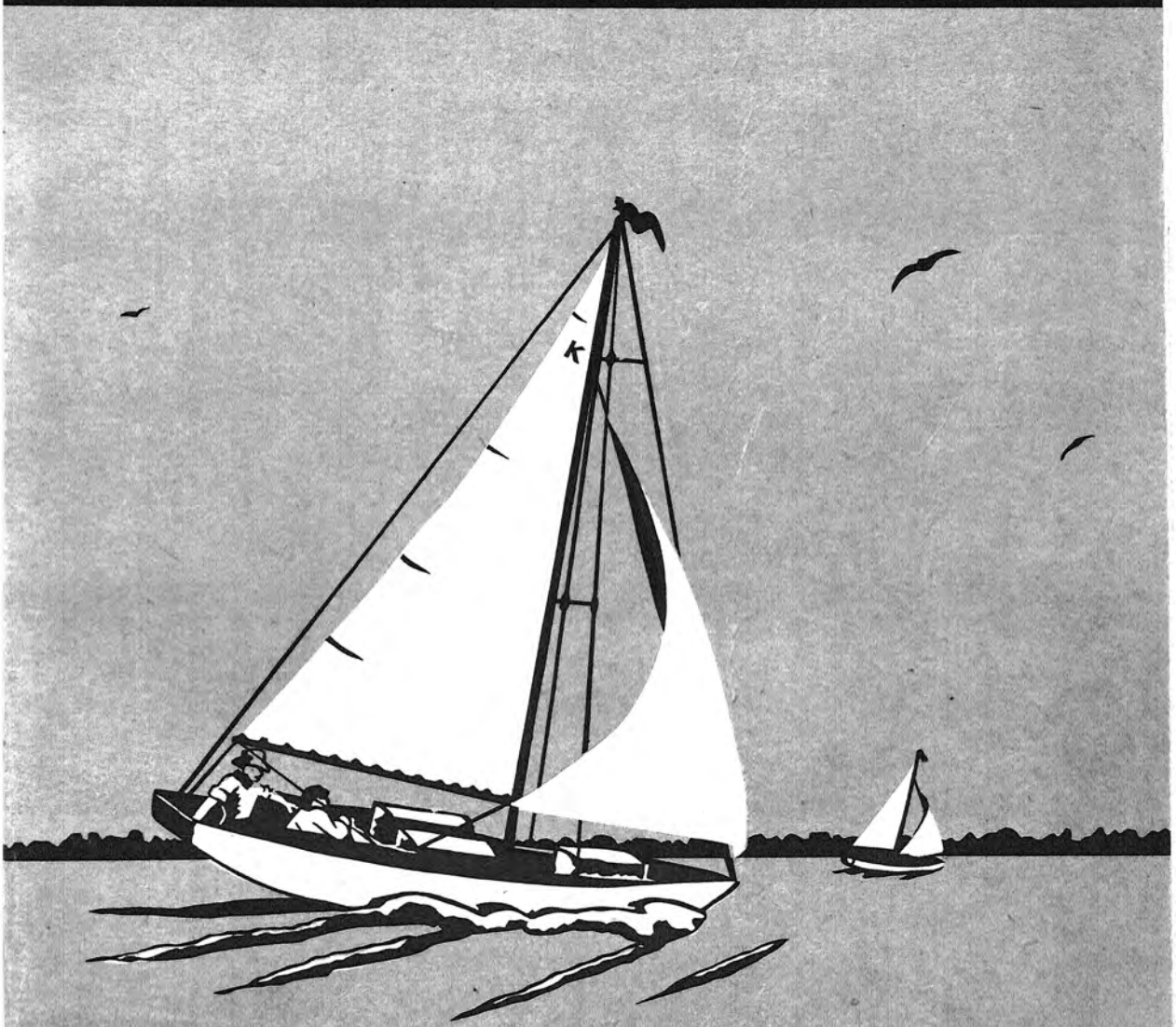
BUENA VISTA COUNTY HISTORY



IOWA WRITERS PROJECT W.P.A

BUENA VISTA COUNTY HISTORY

IOWA

Compiled and written by
The Iowa Writers' Program
Of the Work Projects Administration
In the State of Iowa

Jessie M. Parker,
State Superintendent of Public Instruction,
State-wide Sponsor of the
Iowa Writers' Program

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Buena Vista County Superintendent of Schools
Storm Lake, Iowa

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FOREWORD

The history of every Iowa county is a record of triumph over hostile forces and untamed nature. Our pioneers had little but an indomitable spirit, savored by their own frontier humor, to help them vanquish the wilderness. Today, when the ideals on which they helped to found our American way of life are at stake in every corner of the globe, we are especially glad to have their story before us.

