

The
PALIMPSEST
JULY 1932
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THE EDITOR

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

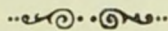
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Who Was Nagelsen

One of the features of by-gone days that gave memorable thrills to the flaxen-haired hopefuls of the Norwegian community in the southeastern part of Hamilton County were the interesting transient individuals that appeared as regularly as migratory birds. Erik Kjyten was one of them. He could mend anything from a watch to a leaky coffee pot, and could make a tousle-headed prairie urchin look as slick as the chromo on the wall. His songs and stories enraptured us.

Another casual visitor was the Tin Peddler whose tinkling mystery-wagon stopped at everyman's door to offer the most beautiful articles in trade for just common, every-day butter and eggs. As we stood on tiptoe gazing wide-eyed at the gorgeous display within the wonderful man's little house-vehicle, we could not understand the

reluctance with which mother parted with her butter and eggs in exchange for his shiny wares. Verily he all but stole our hearts from mother. Was he not kind to us? Did he not tell us stories of strange things and happenings, and was he not anxious that we should have as many of the pretty things as possible, while mother seemed to want as little as possible? Perched on his high seat with a word to the horses and a jolly good-bye, the tinkling was resumed down the road, and we had much to talk about for many, many days.

When the Pump Peddler came on his annual tour with his wagon load of green-painted pumps beautifully decorated with yellow stripes, and very willing to replace the old oaken bucket or the long hooked pole and pail with one of his up-to-date pumps, we were in ecstasy. This was not so much because we hoped father would buy, for he had a way of not buying what he could get along without, but we felt sure "Pump Lars" would stop over night with us and then we could stand and look at the pumps a long time and, if mother would let us stay up beyond our usual bed time, we could listen to him tell of his experiences in the wild west where there were buffalo and other big game, and lots of Indians.

Perhaps the prettiest sight was when the Fanning Mill Peddler hove into view with his long

load of fanning mills all painted red and trimmed with green. That such a man was one of the greatest among men was surely evident to all. If any one among the neighborhood boys who have since attained positions of public trust and honor ever day-dreamed of being exalted to the driver's seat on such a wagon, he never confided it to his companions, and wisely so. The telling of such unreasonable ambitions would have been resented as were the dreams of Joseph.

Yet towering above such satellites of the prairie and being also a cubit wider, physically and intellectually, was NILS REINHARDT NAGELSEN.

Who was Nagelsen? I have asked the question from one end of Story County to the other end of Hamilton County; I have interviewed many who "knew him well" yet, after all, did not know who he was. Though I cannot to my own satisfaction say who he was, I can tell something of what he was as we observed the huge hulk of a man on his periodic journeys through our settlement and, at close range, when he called at our home.

A trustworthy man told me that Nagelsen was seven feet, four inches tall and weighed five hundred pounds. Another equally trustworthy man, whom I interviewed, said he was six feet four and weighed four hundred pounds. A truthful

woman could assure me that her own father had himself weighed Nagelsen and found his weight to be three hundred pounds, "but", she added, "that was before he got so fat." When he first came to our settlement, in the sixties, he was tall and lank.

The following incident has some value as circumstantial evidence in the question at hand. W. D. Gandrup's drug store was one of the regular haunts of Mr. Nagelsen when in Story City. He was a privileged character in the store. On his previous trip he had left a pair of surplus trousers hanging in the room back of the prescription counter. Seeing the voluminous garment there, one of the drug clerks conceived the idea that won him first prize at the masquerade ball a few evenings later. In preparation for the party the clerk secured a five-gallon keg of Pabst's best. To this he attached a strap to fit over his neck so that he could conveniently carry the keg where every normal Milwaukee front was carried. Next he donned Nagelsen's trousers which fitted loosely over the keg and all. When the face mask was in place and other details of his costume attended to, he was ready for the ball and the prize. The purpose of recording this incident is to help establish the size of the man who owned the trousers, and that being accomplished

questions as to the probable fate of the brew thus surreptitiously brought into the ball room may be dismissed as irrelevant.

It was as colporteur that Nagelsen made the rounds of the Norwegian settlements in central Iowa. His stock in trade consisted of Bibles, hymn books, prayer books, and other Christian literature especially of a devotional character and dear to the settlers through memories of the homes across the ocean.

Ready-made clothing was out of the question for our friend. He could not patronize a regular custom tailor; the prices were prohibitive even if he had had access to one. A certain woman at Ballard's Grove near the present village of Huxley, who was apt with her needle and scissors, became the manufacturer of his clothing. His suits were made of Kentucky jean — that stiff, heavy, almost imperishable material so common in those days.

