

Early Schools in Iowa

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EARLY SCHOOLS IN IOWA.

BY T. S. PARVIN.

WHO taught "the first school," and when and where in Iowa? While we may not be able satisfactorily to answer the question, we may by our efforts to do so, bring to light some facts unknown to the educators of to-day. These facts, too, have quite passed out of mind, and been almost forgotten by the early settlers who were the contemporaries of those who taught school in Iowa in the long ago. Of late years commendable efforts have been made to collect and publish the early general history of some of our towns, counties, and even the State itself. But so far as we know no effort has been made to collect and pre-

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serve, in permanent form, the Annals of Education in Iowa, during the first decade of its history. It might pertinently be asked, why has not the "State Teachers' Association" inaugurated the proper steps to rescue from oblivion these facts, which have an interesting connection, at least, with their profession? A vast deal of ignorance prevails in the public mind, and among our educators, on this subject. And a good deal of impertinence now and then crops out by impostors, who set up the claim that they or their friends taught the first school in Iowa.

Any one discovering errors or omissions in this article will confer a favor by communicating the same to the writer.

The members of the "Association" referred to are quite uninformed as to its early history. But a few years since we received the programme of its annual exercises accompanied by a brief history of the Association, prepared by its President and the Executive Committee, in which they omitted altogether the first two Presidents and commenced with the third, making him the first. This, too, notwithstanding the fact that the newspapers of the day made mention of the facts omitted, and the address of the second President, Hon. John A. Parvin, delivered at the second meeting, was published by the Association in pamphlet form, and is preserved in the libraries and collections of some of the old settlers.

Only a week since the *Register*, in alluding to the death of Prof. Tice, the weather prophet, said "he was the first school teacher in Davenport away back in 1840." This latter earmark betrays the error. We shall have to go "away back of 1840" to resurrect the names of those who taught school in Davenport *before* Prof. Tice's day. Prof. Tice was a classmate of ours, as we believe, and emigrated to Davenport in 1840, while in fact a school had been taught in Davenport as early as 1837, and in Scott county, near by, in 1835, as we shall prove in this paper.

Another claimant, this time in *propria persona*, sets up and puts forth the claim that "he was the first teacher of the first school in Iowa." And strange to say he immediately adds that he opened his school "in Burlington, the first Mon

day in November, 1838." An "honest confession is good for the soul," and by his candor in giving the date, he refutes his own statement. Between 1834, when the first school *was* taught in Burlington, and the date when this eleventh hour teacher began his school, some nine or more had preceded him,—“honor to whom honor is due.”

Let us preface our sketch with a few facts of historical importance. The Territory of Iowa was organized July 3d, 1838. The Iowa District, as organized in 1838, had been an integral part of the Territory of Wisconsin since June 3d, 1836. Both Iowa and Wisconsin had been attached to the Territory of Michigan from June 28th, 1834, and so remained till the admission of Michigan as a State in 1836. The Iowa District, or so much of it as was included in the “Black Hawk Purchase,” had only been open for settlement by treaty since June 1st, 1833, although settlers had unlawfully “squatted upon its territory” much earlier.

We shall in this paper attempt to prove that Iowa had schools and school teachers while it was attached to Michigan, and all through the period of its connection with Wisconsin. Yes, even in 1833, before the date of either of those events. And it might be well for all impostors, eager for honors not deserved or earned, to “wait a time with patience” till the old settlers have passed away, as they are rapidly doing.

In the preparation of this article we have availed ourself of our extensive personal acquaintance with the “old settlers” to invite from many of them contributions of facts, bearing upon the subject in hand. The evidence introduced will then be theirs and not ours. We shall commence with the county of Des Moines and include the river counties.

At the semi-centennial celebration of the first settlement of Iowa, held at Burlington in May last (1883), Dr. Wm. F. Ross, now of Lovillia, Monroe county, was one of the speakers.

Dr. Ross came to Iowa in July, 1833, and located at Flint Hills, now Burlington. He was, as we learn from his address, appointed the first postmaster in southern Iowa,

if not for all Iowa, in the spring of 1834. The Territorial government of Michigan, we have seen, was extended, by act of Congress, over the Iowa District, that part of Wisconsin west of the Mississippi river, on the 18th day of June of this year (1834).

