as rapidly as possible. As they would be several days on the road it was necessary to take corn for the hogs and oxen, blankets and the articles needed for killing, scalding, and dressing a large drove of hogs. James Kibbee, William Padelford, and Lucius Vandever were induced to join them and

furnish extra teams and much-needed help in driving the hogs.

The start was made on the seventeenth of December. The weather was cold and the snow knee-deep. Seven yoke of oxen, hitched to the three sleds, went ahead to break a road for the swine. If any one doubts the labor and vexation of this trip let him drive one unruly hog one mile in deep snow and then consider the task of driving a drove of one hundred twenty-five over fifty miles. It took eight days to reach the mission, and every night but one was spent out in the open.

It was Christmas day when they reached the mission where they received a joyous welcome. The weary travellers had no time to rest, but began butchering immediately. The weather was bitterly cold and they had to work on the open prairie, without protection from the wind, though the fires for heating water afforded some comfort when they could avail themselves of it. Five short winter days were required to kill, scrape, and dress the swine at the rate of twenty-five a day.

They started for home on New Year's Day, camping on the banks of the Little Turkey River the first night with the hope of reaching Beatty's cabin on the Volga, twenty miles away, the next day. During the night a furious snowstorm from the southeast began. They realized the danger of starting across the prairie where there was no protection from the storm and no

landmarks visible because of the driving snow, but their food supply was exhausted, so they struggled on. About noon, the storm became so violent that they lost their way and were forced to turn back, arriving about nightfall at the campground they had left in the morning.

All that night the storm raged, but at dawn the men resolutely set out again through the whirling snow, feeling that their only hope was to reach the Volga timber that night. The weather was warmer and their boots and clothing were soon soaked. Rubber footwear was unknown and the coarse leather boots of that time were not waterproof unless freshly coated with tallow. The snow was from two to four feet deep, which made it necessary for the men to take turns going ahead of the oxen to wallow a track for them.

About ten o'clock the snow ceased falling, the wind shifted suddenly to the northwest, and the temperature fell rapidly. As their clothing was soaked they were in great danger of freezing to death. The deep snow, constantly drifting in the strong wind, made progress very slow. About noon, they caught a glimpse of the Volga timber in the distance, but the early dusk of a short winter day found them still miles away from the sheltering forest. Since it would have been folly to push on after dark they were forced to spend the night on the open prairie, exposed to the bitter wind.

As experienced pioneers they knew their danger and

did all they could for safety. Their largest sled was about ten feet long and had a box on it two boards high. By shoveling the snow from a small spot beside it, as it rested high on the deep snow, the top of it was about as high as their heads, thus giving them a slight shelter with a comparatively hard surface for stamping their feet. They tried to build a fire, using another sled box as fuel, but matches and ammunition were too wet to ignite, and their fingers were too numb to use flint and steel. They had been without food for twenty-four hours. Thoroughly exhausted from struggling through the deep snow all day, sleep was sorely tempting, but sleep meant death. They wrapped their blankets around them and stood huddled together, stamping to keep up the circulation in their feet and talking steadily to prevent any one from falling to sleep undiscovered in the darkness.

Joel Bailey, whose story of this dreadful experience has been handed down to posterity, said many years later, "The fearful horrors of that terrible night are as vividly impressed upon my memory as if they occurred but yesterday. We had to watch for each other's voices. If we failed to hear one, we hunted about in the dark, until we found him leaning against the sled, and started him going again. It seemed as if the day would never dawn."

At daylight another start was made and about noon they reached the Volga River and obtained water to

satisfy the intense thirst of the men and their patient oxen. The Beatty cabin was three miles farther and they knew they must get to it that day or perish. Weak with hunger and exhaustion they staggered on through the deep snow, their frozen feet obeying their stubborn determination with difficulty. They were almost past caring whether they lived or died.

About half a mile from the cabin they were encouraged by finding a track which enabled them to reach the cabin just before darkness caught them. There they found three storm-bound men en route to the mission and fort with two loads of butter, eggs, and poultry. Drawing on the loads of provisions for extra supplies, one of them prepared supper while the others attended to the needs of Bailey's party. With haste they cut the stiff and icy boots from their frozen feet, which were then plunged into tubs of cold water. As their feet thawed the men tried to relieve the pain by pouring whiskey and hot water down their throats. Mr. Bailey said afterwards, "That whiskey had been bought of an Indian trader who had thoroughly reduced it to increase the quantity before selling it to the Indians," otherwise it would have killed them all. Meanwhile great kettles of turnips had been put to boil. As soon as the frost was out of their feet and they had broken their forty-eight hour fast with a good warm supper, their feet were done up in turnip poultices and they fell asleep in spite of the pain.

It was weeks before Bailey, Keeler, and Vandever could walk. As soon as they could be moved on beds in the sleds, the kind-hearted Beatty and a man named Johnson took them as far as Brush Creek, an all-day journey of seven miles. Having spent the night at Major Mumford's, the invalids were transported another seven or eight miles to Joe Hewett's, northwest of Strawberry Point. On the evening of the third day they arrived at Eads's Grove, where they found some Delaware County friends who brought them home to Bailey's Ford.

