

## The Old Pottawattamie Mill

When my father moved to Council Bluffs early in June, 1853, I was a boy only ten years old. At that time the town was a straggling frontier village, founded by the Mormons in 1846 and boomed by the gold rush of 'forty-nine. Only a row of frame store buildings with square fronts lined the one principal street, and the Missouri River was about three miles away across the sunflower-covered bottoms. It seems to me now, as I recall those early days, that one of the most interesting places in or near town was the old Pottawattamie mill, located about three miles to the northeast, then in the heyday of its existence. There, as a boy, I frequently went fishing in Mosquito Creek and swimming in the mill pond. Through these excursions I became intimately acquainted with the miller, Stutely E. Wicks, and his family. Being greatly interested in the old mill and its history, I often went through the establishment with Mr. Wicks and was thoroughly familiar with its operation.

The story really begins in 1830, when, on July 25th, the Sauk, Fox, Ioway, Oto, Missouri, and Sioux Indians, who then occupied the western half of the present State of Iowa as a common hunting ground, ceded this territory to the United States, though by the terms of the treaty the tribes were permitted to continue to use the lands as hunting grounds until

the government should locate other Indians thereon or dispose of the same in some other manner.

By a treaty made at Chicago on September 26 and 27, 1833, several scattering bands of Pottawattamie, Chippewa, and Ottawa Indians in Illinois and Indiana, who had not been removed under previous treaties, surrendered their occupancy of lands in those States and consented to removal west of the Mississippi River. At that time the intention of the government seems to have been to settle them, together with others of their people, upon lands which afterward became a part of the State of Kansas; but for some reason the plan was changed and it was decided to locate these bands upon a portion of the lands — about five million acres — acquired under the provisions of the treaty of 1830, in southwestern Iowa. Removal progressed during the years 1835, 1836, and 1837, but the main body of the Indians did not reach their proper destination until late in July of the latter year. The headquarters of these people, as shown by the records in the Office of Indian Affairs at Washington, were established July 29, 1837, “on the left bank of the Missouri river fifteen or eighteen miles above the mouth of the Great Platte river”, where a blockhouse about twenty-five feet square was erected for their protection. For twenty years this old log structure stood “upon the plateau crowning the blunt nose of the hill” which towered over Broadway between the present-day Grace and Union streets, serving first as a fort and later as a

Jesuit mission founded by Father Pierre Jean De Smet in 1838.

The Indians located in small villages well over the south half of the area of lands allotted to them. Fear of the Sioux to the north and west caused the limitation in occupancy. The leaders among the tribal chieftains were Billy Caldwell, Joseph Laframboise, Bigfoot, and Wabaunsee, the latter being the ablest warrior of the Pottawattamies. These men held sway in the four principal villages.

Caldwell, who appears to have been the dominant chief, located his band near the blockhouse. Sagau-nash, his Indian name, is translated "Englishman". He is said to have been the offspring of an Irish officer in the British service and a Pottawattamie woman. He was well educated, reading and writing both French and English and master of several Indian dialects. During the War of 1812, he is reputed to have been secretary to Tecumseh.

Laframboise and his band located about eight miles southwest of Caldwell's village, at a place known to the French trappers and traders as Point aux Poules. It was afterward called Traders Point and, for a short time, Council Bluffs, being situated opposite the headquarters of the Indian Agency of the Council Bluffs at Bellevue. He, as his name implies, was of French extraction and a member of a very large family of Indian mixed bloods. Being fairly well educated, he frequently served as official interpreter for the Indian agents.