The coat was made somewhat on the order of a present-day hunting jacket. To us children the huge garment was full of mysterious catacombs or caverns in which wonderful things were secreted. This much we knew, that they contained not only books, some filled with pictures of strange things and scenes, but also wonder-working bottles that could stop toothache, earache, and even

"bellyache" as we irreverently called our most frequent autumn ailment.

Besides his cargo of books and whatever else might be hidden in the folds and recesses of his coat, he always carried a large carpet bag suspended from one shoulder, presumably containing his personal effects. Thus freighted, he navigated the billowing prairie from haven to haven. Wherever he cast anchor a welcome awaited him. Every dog and every child was his friend. Fathers and mothers were always willing to declare a recess and listen to him as he talked interestingly and familiarly not only of persons and events of the present but also of the past. Though selling books was his business and means of livelihood, his main purpose seemed to be to disseminate knowledge based not on theories but on the experiences of the ages and to provoke thinking and the seeking of useful knowledge. He was the pioneer's university.

Was it such universities that gave impetus to the men and women that laid the foundation of our nation and commonwealth? One thing I do know: the possible influence of such men on the course of many lives and of events was incalculable.

It was useless to offer Nagelsen an ordinary chair; he would not jeopardize himself or the

chair. For the same reason an ordinary bed was not for him and, for the same reason again, he always adjusted his great weight as safely as possible by sitting flat on the bottom of the wagon box when offered a ride in a lumber wagon, which, by the way, was the only conveyance on wheels in which he would accept a ride.

In our home his regular seat was a home-made wooden chest built in Norway for my grandfather and by him brought to this country. It was made to withstand all the vicissitudes that such a chest might be subjected to, barring fire, for many generations. Its maker wrought well for his handiwork is now serving the fourth generation and is still as good as new. Even the name of the original owner, Nils Anderson Follinglo, painted in large green letters, is clearly legible on its front side. And, let me tell you further, the original key is still in use and resembles very much the key to the Bastille given to George Washington by Lafayette.

Seated on the old chest, Nagelsen's huge hulk would ever be rocking, elephant like, to and fro. An invitation to partake of a frugal meal was never received with regrets by our friend, but ere he was satisfied the hospitable hostess might be forced to the humiliation of expressing regret that her supply was exhausted.

During one of his visits to our home while sitting on his accustomed seat, rocking back and forth as was his wont, mother served him a luncheon consisting of coffee, bread, butter, and home-made cheese, the cheese being of a certain variety that many native Iowans would immediately have pronounced "rotten" and as quickly rejected. Nagelsen fell to with his usual appetite. Mother warned him to go a little easy on the cheese as it was fresh and had not been proven safe as yet. He responded by calling for more and asserted that she was the only woman in Iowa that could make real "pult ost" — a certain kind of strong Norwegian cheese. It was too bad for him and for mother too that he did not heed her warning. He became deathly sick, and she, greatly dismayed. Fortunately he soon recovered. The next day mother gave us boys the cheese to use as crow poison. It did not take effect on the crows, however. Perhaps their appetites were more moderate.

Nagelsen was interested in boys. If he met one on the road or on a prairie trail going to fetch home the cattle, or on the way to the swimming hole, or to the creek to fish, he must needs stop and talk to him and learn whose boy he was, where he was going, and if his good parents were well. This mammoth man, apparently leaning

backwards that he might not fall forward, standing in conversation with a barefoot boy, looked for all the world like a meeting of the fabled giant and brownie. The brownie never came to grief,



AN ORIGINAL DRAWING BY HELEN WALKER FROM DESCRIPTIONS

WHOSE BOY ARE YOU?

however, but always sped along on his way a little happier for a friendly pat on the head and some kind word to take home.

Nagelsen was not given to talking of himself. Rather, he studiously avoided doing so. However, during unguarded moments when mingling

with intimate associates, a word would slip which, together with other inadvertent statements, one now and then another over a period of many years, must serve as the warp of this deplorably incomplete biography.

Nagelsen was born in Denmark, presumably Copenhagen, about a hundred years ago. His father was a very wealthy man and his gifted son was slated to become a clergyman. With this in view he was sent to the best preparatory schools and finally to the university. Strained relations with authorities of the State Church developed and the intended career as a clergyman never materialized. Then the father died and an uncle was named as his guardian. Through the maladministration of the guardian, the young man lost his entire inheritance. Nagelsen did not resign himself to hopelessness but immediately sought employment of some kind. He succeeded in being appointed to work in the consular service in Christiania, now Oslo, Norway. Not long afterward he received the offer of a position more to his liking; namely, the editorship of one of the leading newspapers of Copenhagen. He promptly accepted the position and returned to his homeland.