Keeler was laid up for several weeks. Bailey could not walk for three months as both his feet festered and the dead flesh dropped off one of his toes, leaving the naked bone, which Keeler cut off with a knife. This primitive operation was evidently successful for he recovered the use of his feet so completely that he was able to make the overland trip to California with the gold seekers and was employed by the government as a surveyor in northern Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Vandever was not so fortunate. He lost eight toes. Though his feet finally healed, he was a cripple for life.

BELLE BAILEY

The "First" Locomotive

Somebody once humorously said that Dick Steele was the first to make love by the holding of hands. I should like to believe this. I should like to believe that the originator of Sir Roger de Coverley was the very first to hit upon such an agreeable pastime. Everybody who has tried it would be grateful to him, I am sure, if the discovery were properly his; but I fear that Dick was merely one in a long line of amorous swains to learn what was originally discovered by Adam in the Garden of Eden.

However it may have been with Dick, my point is that the word "first", whether used in relation to the holding of hands or in connection with more serious if not more interesting matters, is a tricky word that has enticed many an eager historian into error. Let me illustrate by a story of the first locomotive to run west of the Mississippi, a story which has revealed itself to me in a study of pioneer lecturers who travelled on foot, on horseback, by wagon and sled, and finally by primitive railroad to lecture in the West. The story itself, it seems to me, is not without interest. To any Westerner whose boyhood was spent before the days of the airplane, the first engine west of the Mississippi is an object of fascinating speculation in comparison with

which the Lindbergh trans-Atlantic flight (or the subsequent Lindbergh baby) pales into insignificance.

When was it, then, that "the first locomotive, destined to be used in the vast territory that lies between the Mississippi river and the Pacific ocean," actually made its appearance? Let the records reveal the answer, not in the order in which they were made, but as they might have been found by an historian.

Let us suppose that our historian happens upon an item in the Des Moines *Iowa State Register* of December 11, 1872. There he finds :

"AN ANCIENT LOCOMOTIVE. — The ancient and honorable old locomotive, John A. Dix, of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, has just come out of the shops, under a new name, No. 77, and when you see it boys, take off your hat. The Dix is a remarkable machine. It was the first locomotive that came into the State, was brought over on the ice in the winter of '54-55 to take position on the track of the old M. & M. road just commenced. It has been in almost constant use ever since — and with the exception of a new boiler and smokestack, is about the same machine she was eighteen years ago, when placed in service. Mose Hobbs ran the Dix eight years steady. It is estimated that that Dix has run in her time, about a million miles — equal to more than forty times around the globe, and seems good enough to repeat the same distance."

From this evidence, what are the claims of the "John A. Dix"? Is the item convincing? It was written only eighteen years after the event in question. There is a familiar reference to the engineer which would point to personal acquaintance with Mose Hobbs; hence we might assume that the reporter knew whereof he spoke when he said that Mose Hobbs had had the engine in charge for eight years, nearly half the time it had been in Iowa. Might it not be logical to believe that Hobbs would be sufficiently interested in so remarkable an engine to inquire into its not very extended history? Possibly the *Register* reporter had Hobbs's own word that the "John A. Dix" was the first locomotive to be brought into the State. What better authority could one wish?

Although the reference to date is somewhat vague, there are other details which seem to bear the earmarks of authenticity. What would be more natural, for instance, than to name the first locomotive in honor of the president of the new railroad, John A. Dix? The reference to the transportation over the ice, too, appears convincing. It has the concreteness of the words of an eye-witness. Historians agree, moreover, that the coming of the railroads west of the Mississippi preceded the building of any bridge over that river. Shall we concede the honor to the "John A. Dix"?

Before we do so, let us consider another item or two. The words of a Muscatine pioneer, whose honest in-

tentions I shall not question, appear in the Muscatine *Saturday Mail* on July 2, 1898 : "In the summer of 1855 railroad iron was landed from steamboats on our [Muscatine] wharf and road building begun towards Wilton. A small locomotive and a few flat cars were brought here on a barge from Rock Island. This was the first locomotive west of the Mississippi. The engine and cars were used to transport iron and ties for constructing the road."

Now, you see, we are definitely concerned with "the first locomotive west of the Mississippi". It is somewhat disappointing that we have here, not an imposing "John A. Dix", but only "a small locomotive and a few flat cars". We are confronted, too, with a later date, "the summer of 1855". We might, with an impatient gesture, decline to consider this unnamed engine further were it not for a brief notice in the Muscatine *Daily Journal* of October 12, 1855 : "Heretofore the progress of the railroad [being built from Muscatine] was very much retarded from want of facilities to obtain ties and rails. This will be alleviated now by the arrival of the locomotive. This locomotive is only intended for construction purposes and will not be used when the cars are placed on the road, which it is expected will be in about twenty days."

Although the dates in the two statements do not wholly coincide, may we not assume that both items refer to the same locomotive? At any rate, we are no

longer entirely at the mercy of reminiscence; we are confronted with a contemporary document.

