

THE PALIMPSEST

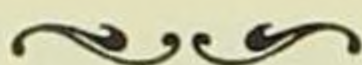
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Bywater Odyssey

Many early Iowa pioneer families were deeply rooted in the American soil, but others, like the Bywaters, spanned the ocean and intervening territory, from England to the Mississippi Valley, in two generations. Robert Bywater, a miller by trade, emigrated to Maryland in 1811. His son William married Amanda Lowman who was the daughter of a veteran of the War of 1812. Their eldest son, Archimedes, was old enough to remember the boats on Chesapeake Bay before they resumed the westward migration. Nearly eighty years later, in 1920, Archimedes Bywater related his father's pioneering experiences to his nephew, Dr. W. L. Bywater, who contributed the manuscript to THE PALIMPSEST.—The Editor.

In 1843 my parents left Baltimore and started west to grow up with the country. The first move from their native State was to Steubenville, Ohio, and a little later to Zanesville. As I was but three years old I do not know what my father worked at. After a residence of about three years in Ohio he moved to New Albany, Indiana.

Being a stranger in a strange land and without much means, he was "simply up and against it." One morning, shortly after arriving at New Albany, he saw a steamboat at the wharf. He went down to the boat and soon came back telling mother that he was going to work on the boat as night watchman. He left that afternoon. The boat crossed the river to Louisville and took on a load for New Orleans. This boat was one of the largest in the lower Mississippi trade. Father was soon promoted to day watchman. After working about six months, he accepted better wages as second mate on another boat. I think before the first year had expired he was first mate.

Sometime in the month of September, 1847, father's boat came up from New Orleans and docked on the New Albany side of the river. She remained there for two or three days for the purpose of loading the Indiana soldiers bound for the Mexican War. Late in the afternoon of the last day mother took us children — your father [Napoleon], Jane, and myself — down to the wharf. Father, seeing us, came ashore with the captain and talked to us a little while. He kissed mother and us children, the captain shook hands with all of us, the soldiers and all hands went aboard, the gang planks were pulled in, the whistle blew, the bell rang, father and the captain waved us good-

bye, the big steamboat swung around with her bow down stream, the black smoke rolled from the smokestacks, and she was gone. I can still see the tears running down mother's cheeks as plainly while writing these lines as I did on that afternoon. The soldiers, known as the Indiana Greys, were dressed in brand new suits of grey, trimmed with new brass buttons and a red stripe about an inch wide down the outside of the leg. Their new caps were trimmed with a red band and new brass buttons.

Well, father was gone a long time, or at least it seemed so to us in those days. One morning when mother and I had been at the market buying supplies we heard a steamboat whistle and when we came to a corner where mother could see the wharf she said: "Why it is the *Queen of the West*, I can tell by her flagpole." Right there and then I left my mother and started for the boat as fast as my legs could run. When I arrived at the landing I saw my father and the captain on shore standing together in very earnest conversation. I ran up and caught my father's hand. The captain looked down at me and said, "Bywater, is this your boy?" Father told him it was. Then he gave me a twenty-five cent piece and proceeded with his conversation.

The captain stood with his hands on my father's

shoulder and said: "Bywater, you must stay with me."

"No, captain," father replied, "when we met with that accident down the river I told God if he spared me to land alive I would leave the river."

After resting a short time he rented a farm three miles north of the city. The owner had to teach him how to harness the horses and how to feed them, how to hitch to the plow or wagon. The next year he went on a farm owned by Jacob Turner.

In the month of March, 1849, we boarded a steamboat at New Albany, went down the Ohio and up the Mississippi to Saint Louis, and thence to Bloomington, now Muscatine, Iowa. From there we drove across country to Tipton in Cedar County, and on to the Denson farm on the south bank of the Wapsipinicon River. We remained on the Denson farm until March, 1850, then moved to a farm owned by David Sears, three-fourths of a mile north of the town of Maquoketa and remained there until April, 1854.

In the summer of 1853, father hired David Bowen and paid his expenses to go with L. S. Frederick to look up a new location and get some land of our own. He procured a map somewhere that showed lots of vacant land in Tama County, and so he started the two men in that direction.

Of course they had to travel on foot. They first struck the Iowa River on the north side near Marenco and stayed over night with an old pioneer bee hunter. He gave them a description of the country at the headwaters of Deer Creek and how to get there. They were to follow up the north bank of the Iowa River until they came to the mouth of Deer Creek, then go up that creek until they came to a grove several miles beyond the heavy timber.

