



FORT DES MOINES DURING THE FLOOD OF 1851.

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THE FLOOD OF 1851.

BY TACITUS HUSSEY.

The flood of 1851 was one of those extraordinary events which happen in a state but once in a lifetime. It could scarcely occur again because of changes in physical conditions. The Des Moines river and its tributaries drained then as now a very large territory. Nearly one-third of the counties of Iowa are touched by this stream which flows in a somewhat meandering way across the State, from west to east, mingling with the waters of the Mississippi about four miles below Keokuk. When it is remembered that in 1851 the upper part of the territory was in a state of perennial wildness and incapacitated by its grassy surface for receiving into its soil the rain, which ran into the nearest streams, the wonder will not be so great. It will be remembered, also, that the source of the Des Moines river touches Minnesota, so famous for its heavy snowfall, which, melting somewhat later than the snows in the central part of this State, fed the smaller tributaries and kept their channels full until the spring rain clouds poured out their copious contributions. The flood of 1851 was phenomenal, and seemed to be the culmination of what is sometimes called a "wet weather cycle."

Let us take the record of the "rain gauge" of eight years, beginning with 1848, two years after the State, which was the youngest and most promising of the sisterhood, was admitted to the Union:

1848, rainfall.....	26	inches.
1849, rainfall.....	59	inches.

1850, rainfall.....	49	inches.
1851, rainfall.....	74½	inches.
1852, rainfall.....	49	inches.
1853, rainfall.....	45	inches.
1854, rainfall.....	23	inches.
1855, rainfall.....	28	inches.

It will be readily seen that more than six feet of water fell upon the earth's surface in less than five months, in addition to the melting of heavy snows in the spring; this would make each "rivulet a roaring cataract," and convert ordinarily well behaved rivers into miniature oceans. It was thus that the flood of waters came sweeping out all sown and planted crops on the low lands, and carrying away everything loose and floatable. Bridges were few over the rivers below; but the primitive ferryboats, fences, stock, stables, and in some cases farm houses, were abandoned to the watery elements, while the owners fled to the hills, glad to escape with their lives. The newspapers published that year (the columns of which have been thoroughly scanned by the writer) gave few particulars in regard to the phenomena. They seemed for some reason to say but little about it, probably because they did not wish the outside world to know what a severe calamity it was, but it was mentioned by some of them in meagre paragraphs under the caption "An Unprecedented Flood," "The Great Rainfall," "The Swelling Rivers," etc. They preferred, like the wounded dove, to hide the rankling arrow of misfortune under the wing of silence.

It might be well to mention, however, that newspapers were not very plentiful in Iowa in those early days. A partial list, gleaned from an old musty record, of papers published in the early fifties, is given:

Evening Gazette, Burlington; *The Western American*, Keosauqua; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Burlington; *Der Demokrat*, Davenport; *Fairfield Ledger*, Fairfield; *Lee County News*, Keokuk; *Iowa State Press*, Iowa City; *Constitution-Democrat*, Keokuk; *Gate City*, Keokuk; *Muscatine Journal*, Muscatine; *Ottumwa Courier*, Ottumwa; *Ottumwa Democrat*, Ottumwa; *The Iowa Star*, Fort Des Moines; *Fort Des Moines Gazette*, Fort Des Moines; *Oska-*

Ioosa Herald, Oskaloosa; *Iowa Democratic Inquirer*, Muscatine; *Miners' Express*, Dubuque; *Dubuque Herald*, Dubuque; *Jeffersonian Democrat*, Keosauqua; *Progressive Era*, Cedar Rapids.

The destruction on the upper part of the Des Moines river was principally in the undermining of the immense trees which stood on its banks. There are two branches of the upper Des Moines which unite a short distance below Humboldt. The channel of the united streams is narrow, rocky, and hemmed in by cliffs of rock, or high hills. The river is very crooked, and in ordinary stages runs like a mill-race. Hundreds of stately trees were uprooted and swept down stream by the resistless current. At some sudden turn of the river where the banks were not so high, the great volume of water would "cut across" to the next bend, carrying everything in its way. The largest trees, after having the soil washed from under their roots, would fall with a crash and join the army of floaters in the wild rush to the far away Mississippi. This destruction was increased when that part of the river below Fort Dodge was reached and the river bottoms became wider. The fierce current ripped up the alluvial soil, undermining the heavy timber, forming temporary dams, ploughing out new channels and carrying the soil, reduced to infinitesimal particles, to the south to form new islands, and change the line of the shores.

Of course this work was unwitnessed by human eyes; but the many islands and deserted channels tell the story of the force of this great flood, and the lesser ones which at intervals followed.

The west part of Fort Des Moines suffered but little loss of property. Business was completely paralyzed, as few passed out or in during the time the flood was at its height. According to the best accounts gathered from the old settlers, the rains were almost incessant from early in May until about the middle of July, and three times during the season the waters broke beyond the bank's confining, in each instance adding gloom to the situation. The east side of the

river opposite Des Moines was covered with water, with a swift current rushing down where the Chicago and Northwestern depot now stands; and the few buildings which stood on the river bottoms here, were swept away, or hopelessly wrecked. On the west side of the river there was a stretch of low ground running in a southerly direction beginning at the mouth of Bird's run and continuing nearly or quite to where the Rock Island depot now stands. At Third street and Court avenue the water partially covered the street, and William Moore, Aurelius Reynolds, B. F. Allen, A. J. Stevens, Chapman & Thomas, William Krause, Hoyt Sherman, Madison Young and others, all gay young men in those days, who boarded at the Marvin House, near Third and Walnut, were compelled to build a raft on which to cross the "back water" coming from the Des Moines, and pole themselves across six times a day. The presence of water in small quantities on Court avenue and Second street is explained in this way: when the old court house, which stood where the Union depot now stands, was built in 1847-8, Mr. W. R. Close was given the contract for making the brick. He found the right kind of clay in the immediate vicinity, and in getting out the necessary amount of material left a large excavation which was continually filled with water. During the summer it stood with a green scum over it and was the receptacle, probably, for dead animals of all kinds. The citizens fearing it would breed disease, and in order to drain it, dug a deep ditch on the side of the street leading to Second street, and thence to Bird's run. When the water rose in 1851, it found easy access to those portions of the village touched by this primitive canal. This will account for the water reported in small quantities on Second, Vine, Third and lower Court avenue. "The water in the ditch" proved a very good gauge for those who were too busy playing checkers, poker, or "one grain of corn ante," to go to the river to see "if she was still rising." By looking at the "ditch" the problem was easily solved.