As editor it appears that he was fearless for he dared to criticize a profligate king. As a conse-

quence he was promptly thrown into prison where he languished for some time. When he emerged therefrom, he was a physical and mental wreck, and his relatives, to rid themselves and country of a disgrace, sent him to America, where he quickly regained his strength of body and mind. This tragic experience in his fatherland, no doubt, explains why he did not seek to associate with his countrymen in America. One venerable old Dane told me: "Nagelsen did not like us Danes; I don't know why."

A corrupt royal court and a fearless subject in combat; result: the kingdom loses a splendidly equipped son and the untutored fishermen's sons from Norway, pioneering on the prairies of Iowa, gain the benefits of association with an educated man. Truly, "Ill blows the wind that profits nobody."

To illustrate further what Nagelsen's coming meant to dwellers on the Iowa frontier I append the following related by Chris. Johnson. Lately arrived from Denmark, the little boy Chris and his father happened in one day at Mr. Doolittle's, a new settler from the New England States. Just then Nagelsen was puffing his way up the hill to the Doolittle home. No sooner had the traveler entered than Mr. Doolittle eagerly asked to see his English newspaper. Nagelsen's re-

grets at not having one at hand were profuse but, said he, "I have my German paper, *Die Berliner Zeitung*." And he forthwith read English from the German paper to the amazement and delight of his listener. Then remembering the Danes present, who, as yet, understood very little English, he read the main items to them in their language from the same paper.

Nagelsen spoke the Danish, English, German, and French languages and was a Greek, Latin, and Hebrew scholar. Of his attainments otherwise we know only that he was at one time considered competent to edit a metropolitan newspaper. Such was one of the men at whose feet we had the privilege to sit many an evening in our pioneer home.

Now just one more incident to show what a prodigious memory this man had. Sometime during the eighties the Thorson brothers, John and Gustav, moved into our settlement. John was nearing middle age and wore a full beard. Gustav was younger and let a moustache suffice. They hailed from Christiania, Norway, originally. One day they dropped in at Gandrup's drug store while Nagelsen was there. They could not but notice the unusually large, distinguished looking man and were greatly astonished when he, the stranger, almost immediately addressed them say-

ing: "You must be sons of Johan and Anna Thorson in Christiania."

They answered, "We certainly are, but how do you know it?"

"Easily enough", said he, "I remember you from the time I was there some thirty years ago."

Nagelsen died quite suddenly in the summer of 1891. He was interred in the Palestine cemetery near Huxley, Iowa. The carpenter who built the casket is still living and says he made it eight feet long, three feet wide, and three feet deep. Our fathers who had so much to do in blazing the trail for us should be excused for neglecting to mark the grave before departing. But if we neglect it, how can posterity forgive us?

P. G. TJERNAGEL

H. M. TJERNAGEL

Old Zion Church

The Holy Roman Empire owed much of its importance to the dignity of a name. It was, in fact, not holy, nor Roman, nor was it an empire. In somewhat the same manner Old Zion Church is remembered. It was not always "Old". Its real name was not "Zion". Nor did it first become famous as a church.

In the spring of 1834 the venerable Peter Cartwright visited Iowa, and, from a pulpit improvised from the trunk of a broken tree in the little settlement at Flint Hills, he "declared the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" and "had a good meeting". About this time a prayer meeting was organized under the leadership of Dr. William R. Ross. Three years later this prayer-meeting group incorporated as the Methodist Episcopal Church of Burlington and began the erection of a house of worship. Before this building was completed it was rented as the seat of the Iowa Territorial Government. When the capital was moved to Iowa City, the structure was refurnished exclusively as a church. In 1851 the building needed repairs and a festival was planned to raise funds. Handbills were printed

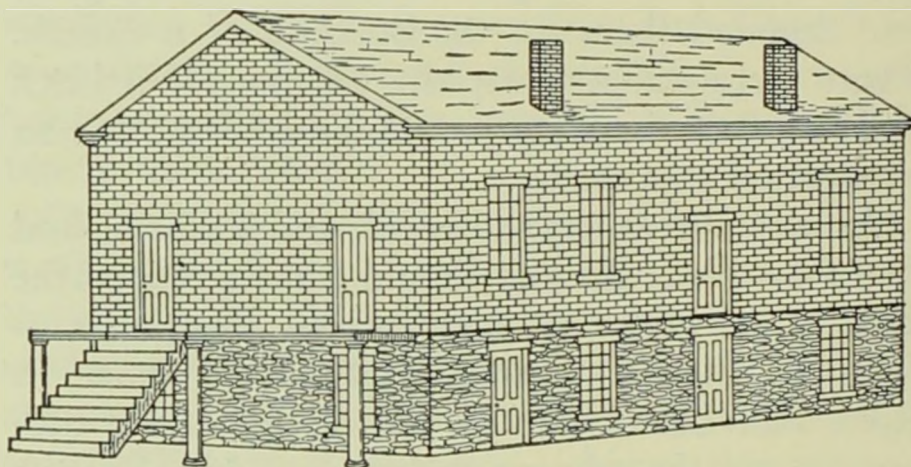
which declared that "Old Zion wants a new roof". From that time forth, this historic old edifice was known as "Old Zion Church".

