

## Historical Sketches—Northwestern Iowa

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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.

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## 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

of the Raccoon Forks was commenced. Mr. Marsh, of Dubuque, set out from that place with his company to run the correction line from a point on the Mississippi, near Dubuque, to the Missouri river. He progressed with his work without molestation, until he and his company crossed the Des Moines. On the west bank of the river he was met by a party of Sioux Indians, under the lead of a chief named "Si-dom-i-na-do-tah," who told him that that country belonged to them, and he should proceed no farther, and ordered him to "puc-a-chee" (be off or clear out). After they had left him, on consultation, Mr. Marsh concluded to proceed. They had not proceeded a mile from the river, however, when they were attacked at a point near the head of a large ravine (south of the south line of section No. 30, T. 89, R. 28), by a large force of Indians who surrounded him and his party and robbed them of everything. They took off their horses, destroyed their wagons and surveying instruments, pulled up his stakes, tore down his mounds, and forced him and his party back across the river, to find their way home as best they could. This outrage, with others committed on families who had ventured up the Des Moines, and made claims north of the Raccoon forks, in the fall of 1849, caused the Government to determine on establishing a frontier post, and station troops to keep the Sioux Indians in check. In 1850, a portion of the 6th U. S. Infantry was stationed at Fort Dodge. After the troops arrived emigrants, felt secure in settling in this northern portion of the State, and in the years of 1849 and 1850 several families settled in Boone Forks, which is embraced in Webster county. Four or five pioneers came in as early as the fall of 1849.

The Legislature of the State of Iowa, during the session of 1850-51, arranged and laid out all the north, northwestern and northeastern territory, in Iowa, into counties, and gave them names (this was done before the treaty was ratified that extinguished the Indians' title to the lands lying west of the Des Moines river). In naming the counties what is Webster county was named Yell county, and what is Hamilton county

was named Risley, in honor of two colonels who fell in the Mexican War.

At the session of the Legislature of 1852-53, the settlers then in Boone Forks, at the mouth of Boone river, the only settlement then in Yell or Risley county, for the purpose of securing a central point for themselves, as they discovered that the dividing line between the two counties ran through their settlement numbering then about fifty persons, petitioned the Legislature, and induced them to unite the two counties, Yell and Risley, into one county, which they named Webster county.

In 1850, previous to the organization, the valuation of property returned to Polk county was \$40,000. In August, 1853, the population, independent of the troops at the Fort, was about 150 souls, all of whom were located in the vicinity of Boone Forks, from eighteen to twenty miles south of Fort Dodge. They were composed principally of emigrants from Missouri, North Carolina and Indiana, with some three or four from New York. They formed a republic of their own. Law and justice was administered in their own way. Every one read the Code of Iowa, and expounded the law to suit himself. It was not long until a few troublesome characters came in and trouble commenced. Quarrels about claims and all kinds of contentions arose amongst them. (It was the privilege of all to make claims. Every man, woman and child had a claim to sell to new comers.) Little was attended to but quarrels and litigation with one another, for the first two or three years. When a law suit was to be tried, all the settlers would attend, and quite an array of men with their rifles in their hands, and each accompanied by from two to three half-starved dogs, were to be seen. Lawing, claim-jumping, trapping and hunting appeared to be the height of their ambition. Rev. J. Johns, who settled among them, preached and expounded the Scriptures for them, on the Sabbath day, when he was not too busily engaged in hunting elk and deer—or bee-hunting—or trapping.

The site of Fort Dodge was first selected for a military post

by Brevet General Mason, then Colonel of the 6th Regiment of U. S. Infantry. The object in establishing the post was to keep in check the Sioux Indians, and it was placed at the extreme western part of what was called the neutral ground between the Sioux and Sac and Fox Indians. In the spring of 1850, Major Samuel Woods was ordered on with a portion of the 6th U. S. Infantry, and established the post which was named Fort Clark. The officers of the detachment, under Major Woods, were Brevet Major Lewis A. Olmstead,\* acting Commissary, Lt. L. S. Corley, Lt. Stubbs, and Surgeon Dr. Chas. Keeney. But it was found that another detachment from the same regiment had established another post on the frontier west, which they also named Fort Clark. To prevent confusion in mail matters and in forwarding supplies, the name was changed by order of the Secretary of War, from Fort Clark to Fort Dodge, in honor of Senator Dodge of Wisconsin.

After establishing Fort Dodge, some time was spent during the summer and fall of 1851 in reconnoitering and examining the country, with the view of ascertaining the location of the Indians, and to determine on the best route for roads as well as to gain a knowledge of streams and the country generally. We found many remains of ancient fortifications and mounds, which had evidently, from their location and construction, been (at some very remote period) raised for defense and positions of observation, giving evidence that this northern country was inhabited by a race of people long before the present race of Indians inhabited it. On viewing the location and tracing the lines we found them arranged with some judgment. Others evidently were burial places. On directing the attention of the Indians to them, we were unable to find any among the oldest Sioux who had any knowledge of them either by tradition or otherwise; they all asserted that they were here when their people first came into the country. The most distinct of these ancient works will be found in the forks of Boone, on

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\*Major Olmstead served through the Mexican war, and was one of the "forlorn hope" that made the assault upon the stronghold of Chapultepec. He was afterwards a Brigadier General in the Rebel army, and was killed at the battle of Gettysburg.

and in the neighborhood of L. Mericle's place, on the west side of the Des Moines, near where Mr. Beam lives, also on Indian creek, about twelve miles north of Fort Dodge, on Lizard rivers, and at Fort Dodge. Some of the mounds at Fort Dodge have been removed, and in digging into them they were found to contain the remains of human beings; such as parts of skulls, teeth, thigh bones, etc., and along with them pieces of burnt or charred wood and coals. From their location on high and dry ground, covered with sand and gravel, together with the appearance of the bones, their color, etc., physicians and all who examined them were of opinion that a great length of time had elapsed since they had been deposited there, perhaps two hundred years or more; the ancient mound builders were in the habit of burning their dead, which is not the custom of any of the Indians of whom we have any knowledge.

In the fall of 1851, the Fort being established, roads laid out, and streams bridged on the east side of the Des Moines river, to enable the wagon trains to pass and repass to Keokuk, where all supplies for the Fort were delivered from St. Louis, suitable stopping places were much wanted, as the escorts and teamsters had to encamp; Major Woods, Major Armistead, Wm. Williams, and Barlow Granger, of Des Moines, in company, determined upon laying out a town and building a company hotel in the forks of Boone river, and for that purpose took in D. B. Spaulding, and enclosed his claim, eighty acres, in the town plat. Mr. Spaulding was to keep the hotel when finished. We went on and surveyed and laid out the town, which looked exceedingly well on paper, and named it Dakota. This raised a great commotion among the natives. Claim-jumping commenced at once, and high prices for claims were demanded. Mr. Spaulding sold out his interest to Wm. Pierce. We had all made claims in the neighborhood of the town site, and each of the company commenced improvements, and after expending from \$75 to \$150 each in cash, some of the very men employed jumped our claims. Rather than be mixed up with such a crowd, we abandoned our projects and left them in their glory.

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