On the side of the main traveled road leading past Union Park, north of Des Moines, stood a large elm tree on which there was a deep notch cut marking the greatest height of the flood during the summer of 1851. This mark was made by one of the Thompson boys, at the river bend a mile or so above the city, whose pioneer residence is now included in Union Park. The notch as noted at the time this article was written shows the depth of water to have been about four feet. A surveyor, after looking at this mark not long since, and making a mental calculation of the "level" of the water's height a mile and a half below, estimated that it would be about 23 feet above low water mark. This would bring it near the floor of the present Walnut street bridge. When it is remembered that the water spread from bluff to bluff, the magnitude of the volume can readily be imagined.

As business was almost at a standstill many of our citizens spent the season in catching sawlogs, trees and driftwood, and anchored them safely along the shores until the waters should recede. Much valuable timber was secured in this way. While catching sawlogs with a boat just below the village, Conrad Youngerman was drowned. In company with John Youngerman and L. D. Karnes, a tailor, he was engaged in this business, when from some unaccountable cause the boat was capsized and Mr. Youngerman was swept away by the swift current and drowned before aid could reach him. The other two men, after a hard struggle for their lives, were saved.

During this year of flood Dr. Thomas K. Brooks was building a house on his farm about a mile east of where the State capitol now stands. He was much troubled about getting his building material to the location, until a raft was built. This was loaded with material and floated over the river bottoms to what is known as "Brooks' Lake," and unloaded on the highlands. The process was slow and attended with considerable danger, but was finally accomplished. The doors, window-frames, sash, glass and hardware formed the

last cargo, and the owner and ingenious contractor were very happy at having triumphed over the watery dilemma. "Brooks' Lake," fed by springs, is still in existence, and the south end of it furnishes water for the largest starch factory in the world.*

The Fort Des Moines Star, May 29, 1851, in speaking of the downpour, says:

For three weeks it has rained almost incessantly, pouring down from the clouds as if the very windows of heaven were opened. Neither the memory of the oldest settlers along the banks of the Des Moines river, nor the memory of the natives who resided here before it was settled by the whites, nor any traditionary account from the natives, furnishes any evidence of such a flood ever having occurred here, in all past time. The 'Coon and Des Moines rivers are higher by several feet than they were in the spring of 1849, which was the greatest rise of water ever known here up to that time.

Professor Charles Tuttle, in his "History of Iowa," says:

It commenced to be wet weather the early part of May, and the heavens were almost daily blackened with angry clouds, and the rain poured down in torrents, frequently accompanied with violent winds and loud pealing thunder, till July.

Prof. Tuttle also states, though his exact language is not quoted, that the fish left the regular channels of the river and found their ways into the ravines and lagoons to be captured by hungry settlers when the waters receded. All the towns on the banks of the river below Fort Des Moines to the Mississippi which were on the lower table lands were flooded. At the height of the flood the water was $22\frac{1}{2}$ feet above low water mark. This immense volume of water spread all over the bottom lands, and East Des Moines was under water to the second bank or ledge, and could only be traversed by boats and rafts.

The Muscatine Journal of May 21, 1851, says:

The Mississippi is still rising and lacks but a few inches of the great rise of 1844. A part of Muscatine island is overflowed.

The Oskaloosa Herald of June that year says:

*Destroyed by fire December 5, 1901.

The destruction of property on the Des Moines river has been very great. Farms have been cleared of fences, growing crops, houses and everything of a movable nature. The river was never known to be so high before. A vast amount of grain in the cribs has been swept away. The inhabitants on the river bottoms have been compelled to desert their houses and flee to the bluffs for refuge. A number of dwellings were carried entirely away. This calamity will be doubly hard on the citizens of the vicinity of the Des Moines river, as it has not only destroyed the present crops but has taken away the old crops that were in store for the needs of the present season. Eddyville, Ottumwa, Red Rock, and the eastern part of Fort Des Moines are nearly submerged by the overflowing river.

It must not be understood by the reader that this flood was confined to the Des Moines valley. The deluge was general, and wherever there were rivers or streams of any size, they were changed to wild torrents, carrying destruction before them.

The Iowa Democratic Inquirer of June 6, 1851, gives an account of the flood on the Maquoketa river, Jackson county, where much damage was done:

A large flouring mill, saw mill, and carding mill, situated on the Maquoketa, are reported as swept away. In addition to the damage done to buildings, mills, warehouses, etc., much damage is also done to farms by the lodgment of drift. In almost every valley the soil has been more or less swept from its bed, and on hillsides the ploughed fields have been badly washed. It is almost impossible to form even an approximate estimate of the damage done in various ways to the property of this county.