The Doctor informs us that in the fall of 1833 he had two cabins built on his claim, west of the Park (in which the celebration was held), *one being for a school house*, and one of which he occupied in March, 1834. In that year (1834) he "boarded *Zadoc C. Inghram*, who taught a school in the log cabin on his (the Doctor's) claim,—*the first school in Iowa*," the Doctor said with emphasis, and he was supposed to know, but we shall see that he was mistaken." As the month of 1834 is not named by Mr. Langworthy, in which Mr. Whittemore taught his school, in Dubuque, in the old log church, we are unable to decide between these two persons and places, as to which the priority should be given. With Mr. Inghram we were personally acquainted in 1838. Subsequently he removed to Louisa county and was appointed Clerk of the Court there, by Chief Justice Mason, of the Territorial Court. Mr. Inghram was living quite recently in St. Louis.

Besides Mr. Inghram there were several teachers prior to November, 1838. From Mr. Wm. Garrett, a prominent citizen of Burlington, an old settler, having located there early in 1836, and well known over the State as the Secretary for more than a quarter of a century of the Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows, we learn that Mr. Ben Tucker was the second teacher who taught a common school in Burlington. He taught in 1835, in a cabin built by Jeremiah Smith, up a ravine called "Stony Lonesome." Tucker was succeeded by Johnson Pierson; as he lived so far away he found it inconvenient to continue his vocation. At a later period in the succeeding year, 1836, Mr. Tucker resumed his labors in the same cabin. I had the pleasure of meeting the widow of Jeremiah Smith at the celebration before referred to, in May last, and received from her a corroboration of these facts, as also some others. Mrs. Cezum taught a school in 1836, in a

cabin on lower Main St., and Mr. Garrett, then a boy, attended her school, before he went into the store of Webber & Remy as a store boy, and where we first met him in the summer of 1838. In 1837 a Miss Wheeler taught school, also in a log cabin, on 5th St. This house had a puncheon floor and puncheon seats. Early in 1838 Mr. Southgate taught in a log cabin on North 7th St., near the spring. And in the same year a Mr Pike also taught school in a log cabin on Main St. Mrs. Sheldon also taught school that year over Chas. Neally's store on Court St. The Rev. Mr. Batchelder taking that room for church (Episcopal) services, Mrs. Sheldon removed to the brick house that Judge Rorer built on corner of Columbia and Fourth Sts.—*the first brick house built in Iowa*, remarks Mr. Garrett, correctly. So the schools, so far, at least, as the buildings were concerned, had an advanced tendency. In this building my old friend Judge Rorer laid the first brick, and when in later years, the growth of the city required the erection of a larger and finer building in its place, and it became necessary to take it down, the Judge was on hand to remove that brick last from its place, and carried to his office, where he keeps it as a relic of by-gone times.

1838 was a prolific year for school teachers to engage in their chosen work, for we are informed that the Rev. Chas. Burnham taught a school on 5th St., west of the Square. A young lady, whose name we do not remember, also taught a school of small children in the summer of that year, and we recollect of having escorted her home from school one afternoon, and prior to November, 1838.

A Sunday-school was organized in August, 1835, by Rev. Dr. Teas (Methodist) and Messrs. Brown and Cottle, which, with varying fortunes and interest, was continued, and became the nucleus from which larger ones sprang.

Following the numerous schools, between the spring of 1834 and the fall of 1838, we come to the last for Des Moines county. From an autobiographical sketch of James Rush Hartsock, published in Iowa City, in 1882, we learn from the head-lines he gives, that he was the "First Teacher of the

First School in Iowa." In the same sketch he states that "he came to Burlington, Iowa, only the 5th day of May, 1838," and "here," (Burlington) he says, "on the first Monday [fifth day] in November, 1838, was opened the first common school in Iowa, and it was successfully conducted for the term of three months." "His landlady, the 'Widow Jones,' who had several children 'running wild,' as she expressed it, 'because there was no school in the town,' first turned the thoughts of Mr. Hartsock to the subject of public education. At that time (he states) the town had a population of not exceeding three hundred [?]. There was no school-house, and the number of children to be taught was small. In the latter part of October he secured a school-house, a part of the remains of a wrecked steamer, which had been fashioned into a lumberman's office, on the corner of 2d and Jefferson Sts. Having secured this as a school-house, it was fitted up with wooden benches or seats, and rough boards fastened to the wall as writing desks. One chair and a small stove comprised the furniture. A paper was circulated and twenty-one pupils obtained. The tuition was \$4.00 for a term of three months."