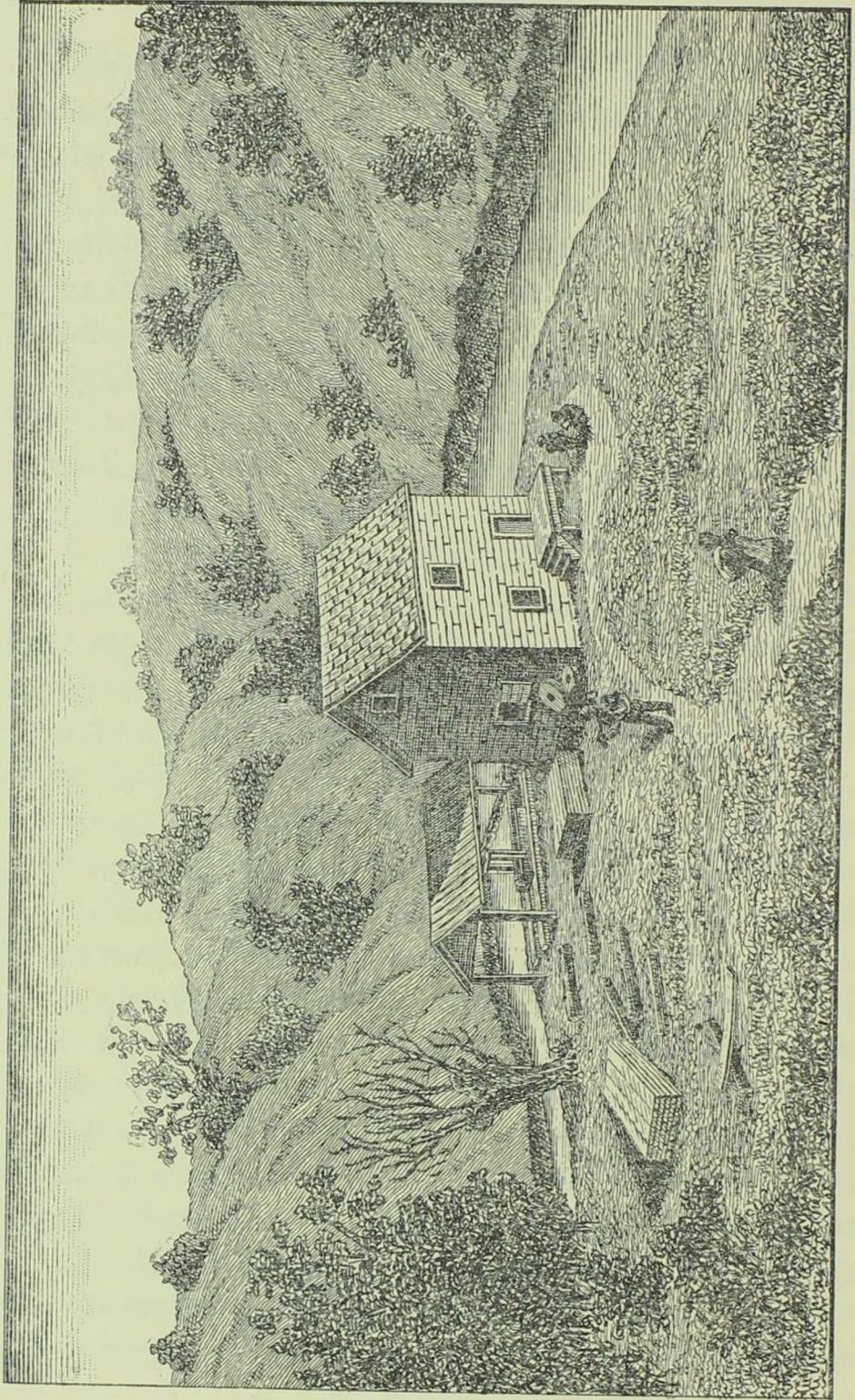
Little is known of the history of Bigfoot. He emigrated with his band from their eastern to their western home, across the country, without military supervision, and demonstrated that he was the best executive of all the chiefs. He located his village some fifty miles east of the blockhouse, on Indian Creek near its confluence with the East Nishnabotna, about where the town of Iranistan is now located. This band comprised about one-third of all the Indians removed to Iowa, and seems to have been more nearly self-supporting than any of the others, giving the Indian agents very little trouble.

Wabaunsee's village was located some ten miles southwest of the site of the city of Glenwood on a stream known as Wabaunsee Creek. It is said that he died there about 1847, his remains being placed in a tree near his home.

