History of Muscatine

Suel Foster
1872.]

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citizens of the place, through the rain, by the light of a lan-
tern, performed the ceremony of depositing the remains of
the stranger in the silent grave — no one being present ex-
cept ourselves and his two traveling companions. There
was no hoary-headed father to weep over the death of a
beloved son, to whom he was looking for aid and support,
when age had rendered him helpless and dependent; no
mother to mourn the loss of a departed child; no brother
or sister to mingle a sympathizing tear. But in the dark-
ness and stillness of the night, in the drizzling rain, by the
dim light of the lantern, by ourselves alone, we gently low-
ered the body down into its narrow abode, closing the earth
over the rude coffin, and left the stranger to repose in the
silent grave until the morning of the resurrection.

This manner of a final disposal of a stranger, who, from
his appearance, in the land of his birth, had friends and in-
fluence, much affected my spirits, and I retired to my lodg-
ings with a sad heart.

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HISTORY OF MUSCATINE.

BY SUEL FOSTER, MUSCATINE, IOWA.

EARLY TITLES OF LAND.

BEFORE Iowa became a territory, in 1838, this part of
the country was called the "Blackhawk Purchase," it hav-
ing been purchased of the Sac and Fox Indians by
treaty, at the close of the Blackhawk War (in 1832), Black-
hawk being chief of these united tribes. The "Blackhawk
Purchase" was a strip of country along the Mississippi river,
fifty to eighty miles wide, and extending from the state
of Missouri to Prairie du Chien, or a little above. One
point in the country of the "Blackhawk Purchase" was
fifty miles west from the foot of Rock Island, which brought
the western boundary this side of Iowa City. Beyond this
line no settler was allowed to "squat."

Settlement was made in Muscatine county in 1834, by
Benjamin Nye, at the mouth of Pine Creek. Previous to
this time, and immediately after the close of the Blackhawk
War, Major George Davenport sent a man by the name of
Farnham, from Rock Island, with two men, down to the
"Grindstone Bluff," as it was then called, to put up a
shanty of a trading-house, which Davenport supplied with
a small stock of goods, to trade with the Indians.

John Vanater was unquestionably the first bona fide settler at Muscatine, and G. W. Kasey the second. Mr. Farn-
ham's residence was at the upper end of the city of Rock
Island, then called Stephenson, where he died in February,
1836, and where, in law, he never lost his citizenship. Mr.
Kasey moved his family here in the spring of 1836, and in
the fall of that year Mrs. Kasey died, and was buried where
No. 1 school house now stands—the first white person
buried at this place.

In the fall of 1835, John Vanater and Capt. Benjamin
Clark bought the Farnham "claim" of Major George Daven-
port (who was only made colonel by common consent, he
never having a commission of that title), for which they
paid $200. The "claim" was half a mile square, beginning
at the trading-house, which stood in Water street, a few
yards above the foot of Iowa Avenue (and the west end of
the long, double log shanty was very near parallel with the
east side of the Avenue), thence one-fourth of a mile down
the river and one-fourth of a mile up, and half a mile back
from the river, which is about sixty feet beyond Eighth
street.

John Vanater, in the fall of 1835, moved into the old
trading-house, using one end of it for a small stock of
goods, which he was selling to the whites and Indians. Mr.
Vanater and Captain Clark had the claim surveyed into
town lots in May, 1836, by Major William Gordon, who
lived, at that time, in Rock Island, and a part of the time
at his claim, just above the mouth of Pine Creek. They
first named the town 'Newburg, but soon changed it to
'Bloomington, which name it retained about twelve years,
when it was changed to Muscatine.

These proprietors soon began to sell undivided one-sixth
and one-twelfth interests in the town. In August, 1836, my
brother (Dr. John H. Foster) and I paid $500 for one-sixth,
which we bought of Captain Clark, it being the last portion
he had. He then lived at Clark's Ferry, ten miles below
Davenport, afterwards called 'Buffalo, where he thought
there was a better location for a town. Many other persons
bought undivided interests about that time and the follow-
ing fall. Among those whom I can recall were Moses
Couch, Chas. H. Fish, T. M. Isett, Adam and Henry Frink,
Robert C. Kinney, William St. John, Captain G. W. Hight,
B. White, William Devoe, and J. W. Nelly. As yet, but
two cabins and two families were here. In the fall of 1836
some other families settled here. R. C. Kinney, late that
fall, put up the rear part of his hotel, which yet stands as
the rear part of Mr. J. G. Stine's hotel.

