

## Comment by the Editor

PHILIP CLARK

In the autumn of 1836, when the forest-clad hills bordering the Mississippi were just beginning to don the gorgeous raiment of Indian summer, hundreds of Sauk and Fox warriors gathered on the west bank of the river opposite Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. They came to negotiate terms for the sale of Chief Keokuk's Reserve on the Iowa River. With them came adventurous white men — the fur traders and Indian agents. On a promontory above the picturesque Indian encampment were the tents of the government officials; and there, on September 28th, the tawny braves, decked in the finery of their red and green blankets, ceded their land to the United States. General Henry Dodge, the Governor of the Territory of Wisconsin, spoke for the "Great Father" in Washington, and explained that within a month the Indians must move farther westward to make room for the white men.

In the throng who witnessed that historic episode were two young men who, having heard that a large tract of land west of the Mississippi was to be vacated by the Indians, had left northern Indiana and made their way on horseback to Fort Armstrong. Philip Clark and Eli Myers were seeking



homes in the Iowa country, and they wanted to be ready to seize any opportunity that might be offered. At the treaty council they fell in with a representative of the American Fur Company, John Gilbert, who persuaded them to locate claims near his trading post at Poweshiek's village on the Iowa River. Forthwith they proceeded to stake out the boundaries of their prospective farms, built cabins, and in the following spring, having brought implements from Indiana, they broke the first furrows in the prairie sod of Johnson County.

Philip Clark was then thirty-three years old. Born in Ireland, he had come to America and formed a part of the irresistible tide of humanity which, flowing ever westward, continually displaced the lodges of the Indians with the cabins of the settlers. With the permission of Poweshiek, he selected a tract of land on what is now section twenty-two in East Lucas Township; and during the summer of 1837 he laid out the site for a town which he named Napoleon. In 1838 Napoleon was designated as the seat of justice for Johnson County and a courthouse was built; but the irony of its name seems to have been overwhelming, for the city never existed except in the fancy of its founder.

On the morning of May 1, 1839, a number of roughly clad pioneers collected at Napoleon to welcome the commissioners who had been chosen to select a site for Iowa City, the permanent capital of the Territory of Iowa, "at the most eligible point"



in Johnson County. By noon only one of the commissioners, Chauncey Swan, had arrived; and the interest of the settlers began to change to anxiety, for unless one of the other commissioners came that day they would have no authority to locate the capital. While other men were speculating on this turn of affairs, suspecting treachery on the part of rival counties in southeastern Iowa, Philip Clark stepped forward and volunteered to ride across country to the home of John Ronalds, the nearest commissioner, who lived in Louisa County thirty-five miles away, and fetch him before midnight.

It was a bold proposal. A trip of seventy miles in twelve hours over the prairie roads, around sloughs, through forests, and across unbridged streams was an undertaking to challenge the mettle of any horseman. After Clark had disappeared in the timber, the little company of settlers at Napoleon waited anxiously. The future of the community depended upon the mission of their neighbor. As the hour of midnight approached their hopes gave way to despair. What if Ronalds was not at home? Perhaps Clark had met with an accident. In vain they watched and listened. At last, however, the rapid thud of hoofs was heard in the distance and at five minutes to twelve, by Chauncey Swan's watch, the expected riders galloped up and dismounted from their foaming horses. The day was saved, though several of those present were amazed that sunrise on May 2nd followed so soon after midnight.



During the years that followed, Philip Clark continued to occupy a prominent place in the history of Johnson County. He cultivated the town site of Napoleon within view of the capitol of Iowa, and added many acres to his extensive possessions. On several occasions he was elected to public offices which he filled to the satisfaction of the community and with credit to himself. In 1850 he fell a victim of the gold fever and joined the rush to California; but eventually he returned to find his wife estranged, his property deeded away, and a disreputable stranger living on his farm.

In the early days, twenty years before, the pioneers of Johnson County had established the habit of aiding each other in times of need — when the work was heavy or when strong men went trembling to bed with malaria fever. They had organized to hunt down horse thieves and capture counterfeiterers, and they had formed an association to protect their land against claim jumpers. So, when the life and property of Philip Clark were endangered, the friends of former years came to the assistance of the old settler with a loyalty that knew no restraint and could not be shaken. His tormentors were punished and the fraudulent sales of his land were annulled. Though partially blind and much bent, he lived to a ripe old age, respected and esteemed by his fellow pioneers and his neighbors of a younger generation.

J. E. B.