

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. X11

ISSUED IN JUNE 1931

NO. 6

COPYRIGHT 1931 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Historical and Memorial Parks

The Iowa State parks, with their forts, their hollows and bridges, their caves and ledges and dens, almost defy classification. Indeed, much of the interest in their beauty and grandeur lies in the fact that each is different from the others. To visit historic old Fort Atkinson, to search for deer, elk, or buffalo bones in Boneyard Hollow, to see the wonder of the Natural Bridge, or to behold the marvelous features of Ice Cave stimulates a desire for further exploration. One wonders what he would see at the Ledges, at the Palisades, at Pilot Knob, or at Wild Cat Den. He wonders if Clear Lake is really clear, if Wall Lake is walled, if Storm Lake is rough, and if Twin Lakes are of the same age and approximately the same size and contour.

Some Iowa parks are primarily historic, some are memorial. Some are recreational, while others are scientific. There is unanimity only in the fact that all are scenic, although they may have historical or me-

morial, recreational or scientific values as well. Fort Atkinson and Fort Defiance are clearly historic, and, without attempting niceties in classification, Lewis and Clark, Dolliver Memorial, Lacey-Keosauqua, Palisades-Kepler, Lepley, Theo. F. Clark, Ambrose A. Call, Pammel, and Bixby each have human associations which may justify their being called memorial parks.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1840 horses, oxen, and mules stamped their weary way over fifty miles of prairie, drawing heavy loads of lumber, nails, and supplies from Prairie du Chien for the building of a fort on the Turkey River. A sawmill on the banks of the stream turned out walnut lumber for interior use, while limestone blocks were quarried near-by for use at the fort. Month by month the stone walls took shape: skilled workmen fitted joists and rafters and laid the floors. During the next spring the building began to assume the appearance of a fortification.

Why should a fort have been built only fifty miles west of the military post at Prairie du Chien? To protect the Indians! In 1837 the Winnebago chiefs had agreed to move across the Mississippi to the Turkey River Valley. But the tribesmen were reluctant to leave their native Wisconsin. Moreover, they were afraid of being attacked by their enemies, the Sacs and Foxes and the Sioux. To allay these fears and to hasten the migration, Brigadier General Henry Atkinson es-

corted the Winnebago to their new home in 1840. To make the position of the Indians more secure the troops established a camp and began erecting permanent buildings. Within a year Camp Atkinson became Fort Atkinson.

When the fortifications were complete, four long rectangular barracks, two of stone and two of logs hewn flat, enclosed a square parade and drill ground of more than an acre. These buildings were two stories high and twenty feet from the ground to the eaves, each having an upper porch along its entire length. Separate buildings were provided for the commissioned officers, for the non-commissioned officers, and for the private soldiers. Provision was also made for a hospital, a chapel and schoolroom, a storehouse, a powder-house, a guard-house, two blockhouses, and ample stable room. A picket fence of squared logs twelve feet high with loop holes at intervals of four feet enclosed the buildings. At the end of the parade ground a tall flag-staff towered above the fortifications.

For half a dozen years troops were maintained there in the interest of peace and safety. Finally, in 1848, the Winnebago moved on northward into Minnesota, and the need of maintaining Fort Atkinson was ended. Accordingly, one morning in February, 1849, the teamsters harnessed the mules at the fort for the last time, the troops loaded their supplies on the army wagons, and, having tacked to a walnut log in the sleeping quar-

ters a card inscribed "Farewell to bedbugs", they departed.

After the fort had been abandoned, the General Assembly of Iowa asked that the United States government give the buildings and two sections of land for the site of an agricultural school, which should be a branch of the State University. The request was not granted, however, and in 1853 the buildings at the fort were sold at public auction for \$3521.

A half century later, time had wrought its destructive work, and the buildings were falling rapidly into decay. By 1918 further evidences of waste and destruction were apparent. The old blockhouses were infested with pigeons; the chapel, with a hole in the roof and the windows gone, was surrounded by a forest of weeds; the powder-house had degenerated into a hennery; and the walls of the barracks were crumbling away. The old fort with its beautiful setting and its elaborate and substantial equipment had gone down, down, down until it sheltered only the beasts and the birds. Old Fort Atkinson had become a pigsty.

