

Touring the Hawkeye State

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Gary Gildner

This poem originally appeared in American Review #17.

I saw the best parts of Iowa covered with New Jersey tea,
partridge pea, rattlesnake master, and Culver's root,
I saw Chief Keokuk's "X" in the county courthouse in Keokuk,
home of John L. Lewis and Elsa Maxwell

I saw sweet William, wild rye, I saw the Iowa Watershed Divide
running through the business district of Orient,
I saw the outskirts of Adair and the locomotive wheel
marking the spot where Jesse James derailed the Chicago,
Rock Island and Pacific and knocked off engineer Rafferty
and ran with the loot to Missouri

I saw gayfeather, blazing star, and butterfly weed,
I saw where Henry Lott murdered Two Fingers on the banks
of Bloody Run, where Dr. William S. Pitts, a dentist,
wrote hymns, taught singing and practiced
in Nashua in Chickasaw County,
home of The Little Brown Church in the Vale,
I saw Osage, home of Hamlin Garland.

I saw the home of Iowa's only one-eyed governor, Bill Larrabee,
and Clarinda, home of Glenn Miller,
and Humboldt, home of Frank Gotch, who hammerlocked
the Russian Lion Hackenschmidt for the world
wrestling championship, and Grundy Center,
home of Herbert Quick, author of *The Hawkeye*,
The Invisible Woman, and others

I saw the braided rugs that Grant Wood's mother made
 from Grant's old jeans, where the *Bertrand* went down
 on her maiden voyage, taking boxes of Dr. Hostetter's
 Celebrated Stomach Bitters, and the Fairview Cemetery
 where Amelia Jenks Bloomer, of *The Lily*, lies buried,
 I saw her Turkish pantaloons

I saw the only Holstein museum in America
 and Mama Ormsby Burke's neck chain and milk stool
 and the west branch of the Wapsinonoc and the modest
 two-room cottage that sheltered young Herbert Hoover
 and Peru where the first Delicious apple tree grew
 and Newton, home of Emerson Hough, author of *Mississippi
 Bubble*

I saw the summit of Floyd's Bluff and the lightning-
 struck obelisk south of Sioux City
 near Interstate 29, the final resting place
 of the bones of Sergeant Charles Floyd
 who died of a busted gut under Lewis and Clark,
 their only loss on the whole trip,
 I saw Oskaloosa where Frederic K. Logan
 composed "Over the Hills" and "Missouri Waltz"

I saw the Walnut, Turkey, Pony, Plum, and Honey creeks,
 the Polecat River, Spirit Lake, the park where John Brown
 drilled for Harper's Ferry, Eisenhower's Mamie's
 home in Boone, the home of John "Duke" Wayne, née Marion M.
 Morrison, in Winterset, Billy Sunday's mother's grave
 a peg from Story County's Sewage Plant,
 where Billy saw the light, where he came back
 to gather souls, in Garner, after shagging flies in center
 for the Chicago White Stockings

I saw ½ mile west of Orient where Henry Agard Wallace,
 experimentalist and Republican, Democrat and Progressive,
 breeder of chickens, strawberries, and hybrid corn
 and Iowa's only U.S. Vice President was born,
 on a nine-acre tract of virgin Iowa prairie
 in West of Orient I saw pink and white beardtongue

I saw where Jenny Lind and Tom Thumb appeared
in Stone City, where Cyphert Talley, a Baptist preacher,
was killed in the Talley or Skunk River War
in Sigourney, where the Sac-Fox council
started the Black Hawk War in Toolesboro,
where Chief Wapello and his friend General Street
are buried in the same plot along the C. B. & O.
right-of-way in Agency

I saw the trails worn in the sod by trekking Mormons,
the Corning farm of Howard Townsend, historic communist,
blue-eyed grass and Jerusalem artichoke,
war clubs, knives, scrapers, grinders, and threshers,
hickory, basswood, hackberry, wahoo, and burr,
a Victorian parlor, a low-growing Yew,
a rare folding bathtub, a belfry stocked with birds

The American Heritage History of the Great West, by David Lavender, planned and edited by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr. McGraw-Hill, 1973, \$16.50, de luxe edition \$18.50.

This superbly illustrated book was originally published in 1965 and was out of print for several years. It starts in 1763 when England forbade her colonials to settle beyond the crest of the Alleghenies and bold hunters like Daniel Boone and scheming land speculators like Richard Henderson pushed over the eastern mountains.

The complex story of the people that followed men like Boone and Henderson is told as one swirling, panoramic whole, meshed chronologically from beginning to end within the larger context of our national history. Over 200 illustrations enhance the story.

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