The Dubuque Herald of June 8th of this year gives an account of the drowning of Mrs. Alloway and the marvelous escape of her husband:

Mr. and Mrs. Alloway, an elderly couple, lived by themselves on the banks of the Maquoketa river. When they found themselves in danger by the sudden rise of the water, they attempted to escape by flight, but were overtaken by the flood before they could reach a place of safety. The husband, finding they were about to be swept away by the strong current, laid hold of a bush with one hand while with the other he attempted to sustain his drowning wife. The unequal struggle was maintained for some time; but suddenly the wife ceased to struggle and the helpless body was torn from his grasp and sank out of sight. The husband retained his hold on the bush until he was rescued in an exhausted state in the morning.

Red Rock, in Marion county, being built on the banks of the Des Moines river, was completely flooded and the few

inhabitants were compelled to move to the higher land when the river began to overflow its banks. It was a steamboat station and a rival of Fort Des Moines in the very early steamboating days. Above the village there stands a huge cliff of red sandstone, guarding the approach by river, while below stands a similar cliff, keeping watch and ward over the sleepy village. It looks very much as if the river at some remote period had cut this great formation in two, leaving the remnants to emphasize nature's handiwork, as they stand there with polished sides, smiling or frowning as the sun or shadows rest upon their moss-grown faces. Nature is a tireless worker, and when there is a stupendous task to perform is never in a hurry. "A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night;" so the cutting of the channel through the solid rock must have taken a great many "yesterdays" as the God of nature reckons. Perhaps the task was not so great after all. The huge mountain may have been of soft material when the never-ceasing current cut through its way; and then, by a miracle which occupied a few aeons of time, the cliffs were hardened to stone. Were this stone as durable as beautiful, it would be the finest building material in Iowa.

How the contracted current must have rushed and roared through these narrow channels! And with what alacrity the water must have spread over the wide, low bottoms a few miles below, enlarging to a lake of from one to three miles wide, bearing on its bosom every movable article from a stand of bees to the faithful cow!

Eddyville was a sufferer, also, by the flood. A portion of the village lying close to the river was under water three different times; the height of the flood being about the middle of June. Mr. E. L. Smith, agent of the U. S. Express at Des Moines, lived there at the time. He came to Eddyville in 1845, and in the year 1850 entered the service of Hon. Ed. Manning, who had a store and warehouse near the

bank of the river.* The river began to show flood-signs about the middle of May and many of the families living on the lowlands had taken refuge on a gravelly knoll where the railroad depot now stands. The storekeepers and warehousemen were compelled to reach their places of business by means of boats and canoes. The inhabitants took the flooding good-naturedly, and in true pioneer spirit shared shelter and provisions with those who were in need. Some of the storekeepers slept on their counters in order to be prepared for any emergency, or to wait on such customers as were provided with boats. On awakening in the morning, the sleepers never knew whether their feet would sink in the mud on the floor left by the receding river, or in three feet of water, the result of an incoming flood. At the supposed height of the flood four adventurous Des Moines men—Messrs. Hoyt Sherman, J. M. Griffith, W. T. Marvin and Peter Myers—appeared at the hotel in a skiff and, tying their boat to the bannisters of the hotel stairway, climbed to the second story and ate a hearty dinner. They were on their way to St. Louis to charter a steamboat for the upper Des Moines river, as provisions were getting very scarce and relief must be obtained in some way.†

For a few days previous to their arrival Mr. Smith had been transferring a thousand or two bushels of corn from Mr. Manning's warehouse to the large warehouse of William Butcher. The latter then stood high and dry, and being nearer the river, was more convenient for loading the corn on the boats for St. Louis. The transfer had been finished on the day the voyagers arrived. The corn was spread over the floor and the doors left open that it might dry quickly. Before the voyagers left they reported that a "three foot rise" was due some time before morning. The owners of the corn treated the prophecy as a "river joke" and paid no further

*Mr. E. L. Smith died in Des Moines May 2, 1902.

†An account of this is related by Mr. Hoyt Sherman in *ANNALS OF IOWA*, April, 1900.

attention to it. In the morning, however, when the superintendent visited the warehouse to "see how the corn was drying," he found that the "three foot rise" had arrived and had floated the corn out of the open door, lodging a portion of it in the picket fences near by, while on the river thousands of floating ears were bobbing up and down in the swift current or circling in golden eddies near the shore. To make the loss more aggravating, corn was worth about two dollars a bushel!

A short distance below Eddyville there was a bend in the river where many trees had lodged, forming a boom which caught all manner of floating debris. When the water subsided sufficiently, every one who had lost an article which would float, repaired to the "drift" to identify and recover their lost property. There were bee-hives, buckets, tubs, baskets, boxes, firewood, fence rails, sidewalks, sections of picket fences, gates and all manner of household utensils. There was very little wrangling. Each woman recognized her tubs and the men needed not to be introduced to their sections of fences, gates and sidewalks.

On the Fourth of July of this year, three jolly couples went on a picnic excursion from Eddyville to Johnsonburg, a mile and a half down the river. The waters had retired within the banks, but the current was swift and dangerous. The going down was an easy task and with song and shout the destination was reached in about twenty minutes. The young people they had planned to meet were there and a pleasant afternoon was spent. The coming back, however, was the rub! Two of the young men rowed while the third endeavored to steer the boat, which zigzagged across the stream wherever there was a promise of smooth water. They hugged the shore closely, taking advantage of all the eddies in the endeavor to make headway. After a three hours' pull, during which seats with the helmsman were changed many times to the peril of the fair voyagers, they reached the starting point with blistered hands and thankful hearts. The

“grave and reverend senior” who related this incident, and who was one of the boating party, said: “As I look back on that wild jaunt of fifty-one years ago, remembering the peril we were in without realizing it, I would not go through the same experience again for the best farm in Iowa.”