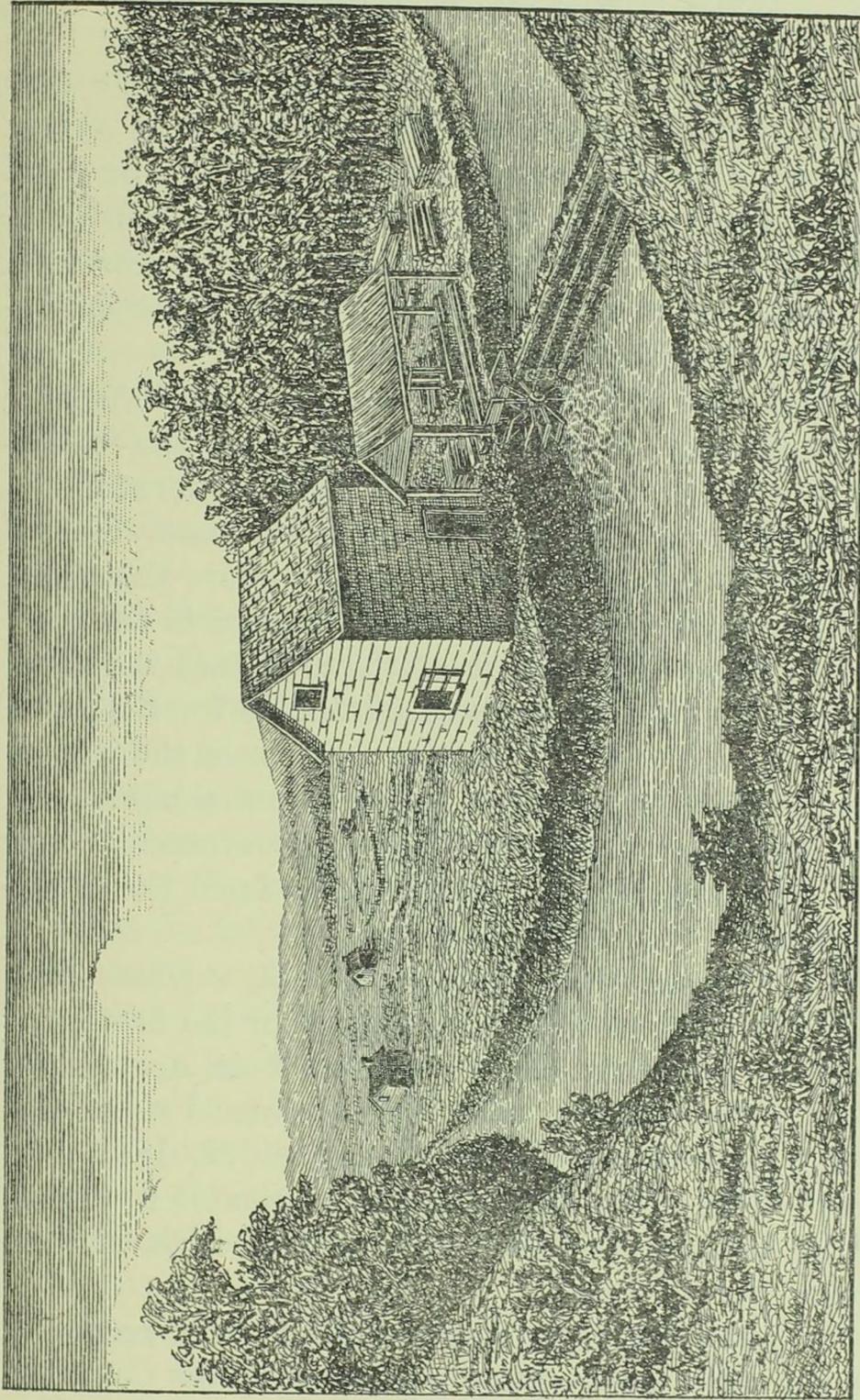
By the terms of the treaty of 1833 a fund of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars was set apart for the erection of mills, farm houses, and blacksmith shops and for the support of such millers, physicians, and blacksmiths as the President of the United States might appoint for the benefit and accommodation of the Indians. The tribesmen who settled in southwestern Iowa were particularly interested in the construction of a mill to grind their grain and saw lumber. Federal officials deferred the erection of the mill, however, notwithstanding urgent appeals for its completion. Finally the chiefs became impatient and took the matter into their own hands.

In 1840 Caldwell and Laframboise, upon their own responsibility, entered into a contract with Samuel N. Holcomb for the construction of a mill on Mosquito Creek, about three miles northeast of the blockhouse, for the sum of three thousand dollars, pledging their personal credit and annuities in payment. By the terms of this contract one-half of the construction price was to be paid on completion of the mill and the remainder within six months thereafter, it being provided that the contractor should retain possession of and operate the property on a toll basis until full payment should be made.

