

Fifth-Two Years in Iowa

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FIFTY-TWO YEARS IN IOWA.

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My father's first visit to the beautiful country lying west of the Mississippi was in 1839, at which time he crossed that river at Flint Hills (now Burlington), and made a very thorough examination of the territory. He was so delighted with the country that soon after the election of General Harrison to the presidency in 1840 he removed his family from Ohio to Iowa, and located in Henry County, near Mt. Pleasant. He was well situated in Ohio; had established a flourishing and successful High School and Academy at Lancaster in that State, in which he had very thoroughly trained for active life the future General Sherman, and his eminent brother Hon. John Sherman, the distinguished Senator from Ohio, as well as a multitude of other ambitious young men who afterward filled honorable and illustrious careers; but he could not resist the fascinations presented by the new Eden beyond the great Father of Waters, and so at a great loss financially, and putting aside the most flattering prospects, he turned his face toward the western world.

My father was a very ardent Whig, and my last recollection of Ohio was that he took me with him to a monster Whig mass meeting at Newark, the county seat of Licking County, held in honor of General William Henry Harrison. I distinctly remember to this day the quaint log cabin, drawn by a long procession of oxen, the barrels of hard cider, the savory barbecue, the festive coon, the flags, banners and music, the eloquent speeches and the great tumultuous, enthusiastic multitudes present on the scene in honor of their illustrious leader.

We made the removal from Ohio in two-horse wagons filled with the usual household furniture and utensils. Brother Hayward, at present and for fifteen years past the successful prin-

cipal of the Carson City, Nevada, High Schools, was at that time the baby, and there was generally plenty of music at the head of the column. I distinctly remember the horrible corduroy roads across the Indiana swamps. Neither language nor imagination can do them justice, but, like the darkey doctor's medicine, they would either kill or cure.

The journey was some six or seven hundred miles, and occupied several weeks. Late in November, 1841, we located on the boundless prairie near Mt. Pleasant. Our first home in Iowa was on the Burlington trail, along which parties of Indians were continually passing to and from Flint Hills (now Burlington), either for their government annuities, food supplies, ammunition, trinkets, or "fire water." Our cabin was very small, situated in a sea of luxuriant prairie grass that rolled its green billows up to the very door. Its one little room was at once parlor, pantry, bedroom and kitchen, and a boisterous crowd of happy little children slept in a trundle-bed under the bed. A hole in the ground about seven feet deep, unwalled and without the sign of a curb, was the only well. All the other domestic conveniences were equally limited and inadequate.

Such was the situation that confronted my mother, who had been accustomed all her life to all the comforts and enjoyments, and even luxuries and refinements of a highly civilized and long settled state. But she faced the new life with brave and patient heroism, and although she had many a quiet and sad shedding of tears over the desolation with which she was surrounded, and the separation from loved relatives and life-long friends in the East, yet the invincible spirit that animated the Spartan mothers hushed every heart-ache—put away every tear—overcame every obstacle. And this is true of every pioneer mother of Iowa to-day. May their memory ever be kept green and sacred in the hearts of their countrymen, and the tributes of deep and loving gratitude be perennial and eternal.

For over two years all our cooking was done by an open fire-place. Such a thing as a stove was unheard of. Corn bread and pork, with rye coffee, formed the prairie bill of fare, with an occasional dish of mustard greens. But there was

an abundance of wild game—deer, wild turkeys, prairie chickens, quails, pheasants, etc., which afforded a very pleasant and delightful change. Indeed, the choicest beef of the present day couldn't begin to compare with the tender young venison of that early period,—so plentiful and tame that the young deer often browsed up to the very door.

In the summer time the snakes were so numerous that they passed to and fro through the house at all hours, and in due time one of the children was bitten by a rattlesnake, but fortunately recovered. This was Oscar, the oldest, now for more than thirty-five years honorably and successfully connected with the New York City Schools.

In the winter of 1841-2, my revered and honored father, the late Professor Samuel L. Howe, resumed school teaching in a log cabin set apart on his farm for that purpose. From this little prairie academy were graduated two men who afterwards filled important stations in human life. One of them, Hon. Thos. Spearman, was sheriff of Henry county continuously for seventeen years, and the other one, Jas. Spearman, his brother, a gallant Captain in the Union army, was desperately wounded in one of the many battles around Vicksburg, and finally died of his wounds,—one of those priceless offerings on the altar of patriotism with which Iowa's brow is gemmed with a glory brighter than burnished gold.