The principal actor in the building of Old Zion was Dr. William R. Ross, who purchased two lots on the west side of Third Street between Columbia and Washington streets in Burlington, and donated them for the building of a church. Plans were adopted for the erection of a brick building forty by sixty feet in dimensions, and an excavation was made.

Money was scarce, however, and it was agreed that Rev. N. S. Bastion should make a tour of the East in an effort to raise funds. Four men — John C. Sleeth, Thomas Ballard, William R. Ross, and Levi Hager — contributed thirty dollars to pay the current expenses of Mr. Bastion on his soliciting campaign. But misfortune attended his mission. He went as far as Louisville, Kentucky, where he had to borrow twenty-five dollars to pay his expenses home. The balance sheet of this adventure showed that the trip cost fifty-five dollars — a total loss, for no gifts or pledges were secured. Local funds, however, were made available and the work was carried forward.

The building as originally constructed was without vestibule, tower, or bell. It consisted of

a basement and main audience room. The basement walls, two feet thick, extended about eight feet above the surface of the ground. On the level of the upper floor along the front end of the building was a platform supported by turned posts and reached by a broad flight of steps that



SKETCHED BY DONOVAN G. TEMPLE FROM AN OLD DRAWING

THE FIRST CAPITOL OF IOWA TERRITORY

led to the entrance of the auditorium. For eight years the building remained in this condition before being remodeled.

When the erection of the church was begun, Burlington was the capital of the Territory of Wisconsin. On the night of December 12, 1837, the capitol had burned. In June of the following year the Territory of Iowa was created and the first Iowa Territorial legislature convened in the

following November. Because of the fact that there was no capitol building, arrangements were made to hold the meetings of the Legislative Assembly in the newly constructed church building.

On the occasion of this meeting the *Iowa Patriot* said: "The new Methodist Church is now occupied by the Legislative Assembly. It is a very neat and substantial building. The basement story, partitioned off for conference and class-meetings, is composed of stone, and the upper part of brick. It is in a commanding situation, and when finished, with its cupola and bell, it will be a great ornament to the city of Burlington."

To equip this building for legislative purposes a railing was placed across the room to separate the lobby from the House, desks were built for the officers and members, and the floor was carpeted. The Council — the upper branch of the legislature, consisting of thirteen members — met in the basement of the church, while the House, composed of twenty-six members, convened in the room above. Thus, by a strange paradox, the upper house was below, while the lower house was above.

During Territorial days the legislature paid more than two thousand dollars rental for the use of Old Zion, but this was not sufficient to pay for

its original cost. Because of a lack of funds the church became seriously embarrassed, and sale of the property was threatened. Dr. Ross came to the rescue, however, and it is reported that he sold his own private residence, which cost thirty-four hundred dollars, for the sum of twelve hundred dollars in order to save the church from sale.

While Burlington was the Territorial capital, Old Zion Church was the scene of much activity and of many interests. Legislators, judges, and the Governor assembled there to perform their official duties during the years between 1838 and 1841. Frequently the building provided a meeting place for public assemblies. On the Fourth of July, 1839, it was the scene of a patriotic celebration. Governor Robert Lucas was the presiding officer, Augustus Caesar Dodge read the Declaration of Independence, and James W. Grimes was orator of the day.

Old Zion was also the meeting place of the Supreme Court of Iowa, as well as the Territorial District Court in Des Moines County. In June, 1845, the Hodges brothers were tried and convicted of murder by a court sitting there. The verdict of guilty was rendered on Sunday morning, and in the afternoon of the same day the condemned men heard the death sentence read from the pulpit of this historic church.

Nor did this dwelling place of peace escape Indian controversies and questions of boundary warfare. In January, 1840, it was the scene of an Indian council held by Governor Lucas to confer with the chiefs of the Sauk and Fox tribes. On another occasion it was the headquarters of a company of soldiers on their way to the threatened border war between Missouri and Iowa. Perhaps the influence of the church was significant in this event, for it proved to be a model war, "where not a drop of blood was shed", and where "those who won the glory paid the bills".