In 1919 an appeal to the historical and patriotic interests of Iowa resulted in the preservation of what remained of the old fort. Two years later the buildings and five acres of ground were purchased by the State to be restored and preserved as a State park and recreational center.

During the days of the Civil War, Indian trouble

in the northwest resulted in the erection of another fort, the site of which, like that of Fort Atkinson, has now become a State park. The Sioux under the leadership of Little Crow had committed depredations in southern Minnesota and were laying siege to New Ulm. It was feared that the Indians, knowing that many white men were away serving in the Union army, might attempt to drive the settlers out of Minnesota and Iowa and again occupy the land west of the Mississippi River. To prevent such an attack, Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood commissioned W. H. Ingham to raise a troop of cavalry in northwestern Iowa. A company was accordingly organized and stationed at Estherville where in the fall of 1862 they began the erection of Fort Defiance.

As soon as Captain Ingham completed his plans for the fort, men were detailed to cut and hew logs for the construction of walls. Other workmen commenced to repair a dam across the Des Moines River which furnished power for the sawmill, where planks for the stockade and other necessary lumber was sawed. The weather was so bitter cold that frozen fingers, ears, and feet were common, but the work went steadily on.

The site of the fort was an inclosure one hundred and twenty-six feet square. One of the buildings — the captain's residence — was sixteen by twenty-eight feet, and contained two rooms below and an attic the full length. A second building sixteen by thirty-six

feet contained three rooms — a kitchen, a dining room, and general quarters commonly known as the “bar room”. This building also had a full-length attic which was used as sleeping quarters. A smaller building about sixteen feet square was erected for use as a jail or guard-house. The barn was so constructed as to form the south wall of the inclosure, twenty-six feet wide and a hundred and twenty-six feet long. Like the other buildings, it was solidly framed of hard wood, and sided with oak and walnut lumber. It was protected on the south — the exposed side — by a sod wall four feet thick and eight feet high. The ends were of four-inch plank as were also the outer doors. The intervening space between the buildings was stockaded with four-inch building plank, mostly black walnut, eight feet high, surmounted by rows of bristling spikes. All of the buildings as well as the stockade were loop-holed at frequent intervals.

In the center of the inclosure was a well with abundant water, and about midway between the captain's home and the company quarters stood the flagstaff, where Old Glory waved for about a year and a half. Captain Ingham's cavalry had enlisted for thirty days but it was fifteen months before they were finally mustered out.

In April, 1864, the fort was abandoned and disintegration soon followed. Although the buildings were left in charge of a caretaker, he seems to have had

little interest in their preservation. For a number of years, Fort Defiance served as a temporary refuge for families seeking homesteads in the northwest. Settlers would move into any of the buildings that happened to be vacant and hold them by virtue of a squatter's right until they could build cabins on their own claims. Plank by plank the stockade disappeared. Every board or stick that came loose or could be pried loose was used for firewood or in the construction of some settler's cabin. Lightning struck the "liberty pole" and it disappeared in splinters. In 1866 the property was sold and such parts of the buildings as remained were moved away.

In 1920, many years after the fort had vanished, the site of this frontier post was reclaimed and dedicated as an historic landmark. An area of fifty-three acres including the site of the fort has become one of Iowa's State parks. It is a place of such great natural beauty, abounding in ravines, flowers, and trees, that it has become not only an historic landmark but a valued wild life preserve as well.

Another Iowa State park — Lewis and Clark, near the Missouri River in Monona County — commemorates an historic event and stands as a memorial to the early explorers. In August, 1804, members of the Lewis and Clark expedition spent several days in this region exploring and making observations relative to the geographical conditions, the plants, and the animals

which they found. Clark in his peculiar spelling noted in his journal that "Beever is verry Plenty". He observed "great nos. of wild gees", and "Great Nos. of Herrons". The party also found "great quantities of Grapes". The "Musquitoes", however, were "very troublesome", and could scarcely be warded off even "with the assistance of a brush".