In 1843 father removed his school to Mt. Pleasant, then a village of log cabins, "few and far between." There being no other accommodations, it was located in the upper room of the old log jail. Hell leered through the grated openings below—Heaven looked with smiles of love and welcome through the barred windows above. Never before perhaps in human life was jail so dignified—so utterly transformed—so glorified. This jail deserves commemoration in history side by side with the famous Bedford street jail where the immortal Bunyan wrote the inspired allegory of the Pilgrim's Progress. Here to this little college jail room in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, came the bright, ambitious lads and lassies of the "village of the plain." Wholesome in mind and body, and every whit as smart and

spirited as the peerless Iowa children of to-day. I remember that there were several boys from the country in attendance, and that they generally stood at the head of their classes, though some of them lived three or four miles away. Nearly every day father would give the school a brief lecture, and always wound up with the forcible expression, "What! are you always going to let these country boys beat you? And they with so much work at home, and then coming so far to school? You ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" But, philosophize as we may country boys have always led the procession. The foremost names in history, in every department, belong to that illustrious array of mighty spirits who began their human destiny on the farm.

From this school in the old jail was graduated one of the foremost merchants of Mt. Pleasant to-day,—a man estimated to be worth over one hundred thousand dollars, and one of our leading and most public-spirited citizens. Also another noble youth left this jail academy who afterwards became Governor of Nebraska and a member of the United States Senate.

In 1844 the school was temporarily removed to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, now the residence of Dr. Wellington Bird, and toward the close of 1845 it was transferred into the Academy Building specially erected for its permanent home, where it has ever since remained, having an unbroken record of over fifty years of continuous existence, making it unquestionably the oldest continuously operating institution of learning in the State. During this long eventful period this noble institution has sent out to bless the world thousands of whole-souled, earnest young men and women into all departments of human life. The present principal, Professor Seward Curtis Howe, ever since he took charge, has gradually maintained the reputation of the school and kept it fully abreast of the demands of modern times.

In this connection it is only just and proper to say that some of Iowa's most distinguished citizens laid strong and solid foundations for useful life work in this school, among whom the late Judges Tracy and Browning of Burlington, Judge Sampson,

Judge L. G. Palmer, Judge W. I. Babb, Hon. Jno. S. Woolson, U. S. Circuit Judge, Hon. B. J. Hall, Hon. John Van Valkenburg, Judge A. H. Bereman, Major Thos. A. Bereman, Hon. Edwin Vancise, Hon. Alvin Saunders, ex-Governor and ex-U. S. Senator of Nebraska, and a long array of other equally distinguished names. Judge J. C. Hall and Judge David Rorer of Burlington, life-long supporters of the school, were among my father's warmest personal friends, though their politics were as wide apart as the poles.

After the destruction of the Whig party my father became a free soiler, though in Henry County he was quite alone in that grand and noble advocacy of "free soil, free speech, free labor and free men." At a very early period his house was a station on the "underground railroad" (the first one north of Salem), and many a poor colored man, woman and child did he help on their way from slavery to freedom,—bidding them God speed, not with loving and encouraging words alone, but also with transportation, money, food and clothing. But as a free-soiler and abolitionist he was bitterly hated, and had to endure the wickedest persecution. But he was every whit a hero,—a hero fit to be named with classic martyrs of the past. His property was destroyed, his stock stolen, emissaries were sent to take his life, and finally he was brutally mobbed by the pro-slavery ruffians in the streets of Mt. Pleasant. I have heard my venerable mother, now 84 years old, often say that she expected to see him brought home dead almost any day,—a victim to the deadly malice of the pro-slavery men. But my father was a man of the most heroic and fearless courage—one of God's grand, great-hearted noblemen. He defied persecution, hatred, loss of property, social ostracism and even dared death itself in defense of those immortal principles that afterwards became the chief corner-stone of the great National Republican Party.

In 1848 he became a stockholder in the only abolition, free-soil paper then published in the Northwest. The paper was called *The Iowa Freeman*, and was published by Alanson St. Clair at Ft. Madison. D. M. Kelsey was its first editor. In 1849 the paper was removed to Mt. Pleasant, Henry County,

this State, where my father finally bought it and published it, under different names, for more than ten years. During the exciting presidential campaign of 1856 it was one of the most powerful and influential advocates of the principles of Republicanism in the State, and even now national distinction in the great political battlefield of the Union. My father lost nearly ten thousand dollars in this heroic newspaper work, as he had already sacrificed thousands of dollars before; but he never regretted all this marvellous self-sacrifice and toil, for he lived to see his life-long principles at last triumphant and crystallized in the platform of the grandest and greatest political organization of modern times.