How strangely the appliances for teaching had retrograded, while the town was rapidly growing in population and the demand for schools. This whole story looks quite as far-fetched as the date, November, 1838, when half a dozen schools had been taught that year, and for several years before, according to Dr. Ross, Mrs. Jeremiah Smith, Gen. Dodge, Mr. Garrett, Mr. Brown, and others, who have furnished us with data of those early times.

In a lecture delivered at Dubuque, March 3d, 1855, by Lucius H. Langworthy of that city, we read that "the first house erected here (in Dubuque) for public worship, was the old log church, standing on the ground now occupied by the old Methodist church (a brick). Rev. Barton Randle usually preached on the Sabbath—and *the house* was occupied for a school on week day. Mr. Whittemore, now (1855) of Bowman's Prairie (a settlement near and southwest from Dubuque) was the teacher."

Mr. Langworthy was one of the earliest settlers in

Dubuque, having located in the mines as early as 1827. He does not give the date of the erection of the house, or of the opening of the school. We are able, however, to supplement this from other data. There is framed, in the State Historical Society, the original subscription for the building of this house, and as it was undoubtedly the first house erected for church and school purposes in Iowa, and as it is an interesting document of itself, we have transcribed it.

It is headed—"Subscription for a Chapel for the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Town of Dubuque," [which place appears to have had a name as well as a local habitation at that early period in our history].

"Plan of the House.—To be built of *heven logs* 20x26 feet in the clear; one story, 10 feet high, lower and upper floor; shingled roof, to be pointed with lime and sand, one batten door, four 20 light and one 12 light window.

"Cost, estimate for completing in good plain style, \$255.00.

"The above house is built for the use of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but when not occupied by said Church, shall be open for divine service by other Christian denominations, and *may be used for a common school* at the discretion of the Trustees. Woodbury Massie, John Johnston, William Hillery, Marcus Atchinson, and Orrin Smith, are the Board of Trustees who are authorized to receive subscriptions and control the interests of said house for the uses above mentioned.

"We, the undersigned, agree to pay to the above Trustees the several sums annexed to our names for the building of said house."

To this paper there are attached sixty-eight names subscribing to, and paying the full sum pledged, and a little more than the \$255.00, in sums varying from twenty-five cents to twenty dollars. No date is attached to the paper, but a number of subscribers are still living at a hearty old age, honored citizens of Dubuque. We are personally acquainted with several of the survivors, as we were with many of those now deceased, and from our personal inquiries as to the date, we have learned from Mr. Allen and others that the house was commenced in November and completed in December, 1833; six months before civil government was extended over the country west of the Mississippi and north of the State of Missouri, and only six months after the District was opened to settlement by the treaty ceding the "Black Hawk Purchase."

We are unable to determine from the statement of the recollections of the old settlers, whether Mr. Whittemore, referred to by Mr. Langworthy, or Mr. George Cabbage, is entitled to the priority of time in teaching a school in that house. Certainly both taught there in the same year, early in 1834. With Mr. Cabbage we were well acquainted, as he was one of the three United States Commissioners to adjust the title to the lots in certain river towns,—Peru (six miles north of Dubuque), Bellevue, Fort Madison, and one or two others. He was a gentleman of education and character, as is evidenced by his selection by the President for the position he filled. My old friend Thomas Hardie, for twenty years or more, past, the efficient Secretary of the School Board of the city of Dubuque, is of the opinion from his investigations in the matter, that Mr. Cabbage was the first teacher there and preceded Mr. Barrett Whittemore. The Rev. N. S. Bastian, the minister referred to by Mr. Langworthy and Prof. Greenlee, succeeded Mr. Whittemore. Early in March, 1836, Mrs. Caroline Dexter opened a school in a little log church. Mr. Shoup, editor of the *Iowa Normal Monthly*, to whom we are also indebted for material aid in the prosecution of this “labor of love,” writes, that the old settlers of Dubuque claim that “Mrs. Dexter was the first lady teacher in Iowa.” In this they are mistaken—see our sketch of Lee county, and learn that Mrs. Rebecca Parmer taught a school as early as May, 1834, near Ft. Madison. Mrs. Dexter, in her prospectus, issued March 15th, 1836, stated that she “would teach reading, writing, spelling, etc., and also instruct young ladies in the art of useful and ornamental needle work.” “Her terms were \$3.50 for each scholar instructed in the first three branches and \$4.50 for others—the house and fuel at the expense of the subscribers.”