Geographically, Lewis and Clark State Park is an interesting place. It contains about three hundred acres on the margin of Blue Lake, a body of water covering about sixteen hundred acres. This lake is shaped like an ox-bow. When Lewis and Clark visited the region this lake bed was a part of the main channel of the river, but sometime since then the river has changed its course to the westward leaving a beautiful Iowa lake. One of the remarkable sights is a bed of American lotus growing in the quiet waters at the shallow end. The aquatic life is abundant and the lake offers good fishing. Sand bars and sand dunes partly covered with native trees add beauty and interest. Several thousand deciduous trees native to Iowa have been planted as a part of the memorial forest being established in honor of Stephen T. Mather, former Director of the National Park Service.

As Iowa honors the explorers who led the way to a country such as Caleb and Joshua would have described as "flowing with milk and honey", so the State also honors and respects its statesmen. We like to

build monuments in their praise. As early as 1918, when memorial parks were still rare, a movement was started to perpetuate the name of Jonathan P. Dolliver, one of the most influential leaders Iowa ever sent to Congress. Three years later, the plans were completed and a tract of land was acquired in Webster County for a Dolliver Memorial Park.

This park of over five hundred acres is situated near the town of Lehigh, and is about fourteen miles from Fort Dodge where Dolliver lived from the time he came to Iowa in 1878. On one side of it flows the Des Moines River; on the other lies a wide expanse of prairie farms. Prairie Creek flows through the park and Boneyard Hollow and other ravines add interest and beauty. "Boneyard" is an appropriate name, for numerous bones of elk, deer, buffalo, and other animals have been found there. Primitive implements of copper, arrowheads, and the remains of other Indian weapons indicate that the red man may have used this gorge as a wild game trap.

Dolliver Park is interesting botanically, especially for its numerous varieties of ferns. The walking-leaf fern, the bladder fern, *Woodsia*, spleenwort, *Osmunda*, maiden-hair fern, and polypody — indeed, with one or two exceptions, all species of ferns found in central Iowa occur here. The trees, too, are of a wide variety. The park affords excellent camping and picnic facilities. It is interesting to the scientist, attractive to the lover

of nature, and inviting to all who are interested in the great out-of-doors.

It is fitting that such a place should be maintained as a monument to Jonathan P. Dolliver, for he was a lover of nature and a lover of mankind, fulfilling his own characterization of a worthy citizen. "I like a man", he said, "who is able not only to take care of himself, but to do something for the unfortunate who surround him in this world, and when you bury a citizen like that you do not call him a man, you call him a lover of mankind, and you build monuments to him".

John F. Lacey, like Jonathan P. Dolliver, was a native of West Virginia. Like Dolliver, too, he was born in obscurity and came to Iowa where he developed qualities of conspicuous leadership. He was by profession a lawyer, by necessity a soldier, by selection and design a statesman, but by nature and by choice he was also a conservationist — an ardent defender of wild life, a constant protector of the forest and woodland, and a genuine lover and admirer of the great out-of-doors. His name is written large in Iowa's conservation program and preserved in Lacey-Keosauqua State Park.

After nearly four years of gallant and meritorious service in the Iowa Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, Major Lacey returned to his boyhood home in Oskaloosa and resumed the study of law. Eventually he was elected to Congress where he served for sixteen

years. During that time his most effective work was in connection with the Committee on Public Lands, where his aggressive conservation policy resulted in great benefit to the nation. He was the author of the "Lacey Bird Protection Act"; he fathered the law which set aside Yellowstone National Park, and drafted the rules for its government; he fostered legislation relative to Crater Lake in Oregon, Yosemite Park in California, and the petrified forests of Arizona.

In 1919 twelve hundred acres of land were purchased near Keosauqua in Van Buren County for the Lacey-Keosauqua State Park. The value of this area as a game preserve is increased by the fact that farmers in the vicinity have voluntarily agreed to assist the State in the protection of wild life on their own land. Thus the park and large areas surrounding it furnish undisturbed breeding places for birds and animals.

Ely's Ford between Keosauqua and the park is an historic landmark, having been a noted crossing of the Des Moines River before the roads were built. A quarter of a mile back from the ford is the site of a prehistoric Indian village, while on the river bank near the ford is a chain of six well-preserved Indian mounds. Lacey-Keosauqua is one of the largest and most valuable of Iowa's State parks.