What we now know as Buena Vista County was an almost treeless tract where even the surveyors lost their way. The hot summer sun was unfriendly and winter brought blizzards that made the land all but untenable. Too, the first settlers were haunted by the fear of Indian attack. Without timber to build homes they made huts of the prairie sod and burned the slough grass for fuel. They fought off malaria and the hordes of mosquitoes that infested the swamplands. Sometimes they seemed far from civilization, but they never lost the faith that it would follow them.

This story of Buena Vista County, from the days of its first survey down to 1942 has been carefully prepared by the Iowa WPA Writers' Program. The reader will find it both truthful and colorful.

A E Harrison

County Superintendent of Schools
Buena Vista County

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1942

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Buena Vista County may well be called an empire of beauty. From the rugged and wooded valley of the Little Sioux River on the north to the wide blue surface of Storm Lake on the south, and beyond, the contours of level fields, rolling hills, and pleasant valleys delight the eye. The low-lying land has been well drained and the soil is black and rich, almost every acre of it suitable for cultivation. During the growing season the whole area is a vast garden, marred by no stretches of waste land. The very name "Buena Vista", taken from the Spanish, means "beautiful view" or "good view."

In the early days this region was a land of marshes and sloughs. We can imagine the hoarse cries of the marsh birds as they were disturbed by the first wagons of the pioneers, the wild ducks flying up from their feeding places among the clumps of slough grass, the honk-honk of wild geese, and the loud complaint of the bittern and heron as they rose from the wild blue iris growing tall and stately at the edges of creeks and bogs. There were not many trees along the shores of Storm Lake then, only a few willows, small bushes, and one grove at the western end. These few trees, however, were taken by the first settlers to build cabins or to build fires and after that there were no more trees for many years, except for a few lone cottonwoods which stood like sentinels above the lonely trails.

William Brooke, who settled in the county in 1857, said that timber in those days was more valuable than land. He could have bought all the land he wanted out on the prairie for even less than the government price of $1.25 an acre, but he did not want it. One reason was that farms were considered worthless if they had no timber with which to build homes and to make warming fires for winter. Another reason was that any sum of cash money, even 15 cents an acre, was hard to get. For a long time land without timber was looked upon as a luxury, a property which could not be used. We must remember that these people came from the timbered regions of Ohio, Indiana, and places farther east. They had no idea that anyone could live without the familiar woodpile, the swing of the ax, and the felled logs to build sturdy walls, roof tops, and fences. Later on, these people learned to build homes out of prairie sod and to make fires out of the prairie hay. They learned to pick red roots out of the new soil after the first breaking and to dry them for fuel. They learned to plant their own groves, and while the trees were getting started they learned to twist flax straw

into balls for burning, to build fires with corn cobs or corn, and get along somehow without wood. They learned that with crops from the new land they could buy lumber. It was land that was most valuable.

But all through the earliest days the first question all settlers asked was, "How far is it to timber?" and they settled accordingly. Since most of the timber in Buena Vista County lay along the Little Sioux River they settled there, and Sioux Rapids, located between high hills along the river, soon became the big town of those early days. It was the county seat and the stopping point on the old stage road between Fort Dodge and Sioux City. It was the place where the first lumber mill and the first flour mill were built and the point where Indians and trappers came to trade their pelts and skins for tobacco and supplies.

All these years Storm Lake lay forgotten in the wilderness. Surrounded by swamp land and marshes which made travel difficult, and with scarcely any trees, the place was avoided by the wagon trains of the settlers and the wind blew over the level stretches for miles with no hamlet or grove to break its force. Sometimes during a storm the wind would sweep the shallow lake to the very bottom (it was only about 15 feet deep) and the high-tossed waves would crash with thunderous impact on the lonely shores. An old trapper, sleeping by the lake during one of these storms, was awakened to find his tent blown down over his head. In the morning he told a group of surveyors that he had named the lake Storm Lake because of his experience. They probably laughed a little, but the name went down in their records and the lake has been called that ever since.

This was in the year 1855. The lake was then bordered by a wall of rocks thrown up by the action of the waves and the movement of ice during alternate periods of freezing and thawing. Later many of these rocks were used as building stones.