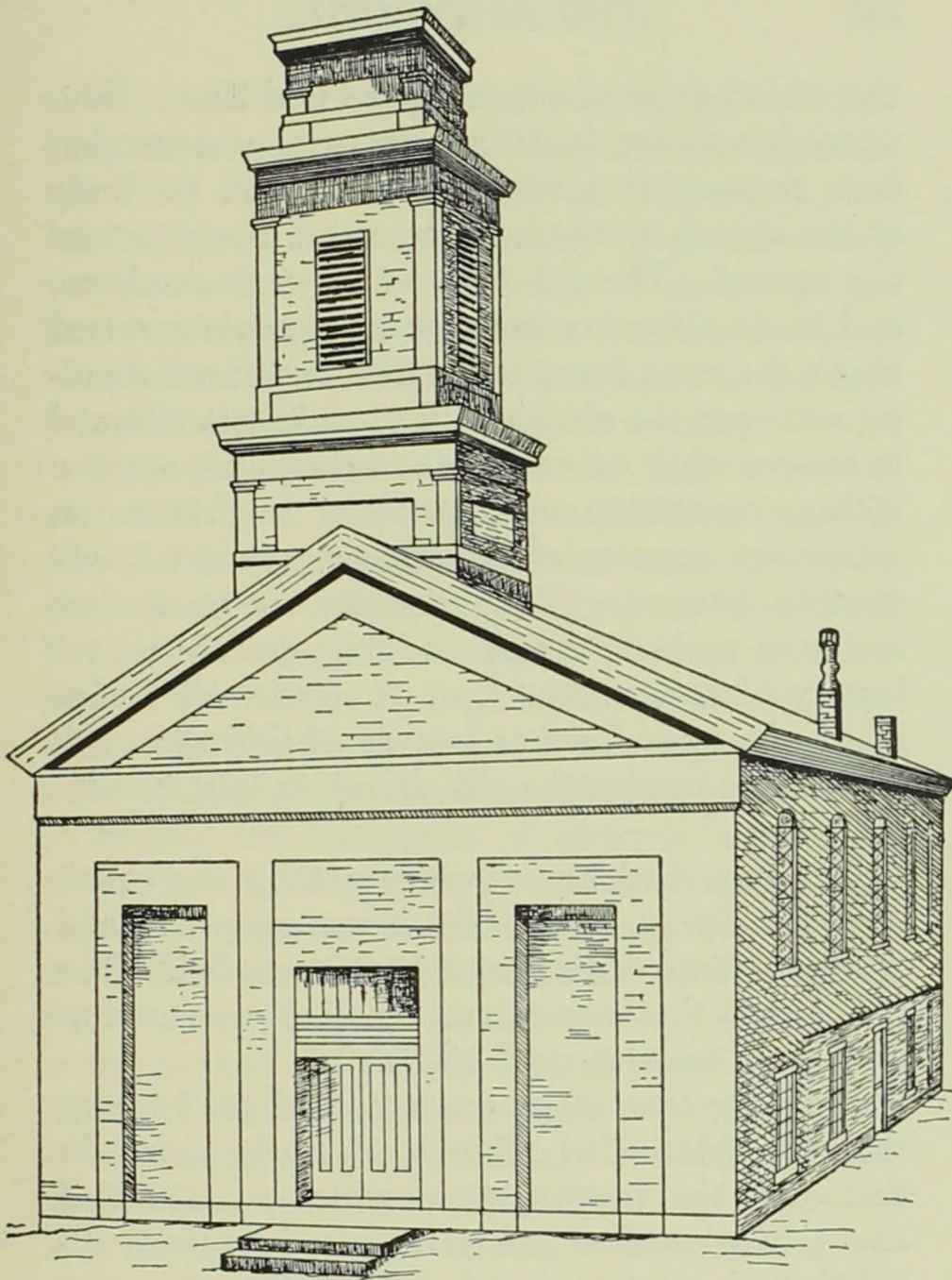
Worshippers, who in the late fifties sat within the hallowed precincts of Old Zion and "listened to the fervid prayer, the calm discourse, the swelling anthem, or the loud hosanna", were reminded that these were not the only sounds that had echoed forth from this room through the years. At an old settlers' meeting in the church in 1858, Judge Charles Mason said: "As illustrative of the novel uses to which it was necessary to adapt the limited means within our reach in those early days, and the shifts to which we were driven by the great mother of invention, I need but remind you of the scenes which have been witnessed within these walls".

He reminded his listeners that it was in Old Zion that "the amiable governor of the Territory

met in friendly conference the representatives of some of the dissatisfied red children, to hear their complaints, and at least to promise them redress — an easy and oft-repeated remedy. Here the citizens listened to the native eloquence of the Indians, and were treated to the exhibition of the song and the war dance. The wild whoop of the savage, which had often carried dismay and horror to many a stout heart, failed to make any impression on Old Zion, which . . . looked on in strange gravity, and was determined not to be surprised at any scene that might transpire within it."