In the southeast part of a fine grove they found a good spring. Limestone was exposed along the creek, and beyond the grove stretched the broad prairie. The land hunters were pleased with the place. Having located some 400 acres of good land, they returned to Maquoketa. Frederick and father went to the land office at Dubuque and entered the land. Father claimed 320 acres at that time and later entered 200 more adjoining what he had. This included the grove and the prairie to the east and south. [The site of the old Bywater homestead in the southeast quarter of section twenty-nine in Spring Creek Township will be flooded by the artificial lake now being formed by damming Deer Creek. The water from the ancient springs is cold enough for trout.]

About April 20, 1854, father and Frederick started for the promised land with their families

— all except myself. I was left to take care of forty-eight or fifty head of young cattle that father had gathered up during his stay on the Sears farm. The grass had not started sufficiently to support the cattle on the road. After about three weeks father returned to Maquoketa for me and the cattle.

Now think, Mrs. Frederick with one small child, mother, Napoleon, Jane, and Viola stayed at the grove all alone from the time the men started back to Maquoketa until we returned to the grove, which was over three weeks. The nearest neighbors were miles away. Can you find me a couple of women to-day that would venture out in a new and wild country and stay three weeks alone, not knowing how far it was to the nearest white person?

On the river bottom where the city of Tama is located stood a little old log cabin occupied by James H. Hollen. That was our first post office. The mail came to that place once a month on horseback from Marengo. In June that first summer Mr. Frederick went to the post office on foot. In August I went on horseback. Late in that fall a man by the name of Joe Brown came from Marion, Iowa, and put up a little store on the edge of the timber near where Christian Bruner's old flour mill stood. He got the post office that far up the creek

and late in the fall I made a trip down there after the mail. Well, sometime about midsummer of 1855, William B. King came along from York State, stayed with us for a couple of days, looked the place over and offered father eight dollars per acre for it. Father wanted ten dollars, but after talking the matter over with mother he accepted King's offer. Their reason for selling was that there was no immediate prospect for a school and we children were at an age that we should be in school. We wintered at the grove.

In the spring of 1856 we moved to the new town of Monticello, fourteen miles down Deer Creek. Father bought a small house and four lots well fenced. Then he hired James Rokes, who had come from New York with King, to build him a new square house. The winter of 1856-57 was terrible, one blizzard after another. Stock froze and people out on the prairies, who were not prepared for such weather, suffered.

Well, that winter began to make father think about the South. Several settlers left the country and went to Missouri. One man that father thought a great deal of settled on the Osage River below Jefferson City. In the summer of 1857 he invited father to come down there, saying he could get all the fine bottom land he wanted on the Osage River at twelve and one-half cents per acre.

Father started on horseback, got as far south as the State line, and was taken sick. When he got better his doctor advised him to go back home.

About that time everybody was talking about Kansas Territory. During the winter of 1857-58, father organized a little party consisting of S. S. Chapman, James T. Jukes, Perry Johnston, and A. Bywater. He bought each one of us two yoke of oxen, a wagon, bows and cover, and loaded each wagon with twenty hundred of flour. On the ninth day of May, 1858, about nine o'clock in the morning, we pulled out of old Monticello and a little before sundown we camped in the heavy timber beside Grey's old mill on the Iowa River, near Indiantown. Next morning we crossed the river. At Indiantown we turned up the river and went about as far as where LeGrand is now. There we turned southwest, having Saint Joe, Missouri, in mind, where we expected to cross the Missouri River.

Mind you, there were no roads at that time in that part of the country, and when we turned southwest and had gone two or three miles we came to a slough about forty rods wide and the mud and water was axle-tree deep. We had to put six yoke of oxen to the wagon to get through. Worked all day, got six miles. In the spring of 1858 it rained almost every day.

It took us a week or more to get to Newton, forty miles south. When we reached the Big Skunk River, seven miles south of Newton, the river bottom was covered with water for two miles between us and the bridge. It was belly deep to the oxen. We were all day crossing the river. Had to put four yoke of oxen to the wagon, and could take only one wagon at a time. Then we had to ride the oxen back two miles for another wagon. Some time in June we arrived at Saint Joe, crossed on a steam ferryboat, and found all the creeks and rivers in Kansas high. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful summer. About the first of July we arrived at Americus, Breckinridge (now Lyon) County, Kansas Territory.