Ottumwa, what there was of it in that early day, was built very near the river, the better to receive and freight goods on the passing steamboats. One who was there at the time says:

We had to move everything we had in our houses and stores to higher ground, and be quick about it. In June, some time about the middle if I remember right, every store, warehouse and residence on the low ground was partially submerged. The highest point was reached about that time, and those who made measurements afterwards found that the water was nearly 23 feet above low water mark. We did not lose a bridge, as was reported, as we had none to lose. There has never been a flood since, to equal the flood of 1851.

D. H. Ainsworth, of Newton, Iowa, in his very interesting book entitled, “The Recollections of a Civil Engineer,” in speaking of the high water on the Cedar river during one of his surveying trips, while running a line from Wilton Junction to Oskaloosa in 1853, says:

On the east side of Iowa river below its confluence with the Cedar, we stopped at the Ferry-house, where were many disagreeable persons, and a parrot usually roosting on an open door at meal time nearly over the table. To get here a high water mark, we took the elevation of a streak on the plastering about three feet from the floor, where the water had evidently stood. Greater surprise would have been occasioned had I not, some weeks before, on the banks of the Cedar at Rochester City, seen a monument marked “High-water of 1851.”

Iowaville had a wide stretch of bottom land between the river and the bluff, a mile or so away. It was situated on the north side of the river. At the time of the flood of 1851 the village contained about thirty houses, some stores, a blacksmith shop and hotel. The village exists in memory only, as the former site is now used as a farm. Previous to the flood there was a sawmill running by steam on the bank of the river and N. L. Milburn, who had contracted to put up a

bridge at Keosauqua, had a small gang of men getting out the material and framing it ready to raft it down the river.

About the 20th of May the water rose so high that it put out the furnace fires and the work had to be abandoned for the time being. The workmen engaged were R. E. Underwood, foreman, Ed. Dunning, Richard Douglas, William Terry, Seth Graham of Des Moines, and perhaps others. When the waters cut off the inhabitants from the mainland all the available men and boats were set to work to carry them to the bluffs about a mile away. They took with them such articles as would be available for camping purposes. A generous-hearted farmer by the name of Joel Avery, who lived on the high ground, sent this message to his unfortunate neighbors: "Come over and bunk with me; I have a big house and barn, and everything I have is at your service." The invitation was generally accepted, and instead of looking upon the flood as a calamity, it was turned into a picnic of nearly a month's duration. These neighbors clubbed together, did their cooking out of doors, and used the farmhouse and barn for shelter and sleeping apartments. A partial list of the names of those accepting Mr. Avery's hospitality follows: The Stouts, Hoovers, Huttons, James and John Baker, Alexander Nedrow, B. Nagle, William Starr, Rev. Mr. Rathburn, a Mormon preacher, with their belongings. Some of the inhabitants who lived in two-story houses moved into the second story and so lived until the waters subsided.

The Iowa hotel moved its furniture and cooking utensils into the second story where the guests, who arrived and departed in boats, were made as comfortable as possible. Mr. Seth Graham, now a resident of Des Moines, who "passed through the flood," says that the water reached its height about the 20th of June and spread over the lowlands, from bluff to bluff, doing great damage where there was a strong current. The bridge contracted for by the authorities at Keosauqua and N. L. Milburn was never put in place, partly

on account of the high water and also because of a disagreement between the contracting parties; each preferred to lose the money advanced and the work already done rather than complete the contract. About the middle of March, 1852, a heavy windstorm from the west caught the two spans of the bridge already in place and hurled them into the river with a great crash. The authorities then began to advertise a free ferry in order to catch a share of the California immigration. An early settler in mentioning this matter refers to it as the first "draw" bridge contract ever entered into by a county in Iowa.

The hearts of the people of Lowaville were made happy on the Fourth of July of that year by the arrival of the steamboat Caleb Cope well loaded with provisions for the hungry people on the upper river. It will be remembered that this boat reached Fort Des Moines on the 5th of July of that year, and was a welcome arrival, for provisions had become very scarce and high.

It always adds interest to a history to have the personal experience of a participator in the incidents. It is a pleasure, therefore, to introduce to the reader Mr. Carlisle St. John, who spent his boyhood days at Keosauqua, Iowa, and whose remembrance of the flood at that place is fresh, notwithstanding more than half a century has elapsed. His sketch is given as written, with but few changes:

THE FLOOD AT KEOSAUQUA.

To get an intelligent idea of the flood at this point it is necessary that the reader should have some knowledge of the lay of the ground. Just above the business part of the town a small ravine opened into the river, and below the business district a small stream emptied into the river. In the times of high water these ravines overflowed and formed bayous. The business was located along First street, or the river front, and in the rear of this, and about midway between First and Second streets, the ground was lower. Until '51 there had been no inconvenience experienced from the water backing up and forming these bayous, but this year it kept rising until it began feeling its way along the low ground in the rear of the business houses, connecting the upper and lower bayous and at last left the business portion of the town an island.

At first a gangway answered the purpose of keeping up communication between the business portion and the mainland; but in a short time the current became too strong and swept it away, so it became necessary to provide some kind of a craft to meet this emergency. Everybody made a watercraft from the best material which could be found. I had one of the most unique. At that time I was serving my last year as an apprentice to the tin trade. The proprietor had just had manufactured a peddling-box for the purpose of hauling his wares through the country in order to supply country dealers. This peddling-box was made of inch pine boards nailed together and in proportion and appearance might have been taken for a baby flatboat. It had not yet been placed on the wagon and was sitting by the side of the shop. I caulked it up as well as I could, launched it, and with a pole to propel it started for the mainland. I soon found it to be a real broncho to ride. It bucked worse than a broncho. A broncho might fail sometime to throw its rider—but this, never! There was always some water in it, and this would roll from one side to the other, so at about the third lurch it never failed to throw me, to the great amusement of those on shore. The water soon became too high to run a craft of that kind, and the proprietor bought an excellent skiff of some parties who had come down the river, and put me in possession of it. From that time on, I roamed the surging flood with the freedom of a buccaneer. By this time the water was running over the lowest places on Front street and kept rising until it came onto the floors of the business houses. The merchants moved their goods higher up on the shelves and on the tops of the counters, all the while saying, "It certainly will not get much higher." But it kept coming up until it reached the top of the counters in some instances, and in others about half way up, and remained at that point for a short time. Then it began to recede and reached about the original high-water mark where it remained for something like a week. It then began to rise again, and reached a point a few inches higher than before. After a short time it began to recede again and continued to do so until it was finally within its banks where it remained.

