

Two Old Letters

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TWO OLD LETTERS.

The old settlers of Burlington, Iowa, held an "Anniversary Meeting" on some date in June, 1858, extending invitations among others, to Messrs. Edward Kilbourne, of Keokuk, and Charles Negus, of Fairfield. Mr. Kilbourne was a Connecticut man, born at Marlborough, Jan. 22, 1814. He came to Iowa in 1836, residing first at Montrose, Lee county, and later in Fort Madison and Davenport, finally settling in Keokuk in 1848. This was thenceforth his home until his death. He was a man of affairs, a leader in business enterprises and in the Episcopal church. He engaged in steamboat navigation and the building and management of railroads. In this last direction the most important work with which he was connected was the Des Moines Valley Railroad. He died Feb. 3, 1878. Mr. Kilbourne responded to the invitation from Burlington as follows:

KEOKUK, June 1st, 1858.

GENTS: Your polite invitation to attend the "Anniversary Meeting of the Old Settlers" came duly to hand, and it was my intention to be present and assist in the celebration, but I regret to say that it will not be possible for me to do so.

Twenty-two years ago to-day I arrived in Chicago, a youthful adventurer in quest of health and fortune. Chicago at that time contained from 1,200 to 2,000 inhabitants, while Iowa, then known as the "Black Hawk Purchase," was almost an unbroken wilderness. A month later I was traveling up the Mississippi on the good steamer Dubuque, Capt. Geo. W. Atchison commanding, and Capt. LeRoy Dodge clerk. We passed the present site of the city of Keokuk in the night, and the next day—the 1st day of July, 1836,—landed at Burlington, (as I find noted in my journal) "a new town in Wisconsin." Our stay was brief, but long enough for me to ascertain that the price of the best lots was \$500 each, which from the then appearance of the place I deemed to be extravagantly high, but readily accounted for in view of the wild mania for speculation then prevailing. I may add that I am happy, however, to learn from some of my "ancient" Burlington friends that an investment at that time, even at the prices mentioned, notwithstanding the present stringent times, would have proved a remunerative one.

The day following we passed the town of Davenport, then recently laid out but containing no buildings, Stephenson (now Rock Island) containing about 30 houses, mostly built of logs, and landing at the island of Rock Island Col. Geo. Davenport came on board and went with us to Galena. He informed me that emigrants were going into the "Black Hawk Purchase" in great numbers and he was of the opinion, extravagant as it might appear, that not less than three to four thousand had already settled there. Previous to this time, and up to the 4th of July, the territory comprising the present State of Iowa was under the government of Michigan.

and the title to all the lands to which the Indian title had been extinguished (except the Half Breed Reservation in Lee county) remained in the U. S., and so remained for a period of two years.

How wonderful the change! There were then two counties in the Territory and a population of 4,000. Now we have one hundred counties with a population of 600,000, and it is gratifying to know that this unparalleled increase in population has brought with it to the early settlers and founders of this fair commonwealth generally a corresponding increase in wealth, in the comforts and luxuries of life, educational advantages, and all those things which distinguish the dwellers in cities from the settler on the frontier.

Trusting that the "Pioneer Hawkeye Association" may hold their annual celebration while any of the original band remain, and that I may have the pleasure at some future gathering to meet with them,

I am, Gents, very respectfully,

EDWARD KILBOURNE.

To Messrs. J. C. Hall, A. W. Carpenter, Ebenezer Cook, Committee, Burlington, Iowa.

Hon. Charles Negus, of Fairfield, was also the recipient of an invitation to attend this "anniversary meeting." He was a pioneer of very considerable note in southern Iowa—a self-made, but highly cultured man. He was a lawyer, and at one time served as Judge of Probate for Jefferson county. He was elected to the lower house of the general assembly in 1850. He also served a term as prosecuting attorney. His most valuable service, however, and that for which he will longest be remembered, was the writing of many excellent articles on the early history of Iowa. For the most part these were published in the 1st series of *THE ANNALS OF IOWA*.

FAIRFIELD, June 1st, 1858.

To Messrs. Hall, Carpenter and Cook:

SIRS: Yours, inviting me to attend the old settlers celebration at Burlington, has been received, and I feel highly honored by the compliment you have shown me; and could I get to your city by any reasonable exertion I should most certainly attend your celebration. But mud and water render the undertaking almost impracticable, so I shall have to forego the pleasure of participating in your festival to the old settlers. I desire to be represented on the occasion and for this purpose I herewith send you a toast:

"The old settlers of the Black Hawk Purchase—may they live to see Iowa the first state in the Union."

Yours most respectfully,

CHARLES NEGUS.

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