The town site of Americus was laid out by T. C. Hill from York State. He was an Indian trader, but no finer man ever lived. We remained at Americus about ten days, let our oxen rest up, and got acquainted with the people that were in the new town. Sold all four loads of our flour that we had hauled 500 miles or more for four dollars a hundred pounds. We were all paid in gold. My twenty sacks brought eighty dollars. Now, remember, the little new town sites of Americus and Emporia, nine miles down the Neosha River, were the last settlements of white people. The Caw Indians lived only one mile from Americus.

After ten days we started on the back trail to Iowa. The town site company of Americus sent by S. S. Chapman an offer of town lots and money to Kuns and Bruner of Monticello to move their saw mill to Americus. In the winter of 1858-59 they hired ox teams and moved the whole business to Kansas.

On the way back we crossed the Missouri River three miles above Fort Leavenworth, then went north through fine Missouri plantations. We arrived home in the latter part of September, nearly five months from the time we started.

In the spring of 1859, E. M. Kuns and family, Halbert Bill and family, Amandus Massau and wife, Rice and wife, Benjamin William and wife, father and mother, A. Bywater, and D. S. Stover all went out to Kansas. I think there were twenty-six or twenty-seven people in the crowd. The roads and weather were fine that summer. Father and J. A. Brown bought out the only store and put me in charge of running it until they could move out in the early fall.

But hard times began to set in. I wrote father that few people were coming in and there was no money. Some were already leaving. But father was determined to go on with his venture. It was Saturday evening, October 1st, when he and the family and Brown arrived. After he had been in

Kansas about six weeks, he came to me in the store one day when we were alone and said, "Ark, I have made the greatest mistake of my life and when spring comes we will hitch up and go right back to Iowa." He still owned our house and lots in Monticello and the farm south of the grove.

In some way Uncle Kuns found out we were going back to Iowa and he determined to go back also. As he and his partner in the mill had had some trouble and were not on speaking terms, he came to our house one Saturday night and asked father to take his place in the mill, not to work but to see to the division of the lumber. He could then go out into the country and trade lumber for a couple yoke of oxen and be ready to go back with us in the spring. Father told him he had never had any experience in a mill and did not want to go, but uncle insisted so strongly that he finally agreed to help for one week. Uncle Kuns did not succeed in making any trade that week, however, and urged father to stay one week more, which he reluctantly agreed to do. On Monday morning about daylight he started for the mill but after he had gone two or three rods he turned and ran back, opened the door and said: "Ark, don't you go out of the house to-day." I was very sick with the quinsy.

About eight o'clock that morning a German who

had emigrated from Iowa with our crew, came to our well for a pail of water. Mother was outside the front door sweeping the yard.

"Good morning, Mr. Massau," she said, "this is a beautiful morning."

"Yes, Mrs. Bywater," he replied, "he is a beautiful morning, but I feel very sad."

"What do you feel sad about?"

"Vell, I had a very bad dream last night. I no could sleep any more after I voke up."

"What did you dream about?"

"I dreamed they came to me to make a coffin for Mr. Bywater."

"Oh, Mr. Massau, don't you know you must always take a dream to the contrary?"

"I don't know about that. I can not get it off my mind."

At ten o'clock mother happened to step to the door and, looking down the street for a moment, inquired, "Ark, is that Halbert Bill coming up the street?"

I looked and told her it was.

"I thought he was working at the mill", she remarked.

When he was within five or six rods of the house she said, "What makes him walk with his head down, and he seems to be wiping his face with his handkerchief?"

With terrible foreboding she ran out to him.
"Halbert Bill, what is the matter?"

"Mr. Bywater is badly hurt." At that he covered his face with his handkerchief and stood there crying.

Mother started for the mill as hard as she could run. As she was passing the hotel, T. C. Hill, the proprietor, ran out and caught her by the arm and told her she must come into the house, that Mr. Bywater was dead, that she must not see him until later. The men and women who brought her home could not console her. She screamed all the rest of that day and all night.

And so Massau had to make the coffin that he dreamed about the night before.

Father was killed on December 19th and was buried on December 21, 1859, in a little cemetery, a half mile east of Americus.

ARCHIMEDES BYWATER