In a little while all traces were cleared away and business was resumed, and everything moved along as if there never had been a flood. There appeared to be no serious results from it. The water passed the high-water mark in the fore part of May, and receded the last time about the middle of June, causing an interruption of business of about five weeks. It caused a great deal of inconvenience and loss of business, but the people kept in good spirits through it all. Some one found some horseshoes and a game of quoits was started, and soon almost every one was quoit-pitching, apparently getting some fun out of what would seem a great calamity. But it was very quiet and monotonous. Not a stir but the water as it swept by between the houses in the submerged districts. A "gondolier" with his girl was occasionally seen passing among the submerged houses taking in the situation; or, perhaps, a larger craft with youngsters aboard, with mirth and song, somewhat relieved the monotony.

I remember seeing a boat load of young folks on the lower bayou,

among whom was E. O. Stannard, who, having a fine voice, sang some of the melodies of the day, among which was "A Farmer's Life is the Life for Me." A little more than a year after this he left the parental roof and went out to make his own way in the world. In a few years we heard of him as a member of a business firm in St. Louis; again as lieutenant-governor of the state of Missouri; again in the councils of the nation as a member of congress from St. Louis; today he is one of the foremost business men of that city, and recently received favorable mention in connection with the second highest office in the gift of the American people. Of the business concerns and residents who were flooded at that time I recall the following:

The steam flouring-mill, belonging to the estate of Hugh Brown, located on the bank of the river just above the upper bayou.

L. W. Thornburg, furniture manufacturer, on First street and located on the upper bayou.

William McNee, stoves and tinware, on First street, near Market.

The firm of Marlow & Whittlesey, general merchants.

Henry Wheelan, drug store, on the corner of First and Main streets.

William Burton, general bakery and restaurant, near the corner of Main on First street.

Julien & Wilson, dry goods, on First street.

George G. Wright and Joseph C. Knapp, lawyers, office on First street, between Main and Van Buren.

N. R. Dawson, tailor, on First street between Van Buren and Cass.

J. J. Kimberly, dry goods, corner of First and Cass streets.

Steele & Chittenden, dry goods, on First between Cass and Dodge.

James H. Jackson, merchant tailor, corner of Dodge and First streets.

Henry M. Shelby, attorney at law and county attorney, on First between Cass and Dodge streets.

Thomas Dare, tinware, corner of First and Market streets. We called him "Colonel" Dare. How he acquired this title I do not know, unless it was because he was one of those "hale fellows well met." He came to Keosauqua from Fairfield, Jefferson county, the fall previous, where he had been in business for a time as senior in the firm of "Dare, Sweat & Root." The firm had failed in Fairfield and he had come down to our place, I suppose temporarily, until he could select another situation. He was a bachelor but during the flood he was married to a lady of Fairfield, and brought her to Keosauqua as a bride during the high water. I assisted him in getting his tools and machinery onto the dry land. Shortly after this he moved to Osceola, Clarke county, where he established himself in business and reared a family. His son, George, is in the hardware business, now senior of the firm of Dare & Sanford, Osceola, Iowa.

Edwin Manning, general merchandise, corner of Van Buren and First streets. Mr. Manning is perhaps the oldest merchant in the State of Iowa having come to "Ioway Territory" somewhere about the '30s. He was one of the founders of Keosauqua, and the oldest merchant of the place; and although 91 years of age, is physically strong for one of his years. The

old sign of "Manning's Store" still remains, representing a remarkable business career of about 66 years.*

The Keosauqua House, James Shepherd, proprietor, corner of Van Buren street. This hotel was open for business all the time during the flood. The guests were conveyed back and forth in skiffs. Trestles with planks laid upon them extended from the entrance to the stairway and meals were served in the second story. The guests of the hotel at that time, as I recall them, were: J. B. Miller, lawyer; Dr. William Craig, Dr. C. C. Biser, Madison Dagger, Mr. Welsch, cabinet maker; Shepheap S. Elwell, carpenter; and C. C. Nourse, lawyer. Mr. Nourse came there just between the first and second floods. He was recognized at once in his profession and in little more than a year was elected county attorney. He removed to Des Moines in 1858. In 1860 he was elected attorney general of the State; was re-elected in 1862; was subsequently judge and now ranks as one of the leading attorneys of the Polk county bar.

John B. Miller moved to Des Moines in the early '60s and engaged in the mercantile business under the firm name of Manning & Miller, after which he served Polk county as auditor for several years.

Leonard J. Rose, dry goods, corner of First and Cass streets. In 1858 he started for California, with perhaps one of the best outfits ever used in crossing the plains. He was advised to take the southern route, via Albuquerque. He got as far as the Colorado river where his party was attacked by Navajo Indians and nearly all his company massacred and his outfit taken by them. Mr. Rose and his immediate family escaped and returned to Albuquerque, where he remained until the next spring when he went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and for a time kept the United States Hotel. Later he went to California, settling near Los Angeles, and established an immense vineyard and winery, one of the largest in the state, to which he gave the name "The Sunny Slope." It became one of the objects of interest to the tourist. He ranked as one of the foremost citizens of the state, was president of the Wine Growers' Association, and a member of the state senate. Some two years since his old-time friends were much surprised and grieved to read a newspaper announcement that he had committed suicide. Shortly after another newspaper paragraph told the sad story that a bank at Los Angeles had commenced foreclosure proceedings against his estate for the sum of \$150,000.