When the Territorial Government was removed from Burlington to Iowa City in 1841, Old Zion was equipped as a house of worship. Some rough benches, with a back to each seat, were placed in the "Amen corner", while the other parts of the house were equipped with seats without backs. In 1845 more comfortable seats were provided. It was about this time, too, that the outside stairway and platform were removed and a vestibule and tower were built. In 1850 a bell weighing fourteen hundred and fifty pounds was purchased from the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati, Ohio, and placed in the belfry.

Fourteen years later further repairs and adjustments were made. The Burlington *Hawk-Eye*



SKETCHED BY DONOVAN G. TEMPLE FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

OLD ZION CHURCH

chronicled these changes thus: "Old Zion. This venerable edifice, in its internal arrangements, has been thoroughly remodeled. Through the body of the church were run three aisles, two side and one central. The old gallery has been remodeled, and in its place are the pews, but slightly raised above the main floor, and a new and tasteful pulpit succeeds the old one. The ceiling is adorned in fresco, while on each side of the pulpit are two niches, containing each a tablet in fresco, on which are appropriate scriptural quotations, admirably lettered. The windows, formerly low are now arched, thereby adding greatly to the beauty of the church. . . . When all is finished, the most familiar friends of Old Zion will scarcely recognize the old church in this, its second youth."

Old Zion had never been formally dedicated. Accordingly, in June, 1864, it was reopened and an appropriate dedicatorial service was held. The old church, thus many times repaired, was used as a house of worship until 1879.

From the time of its erection until 1853 it was the only Methodist Church in Burlington. In that year the congregation, which consisted of about two hundred and sixty members, was divided, and another church, called Ebenezer, was built in south Burlington. These two churches

worked side by side until 1879 when the two congregations were again combined and continued as the First Methodist Church of Burlington, the services being held at Ebenezer. A new building was erected a few years later. This congregation now consists of more than fourteen hundred members, and the old bell which hung in the belfry of Old Zion still calls them to worship.

During the years in which Old Zion was used as a church, it had twenty-six different pastors. Most of them served but one year each, and only two of them — Rev. J. B. Blakeney and Rev. Charles B. Clark — remained as long as three years. Rev. Pearl P. Ingalls was pastor for only a few months in 1861, when he resigned to become a chaplain in the Union Army.

Among the hundreds of persons who worshiped at Old Zion through the years there were men of prominence in the affairs of state. These included Governor Robert Lucas and Chief Justice Charles Mason. Moreover, from among the worshipers at this historic church there came two ministers who attained a national reputation. At a watch-night party on January 1, 1851, Charles C. McCabe was converted at Old Zion. Later he was the leader in a movement to raise millions of dollars for church extension, and finally he became a bishop in the Methodist Church. In 1852

Addison C. Williams became a member of Old Zion. Fifteen years later he served as pastor. From there he was transferred to Des Moines and then to Indianola. Later he held pastorates at St. Louis, Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. Thus it appears that the influence of Old Zion has radiated far and accomplished much.

But the old church building has long been gone. In 1881 it was razed and a modern theater was erected on the site. Thus, this sacred shrine, in which "the people of God had so long gathered for worship, which had been solemnly dedicated to its sacred uses, and which had become hallowed by its association in the memories of thousands" passed from view. Yet, memory lingers. A bronze tablet, twenty-four inches square, marks the site where the old church stood. History will not permit this shrine to be forgotten. Iowans, in generations yet to come, will pause to honor Old Zion.

J. A. SWISHER

A Mass Convention

The present generation of Iowa voters, accustomed since 1908 to the direct primary as the means of nominating party candidates, may have the advantage of an improved method, yet they miss some of the thrills that voters now of middle age and older used to get from the dramatic incidents of the old caucus-and-convention system.

Before the primary law was enacted, in most of the counties of Iowa each political party did its principal business for the year by holding one delegate convention. That was an important occasion. A few counties in the State, however, had adopted a voluntary primary system for making local nominations, and this left, as about the only business to be done by the county convention in any such county, the selection of county delegates to the State convention. Most voters regarded this job, on all ordinary occasions, as sufficiently unimportant to be left to the politicians. It was, therefore, hardly practicable to run all the machinery of caucuses in every precinct for that single purpose, so mass conventions were frequently substituted. These mass gatherings were usually perfunctory, having a small at-

tendance made up mainly of active politicians at the county seat.

Ringgold County adopted a voluntary primary system in 1893 for the nomination of county officers, and resorted to mass conventions for the selection of State delegates. Such was the local setting when a real contest over the governorship broke out in 1901 between A. B. Cummins and several opponents. The peculiar circumstances of that campaign led to one of the most notable mass conventions ever held in Iowa.