I presume that no man—no newspaper—did more effective work for the election of Governor Grimes, Iowa's first Republican Governor, than did my father,—for not only did his newspaper exercise a powerful influence in every portion of the State, but he also made a personal canvass of the same, and delivered ringing and eloquent Republican speeches in every large city and town.

In the momentous conflict in Kansas between the Free State men and the Border Ruffians, covering the period from 1855 to 1859, two of my father's sons, at the most critical period of the contest, stood side by side with the heroic John Brown in the great preliminary struggle between freedom and slavery just preceding the civil war, and the old hero of Osawatomie and Hickory Point never had more devoted defenders.

When the civil war broke out, my father sent three sons and two sons-in-law to the Union armies, and from the 15th day of April, 1861, to the 21st day of July, 1865, there was always a member of the Howe family in the service maintaining the honor of the old flag and the integrity of the nation. To the day of my father's death this fact sweetened every hour of the beloved hero's existence, and invested his life with a halo of happiness.

But I must bring these reminiscences to an end, leaving untold very many interesting events for lack of room. My mother, now in her eighty-fourth year, and myself, are the only

two members of the family who have lived in Iowa over fifty-two years. We feel very proud that, under God, we have been permitted this great honor. It is certainly an experience well calculated to fill any honest heart with just pride and satisfaction.

As I draw to a close suffer me to say that no imagination can form an adequate idea of the beauty and grandeur of the Iowa Eden as it existed in the early territorial settlement. It was one vast ocean of billowy plain, gorgeous with flowery beauty—vocal with harmonies of life and landscape almost divine. The soul gazed in wonder on a scene more brilliant than the Field of the Cloth of Gold,—more beautiful than the vales of Valambrosa,—more enchanting than dreams of Araby the Blest. The warble of bird—the hum of bee—swelled the sweet chorus of the great hymn of nature. Beautiful groves here and there dotted the emerald landscape with the glory of God's first temples. Everywhere, all around, in limitless and unequalled grandeur and loveliness, swept away one vast, magnificent pastoral. Here, amidst this wealth of beauty and glory, might have been written the Odes of Horace—the Georgics of Virgil—the tender lyrics of Burns—the majestic measures of Scott. Herds of deer fearlessly roamed the vast verdant plains, and the wild turkey, the pheasant and the whistling quail swarmed in countless numbers in its secluded woodlands or along its pellucid streams, and the call of the pinnated grouse from the flower-crowned prairies fell on the ear with a melody pure, joyous and never to be forgotten. The picturesque Indian, solitary and reserved, still lined its romantic rivers with his wigwams, and chanted his legendary hymns from the bosom of its peaceful vales.

All this has passed away forever. Fifty years have wrought a wondrous and a mighty transformation. Iowa is the miracle of the ages. From her primeval wilderness has been carved out the most wonderful commonwealth of the Union,—the brightest star in our proud galaxy of States. Truly a peerless empire,—Christian, enlightened, progressive. All honor to that noble band of pioneers who dared the dangers

and privations of the wilderness that they might build for future generations this mighty State. Many are dead,—have passed away to “that silent bourne from whence no traveler returns.” But few remain. All too soon shall we see these venerable heroes no more forever. May they ever be crowned with the love and honor of a grateful people. To have been a pioneer in the upbuilding of such a peerless and majestic State as ours—representative of all that is noblest and best in modern civilization—is a crown of honor to any man or any woman, and may well entitle every venerated old settler of Iowa to the love and gratitude of mankind.

God bless those dauntless heroes,
 The West's brave pioneers—
 All honor to their courage,
 To their memory our tears.
 They bore the toil and hardship,
 They gave their noblest powers
 To build in matchless beauty
 This glorious State of ours.
 God help us guard the treasures
 Committed to our trust,
 And may angels keep their vigil
 Above their sacred dust ;
 High on the roll of glory
 Will their peerless names be seen,
 And love,—in song and story,—
 Will keep their memory green.

Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, October 18, 1894.

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