

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. VI

ISSUED IN MAY 1925

NO. 5

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In Honor of the Flag

It is probably impossible for people living at the present time, whose memories do not antedate our Civil War, to fully appreciate the bitter feeling that existed at that time between the people of the North and the South. This feeling was more in evidence on the borders, where the free and slave States adjoined, than elsewhere, as the people of radically different views were brought more into contact with each other than in those States that were more widely separated. The following incident will, to some extent, illustrate my meaning.

A few years before the breaking out of the war, a family by the name of Fallon moved from the South and settled in Iowa, a few miles east from Glenwood in Mills County. The family consisted of the father, mother, and several children — among them one named Joseph, generally called Joe. Joe was a young man, something under thirty years of age.

The family stood well in the community, but brought with them all the prejudices of the South, especially those concerning slavery or the so-called "peculiar institution", and were generally known as copperheads. However, with the exception of the feeling engendered by those conditions, they were well liked by their neighbors and others in the community in which they lived. Joe engaged in hauling merchandise to the newly discovered mines in the neighborhood of Pike's Peak. This at that time was the only method of transporting supplies, there being no railroads west of the Missouri River.

It happened one day, in the fall of 1863, that Joe was in Glenwood. In going about the streets, he passed near a flag pole, which the citizens had raised in the public square, and on which they generally kept a flag flying. The flag was flying on the day mentioned. As Joe passed by, the sight of the Union emblem seemed to anger him, for he pulled out his revolver and began shooting at it.

There was living in the town at that time a man by the name of James A. Nelson, generally known as Jim. He was a radical Union man, and would no doubt have been in the service had it not been that he had lost one of his legs and had to walk with the aid of a crutch.

Jim happened to be near Fallon when he fired at the flag. It was but the work of a moment for him to hobble out to where Joe stood, balance himself on his one leg, and give the copperhead such a blow

over the head with his crutch that it knocked him down. Almost in the time which I have taken in telling it a crowd gathered and, as soon as Fallon's action was understood, the excitement became intense. Some of the more radical citizens were in favor of immediate and violent measures, and many favored hanging him at once. After a good deal of discussion, however, better counsel prevailed, and it was decided to place Joe in the hands of a reliable committee, to be held by them until the next day. In the meantime runners were to be sent out through the county to leading loyal men, telling of Joe's action and asking them to come into town the next day to attend a mass meeting which would determine what action should be taken.

On the following morning, toward noon, men began to gather in from all parts of the county, and it was announced that immediately after noon a meeting would be held in the courthouse to determine what punishment should be meted out to Fallon. At the appointed hour a large crowd gathered and filled the courtroom which occupied the entire second floor of the courthouse. Many were unable to obtain entrance. A chairman was appointed who stated the object of the meeting and called for remarks. All kinds of plans were suggested as to the punishment that should be inflicted. Many were in favor of proceeding to extreme measures, such as whipping or hanging. Others, wanting to avoid anything like such a tragedy, favored a milder course. Some

thought he should be delivered to the Deputy Provost Marshal of the district, who was present, to be taken by him to headquarters in Des Moines. After a good deal of discussion, however, the extreme heat of passion subsided to some extent, and it was finally decided that Joe should be compelled to kneel on the floor, subscribe and swear to the oath of allegiance to the United States, and pay to a committee to be appointed for that purpose the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars, to be distributed among needy families of soldiers who were at the front.

The prisoner was evidently greatly relieved at this decision, for undoubtedly he well knew that his life had hung in the balance for some time during the progress of the meeting. He kneeled down at once, subscribed and took the oath of allegiance, and, putting his hand in his pocket while still on his knees, he drew out a roll of bills and counted out two hundred and fifty dollars which he handed to the committee. He was then told it would be best for him to leave town at once and not be seen again on the streets — at least not until after the excitement had died out.

“He did not stand on the order of his going, but went at once.” I never saw him afterward, but have been told that, after the lapse of a few years, he one day appeared in Glenwood. The family, however, moved away from there and I do not know what finally became of them or him.

As I write, I have before me the oath subscribed by Joe, a facsimile of which appears below.

Joseph Pelon of *Mills* County,
of *Iowa*..... State of ~~Illinois~~ *Iowa*, do solemnly swear that I
will support, protect and defend the Constitution and Government of the
United States against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign; that I will
bear true faith, allegiance and loyalty to the same, any ordinance, resolution or
law of any State Convention or Legislature to the contrary notwithstanding;
and, further, that I will well and faithfully perform all the duties which may
be required of me by the laws of the United States. And I take
this oath freely and voluntarily, without any mental reservation or evasion
whatsoever, with a full and clear understanding that Death, or other punishment
by the judgment of a ^{Court} ~~Military Commission~~ will be the penalty for the
violation of this, my solemn oath and parole of honor

Certificate:

and subscribed
Quond to before me this 15th day of October
1863
Witnesses:
J. Edmundson
Notary Public.
D. O., County, Mo.

J. B. Hall 

There is no doubt but had some man with the qualities of a leader got up and said, "Come on, boys, let's hang the —— copperhead", (the reader may fill the blank with such an adjective as he thinks would have been suitable for the occasion), nothing could have saved him. But better counsel prevailed, and after the excitement had died down everybody was satisfied that the best course had been taken.

J. D. EDMUNDSON