In this same year (1836) Mrs. Louisa King, assisted by her daughter, Miss Louisa C. F. King opened a school for young ladies, which prospered until 1839.

Dubuque has the honor of publishing the first newspaper in Iowa. John King, who came to Dubuque in 1834, issued the first number of the Dubuque *Visitor*, May 11th, 1836, and

Andrew Keesecker (both now deceased) did the first type-setting in Iowa. Several other ladies and gentlemen taught here during the year 1837 and 1838. Having mislaid the paper, we can only name from Mr. Shoup's memoranda, Mr. Alonzo P. Phelps, and Mrs. Mary Ann O'Reilly, who taught in 1838. The first tax for the support of schools in Dubuque (and for what we know in Iowa) was levied in 1840. The first school law passed at the session of the Territorial Legislature, January 1st, 1839, committed Iowa to a system of "Common Schools," and after a few years the "occupation" of the teachers of private or select schools was in a great measure like that of Othello's—"gone." This act is entitled, "an act *providing* for the establishment of common schools," and was superseded by "an act to *establish* a system of common schools," approved January 16th, 1840.

By an act approved January 13th (not "February 12th," as published in page 696 of the "Iowa Historical and Comparative Census), entitled "an act to create the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction," Dr. William Reynolds, late a teacher in Iowa City, was appointed Superintendent. The appointment had been tendered by Gov. Robt. Lucas to ourself and declined.

We have mislaid some of our papers relative to the early history of Dubuque and Lee counties. It is well known that the United States had a Fort at Madison, commanded by Capt. Pike, as early as during the war with Great Britain in 1812 or 1814. From our old friend Col. Parrott, late Postmaster at Keokuk, who was a soldier there in later years, we learned, that as early as 1833 there was a school taught by one of the company, the children being those of the officers and soldiers. This paper is one of those mislaid. We learn, however, from a communication in the *Gate City* (in answer to an inquiry), from Marcus D. Box, whom we believe to be a son of Hon. John Box, one of the Representatives from Lee county in the Wisconsin Legislature of 1836, that a school was taught in Lee county, about two miles from Fort Madison, on the road leading to Augusta and Burlington, as early as May, 1834. The teacher was a lady, too, Mrs. Rebecca

Parmer, sister to E. S. Ayres, one of the old settlers of Lee county. "The house used was a small cabin with dirt floor and split rails for seats." Some of her scholars are still living (1882), and we have heard from their own lips recitals of the events of their school days in that primitive school-house.

The next school was taught by Wm. Crawford in the fall of 1835, as we learn from Mrs. Eliza E. S. Malcolm *nee* Sample, and daughter of the late Hon. Hugh W. Sample, of Keokuk, well known in his day throughout the State. This school was in the town of Fort Madison, and in a cabin of course, as were most of the residences of those early days. "He was considered a smart man for his time. He could not get a school now." We guess this is the case with some others who claim to have taught at an early time in Iowa.

Mr. Box states, in which we heartily concur, "there were a great many incidents connected with the early settling of Iowa that should pass to history." Who will rescue some of them? Mr. J. B. Stewart, a prominent citizen of Des Moines, was a pupil, or "scholar," as then termed, of Mr. Crawford. As he went to Fort Madison when a boy, in 1835, and has kindly aided us in this matter, we trust he will give us more light on this somewhat dark subject, and vindicate the majesty of truth, and give honor to whom honor is due for having taught in those early days.

