

The Iowa Forts

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ANNALS OF IOWA.

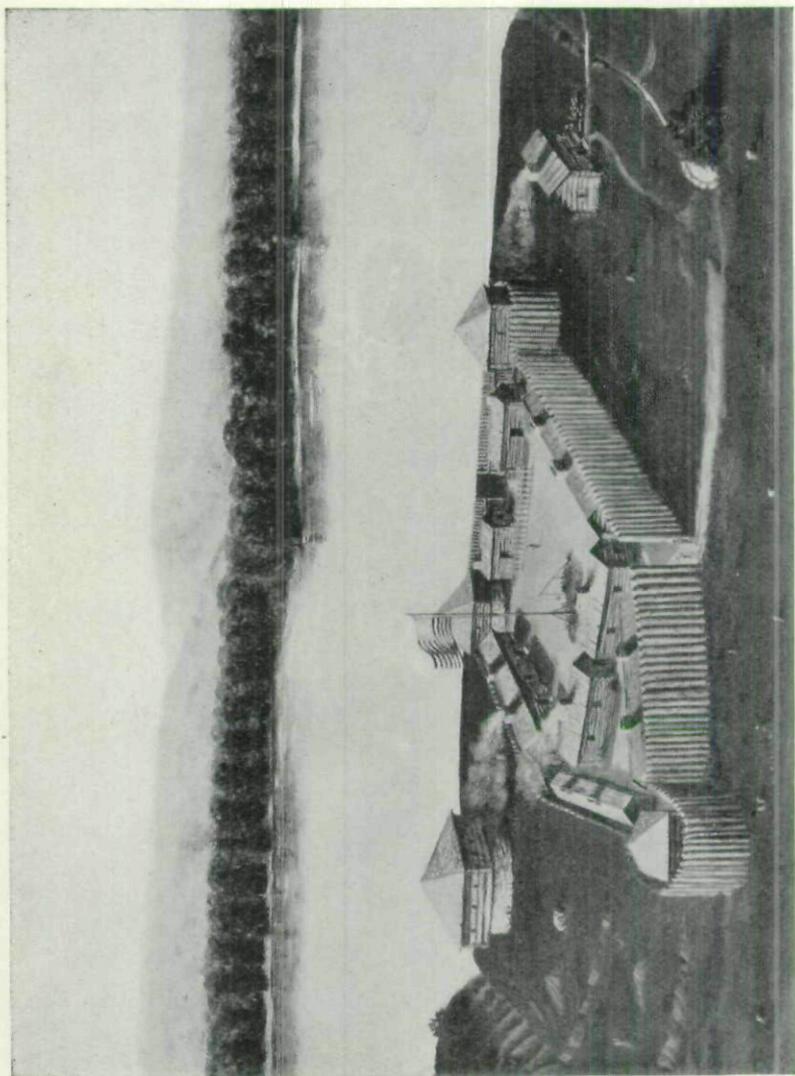
EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

THE IOWA FORTS.

A gentleman in the War Department tells in our pages today the interesting story of the selection of the site, the erection, occupation and final abandonment, of Fort Des Moines, No. 2. This old military establishment stood just above the confluence of "the Raccoon Fork," as it was known in earlier days, with the Des Moines river. When we commenced the publication of these articles, it was exceedingly difficult to find any reliable information concerning our old military posts, aside from the official records in the War Department. Such a narrative as that now presented makes the old fort altogether a tangible affair, and will give the reader and preserve to other times clear ideas of what it was and the purposes of its establishment.

It is also seen that some of the company officers, then but recently from the Military Academy, afterward rose to high rank during the civil war. And we have glimpses of individual pioneers who later on bore prominent parts in the settlement of the capital city and county. The frontispiece—a ground plan of the military post—was engraved from a copy of the original plan of the fort on file in the War Department. The other engraving is the residence of Lieut. William N. Grier, and is without doubt the first house erected within the limits of the present city of Des Moines.

A statement is made on page 164 which seems somewhat confusing. "It was decided by Gen. Winfield Scott to locate a detachment of troops directly on the reservation, within a few miles of the agency buildings, and on the Des Moines River, a short distance below the Raccoon Fork, at the site of what was then the town of Fairfield, Iowa." We



FORT MADISON, IOWA, 1808.

The site of this old frontier post is now occupied by the Morrison Manufacturing Company's Plow Works.

are so accustomed to think only of the enterprising capital of Jefferson county when the name "Fairfield" is mentioned, that a question at once arose as to the frontier town bearing the same name, but neither in local records nor in the recollection of the "oldest inhabitant," could a trace of it be found. It is within the range of probability that some beautiful spot in the broad valley of the Des Moines, and within a few miles of the present capital, may have been for a time fancifully so called: or, a town may have been located and laid out which never progressed beyond an aggregation of stakes. "Stake towns" were often met with on the prairies, where a tract had been surveyed into streets, alleys and lots, remaining in that condition, without change, until years afterward it would be given up to farming purposes. No more opprobrious epithet could be applied to a rival county seat forty to sixty years ago, than to call it a "stake town." In the course of years the name given to one of these "towns" would fade out of recollection and utterly disappear. Something like this may have resulted in the case of "the site of what was then the town of Fairfield, Iowa."

THE ANNALS for July, 1897 (p. 97, Vol. III, 3d Series), contained a ground plan of Fort Madison, doubtless the most elaborate defensive work ever constructed on what is now the soil of Iowa. The copy from which our plat was made was understood to be an exact facsimile of the original draft in the War Department. It was not practicable at the time of our publication to obtain anything but the outline of the old fort. Quite recently, however, the Morrison Manufacturing Company of the city of Fort Madison, as one of the illustrations of their business catalogue, had the engraving prepared which precedes this article. It was based upon the outline of the original fort, and the recollections of early settlers who saw its ruins many years afterwards. Nothing is added to the outline of the official drawing, in this later cut, except the small structures outside of the stockade. The Morrison Plow Works now occupy the site of the old fort,

every vestige of which has disappeared except the ancient well, which "furnishes as clear, cool water to the factory hands today as it did to the soldiers over ninety years ago."

We have secured sketches of Forts Atkinson, Dodge and Sanford, which will appear in these pages hereafter. The two first named will be accompanied with illustrations, but of Fort Sanford we have been unable to obtain any drawing. It consisted, however, of but a few small log houses, and was never a post of much importance.

MEMORIALS OF GEN. M. M. CROCKER.

A Grand Army Post, one of the fine school buildings, a street, a beautiful piece of woodland—"Crocker Woods"—in Des Moines, and a station a few miles north on the Chicago & North-Western Railway, have been named in honor of this great soldier. His equestrian statue was also placed upon the Iowa Soldiers' Monument. And just now, Mr. Conrad Youngerman is erecting at the southwest corner of Fifth and Locust streets, Des Moines, an imposing business block, which bears the name of "Crocker Building." Mr. Youngerman has in other less important ways honored the soldier's memory at the capital of the State. He was the first to secure a fine engraved portrait of Gen. Crocker. This was for a purely business purpose, but that cut soon found its way into publications of permanent interest. It faithfully represents Gen. Crocker as he is remembered by the few survivors who knew him intimately. Mr. Youngerman's building in the heart of the city, adds another to his many substantial tributes to Gen. Crocker. This has grown out of the fact that when Mr. Youngerman came to Des Moines, some years before the civil war, he found in the bright young lawyer an abiding and valued friend. And so he is laudably doing what he can to keep the soldier's memory green. This leads us to the suggestion that the capital city

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