The mill, fully equipped, was ready for use in the early part of 1841. A dam extending across the creek from north to south was in the neighborhood of forty feet long and from eight to nine feet high. It was constructed of timber-built cribs filled with earth, having an apron below to prevent washout from the backflow of water and a spillway at the south end. The sawing department consisted of a shed of hewn timber roofed and partly enclosed, about thirty or thirty-five feet long and twenty feet wide, fitted with an upright (or stirrup) saw and automatic feed carriage. The gristmill was a two-story frame building, well finished and weather-boarded. It was furnished with a single pair of granite grinding stones, about thirty inches in diameter, and cloth bolt capable of removing the bran from corn but not suitable for the manufacture of fine flour. The power was furnished by the action of



THE OLD POTTAWATTAMIE MILL—A VIEW FROM THE NORTHEAST NEAR THE INDIAN BLACKSMITH SHOP SHOWING THE BLUFFS ACROSS MOSQUITO CREEK



THE OLD POTTAWATTAMIE MILL — A VIEW FROM THE SOUTHWEST SHOWING THE MILLER'S DWELLING AND THE INDIAN BLACKSMITH SHOP IN THE BACKGROUND

the water upon an undershot wheel, probably ten feet in diameter and eight feet across the face of the buckets or paddles, supplied by a sluice box or gate head located at the north end of the dam. It was only at exceptional times, when the waterflow was unusual, that both the saw and grist departments could be operated simultaneously.

While the mill was in course of construction Caldwell and Laframboise canvassed the other chiefs with a view to securing their coöperation in paying the contractor. They were unsuccessful, however, it being contended by the others that they all should have been consulted in regard to the contract for the construction of the mill, that the location chosen was not the best attainable for the good and convenience of the greater number of the tribesmen, and that the cost of construction should have been borne by the United States government, payable from the general fund, and not from the tribal annuities.

Thus the matter stood in June, 1841, at which time Caldwell, without having arranged for the first payment to Holcomb, absented himself on a summer hunting excursion from which he returned sick. The final payment came due on August 22, 1841, but Caldwell was then seriously ill and unable to transact business. He died on September 27th of that year.

The questions regarding acceptance and payment for the mill were eventually referred to the Commis-

sioner of Indian Affairs, at Washington, who overruled the objections of Bigfoot and Wabaunsee, approved the Caldwell-Laframboise contract with Holcomb, and authorized acceptance and payment from the general fund by the Indian agent. Accordingly, on March 28, 1843, the Indian agent accepted the mill and made payment therefor to W. H. Parks, Holcomb's miller and agent, and the title passed to the United States in trust for the Pottawattamies. On the same date Reuben Hildreth was appointed as the first official miller in charge of the premises. He resigned on March 31, 1845, and William Russell was appointed to the position.

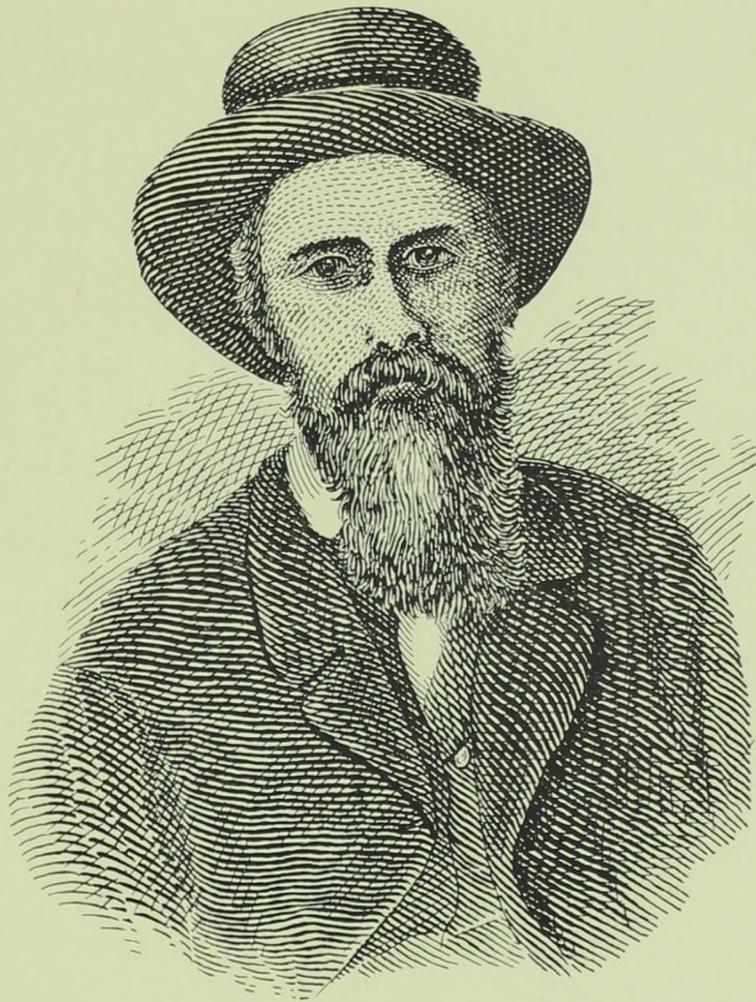
The miller was required to operate the mill free of charge to the Indians for whose benefit it had been built, though authorized and instructed to grind grain and saw logs for any other parties who might apply, just compensation being demanded for such service. The milling business was probably very light at the beginning, inasmuch as the Indian agent reported that the Pottawattamies who resided in the near vicinity "planted very little corn or anything else except here and there one who happened to have a plough." The need for lumber must have been limited because the Indians had completed their houses before the erection of the mill, and although several trading houses had been established in the vicinity soon after the coming of the Pottawattamies, the lumber needs of the traders, if any, were insignificant, while their breadstuffs were undoubtedly