Mrs. Malcolm writes that early in 1837 a Miss Jennings taught in another cabin in Fort Madison, located on Second street, between Pine and Cedar.

In 1837, a no less distinguished person than the late Hon. Alfred Rich taught school in the same place. All old settlers will remember him as the able and eloquent competitor of the late Hon. A. C. Dodge for Congress, and who by his burning eloquence almost persuaded the Democrats of that day to vote for him. He came to Iowa poor, and located at Ft. Madison. He had read law in Kentucky, but seeing no immediate prospect for business, like many another young lawyer, taught school for a livelihood. Soon after an important case arose, regarding a land claim, and all the lawyers had been retained by plaintiff. In this dilemma Mr. (now

General) Parrott came to the rescue of the defendant, and suggested that the young teacher might be a lawyer; so they called upon him. He owned up, dismissed school, followed his client to the court-house, and by his knowledge of the law and his burning eloquence, won the case—and clients and business came to him from that hour. He fell a victim to consumption, and returning to Kentucky, died in 1843 at his mother's home.

A Mrs. Williams and her sister, Miss Fanny Pond, taught school in their own house, a frame on Oak street. They were from Boston, educated and capable women.

From Mr. Patterson, of Keokuk, formerly of West Point, Lee county, we learn that a school was taught at Nashville, on the Rapids in Lee county, as early as 1830, by Benjamin Jennings. Mr. Jesse Creighton taught in Keokuk as early as 1834. Capt. Benjamin Campbell, now of Fort Madison, says, in an address delivered by him at Fort Madison in 1875, that "Mr. Creighton was a shoemaker, but finding it difficult to support himself at the trade, owing to the customs of those days of people going barefoot in summer and wearing moccasins in the winter, he was induced—a makeshift, practiced to this day—to open a school." Among his scholars, a list of whom is given, we find the name of our friend Capt. Campbell, who assigns the time of the opening of this school to 1833, an earlier date than that assigned to the schools in either Burlington, Dubuque, or Fort Madison. Capt. Campbell, who located in Lee county as early as 1830, and has resided there continuously since, refers, in his address aforesaid (to the old settlers of Lee county), to this same Jennings, and styles him "Benjamin." He further refers to him as "late a millionare in Oregon," by which we are enabled to trace his geneology. This we will briefly do from the records as far as they go. In August 1851, *Berryman Jennings*, J. C. Ainsworth, also from Keokuk, Iowa, and others united in the formation of the Grand Lodge of Masons of Oregon, and *Berryman Jennings* was elected Grand Master. The Grand Lodge met at Oregon City, which was then, as now, the residence of Brother Jennings, and he is returned

in June, 1883, as a member of Multonomah Lodge No. 1, of that city (now eclipsed by its near neighbor Portland). We are led to think that Benjamin and Berryman Jennings are the same persons, and that his name must be incorrectly given by the Historian of Lee county, and by Capt. Campbell in his address. We have written P. G. M., Jennings upon the subject and for tidings from that *first* school.

Mr. George Stevenson taught school in West Point in 1837, and was succeeded the same year by Eli Stoddard, a finely educated man and a graduate of Dartmouth College, while his predecessor was an uneducated man—not the only one who essayed to teach in those days. The records from this county are quite full and to the point, and from living witnesses who were “scholars” in the schools of which they write.

Mr. Simeon Cragin, a discharged soldier, taught school in Pleasant Valley, just north of Davenport, in November, 1835. Capt. Clark, of Buffalo, same county, from whom we have gathered this item, was a scholar during that term of four months. The children composing the school were mostly of the families of Clark, Sen., and Levi S. Chamberlin. The next year, 1836, E. H. Barrett opened a school at Buffalo, to which place Capt. Clark’s father had removed. A young lady, a niece of Judge Cook, also taught during that year.

The first school *in* Davenport was taught by Miss Marianna Hall, now Mrs. Jackman, and living in Indiana. She taught in June, 1837, in what is now West Davenport, and so was the predecessor of Prof. Tice three full years. From a brother of Mrs. Jackman, now residing in Davenport we learn this fact.

