

The Oldest Mill-Dam Across the Iowa River

S. W. Huff

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 7(2) (Apr. 1869): 191-193

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

captain in the late civil war, and recently editor of a democratic paper in Benton County; John B. Booth, Judge of the 8th Judicial District in 1854, lawyer of Bellevue; S. G. Matson and Geo. F. Green, members of the 1st General Assembly; John E. Goodenow, one of the first settlers of Maquoketa, and member of the 3d General Assembly; J. W. Jenkins, member of the Legislature in 1856, '57, Lieut. Colonel of the 31st Iowa infantry, lawyer at Maquoketa, and recently a practicing lawyer in Missouri; John Hilsinger, lawyer of Sabula, member of the 10th General Assembly; Jackson J. Woods, Colonel of the 12th Iowa infantry, and editor of the Excelsior, and Chas. M. Dunbar, lawyer of Maquoketa, democratic candidate for Attorney-General in 1864.

THE OLDEST MILL-DAM ACROSS THE IOWA RIVER.

BY S. W. HUFF, M. D.

The facts of the following narrative was given us by SILAS FOSTER, Esq., of Iowa City, from a memorandum in his possession, made at or about the time of the occurrences herein related.

In the spring of 1843 a few of the citizens of Iowa City met at the office of Judge Coleman. The purpose for which the meeting had been called was to take action relative to the survey into lots of the burying grounds given to the city, and take measures for their improvement.

We have no means of knowing all the persons who attended this meeting, but do know from whom the suggestion came to enter upon the enterprise which forms the subject of this paper.

The meeting had transacted the business for which it had been called. Arrangements had been made for their survey; plans had been proposed and adopted for their improvement, and then adjourned. At the announcement of the adjournment Judge Coleman, who was at that time acting by appointment as Territorial Agent for the sale of public lands in Iowa City, requested the meeting to remain in their places for a few minutes as he had a suggestion to make. The sug-

gestion had reference to the construction of a dam across the Iowa River at a point above the village, and by a canal bringing it within its limits to near the point where Dr. Metcalf's bridge was afterwards built. This proposition found favor with the assembly, and a future meeting was appointed to enter into more definite arrangements for its construction. This meeting was held at the Tremont House. At this meeting a committee was appointed to draught articles of incorporation for a joint stock company. Whether this committee reported the document at this or a subsequent meeting, we are not informed, but its provisions were as follows :

The capital stock of the company should be divided into shares of \$25 each. That when \$5,000 worth of these shares should be taken the company would then be ready to commence organization and operations. In a brief time the required amount of shares were taken. At the organization meeting of the society, the officers elected were : Directors, Chancy Swan, Augustus C. McArthur and J. K. Haverstragh ; Chancey Swan being President of the Board.

This board at a subsequent meeting elected Silas Foster, Esq., their Secretary and Treasurer, and A. B. Newcomb, superintendent of the work. Under this organization on the 18th of June, 1843, the work of construction commenced, by the felling of timbers suitable for the dam.

It is not our purpose to follow this work through in all its details to completion, but we pass to another meeting of those interested in this organization.

On the 1st day of January, 1844, six months and twelve days from the day of commencement, there gathered at the rudimentary boarding-house of the company, its officers and the workmen, and revelled at a table spread with corn-dodgers and mush, made of meal ground that day in the mill which had been erected simultaneously with the dam.

But the curious feature of this festive occasion is that on an examination of the books of the company it was found that this structur, the dam, four hundred feet in length, which was then bearing the weight of the wintery torrents of the Iowa,

and was now paid for, had cost in money *twenty-five dollars!* How this could be accomplished, can be better appreciated by the old settlers than by those more recently on the field, and unaccustomed to vicissitudes and *methods of business* of the early days. Nearly all the workmen put in the time, which each gave in payment of shares of stock at a stipulated price. A few, a very few, received goods in payment from the stores of merchandising stock holders.

John G. Coleman and Philip Clark won the admiration of all, for what was thought at the time to be magnanimous conduct, in paying the value of their four shares each, in meat and flour, and used in sustaining the workmen. And C. C. Buck was also written down in the same list of generous-hearted men for paying his stock subscription in groceries.

The dam thus constructed was on the site of what is now Clark's mill. The site was donated by Walter Butler, Esq., who in making the gift reserved the right of constructing a mill on the west bank, and using water sufficient to run a saw-mill with one saw from the company's mill.

[To be continued.]

HUMMER'S BELL.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ANNALS OF IOWA :

Dear Sir—Deeming it worthy of preservation, as a part of the fragmentary history of the times when the Rev. Michael Hummer and his Bell engrossed so large a share of public attention, I forward you a poetical epistle to that belligerent personage, written by Judge Tuthill, of Cedar County, and published in the "Tipton Times," (the first newspaper in Cedar County,) while Hummer was in the zenith of his prosperity at Keokuk, after the Iowa City escapade.

FEBRUARY 26, 1869.

TO A NOTORIOUS PERSONAGE.

Ex-teacher of truth, for the love of gain,
 You deserted the Church you vowed to sustain,
 'Twas a scurvy part to act:
 But polish and breeding, the more's the pity,
 You lacked even while at Iowa City,
 And you're now on the "half-breed tract."

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.