Any one who has made a trip up the Hudson River will long remember the Palisades. In like manner, any one who has gone down the less romantic but very

beautiful and picturesque Cedar River will remember the Iowa Palisades. The Palisades of Iowa, it is true, may not equal in height those of the Hudson, "but for sheer beauty of surroundings, for a quiet resting place for tired and weary country folks, as a refuge for the over-heated people of the crowded cities, the Palisades of the Cedar River in Linn County cannot be excelled". In 1922 the State acquired one hundred and forty acres of flood-plain, upland woods, and vertical cliffs in this region. Five years later the Louis Kepler Memorial Tract adjoining the Palisades was received by gift, and additional land has since been purchased. The whole area constitutes the Palisades-Kepler State Park.

The varied topographical features of this area afford interest to the student of science and give protection to a large number of native plants, birds, and animals. The park is more than a place for rest and recreation. It is one of Nature's rare gifts to those who "see and hear with their brains and their hearts as well as with their eyes and their ears".

This region also has an historic and prehistoric interest. A molar tooth of a mammoth found there speaks of a far distant past, and numerous Indian relics are reminders that this was a favored haunt of red men before the white settlers arrived. The ruins of an old mill for the crushing of rock is evidence of the less remote activities of the region. To one who desires rest or recreation, scientific adventure and study, or the

acquisition of historical data of Indian and pioneer life such as can not be acquired in books, Palisades-Kepler makes a special appeal.

Among the pioneers of Hardin County the family name Lepley is prominent and persistent. Peter Lepley was the first of the family to enter Iowaland. His grandfather had come to Pennsylvania about 1750 and had witnessed a wasteful destruction of forests. His father had lived in Ohio and observed a similar waste. Peter and the other Lepleys — ten in all — who came to Iowa as pioneers purchased farms which were half timber and half prairie, and used the timber sparingly. "Save the good trees, and cut the poor ones", seems to have been a family slogan. It was Manuel Lepley who set aside ten acres of woodland and native flowers, near the town of Union, and instructed his sons not to use it for pasture land, and not to cut any trees that were "healthy and straight". This tract of virgin timber was later donated to the State and dedicated as Lepley State Park.

The park contains basswood, slippery and American elm, hackberry, green ash, white oak, bur oak, and red oak trees, and such wild flowers as the waterleaf, cranesbill, bellwort, Canadian lily, greater lobelia, bell flower, goldenrod, and aster. It is a small but a delightful picnic place.

Along the banks of Wolfe Creek, four miles northeast of Traer in Tama County is a beautiful little park

dedicated to the memory of Theo. F. Clark, a pioneer of that region. This area is the gift of Mrs. May Clark McCornack. It contains twenty-four acres of woodland in which there is a wide variety of trees — the elm and the basswood being the most numerous. The park serves as a valuable recreational center for the residents of central Iowa.

In the spring of 1854 Ambrose A. Call, a native of Ohio, left Cincinnati to seek a new home west of the Mississippi. He journeyed west and northwest across Iowa, visiting Iowa City, Fort Des Moines, and Fort Dodge. There he was advised not to venture farther because of the Indians. Little heeding this advice, however, he pressed on to the northwest until he arrived at the present site of Algona, where he camped for the night. Locating a grove near-by, he blazed a walnut tree with his hatchet and wrote on it, "Ambrose A. Call claims this grove — July 10, 1854". Later he built a log cabin and made his home in that grove. It was the first claim marked and the first cabin built in Kossuth County. This site now constitutes the Ambrose A. Call State Park.

The tract lies on the right bank of the east branch of the Des Moines River. It contains one hundred and thirty-four acres, and is profuse in all the beauties of nature. Its rolling hills covered with wild flowers make it one of the treasured spots of the State. Interested citizens of Kossuth County contributed liberally toward

the purchase price in order that this pioneer settlement might be preserved.