The Keosauqua Jeffersonian, Orlando E. Jones, proprietor, corner of Dodge and the alley between First and Second streets. I suppose the press used in printing this paper was the first, or among the first, brought into Iowa. It was brought to the State by James Shepherd in the early '40s. On it he printed the first newspaper published in the county, entitled *The Iowa Democrat*. A few years later James B. Howell and James Cowles published a paper entitled *The Des Moines Valley Whig*. In 1849 they bought *The Keokuk Register*, moved to Keokuk and merged the two papers. For

*Since this article was written Mr. Manning has passed away; he died in Keosauqua Aug. 16, 1901.

several years they published a paper entitled *The Des Moines Valley Whig and Keokuk Register*. From this has grown the present *Gate City*.

Among the families I recall in the submerged district were those of Joel Walker, on the alley on Cass street; Wesley Walker, on the opposite side of the street; N. R. Dawson, also on the opposite side of the same street; Francis Harrison and Elihu Hinkle, on Dodge street between First and Second; the families of Ormsby and the widow Miller on Van Buren street between First and Second. Living below the lower bayou and near the mill I remember the families of F. F. Anderson and Russo King, or "Major" King as he was familiarly called. Between the upper and lower bayous the water only reached to the land as far as Second street. I have lived on the Des Moines river since 1840 and the flood of '51 was the highest water I have known in that river.

In January, 1866, there was a spell of warm weather and an ice gorge came down upon us at Keosauqua in the night time. The water and ice reached about the same point as in the flood of 1851. This was a much severer flood, though of short duration. It was the custom to ring the Congregational church bell in case of fire. About 12 o'clock at night I was awakened by the ringing of the bell. My wife said, "There must be a fire." I replied, "No; I think it is water this time." When I got down to the river I found the ice and water overflowing its banks and the people making their escape from the flood in all directions. In a short time the gorge gave way and the water receded. In a little while it rose again so rapidly that some of the merchants who had gone to their stores were caught and had to remain surrounded by ice and water until the next morning. About 8 o'clock the gorge again gave way, the water receded and the danger was over. There were immense ice piles in the lagoons and in the streets which did not melt away until the next June.

Mr. Henri K. Pratt of Keokuk gives the following reminiscences of the flood of 1851 and some facts of the old history of Keosauqua:

I came to Keosauqua from Boston, Mass., when a small boy in the winter of 1843, and in 1844 I received my first lesson in politics by being instructed to "Hurrah for Polk and Dallas." In 1843 Jesse M. Shepherd and J. L. T. Mitchell came to Keosauqua and started *The Iowa Democrat*. In 1844 James Shepherd came to Keosauqua and took charge of it. This was before any paper had been started in Keokuk. J. L. T. Mitchell published a paper called *The Keosauqua Times*.

In 1850 Shepherd sold out to Orlando E. Jones, who published *The Keosauqua Jeffersonian*. This I well remember, for one day the foreman, R. E. Beahan, and I were alone in the office. The foreman went down town to get a drink when the sheriff came in and attached the office and locked it up, leaving me sitting on the doorstep. The foreman returned and his language was more forcible than elegant.

L. D. and H. Morris purchased *The Jeffersonian* and published *The*

Western American. L. D. Morris was a fine and brilliant writer. Morris sold the office to H. and S. M. Mills and they published *The Democratic Union*. Mills sold the paper in 1854 to Millington and Summerlin, and they in turn sold it to J. M. Estes, who published *The Democratic Mirror*. Estes was a better fiddler than editor. He sold the paper to Oliver I. Taylor who published it as *The Des Moines News*. His brother, John M. Taylor, was considered the best local writer in the State. Oliver I. Taylor was a brilliant and scholarly man who could write better poetry than politics. He sold the paper to Shepherd, who was called "the veteran of the press." Shepherd sold the paper to a son of Dr. G. S. Bailey who took the old Washington press out west.

James B. Howell and James H. Cowles started *The Des Moines Valley Whig* in the '40s and published the paper until they removed to Keokuk where they established *The Whig and Register*, now *The Gate City*.

In 1855 H. C. Watkins came to Keosauqua and started *The Keosauqua Republican*. Watkins sold the paper to John S. Stidger, he sold to L. D. Morris, and Morris sold it to Joel Mayne, and I think Mayne sold it to Sloan and Rowley. Rowley still publishes the paper.

James Shepherd died years ago, beloved by all who knew him. He claimed to be the father of all the Masons in Van Buren county, and it was he who first showed Masons the "light" by which they read. J. M. Shepherd died in California a year or so ago, and Mitchell was still living at last accounts.

Seth Millington died in California, and Rufus Summerlin was living in Washington, D. C., when last heard from. Oliver I. Taylor died in Burlington, Iowa, and his brother, John M., died the same month in 1860. H. Mills died in Montreal, Canada, and S. M. Mills in Keokuk, Iowa.

I was a compositor on *The Western American*, *Democratic Union* and *Des Moines News*. I then went to Santa Fe, New Mexico, and on my return I again worked a short time for Shepherd. This was my last work as a compositor. J. S. Shepherd, a son of James Shepherd, is now publishing a paper at Mt. Ayr, Iowa.

I well remember the flood of 1851; the water was all over the front part of the town from two to ten feet deep, and the merchants had to flee to the hilly country. We lived on First street, one block from the levee, in a house where now stands the State Bank. The water rose over our doorstep.

