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# A Town Looks Back

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## A Town Looks Back

My memories of Burlington's Semi-Centennial celebration of the beginnings of her permanent settlement are vague, but I was there. I cannot say that I recall a single one of the distinguished visitors, who sat on the stand in North Hill Park that morning of June 1, 1883, or who addressed the Praise Service at the Congregational Church two evenings later. But I do remember Burlington's crowd-filled streets, the banners flying from every building, the profusion of evergreens and flowers, the march of the paraders. And I have read the printed accounts to help refresh my memory.

The opening day of the Semi-Centennial was sunny but cool. From earliest dawn strangers had been streaming into town on every train and steamboat. Bands played all day long, and not one accident marred the joy of the occasion. How different Burlington was in 1883 from the Flint Hills of 1833! Once the forest home of a few red men, it was now an orderly city of 20,000 white men. Banners and emblems everywhere reminded us of the great changes which fifty years had brought.

"Welcome to all: Pioneers, Old Settlers and



Every One, Thrice Welcome" was the greeting displayed at the steamboat landing. At the corner of Main and Valley streets was a picture of an ox team drawing a prairie schooner, labeled "Go West, Young Man!" On the reverse appeared a beautiful residence with fountains and flowers and the inscription "Fifty Years After." While no Indians were present, Black Hawk was not forgotten. "Peace to his ashes," read the legend below his picture. The progress of transportation was memorialized in a banner on one side of which was portrayed "First engine in Burlington, J. C. Hall" and on the reverse a C. B. & Q. "Mogul" locomotive. Another banner read: "Shokokon, Flint Hills; After Fifty Years, Burlington, the Orchard City!" Most arresting of all was the streamer that proclaimed: "Iowa the Beautiful; Iowa the Banner State, Iowa, The Pleasant Land, This is the Place."

To children like myself gazing enraptured from the curbstone the chief interest of the day was in the big parade that swept through the streets at noon heralded by the booming of fifty guns to commemorate the passage of fifty years since permanent settlement. Two thousand people were in the procession. With excitement, we recognized Willie Potter — "Master Willie Potter," according to the official program — riding stiffly by us on a horse as "orderly to the Chief Marshal."



"Hi there, Willie!" we called, but Willie stared straight ahead, ignoring our salutations, his thin, pale face very solemn.

Preceded by a Ladies' Band — a veritable novelty then — and a platoon of uniformed police, Buren R. Sherman, the Governor of Iowa, and John Zaiser, the Mayor of Burlington, rode through the streets in an open carriage drawn by four white horses. There followed twenty carriages in which sat the old pioneers of 1833.

Then came the marching ranks of Odd Fellows and various "Ancient Orders": United Workmen, Druids, Hibernians. A lodge of colored Masons trod closely on the heels of the Knights of Pythias. Members of the German Mutual Aid Society and the Swedish Gotha Society followed. Local musicians — the Orchard City Band and the Burlington Brass Band — kept the first divisions of the procession moving briskly along, but a band from Monmouth, Illinois, at the rear was less successful in holding "The Grip Sack Brigade of Traveling Salesmen" to their step, for the drummers were inclined to lag a bit, waving gaily to friends along the way. Not a single soldier was in the procession, nor an Indian either.

In the afternoon there was a regatta on the river with races by young men of the Boat Club in their graceful shells. With the coming of night the city blazed with light. Chinese lanterns sway-



ed in festoons and rockets zigzagged across the sky. From an elevation which I think was probably South Hill Square, I gazed with brother Frankie and sister Katie, at the exhibition of fireworks set off from flatboats anchored in the river. What I remember particularly was an illuminated piece representing George Washington on horseback. And then, at last, in letters of gold across the black sky the words "Flint Hills, 1833 — Burlington, 1883."

It is pleasant to know that among the pioneers present were good Dr. Ross and "his estimable lady," who for many years had been residing in another part of the State. Dr. Ross was called on for a review of early events and he did not forget to mention that his had been the first marriage among Flint Hills residents.

"I was married under a sycamore tree on the east bank of the river, December 3, 1833," Dr. Ross told the Burlington citizens of 1883. Since no government had yet been established in the Black Hawk Purchase, the couple could not obtain a marriage license west of the Mississippi. It was getting late in the year and navigation might soon be blocked. As soon as he knew that Miss Matilda was willing to join her lot with his, Dr. Ross hurried to Monmouth, Illinois, for the indispensable license. He asked Judge Allen to meet him on the eastern shore of the river on December 3. At the



appointed time the whole population of the new settlement crossed the river on a flatboat for the rendezvous with the judge under the sycamore tree. So Dr. Ross, first in all pioneer activities, was first to marry also. And now, here was the fine old couple, helping to celebrate the semi-centennial of Burlington and doubtless thinking, sentimentally, of their own approaching Golden Wedding Day.

The central figure of the commemoration exercises was General Augustus Caesar Dodge, and properly so. Ex-Mayor A. G. Adams and Thomas Hedge, Jr., our future congressman, served as vice-presidents of the celebration. Dr. Salter, who had been named Chaplain, gave a moving prayer at the exercises in North Hill Park. But it was General Dodge who exemplified more than any one else present the events that we had assembled to celebrate. As an Indian fighter, as legislator, and as diplomat, General Dodge had played a leading part in the events by which the first fifty years of Iowa's history had been shaped.

As a youth, he had been aide-de-camp to his father, Colonel Henry Dodge. The Dodges knew the ways of Indian warfare, for no less than five of Henry Dodge's uncles had fallen under the Indian hatchet in the settlement of Kentucky.