To one interested in nature study and in the preservation of areas which serve as geological and botanical laboratories as well as holiday resorts, Pammel Park in Madison County makes a special appeal. Because of its peculiar and significant rocky outcrop, this area was for a number of years designated as Devil's Backbone. Here a sparkling little river "fights" its way through timbered limestone hills. As if possessed of a personality and a will to win, it "twists and winds, and turns along steep rocky bluffs for two miles over limestone beds and rocky ripples, until it comes almost back into itself, stopped by a narrow, straight-up backbone of rock barely a hundred feet wide at its base, and then it sweeps along and away at the base of a magnificent timbered rock bluff". A mile more and it has fought its way through the Upper Carboniferous rocks. It makes one more turn, and then resumes its ordinary peaceful course across the rich Iowa prairies.

In this region, too, are numerous and varied prairie flora — flowers, shrubs, and trees, a veritable botanical garden. The conifers and white birches are numerous. The area is also a favorite wild life preserve. Ground-hogs, raccoons, minks, opossums, squirrels, foxes, and other wild animals as well as a great variety of birds are found there.

Early in the fifties, Tilman G. Harmon discovered

that by tunneling a mill-race through the shale stratum of the narrowest part of the ridge he could divert a stream of water from the higher level of the river on the west side of the backbone to the lower level on the east. A tunnel about six feet in diameter and a hundred feet long was dug, a dam was built, and a flour and saw-mill constructed. The water flowing through the tunnel fell twenty feet on the mill-wheel and thus supplied the power for the mill. The old mill-wheel has now long since ceased to turn.

In June, 1930, the Devil's Backbone was rechristened as Pammel State Park in honor of L. H. Pammel, for many years one of Iowa's most ardent advocates of a systematic, consistent, and forward-looking park and conservation program. Dr. Pammel was among the early scientists of the State to see the value and beauty of Iowa's natural resources, and to plan definitely for parks and wild-life preserves. As a member of the Board of Conservation, as a member of numerous committees in the interest of wild life, as a scientist, an author and a teacher, no other man has been as influential as he in the development of Iowa State parks. The high regard in which he is held throughout the State is in a measure shown by the naming of Pammel State Park in his honor.

When Marquette and Joliet looked upon the shores of the Mississippi River a few miles below McGregor in 1673, they beheld a wild, hilly country which in

recent years has come to be known as the "Switzerland of Iowa". To this region in 1854 came the pioneer Bixby family. Natives of the Green Mountain State, accustomed to hills and valleys and woodlands, they were delighted with the scenery of northeastern Iowa. The family homesteaded in Clayton County, where a son, Ransom J. Bixby, was born. With the passing of time the younger Bixby became a teacher, a farmer, a legislator, and the owner of a considerable tract of Iowa land. Upon one of his farms was "most rugged and beautiful scenery". There he built a log cabin, equipped it with a fireplace, kept it in excellent condition, paid taxes on it, and allowed the public to use the place as a park free of charge. This area has now been acquired by the State and dedicated as Bixby State Park.

The most peculiar phenomenon of this region is the Bixby Ice Cave — one of the few scientific wonders of its kind found in the middle west. Numerous springs of flowing water, a charming waterfall, a profusion of wild flowers and native trees, and a wide and varied distribution of wild life makes this region "the real mecca of the lover of nature". The park contains sixty-nine acres. It is near the town of Edgewood, and is one of the most attractive of Iowa's summer resorts.

A retrospective view reveals the fact that a brief century ago the Winnebago had not yet moved westward. Old Fort Atkinson and Fort Defiance with their

blockhouses and stockades were not yet built. Boneyard Hollow in Dolliver Memorial Park was a rendezvous of the elk and the buffalo. The sparkling little river, that "twists and winds and turns along steep rocky bluffs" in Pammel Park was still undiscovered, while Bixby's Ice Cave, and the Palisades awaited the advent of appreciative visitors.

Now all is changed. The Winnebago have come and gone. Forts have been erected and fallen to decay. The elk and the buffalo, too, have gone. But there remain memories and tokens of the past. Old forts, stockades, and even the sites on which they stood recall the days of Indian warfare. Gorges, hollows, caves, and cliffs with their surrounding points of historic and memorial interest, together with their present-day scientific and aesthetic value, make a wide and fascinating appeal. As a result of this interest Iowa stands in the forefront in the maintenance of the historical and memorial State parks.

J. A. SWISHER