I well remember Delazon Smith, the little giant orator, and Henry Clay Dean, with his eloquence and dirty shirt. Dean used to hold revival meetings in the old court house where sinners were nightly melted like old pewter and run up into christians bright and new. Dean died at his house, called "Rebels Cove," in Missouri, some years ago. Delazon Smith died in Oregon.

Keosauqua has furnished four United States Senators—D. Smith, Geo. G. Wright, James B. Howell and John H. Gear.

Perhaps I have made some errors in my statements, for it is hard to remember so many things away back in my boyhood days.

In the ANNALS OF IOWA, January, 1901, is an article on the flood from *The Western American*, published at Keosauqua, July 5, 1851. It is a very graphic account of the situation at that time. In the same paper of the date of August 9th, there appears this card:

C. C. Nourse, attorney at law, Keosauqua, Iowa. Office in the Court House. N. B. Conveyancing, &c., promptly attended to. Address, post paid.

Mr. C. C. Nourse, now of Des Moines, arrived at Keosauqua about June 1, 1851, "between floods," as one might say. After graduating at Transylvania college he started from Lexington, Ky., for the west by the way of Louisville, by boat. Thence up the swollen Mississippi to St. Louis and thence by steamboat to Burlington. The river was full of flood debris, consisting of fences, sidewalks, outhouses, farm houses, some of them with live chickens on the roof, dead stock of various kinds, corn, and in fact almost every article which would float, giving evidence of devastation by water seldom equalled. Arriving at Burlington he stopped at the Barrett House, now no more, but which has sheltered so many thousands of people seeking homes in the west. Here, in the solitude of his room, he held a "council of war" with himself as to where in Iowa he had better locate. He had been provided with general letters of introduction by Gen. T. A. Edwards and President Dodd, of Transylvania college, and had also a letter from the pastor of the Methodist church of which he was a member. He very wisely concluded to look up Rev. Mr. Dennis, having charge of the Methodist church at Burlington, whom he found to be a very affable and kind-hearted man. The supreme court was then in session, and as the minister was well acquainted with Judges J. F. Kinney, Joseph Williams and Geo. F. Greene, he took Mr. Nourse to their rooms at the Barrett House after the day's session was over and introduced him. He found one of the judges in the very undignified position of lying on his back playing the flute, for Judge Joseph Williams was

the master of many musical instruments. After the ice had been broken the little company indulged in many jokes and pleasantries. In asking Mr. Nourse some questions it leaked out in some way that he was the possessor of a diploma from Transylvania college.

"Where is your diploma?" asked Judge Williams.

"In one of my trunks in my room," answered Mr. Nourse.

"Let us have a look at it," requested the musical judge.

It was quickly produced; but horrors! it was written in Latin, and as none of the judges were very well acquainted with the dead languages they had to do considerable guessing before they arrived at the correct results, modestly aided by Mr. Nourse, who knew the language of the diploma by heart and the interpretation thereof. It was suggested that on the morrow Mr. Nourse should be admitted to the bar. It was usual in those days to appoint a committee to examine candidates for admission, and one of the judges suggested it, but Judge Williams interposed:

"It is entirely unnecessary in this case. The candidate is all right. The clerk will please make out his certificate of admission."

And Clerk J. W. Woods, "Old Timber" as he was familiarly called, made out the necessary document and affixed the seal.

Hearing of an opening in the law office of Mr. Ben Hall, of Keosauqua, Mr. Nourse determined to start for that place at once. He left for Keokuk by stage, and thence to Utica Post Office. The stage driver, Theodore Hohbrecker, in his anxiety to attend a dance at Keosauqua that evening, did not wait for stage connection or anything else, for a dance in those days without a full complement of stage drivers would have been a very tame affair. So to avoid staying one more day on the road, although his fare had been paid, Mr. Nourse concluded to walk to his destination, ten miles away, over muddy roads and with only twenty cents in his pocket.

On arriving at Keosauqua, footsore, mud-be-splashed and

wearry, he made anything but a presentable appearance. He made application for board at the house of Mrs. Stannard (mother of ex-Governor Stannard of St. Louis), but she looked upon him with suspicion as there had been a number of horses stolen in the county of late, and in her judgment the applicant for board looked as if he needed a horse more than anything else. He answered all her questions truthfully, but did not fully satisfy her, and though at last she gave a reluctant consent to his staying, he did not accept it, but sought out the Keosauqua House, kept by "Father" Shepherd, which became his home so long as he remained unmarried. During the high water which followed, he traveled from his office to the hotel in a skiff, landed on a couple of benches at the door and climbed to the dining room for meals. Henry Clay Dean was the Methodist preacher at that place in those days. Among others living there were Delazon Smith, Josiah Bonney, James Kennesly who owned the water mill site, Ezra Jones, father-in-law of L. J. Rose who afterwards went to California, and George Duffield who has lived on his beautiful farm overlooking the Des Moines river for more than half a century. Mr. Nourse removed to Des Moines in 1858.

With the telling of the story of the flood at Keosauqua is told, also, that of Bentonsport, Bonaparte, Croton, Athens, Farmington, St. Francisville, and other settlements, for they were also flooded and the inhabitants on the low grounds were compelled to vacate for the time being.

The channel at the river's mouth at that time was more than a mile wide and while nature, with her healing hands, has planted thousands of willows and cottonwoods in the deserted excavations to hide the wounds of that eventful year, a practiced eye can readily mark out the boundary of the flood and imagination can easily picture the thousands of pieces of debris which floated out upon the broad bosom of the Mississippi, entailing a loss upon the pioneer settlers which could never be estimated in sordid dollars and cents.