After the Black Hawk War, Henry Dodge had been appointed Governor of Wisconsin Territory



and his son, Augustus Caesar Dodge, had settled in Burlington. When the Territory of Iowa was established, Augustus was elected Delegate to Congress from the new Territory. Arriving in Washington in 1840, he was joined by his father in 1841, who had been elected Delegate from Wisconsin Territory. Later, when statehood came to their respective constituencies, father and son moved up together to the Senate. It is the only case in the history of the United States when father and son sat side by side successively, first in the lower house as Delegates, and then in the upper house as Senators. In a Congress that boasted such outstanding personalities as Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun, the Democrats of Wisconsin and Iowa were proud to claim the two Dodges.

With great dignity and amazing zest for his seventy-odd years, General Dodge presided at the Semi-Centennial exercises. "From his capacious, accurate, and ready memory" he poured forth "treasures of information concerning the beginnings of the Commonwealth." At the morning session he reviewed the chief historical events, telling of the French Explorers, of the Black Hawk War, of the Flint Hills Settlement. At the Praise Service in the Congregational Church his speech was rich in personal reminiscences concerning the hardships of pioneer life, the horrors



of Indian warfare, the terrors of cholera, and the many trials of Iowa's statehood.

To the school children of Burlington, General Dodge was a romantic figure. He used to tell the shuddering youngsters how his own brother, Henry LaFayette Dodge, had been captured by the Apaches in New Mexico in 1857 and burned to death at the stake. He himself, when less than fifteen years old, had participated in the Winnebago war of 1827. "Don't you remember, he had a gashed ear," Mason Remey, Judge Mason's grandson, reminded me. "I used to stare at it and wonder if the Indians had tried to tomahawk *him*."

General Dodge was happy in having with him, that Semi-Centennial day, his old companion-in-arms, George Wallace Jones, his associate in the Black Hawk War and his colleague for two terms in the Senate. Senator Jones told stories of how he and the general had campaigned together in the Black Hawk War, sleeping side by side, with their saddles for pillows; and he told how, later, as senators, they had worked together, drawing up bills for preemption and homestead rights, for improvement of the Mississippi, and for railroad land grants in Iowa.

Senator Dodge had indicated in his introduction what Senator Jones' special work had been. Grasping his friend's hand and holding it up, he said laughingly: "In early days the pioneers al-



ways estimated a workman by his chips. Here, ladies and gentleman, is the hand that chipped Wisconsin out of Michigan; that chipped Iowa out of Wisconsin; that chipped for us six hundred and forty acres of land covering this original town at a mere nominal price; and to the same hand more than any other man or representative, we are indebted for our railroad grants."

There was dancing that night at the Boat Club House in which Senator Jones, seventy-nine years old, participated gaily. In his time he was reputed to have been the Chesterfield of Washington society. He lived to be 93 years old, with a reputation to the last, for being fastidious about the polish of his boots and the twist of his mustache. I was interested, in 1933, to hear Louis Murphy, the newly-elected Democratic senator from Iowa tell how, as a boy, he admired the dapper figure of old Senator Jones strolling through the streets of Dubuque in his long black velvet cloak.

The official record indicates that General Dodge and his lady "looked on awhile during the forepart of the night," at the dancing at the Boat House. Six months after this, General Dodge was dead. The children of North Hill School marched to his funeral, proud of having contributed each ten cents — or perhaps it was fifteen — toward a floral offering which, Mason Remey said, was an imposing Gates Ajar with a stuffed pigeon on top.



As was natural, the speeches of that anniversary day centered on the achievements of the past. Miles of railroad now replaced the old-time stagecoach routes. Highly-cultivated farms lay now where formerly dreary miles of uninhabited prairie stretched. As Richard Spencer said: "The few cabins have given place to large, well-furnished farm houses, filled with rich and happy people; the few villages have grown to flourishing cities with an intelligent and industrious population."

The official Orator of the Day, John H. Craig of Keokuk, reviewed the course of past events in a brilliant address. In making his estimate of Iowa's material advancement, Craig, whose oratory "had few equals in the State," said: "A vast system of railroads, all built within the last fifty years, extending from the Atlantic, including great trunk lines across the state of Iowa connecting with the central line across the mountains to the Golden Gate of the Pacific, forms a splendid 'Portage' across the continent, and places Iowa in direct communication with the oldest and most populous nations of the globe; so that now the locomotive, with its 'breath of flame and nerves of steel,' speedier than the swiftest winged ship, brings the commerce of the Orient to your doors and drops its treasures into your laps."

Most of the speakers noted with pride Iowa's progress in matters of education. "Iowa now an-



nually expends for her schools vastly more than the entire original value of the millions of acres embraced in the Black Hawk Purchase," wrote J. K. Graves of Dubuque. Yes — "today Iowa has more churches and school-houses and less ignorance and vice according to population than any other state in the Union," exulted W. B. Culbertson of Burlington. And Theodore S. Parvin, who had once lived in Burlington as Secretary to the first Governor, Robert Lucas, capped the climax when he told his audience that he had just "journeyed in palace cars pulled by iron steeds" from Boston to San Francisco, and found that Iowa rather than the former city was indeed "the hub of the universe."

After more than sixty years, it is the clear voice of Richard Spencer that seems most vividly to epitomize that day. I recall him as a gentle old man of modest mien, looking thoughtfully upon us younger folk. "Is it too much to hope," he asked, "that when our children and our children's children come to celebrate . . . a completed century, a *moral order* with no abatement in physical progress or intellectual activity may be established here so far in advance of present attainments as to challenge universal admiration?"

HARRIET CONNOR BROWN