Ringgold is a small county, and in those days, before equal suffrage, had a Republican strength of almost exactly 2000. Of its Republican voters, 1021 came to Mr. Ayr, the county seat, on June 27, 1901, to vote on the governorship, and it is believed that on no other occasion in the State have more than fifty per cent of the voters of any party gathered at any county seat for any political purpose.

The dominant figure of that fight was Dr. Percy L. Prentis. For the last quarter century of his life which ended in June, 1928, Dr. Prentis was in the government service, as immigration inspector and superintendent at Sault Ste. Marie, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Chicago, and Detroit. He came to Delphos and began the practice of medicine about 1893. Two years later, at twen-

ty-five years of age, he was elected State Representative. In 1899, after a stirring contest in the primary, he obtained a third term, being the first man so honored in Ringgold County.

More background must be supplied. The two southern tiers of counties in Iowa, responsive to the C. B. & Q. railroad influence, were dubbed the "Burlington reservation." J. W. Blythe of Burlington, general attorney for the C. B. & Q., was the most powerful political figure in southern Iowa, and the fountain of favors such as free passes. Ringgold County always had a latent tendency towards insurgency, though seldom making it effective against the overwhelming influences which controlled that quarter of the State. The leading political manager of the county was R. H. Spence, then a member of the Republican State committee and aspiring to the chairmanship. J. H. Tedford and his son, Howard, were editing the *Ringgold Record*. F. E. Sheldon and Homer A. Fuller were young men of influence and activity. Indeed, men from all parts of the county took an active part in that memorable struggle. One name, particularly, must not be omitted from the list — H. H. Wilson, to whom all of his associates in the Cummins crowd deferred when it came to making decisions in matters of political strategy.

Dr. Prentis, after his reelection in 1899, announced his candidacy for the speakership of the House. He was rated as a supporter of Senator J. H. Gear, who was J. W. Blythe's father-in-law and a candidate for reelection to the United States Senate. An interview which appeared in a Des Moines paper anonymously (erroneously believed by Dr. Prentis to have emanated from Edward H. Hunter) stated with excessive frankness that Prentis would withdraw from the speakership race when told to do so. His response was to withdraw, at the same time announcing his support of A. B. Cummins for Senator. Although Cummins was beaten by Gear in the senatorial election by the legislature in January, 1900, the groundwork had nevertheless been laid for his successful candidacy for the office of Governor in 1901. At the State convention of 1900, his friends were in control, nominating W. B. Martin for Secretary of State and G. S. Gilbertson for State Treasurer.

Kept warm by attacks on the administration of Governor Leslie M. Shaw, the Cummins gubernatorial candidacy went into the campaign of 1901 under a full head of steam. When Dr. Prentis and his friends decided to make a fight for the Ringgold County delegation, their worst handicap in that dry district was Cummins's past

record in opposition to prohibition. They had a fortuitous aid, however, in the fact that in two townships there were many voters who came from Cummins's birthplace, Greene County, Pennsylvania. When the conservative county committee met, they fixed June 29th as the date for the nominating primaries, and defeated G. A. Tennant's motion to submit a gubernatorial preference on the primary ballot. The calling of a convention to pick delegates to the State convention was left to the county chairman, Lloyd Talley.

The Cummins men made the most of the refusal of the county committee to permit a preference vote on Governor, and succeeded in arousing much indignation. The interest in the governorship quite overshadowed the county contests. In fact, the whole campaign was so completely influenced by the factional dispute that the local candidates were labeled pro or anti Cummins. Demands on the county chairman to announce the convention date were insistent, and finally on notice of about eighteen days he set the time for Thursday, June 27th, two days before the primary.

Conferences at all hours of the day and night were kept going in Mt. Ayr by both sides. Business was generally neglected. A county meeting of Cummins workers was held. When men were

asked to go to far corners of the county to "see a man" they made no excuses, but went. The need for sleep was forgotten, and the livery teams of all Mt. Ayr stables were used to the limit of their endurance.

Hon. H. M. Towner of Corning, since Congressman from the Eighth District and Governor of Porto Rico, was then a judge of the third judicial district and a candidate for the State Supreme Court. He was popular in Ringgold County, and the anti-Cummins men made much of the argument that the State delegation should be constituted primarily in his interest rather than in behalf of any candidate for Governor. The voters, however, took the view that the choice of a Governor was the more important problem.

Just before the convention day, a tramp artist came to town and stayed at the Currie hotel. W. K. Currie and the late J. A. McNerney, though Democrats, were giving quiet help to the Cummins men, and they with the artist framed up the first local cartoons which were ever used in Ringgold County politics. These appeared in the *Twice-a-Week News*, published by the writer of this article.