Some of the counties of Iowa bordering on the Missouri river, especially Monona and Harrison through which the Big and Little Sioux passed, were completely inundated, and the brave pioneers who were seeking homes in that part of Iowa had many watery adventures. In order to give the reader an idea of the waste of waters of that flood year, an extract is given from the "Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur," a French explorer who sought a home in Harrison county:

About the 15th of May [1851], when Mr. Honore Picotte came down from Fort Pierre in a Mackinaw, I embarked with him bound for Sergeant's Bluffs, from which place I intended to go down to my claim by land. We had had a great deal of rain. The Missouri, as well as all other streams, had overflowed their banks, and the bottoms were all inundated. I had to remain about fifteen days at Sergeant's Bluffs waiting for the roads to become practicable. I purchased four Indian ponies, two French carts, and hired a guide at \$2 a day to pilot me through the water, for there was very little dry land to be seen between this and my place. About the last of May or first of June my guide said he thought he could get me through, so we hitched up and started. The fourth day after traveling through mud and water, we reached a place called Silver Lake.* Our ponies were then nearly broken down, although they had not made over 35 miles during the four days. As this was the best part of the road my guide said that it would be impossible for us to reach my place with the carts, that we still had 25 miles to make, "and," said he, "you have not seen anything yet; wait till we get near the ferry." He advised making "horse travailles," which consist of two long poles tied about three feet apart and extending eight or ten feet at the far ends, which drag on the ground, with crossbars fastened to them behind the horse, so as to make a kind of a platform on which plunder is loaded.

The travailles being thus prepared and the children loaded on them, we proceeded on our journey. Having made about 10 miles we camped at Laidlow's grove, which was afterward called Ashton's grove and goes by that name still. We were then 16 miles from my place, which we had to reach next day or camp in the water as there was no dry place to be found. We could have made that distance easily in a half day had the road been good. We rose early, and having placed the children to the best advantage on this kind of conveyance, got under march, not expecting to stop to lunch as there was no fit place. On we went, my guide taking the lead, I behind him leading a pony, and my woman behind me also leading one. The nearer we came to the ferry the deeper the water became and the sun was already approaching the western horizon. Finally it came up to the

*One of the deserted channels of the Missouri river.

armpit of my guide, and the children were dragged almost afloat on their travailles, crying and lamenting, saying, "Father, we will drown—we are going to die in this water—turn back." At times the ponies were swimming, but there was no use of turning back; the timber on the dry land ahead of us was the nearest point; there was nothing to be seen behind us but a sheet of water, and the sun was nearly down. So we pushed on, in spite of the distressing cries of the children, whom we landed safely on dry ground just at dark.

We had not eaten a bite since morning, but the children were so tired, and had been so frightened, that they laid down and, in spite of the mosquitoes which were tremendously bad, went to sleep without asking for supper. This was certainly one of the most distressing days I had ever experienced, but we old folks felt like taking a good cup of coffee after such a day's work. A fire was immediately made, the coffee was soon served, and no time was lost in turning in for the night. The next morning we did not rise very early, but took our time, got up a good breakfast, and then called out for the boatmen. Silas Condit and Amos Chase, both Mormons, the gentlemen of whom I had purchased the place, came to ferry us over, and in a little while I was in my log cabin about 15 feet square. As I had left the carts and my effects at Silver Lake I left the ponies on the other side intending to return next day, but as it seemed impossible to bring my stuff through that deep water with my ponies and carts, I arranged with Mr. Chase to meet me with a yoke of cattle hitched to a large canoe. With that understanding I started next morning with my guide. We pushed the march and arrived at Silver Lake about 10 o'clock at night. Then a tremendous dark cloud arose in the west, and just as we were going to take supper—about the hour of 11—it blew a hurricane, or rather a whirlwind [cyclone], which took our lodge clear up into the air, and then blew the fire into the baggage. It was all we could do to save our plunder, and the lodge we did not find till next day. The latter was so suddenly taken up that we felt like two fools for a moment, not knowing what had become of it. Our supper, as you may say, was good as gone; but, fortunately for us, it was all wind.

The missing articles were hunted up next day, and providentially there came along an acquaintance of Mr. Larpenteur, with a wagon and four yokes of oxen and a bargain was made to take him to his destination. The baggage and supplies were loaded into the big wagon, and the return trip was made with comparative comfort. The man who had been engaged to meet him with the oxen and the big canoe was met on the way, and, turning back, joined the watery procession. And this was travel and pioneering in Monona and Harrison counties, Iowa, fifty-one years ago. The location

of Mr. Larpenteur's cabin was in Harrison county, two and one-half miles south of the Monona county line. Charles Larpenteur, the explorer and pioneer, died November 15, 1872, and was buried as he requested under a low-spreading red cedar near the site of his old cabin. The grave is marked by a small marble slab, giving name, date of birth and death. The spot is historic and should be carefully cherished by the pioneers of Harrison county.

Fifty-one years ago the sun at intervals peeped through the rifts of watery clouds upon the flooded earth, finding here and there a fruitful field upon the highlands in this sparsely settled State. So he looks down today through the heat of July upon the most productive land of the world; the growing corn in great green waves and the cattle on a thousand hills, hearing in anticipation the hum of the thresher intermingling with the "Harvest Home" song of a happy, prosperous people. Fifty-one years! Is it not reward enough to have lived and wrought in such a glorious State more than half a century?

AN OFFICE FOR ABE LINCOLN.—A correspondent writes us that some citizens have intended to get up a petition to the president, requesting to appoint his co-laborer against Douglas—Abe Lincoln, of Illinois—to a foreign mission. It is thought that this might console him for his defeat, and at the same time show a proper sympathy on the part of the administration for a man who has struggled hard with it to overthrow the Democracy of Illinois. Will the president appoint Abe Lincoln to a foreign mission to make up for his defeat? That is the question.—*Dubuque Express and Herald*, Nov. 10, 1858.

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