shipped to them from points farther down the Missouri River.

Late in 1845 a self-appointed delegation of the Pottawattamies, without asking permission from the Indian Office, visited Washington with a view to surrendering their Iowa lands and removing to Kansas where the main body of their tribe had been located some years previously. Councils were held during the months of November and December between this delegation, assisted by their attorney, and the officials of the government, resulting in an agreement that a treaty should be afterward entered into whereby the Indians, for a cash consideration and a tract of land in Kansas thirty miles square, should release the Iowa lands and move to Kansas within two years from the ratification of the treaty. On June 5, 1846, a treaty in accord with that agreement was signed by nearly all of the Pottawattamie chiefs at the Council Bluffs Sub-agency.

The ceremonies connected with the signing of this treaty were probably conducted at the log barracks of Fort Croghan, constructed by Captain John H. K. Burgwin in 1842. Commemorative of these proceedings the place was thereafter known as Council Point, Fort Croghan having been abandoned in 1843. The site is within the corporate limits of the city of Council Bluffs, but the barracks disappeared long ago and now nothing remains to mark the spot they occupied.

In September, 1847, the Pottawattamies began



STUTELY E. WICKS

leaving the Council Bluffs country for their new Kansas home, and it became apparent that the exodus would be completed within the period prescribed by the treaty of 1846, rendering government operation of the old Pottawattamie mill unnecessary for their benefit. Meanwhile, William Stafford, who succeeded Russell as miller in 1846, surrendered the position on March 1, 1847, when Ambrose E. Owen became the last regularly appointed miller at the Council Bluffs Sub-agency of the Pottawattamie Indians.

There came with the Indians as a member of Caldwell's band, a white man named Stutely E. Wicks, known in frontier parlance as a "squaw man" because of his marriage to an Indian woman. He was born of pure New England parentage at Watertown, New York, in 1810 or 1811. At an early age he went to the vicinity of Chicago and there joined the Prairie Band of Pottawattamie Indians. On October 25, 1835, he married Catherine Muller, a mixed blood, and became a full member of the tribe with which he migrated to southwestern Iowa in 1837.

Wicks was an expert miller and tradition says he was employed at the mill from the very beginning of its operation by each successive officially designated miller, and that he in conjunction with his father-in-law, a professional wheelwright, ran the mill up to the appointment of Owen. Immediately upon assuming control, Owen discharged Wicks and unsuc-

cessfully sought possession of the miller's dwelling, occupied by the latter. Possession was denied him by Wicks, who contended in a manner convincing to the Indian sub-agent that he had built the house with his own money and that it was his personal property.

Early in 1848 Wicks proceeded to St. Louis and obtained an order from the Superintendent of Indian Affairs directing the sub-agent to lease the property to him as soon as the Indians had no further use for it. Accordingly Owen was ousted from the position of miller and Wicks entered into full possession and control about October 1st and began operating the mill as a private enterprise.