The day dawned clear, with the roads good as that term was then understood. The town was thronged from early morning with earnest men,

excited, perhaps, but not unruly. Not until that morning did the anti-Cummins men disclose who their candidate would be. Then they blossomed out in enormous buttons bearing a picture of Edwin H. Conger. Meanwhile, the supply of small metal Cummins buttons had been exhausted, whereupon the Cummins men also made a splash by printing up large badges of ribbon. As the hour of eleven approached, the crowd, representing all of the sixteen townships and some of them almost one hundred per cent, gathered in the northwest corner of the square, near the band stand.

When Chairman Talley called the mass convention to order, Mr. Spence nominated for temporary chairman, State Senator George S. Allyn, while Dr. Prentis, with a few words of explanation, in a ringing voice proposed John E. Scott, evoking a response of cheers. Then there was a pause, for there was honest perplexity as to a method of getting that concourse counted. As a preliminary the chairman asked the Cummins men to step to the west side of the area and the Conger men to the east side. The division revealed that the west siders were more numerous, whereat another great shout went up. After another delay for consultation, it was decided to let the voters walk from the west through the central corridor

of the court house (the old one that was torn down in 1922), and be counted as they emerged from the east door. This orderly procedure resulted in a count of 565 for Cummins and 456 for Conger.

The Conger men made no further resistance, permitting Chairman Scott to pick the committee to choose the delegates to the State convention. He named the one man from each township who had been previously selected by the Cummins faction for that purpose. Their slate of thirteen delegates, headed by Dr. Prentis, went to Cedar Rapids and on August 3, 1901, helped to give Cummins his first nomination for the office of Governor. From the whole Eighth Congressional District, Cummins received only fifteen votes in the State convention, thirteen from Ringgold and one each from two other counties.

Dr. Prentis evidently thought that there was no political future for him on the "reservation", for about two years later, when he had an opportunity to take a professional post in the immigration service he accepted. It was generally believed that the regular organization considered him too able an insurgent to be left footloose in the Eighth District, and so caused the appointment to be offered through Congressman W. P. Hepburn. It is probably fair to state that the few years of

his activity in Ringgold County were among the most interesting in the county's political history. Dr. Prentis had the qualities which win success in public life — character, ability, force, ambition, personal magnetism, striking appearance, and eloquence. He might have gone far.

Though the insurgents capitalized hostility to what they called the county's "machine", the local effects were largely temporary, for the managing politicians after 1901 were mainly the same individuals as before. R. H. Spence, against whom the hardest drive was made, was actually picked that summer by the Cummins men on the State central committee to be State chairman, and as such the manager of Cummins's campaign.

During that fall a bill from a Des Moines engraving house was presented to the Republican State committee for payment, listing two cuts, made from cartoon drawings sent from Mt. Ayr and used in the Ringgold County campaign. These were the cartoons in which State Chairman Spence had been pilloried by the Cummins men of Ringgold County! To the newspaper man who had ordered and published those cartoons, Mr. Spence related the incident in glee, and said: "I told them that presenting that bill to me was adding insult to injury."

"The mass convention" is still referred to in

Ringgold County political conversation as a landmark. Nearly a third of a century has since sent many of its participants beyond the noise of political battle. Of those still living, many are scattered far and wide, and others have retired from politics. The active survivors have crossed and re-crossed the lines of allegiance many times in later campaigns, but the sentimental line leading down from that day still seems clearly marked in their minds. They have been proud to have participated in a remarkable feat of practical democracy — the unparalleled achievement of bringing more than one-half of all the Republican voters of an Iowa county together at one time in one place to make a political decision.

WALTER H. BEALL

Comment by the Editor

POLITICAL DRAMATICS

Americans have a way of dramatizing politics. Election campaigns are featured by hilarious meetings, boastful speeches, and flamboyant placards. Persuasion is based upon proof by assertion. Crude symbols of political character, such as roosters, elephants, and donkeys, are flouted in the faces of bewildered voters to guide their thought. Artificial enthusiasm is unbridled, but prejudice is rampant. As a demonstration of national immaturity, the conduct of a political campaign is convincing.

Once upon a time torchlight parades were popular; but in an age of mazda bulbs and ethyl gas, votes are sought by more comfortable methods. Perchance the busy housewife or the unemployed workman pause in their efforts to earn a living. If they merely turn a switch, political ballyhoo will assail their ears. From every restaurant, cigar store, and home the blatant loud speaker proclaims the virtues of candidates or advocates booze. No exertion is necessary.

In recognition of the quiet radio audience everywhere, the procedure of national conven-

tions is modified to make a better entertainment. A presidential candidate flies to Chicago to provide a thrilling climax. Noisy demonstrations dare not be too prolonged or the potential constituents will turn to tooth-paste or tobacco advertisements for relief. If the people are so intensely concerned with public welfare, why not install microphones in Congress?

J. E. B.

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