It was two years after this before the land was in market
at the United States land office — namely, November, 1838,—
and in March, 1839, that part of the city lying in township
76 was brought into market. That part of the city on
which the county court house stands was pre-empted by the
county commissioners, according to a law of congress, with
the privilege of taking a quarter section by paying the land
office $1.25 per acre for it.

The above relates to the central part of the city. The
lower part, or, as it was called, Kasey's addition, had other
proprietors — G. W. Kasey, E. E. Fay, William St. John,
N. Fulington, H. Reece, Jona Pettibone, L. C. and H. H.
Hine, R. P. Lowe, Stephen Whicher, J. E. Fletcher, Breese
& Higinbotham, Abijah Whiting, W. D. Abernathy, Alexas
Smith, and others. This claim was a mile square, including
the cemetery, Butlerville, and to the slough. The upper
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addition included all that part east of the center of the court house square. After these titles were obtained of the government, a re-survey was made, and a plat recorded. [It is supposed that this plat has been lost from the records, and if such is the case, it is high time our city fathers had an authentic plat put on record again.]

The first government line run here for surveying this country into townships and sections was in December, 1836, months after the place had been surveyed, by private enterprise, into city lots. Mr. Brown, of Michigan, an old and experienced surveyor, had the contract of surveying this part of the country into townships, and one of the severest of Iowa's winter days the surveying party came in from the west, through the oak woods, running the township line between 76 and 77, and set their terminating post on the bank of the river, and on the east bank of Pappoose Creek, marking the number of the sections upon the cottonwood trees. About six months after, it was subdivided into sections. Then came the difficulties among claimants, for it often occurred that a settler's claim and farm was upon two quarters, and sometimes in four quarters. Good and honest neighbors had no difficulty in setting the lines of their farms, by deeding to each other that part of their claim which rightfully belonged to them. Other less neighborly neighbors had bitter quarrels. We established rules of law and rules for recording our claims, and established courts and juries; and, although we "poor devils" did not own a foot of the land, out of the necessity of our situation, the legislature of the territory passed laws to meet our necessities, making established claim lines binding and arbitrations legal. Legal men of the present day might think it a "drum-head court" that would undertake to settle the legal rights of parties to lands, the title of which was yet in the government. The crowns of Europe handed laws down to our forefathers, but we, the "squatters" of Iowa, handed laws up to our rulers, and they acknowledged our "sovereign power" and accommodated their laws to suit our necessity. Notwithstanding legislative aid in settling our acquired
rights to our homes, many and bitter were the quarrels between the claimants, and fights were not unusual, occasionally with deadly weapons, and fatal results. I have seen these disputed rights carried to the government land office, where the claimants would bid against each other, the performance usually terminating in a few "knock downs." In such cases, the land sale would be adjourned to the next day. This I saw occur among the settlers of Des Moines county, but I believe we managed to preserve the peace at the land sales, though we had to carry our court of claims with us to the land sales at Burlington in 1838 and 1839.

A legal squatter's claim consisted in putting up a shanty, or inclosing a few acres of land with a fence, or breaking prairie. The outlines must be marked with a plow, if on the prairie, or blazed on trees, if in the grove. This held the claim six months; then actual residence. Sometimes actual residence consisted in the squatter taking a blanket and a lunch out to the claim, and boarding and lodging there an hour or two, and washing his dirty stockings. This made a substantial claim for six months more.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF MUSCATINE.

On reading Bancroft's History, some years ago, in it I found a tribe of Indians of this name, and I have no doubt the name was brought here by them, before the Sacs and Musquakies came here. He says: "At the last village on Fox river ever visited by the French, where Kickapoos, Muscoutins, and Miamis dwelt together on a beautiful hill in the center of the prairies and magnificent groves, etc., Marquette begged two guides of these Indians to pilot them to the portage from the Fox to the Wisconsin river, when he and his companion Joliet went on their voyage, and first discovered the upper Mississippi river." They "were the first white men who trod the soil of Iowa," June 25, 1673. I conjecture that a remnant of the Muscoutins, soon after this, were driven from Wisconsin, and formed a lodge upon the beautiful plains of Muscatine Island. The Sacs and Foxes knew nothing of the origin of this name.