The departure of the Indians, the settlement of several thousand Mormons near Caldwell's village at Miller's Hollow (afterward called Kaneshville and in 1853 officially named Council Bluffs by legislative enactment), and the opening of the lands to settlement under the public land laws gave an impetus to the milling business and Wicks appeared to be having much success in his venture. He was an improvident man, however. It was alleged that he was in arrears in the payment of rentals, and efforts to dislodge him were begun.

In October, 1849, a Mormon named Jesse Lowder secured a lease of the mill from the Superintendent of Indian Affairs and demanded the surrender of the property by Wicks who demurred, saying that he had expended in repairs and replacement of machinery a sum in excess of his alleged indebtedness

for lease money and that practically all of the machinery then in the mill had been purchased by him with his own money. He therefore refused to give up the property, demanding reimbursement in the sum of five hundred dollars and additional payment for the miller's residence. Lowder refused to advance the necessary amount and the government officials were without authority to do so. No resort to the courts was made by either party and Wicks remained in possession.

After a year or so, Lowder, despairing of securing possession of the mill, filed a claim for five hundred dollars damages with the sub-agent for failure of the government to put him in possession of the premises, and while the claim took its regular slow course through official channels he departed for Salt Lake in 1852 with Orson Hyde's Mormon train. His claim was finally rejected by the Indian office, leaving Wicks in possession, and it does not appear that he was afterward required to pay rent.

The United States public land surveys were extended over the former Pottawattamie territory in 1851. A land office was established at Kaneshville in 1852, but was not opened for business until March, 1853, at which time the tract upon which the mill was situated became subject to preëmption entry, or disposal at public sale after due proclamation.

By reason of his tribal relations with the Pottawattamie Indians, Wicks was not qualified to make preëmption entry, and he did not wish to sever his

Indian connections. It also appears that he did not wish to enter into competition with other bidders for the purchase of the land when it should come into market for sale, so he arranged with a young man in his employ, who was residing upon the land, to enter the same as a preëmtor, probably with an understanding that it should be transferred to Wicks whenever such action might be safely taken. Accordingly, after due preliminary filing and proof, George Schofield made cash entry for the tract embracing the mill and miller's dwelling, together with a blacksmith shop and the tools therein (removed from Fort Croghan in 1843, when the barracks were inundated by the Missouri River), and on June 18, 1853, (about two weeks after the purchase) Schofield conveyed the premises to Wicks.

Ordinarily, and in strict accordance with law, this tract of land and the improvements thereon should have been appraised and withheld from entry or sale of any kind to be later disposed of in such manner as the government might adopt; or the appraised value of the land occupied by improvements including the value of the latter should have been required of the preëmtor or other purchaser. In this instance, however, there appears to have been some oversight and the preëmption entry of Schofield was approved for patenting by the General Land Office on November 7, 1853. Upon the request of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated November 14, 1853, Schofield's entry was suspended for investigation. After a long

delay, the matter was finally cleared up on September 1, 1866, when a patent was issued to Schofield, thus validating the title of Wicks to the land and all of the improvements.

So the old Pottawattamie mill at Council Bluffs passed from the control of the United States and thereafter became in fact "Wicks's Mill", as it had been known since the departure of the Indians. Wicks operated the old mill continuously until early in April, 1862, when it was seriously damaged by flood. After a period of twenty-one years of faithful service the old Pottawattamie mill at Council Bluffs fell a victim to the element from which it drew its life and power. For some time prior to this disaster Wicks had been doing very little business and had mortgaged the property for all it would carry, and so was not in a position either to repair the flood damage or attempt to rebuild the structures. Shortly afterward — the same year or the next — he went to the mining regions of Montana and Idaho, hoping to rebuild his fortune. In this he was unsuccessful. He became sick and started to return to his home, but he died of pneumonia on the way late in 1865, and was buried by his companions in the mountains, not far from the site of the Custer battlefield.

Upon the departure of Wicks for the West his mortgagee took possession of the mill property and erected a new mill on the site of the old one, but the venture proved unprofitable and, after passing through several transfers, the place became known

as Parks's mill, and continued under that name until the buildings were destroyed by fire in the early seventies. The actual spot upon which the old mill stood has become so obscured by urban improvements and artificial changes in the channel of Mosquito Creek as to render its precise identification difficult, if not impossible, at the present time.

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