In the spring of 1837, John A. Daniels taught the first school in Henry county in the town of Mt. Pleasant, and was succeeded same year by John P. Grantham.

In Muscatine county, Rev. George Bumgardner, a local Methodist minister, taught school in Muscatine, in the fall of 1837. The school house was a small, low, rough log cabin, on Iowa Avenue. The Hon. John A. Parvin taught in a

small frame house, during the spring and summer of 1839, as we personally know, and many of his scholars are still living in Iowa.

In the fall of 1836, Mr. Dean Gray, a man of limited education, taught a school in Bellevue, Jackson county. "In the spring of 1837, a Mr. Barrett kept school a term after corn planting," and in the fall of the same year a Mrs. Noble succeeded him.

In May 1838, Miss Mallard, a highly educated lady from the state of New York, taught also in the same place. My old friend Col. Warren, first sheriff of Jackson county, and a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1857, writes me, that "a plain stone marks her grave, that of the first educated teacher in Jackson county." Among her successors we find the name of Gen. George Cabbage (who had it seems been promoted since teaching in Dubuque).

We acknowledge our indebtedness to those whose names we have mentioned in the course of this narrative and also to Hon. J. W. Satterthwaite and Presly Saunders of Mt. Pleasant, Suel Foster of Muscatine, and others, all "old settlers," who know full well whereof they affirm.

We have no *data* from the counties of Louisa, Clinton, and Van Buren.

In conclusion then we will attempt to name those who taught school at an early day in Iowa, based upon the authorities we have cited.

- Lee county.*—1830. Benjamin Jennings, Nashville.
 " " 1833. Jesse Creighton, Keokuk.
 " " 1834. Mrs. Rebecca Parmer, Ft. Madison,
 " " 1835. Wm. Crawford, Ft. Madison.
 " " 1837. Miss Jennings, Fort Madison.
 " " " Eli Stoddard, West Point.
 " " " George Stevenson, West Point.
 " " 1838. Alfred Rich, Ft. Madison.
 " " " Mrs. Williams.
 " " " Miss Fanny Pond.
- Des Moines county.*—1834. Zadoc C. Inghram.
 " " " " Benj. Tucker.
 " " " 1835. Johnson Pierson.
 " " " 1836. Benj. Tucker, again
 " " " 1837. Miss Wheeler.

<i>Des Moines county.</i>	—1838.	Mr. Southgate.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Mr. Pike.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Mrs. Sheldon.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Rev. Chas. Burnham.
“ “ “ “	“ “	(in November) James R. Hartsock.
<i>Dubuque county.</i>	—1834.	George Cabbage.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Barrett Whittemore.
“ “ “ “	1835.	Rev. N. S. Bastian.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Prof. Greenlee.
“ “ “ “	1836.	Mrs. Caroline Dexter.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Mrs. Louisa King.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Miss Louisa C. F. King.
“ “ “ “	1838.	Alonzo P. Phelps.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Mrs. Mary Ann O'Reilly.
<i>Scott county.</i>	—1835.	Simeon Cragin, Pleasant Valley.
“ “ “ “	1836.	E. H. Barrett, Buffalo.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Miss——— near Buffalo.
“ “ “ “	1837.	Miss Marianna Hall, Davenport.
<i>Jackson county.</i>	—1836.	Dean Gray, Bellevue.
“ “ “ “	1837.	Mr. Barrett.
“ “ “ “	“ “	Mrs. Noble.
“ “ “ “	1838.	(May) Miss Mallard.
“ “ “ “	“ “	George Cabbage.
<i>Muscatine county.</i>	—1837.	Rev. George Bumgardner.
“ “ “ “	1839.	(May) Hon. John A. Parvin.
<i>Henry county.</i>	—1837.	John A. Daniels, Mt. Pleasant.
“ “ “ “	“ “	John P. Grantham, Mt. Pleasant.

There were, as we have authoritatively learned, forty or more schools taught in Iowa prior to November, 1838, and by that number of different persons, ladies and gentlemen, married and single. So the claim put forward by the November teacher of 1838, is not based upon the truth, and we may conclude by quoting the words of the Great Teacher of such persons, “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all.”

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