

A Pioneer of Territorial Times

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A PIONEER OF TERRITORIAL TIMES.

REMINISCENCES OF KISHKEKOSH COUNTY.

BY B. F. GUE.

James Hilton, one of the notable pioneers of southern Iowa, who is a fair type of our young men who came west fifty years ago, visited the Historical Rooms at the Capitol in April. He was born in Columbia county, New York, in 1816. In 1824, when eight years of age, his father took him to Newburg to see the great French patriot and nobleman, General LaFayette, of Revolutionary fame, who was then making his last visit to the United States. Young Hilton was one of the few boys who shook hands with that friend and companion in arms with Washington, who was loved and revered by all Americans. When a young man Hilton opened a drug store in New York City near Bond street. The upper story of the building was occupied by George Catlin, the famous Indian writer, traveler and portrait painter. In Catlin's studio Mr. Hilton often met Black Hawk and other noted Indian chiefs, who frequently visited this friend and historian of their race. A warm friendship sprang up between the young druggist and the great artist, and Mr. Catlin secured for Mr. Hilton a position in the American Fur Company then fitting out an expedition at St. Louis to go to the Yellowstone River. Mr. Hilton started west in 1840 to join the expedition, but met with so many delays that he reached St. Louis too late, it having got off several weeks before his arrival. He had formed a very favorable opinion of the new Territory of Iowa, but remained in Missouri until the treaty was concluded with Keokuk, by which the Indian claim to the west part of the Territory was relinquished at Agency City in 1842. Mr. Hilton went up into the new purchase and took a claim in May, 1843, about six miles south of where Albia now stands. On this claim he made his first home in Iowa, and opened a farm where he has lived for fifty years. During the first year after he came to Iowa he

often met Keokuk, Appanoose, Hardfish and other Indian Chiefs.

In February, 1843, the County of "Kishkekosh" was established and named after a chief of the Fox Indians. Wareham G. Clark, in 1844, laid out a town two miles northwest of where Albia is located, and named it Clarksville. Here the first court in the new county was held.

James Hilton, who was quietly working on his farm, was surprised one day by receiving a letter from Charles Mason, one of the Territorial Judges, a copy of which we here present:

OTTUMWA, September 19, 1845.

Mr. James Hilton,

Sir:—Enclosed you will receive an appointment as Clerk of Kishkekosh county. You are authorized to use the eagle side of the American half dollar as the seal of your county, until further arrangements shall be made. I should have made an appointment sooner, but it has not yet been three weeks since I first saw the law organizing your county, and authorizing me to make the appointment. It will be wholly impossible for me to hold court in your county this fall. I shall endeavor to find time during the spring to visit you for that purpose.

Yours Truly,

CHARLES MASON.

CERTIFICATE OF APPOINTMENT.

By virtue of the authority in me vested, I hereby appoint James Hilton, of the county of Kishkekosh, Clerk of the District Court, to hold his office from this date till the end of the first term of the District Court in and for said county.

Dated this 19th day of September, A. D., 1845.

CHARLES MASON,

Judge of the 1st Judicial District, Iowa Territory.

Mr. Hilton had not been an applicant for the place and was very much surprised when notified of his appointment, as he was not even acquainted with Judge Mason.

It afterwards appeared that a "ore-horse" lawyer at Keokuk was the only candidate working for the appointment, and he had secured the indorsement of a large number of his Democratic neighbors. Armed with these documents, he called upon Judge Mason, presented his credentials, and urged his claims most eloquently. The Judge listened patiently to the young man, carefully read the letters of indorsement from his kind neighbors, and remarked that he would consider the matter.

After the visitor had departed he inquired of a friend from Van Buren county if he knew of a good man for Clerk over in the new county of Kishkekosh. "Why, yes," he replied; "there is a young farmer, James Hilton, who will make a good one." "Well," says the Judge, "I don't know Mr. Hilton, but I do know this young fellow from Keokuk, who is the only candidate for the place—and I shall appoint Hilton."

John Clark, who was the Sheriff of Kishkekosh county, had put up a log cabin in the newly laid out town of Clarksville, early in the spring. It had no floor, and no door, but there was an opening on one side for an entrance. In April, 1846, when Judge Mason came to open his first term of court, the horses ridden by the Judge and lawyers were put in the log building for want of a stable. In the morning they were taken out and hitched to the trees, while the Sheriff fixed up a rude table and some benches in the cabin thus vacated, for the accommodation of the court. There was but one case on the docket, and that was soon disposed of, when the court adjourned.

Edward Johnstone, then a young man just entering upon the practice of his profession, was among the lawyers in attendance at this primitive court. He is described by Mr. Hilton as a very tall, fine-looking youth, "six feet four," with long white hair falling about the brow of one of the most majestic heads ever seen in Iowa. Several other young lawyers were present who in later years became eminent in their profession, and held important offices.

But alas! the first county seat, Clarksville, was beaten in a contest with Princeton, two miles away (now Albia), and soon after disappeared from the map of Iowa as a town. The first court house became a farm house, and even the name of the county vanished forever a year later, when the Legislature changed it to Monroe. "Kishkekosh" county and its first seat of government, "Clarksville," exist now only upon here and there an early map, or in the memory of the old pioneers.

The original letter of Judge Mason, and the commission sent to Mr. Hilton fifty years ago, written with a quill pen

on foolscap, faded and yellow with age, are now deposited in the Historical Department at Des Moines. There is little besides now in existence to remind the present and future generations that Iowa once had a county named after the forgotten Fox Chieftain, Kish-ke-kosh.

HISTORICAL SKETCHES—NORTHWESTERN IOWA.

BY MAJOR WILLIAM WILLIAMS.

[In the year 1866, Major William Williams, a pioneer settler of Fort Dodge, contributed to *The Iowa North West*, a weekly paper published at that place by Hon. B. F. Gue, a series of very interesting and valuable historical sketches which were continued through several months. He was a man of rare intelligence, and had distinguished himself as the commander of the relief expedition which went to Spirit Lake immediately after the inhuman massacre of the settlers by the Sioux Indians, in the spring of 1857. He saw the first settlements, when that portion of the frontier was still under military protection, and lived long enough to see the country quite thickly populated. Wielding a ready pen, and having been an active participant in public affairs, his articles possess permanent interest. From the first and second we copy the following:]

Fort Des Moines, situated at the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, was established in May, 1843, and continued to be the outpost on the northern frontier of Iowa until the 11th of October, 1845, when it was abandoned. At that time the territory lying north, northeast and northwest of Fort Des Moines was comparatively an unexplored region of country, the habitation of the wild Sioux Indians, and ranges for buffalo and elk. The only exploration of the country north of the Raccoon Forks (Fort Des Moines) that was previously attempted, was by Captain Boone of the U. S. Dragoons, who by order of the Secretary of War marched with his company from Old Camp Des Moines, formerly a station of the U. S. dragoons, situated on the Mississippi river, and now called Montrose.

In 1848 the government surveys of the land purchased north

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