What, now, of the "John A. Dix"? Shall we yield to its claims to an earlier date, or shall we be skeptical because of the demands of a rival which offers a somewhat later date but an apparently more convincing kind of evidence?

If, however, we are to base our judgment upon contemporary records, we must reckon with an account in the Davenport *Gazette* of July 21, 1855, which states that "the first locomotive west of the Mississippi" was the "Antoine LeClaire". It was transported across the river on a boat two days previous, July 19, 1855. We are assured later by another Davenport paper that the "John A. Dix", instead of being the first to cross the Mississippi, was really the seventh; and instead of arriving "in the winter of '54-55, actually arrived on February 16, 1856. It was, however, "brought over on the ice," the bridge not yet having been built.

May we not now feel that our quest is at an end? We have placed our reliance only on the best possible evidence — contemporary records. It was not the "John A. Dix", and it was not the nondescript locomotive at Muscatine which was the first to turn wheels west of the Mississippi. It was the "Antoine LeClaire", named in honor of "the father of Davenport".

We might now feel satisfied were it not for still another newspaper notice : "Clear the Track — The new

Locomotive *Burlington,* made her first trip yesterday evening. She proceeded a short distance beyond Running Slough. We understand she performed admirably. The 'Whistle' created quite a stampede about town, as well it might, it being the first locomotive whistle that ever was heard on the Upper Mississippi." This item from the Burlington *Telegraph* was quoted in the Muscatine *Journal* of December 9, 1853, more than a year and a half before the advent of the "Antoine LeClaire".

Contemporary records? Where now is our unquestioning faith in such will-o'-the-wisp evidence? However, if my reader is still hopeful, I shall quote only once more, this time from the *Daily Indiana State Journal,* Indianapolis, December 28, 1852 : "The first Locomotive, named the 'Pacific', was placed upon the track of the Pacific Railroad at St. Louis, on the 2d inst. It was the first railroad engine ever set in motion on the other side of the Mississippi."

I am inclined to believe, of course, that some locomotive probably was the first to be operated west of the Mississippi. It seems logical to suppose so. Possibly this locomotive was the "Pacific". On the other hand, perhaps it was the "John A. Dix." I have read that she was a remarkable machine.

HUBERT H. HOELTJE

Comment by the Editor

YOUTHFUL RAILROADING

"When I was a boy in a village in eastern Iowa," writes Mr. Hoeltje retrospectively, "one of my greatest pleasures in the summer vacation was to play along a creek that ran near the railroad east of town. There I used to sit and wait for the afternoon flier. It came around a bend near some tall poplar trees; then it went straight ahead into town, not stopping, of course, but disappearing finally at another bend. It was a grand sight. When it had gone, I still saw it in my mind's eye. . . . I can see it there now."

When I was a country boy in northwest Iowa, I could hear the whistle of the locomotive of the eastbound passenger train five miles away on clear crisp autumn mornings. And I wished ever so much to be seated in one of the orange-colored coaches, going to visit my grandfather where another railroad ran right through the pasture back of his house.

Sometimes, when we were in town on Saturday, I had the rare good fortune of being at the depot or the grain elevator when a train came thundering by. Once the engine stopped with a tremendous sigh only a rod or two from where I stood. It must have been running

fast because it panted all the time it stood there. Such a mighty creature, I thought, ought to have a name as glorious as any of the "Giants of the Republic", for it was quite as much a leader. Certainly a number, even with three figures, was inadequate.

Yes, I would be an engineer when I grew up.

The new railroad from Gowrie to Sibley ran not more than two miles from our farm. One memorable Sunday afternoon we went to see the construction train in operation. It seemed incredible that the railroad had to be built so fast that men must work on the Sabbath. Such labor was justifiable only when the dead-ripe oats were beginning to lodge.

But the ethical question was suddenly dissipated by the sight of the train. The engine was in the middle! Flat cars in front were loaded with rails while behind were car loads of ties and other material. Along each side of the train were troughs with some kind of endless chain in the bottom that conveyed the ties and rails forward. Directly in front of the first car men worked frantically — four men to a tie, eight to a rail, four spiking the rails to the ties, and, down on their knees almost under the wheels, two others hurried to bolt the rails together. But always the engine whistled before they had finished, and the train moved forward, ponderously, inexorably. That is the way of progress.

To me the most attractive feature of our new home in town was the proximity of the railroad, only a block

away. There were only two trains a day, but that was enough to flatten all the pennies we could get. Eventually came the news that a rich man had bought our grass-grown Mason City and Fort Dodge road and was going to make it a part of the Great Western. Boyish resentment changed to pride when bigger and better trains began to come through. Some of the freights were pulled by locomotives with three drive wheels on each side. Hog engines we called them. For years I watched for one with eight drivers. But there was some consolation in the thought that the North Western used none larger.

One foggy night a Great Western freight crashed through the middle of a North Western stock train. Many hogs were killed and some ran away. The Great Western engine lay on its back at the bottom of the embankment, a crushed and useless mass of iron.

Perhaps I would not be an engineer after all.

J. E. B.

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