

A Steamboat History

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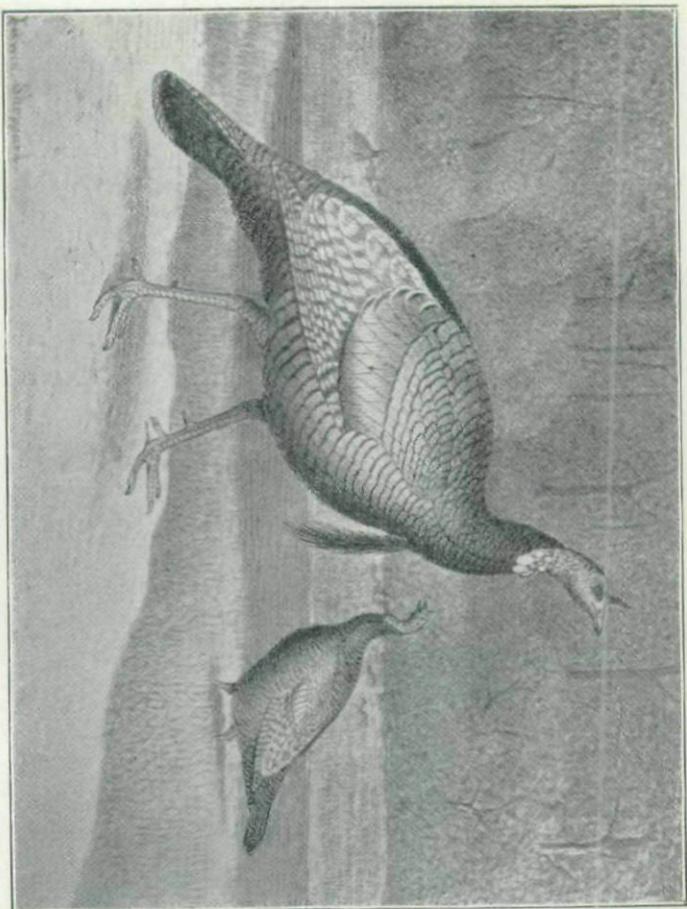
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AMERICAN WILD TURKEYS.

The above engraving is copied from Prof. D. G. Elliott's "The Gallinaceous Game Birds of North America", by the kind permission of Francis P. Harper, publisher, New York.

ANNALS OF IOWA.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

A STEAMBOAT HISTORY.

This number of *THE ANNALS* is largely occupied with a history of steamboating on the Des Moines river, from 1837 to 1862, from the pen of Mr. Tacitus Hussey, a well known resident of the capital city since 1855. This mode of transportation and passenger travel was a large element in the life of those early times, but more especially from the city of Ottumwa to Keokuk. This article gives abundant testimony to the industry of the author in the acquisition of his facts and the preparation of his monograph. It is a paper which we are sure the reader will regard as of great historical value. The narrative exists in no other form, nor is it likely ever to be written by any other hand. It will undoubtedly remain the sole history of this important business interest which has totally vanished from the valley of the Des Moines. Steamboating in this region is as much out of date, as far from the thoughts of our people, as the industries and handicrafts of the antediluvians. Indeed, it is difficult to realize as one now looks upon our shrunken river, spanned by many steel bridges, the little current creeping through and around the sand-bars which usurp its old channels, that it ever floated such a craft as a Mississippi steamboat. And yet the writer of this article in 1859 saw three large steamboats landed at the mouth of Coon river (the "Raccoon Fork"), and welcomed ashore friends who came from various parts of the State to attend a great political convention. Others speak of having seen five such steamboats lying together at the same place. Whenever floods prevailed the villages along the lower Des Moines were theaters of great business activity, owing to the frequent arrivals and departures of steam-

boats, which, when this river was at a low stage, found plenty of occupation on the Mississippi. In less frequent instances many of these boats ran up to the State capital. Many causes have conspired to bring about the disuse of steamboats on our smaller rivers, as the advent and development of railroads, the necessity for a more speedy and reliable mode of transportation, and above all, the constantly diminishing volume of water everywhere. Forty to fifty years ago the Des Moines and Coon rivers were beautiful streams, and they poured out an amount of water compared with which their present flow is but a sad reminiscence.

In addition to the value of this paper, as a history of steamboat navigation on the Des Moines river, it throws much light upon other incidental affairs, giving us some accounts of the habits of the enterprising people who first penetrated into the heart of Iowa, as well as disclosing to him who can read between the lines, the great physical changes which have taken place during the past forty years. Major Hoyt Sherman tells us something concerning the unprecedented flood of 1851, an event now rarely mentioned even by here and there an old settler. We get other hints that the country was at times "all afloat" with the wonderful surplus of water. The heavily laden crafts floated over many a place which has been dry and dusty for more than a score of years! Is there any lesson or portent in these curious facts?

Mr. Hussey is entitled to much credit for thus saving to the future these interesting pictures from the vanished past.

IOWA'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLACIOLOGY.

The glacial theory is of wide-spread interest. The proving that there existed in late geological times a vast polar ice-cap reaching down to the latitude of Cincinnati and St. Louis, may be regarded as one of the grand triumphs of science. Until a generation ago scientists had no idea that an

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