Buena Vista was originally a part of Fayette and Buchanan counties. These were two large temporary counties named when Iowa was still part of the Wisconsin Territory. The Wisconsin Territorial Legislature, by the act of December 21, 1837, created four large counties -- Benton, Keokuk, Fayette, and Buchanan. Before this there had been only two counties -- Dubuque and Demoine (as Des Moines was then spelled) but these big counties were constantly being changed. Fayette originally included areas that later made 21 counties and parts of nine others, besides reaching into Minnesota, and North and South Dakota.

The act which established the boundaries of Buena Vista County was passed January 15, 1851, but the county was not

fully organized with officers of its own until 1858. It was set off in the shape of a square, each side measuring 24 miles, and was divided into 16 congressional townships of 36 sections each, making a total area of 596 square miles. The county was bounded on the north by Clay County, on the east by Pocahontas, on the south by Sac, and on the west by Cherokee; it was the third from the western boundary of the State, and was also the third from the north.

Several rivers and creeks flowed through this area, principally the Little Sioux River in the north, the Raccoon River in the east, Maple Creek in the southwest, and Brooke's Creek in the central portion. There were two lakes; Storm Lake, rated among the large glacial bodies of water in Iowa, and Pickerel Lake, lying half in the northeast corner of Buena Vista, and half in Clay County. Most counties were established only after the Indian titles had been extinguished but it was not until 1851 that the last of the Sioux Indians agreed to sell their lands in northern Iowa to the government. Thus for a long time parts of Buena Vista County were Indian territory.

The act of 1851 set off 50 Iowa counties, fully one half of the State, so until 1858 and afterward, surveyors were sent out by the United States Government into this vast region and surveying was always in progress somewhere along the frontier.

Surveying was a lonely and dangerous occupation in those days. Wandering Indians were always on the lookout for the little party of surveyors, whom they hated. They feared the stakes and marks. They felt that the numerals and signs on the stakes were bad medicine and would bring evil spirits to the land.

All sections in each township were numbered from one to 36, beginning at the northeast corner of the township and counting from east to west alternately. Thomas Jefferson is said to have been the author of this system of surveying, dividing lands and numbering by ranges, townships, and sections. Surveyors were paid by the Government, a certain price for each mile line surveyed. The surveyor made notes of the type of land in each section in regard to streams, soil, timber, and minerals or any other features, and would mark the section first, second, or third quality so that those who wished to purchase land later would know something of what they were getting. This surveyor's report was often the first definite record of the conditions to be found in certain sections of the county.

The equipment of each surveyor would include a compass and transit, surveyor's chain, wagons to carry tents or

other camp equipage, and food enough to last a few weeks or even several months. Horses or oxen were provided to haul the wagons, and often several riding horses or ponies were used by the surveyor and his assistants to cover the long distances which had to be traveled to make the survey.

The surveyor had to mark each corner as soon as he had measured the lines. On the prairie, where there were no trees to blaze, he had to mark the section line or township corner in the long grass. To do this he had to cut a square out of the tough sod with a spade and throw out enough soil to make a small mound. A square stake was driven into the mound with the number of the section marked on the wood. These stakes were set up at each half mile and were called half-mile posts.

Sometimes the surveyors who covered northwest Iowa would find skeletons of cattle, and they wondered how the animals had come to die so far out on the prairie, away from any known settlement. The question remained a mystery for many years but was cleared up in 1931 through the efforts of L. C. Sutherland of Storm Lake and the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune. Correspondence with the State Historical Departments of Iowa and Wisconsin revealed the existence of the Dickson-McKnight trail which had passed southeast from Manitoba, Canada, across Iowa through Dickinson, Clay, Buena Vista, Sac, and Carroll counties to a point a few miles above the present town of Keosauqua on the Des Moines River. Dickson, a Scot living in northern Minnesota in 1812, was an independent trader who sold furs and other articles to markets in Montreal and St. Louis. He began dealing with a party of evicted Highlanders who had left Scotland in 1811 and, led by agents of Lord Selkirk, moved to new homes on the Red River of the North, in Manitoba. They wanted to start raising cattle and sheep, and Dickson agreed to supply the stock from the market at St. Louis. He formed a company of men to drive the animals from the headquarters of his associate, McKnight in Missouri, through Iowa and Minnesota to Canada. Some of the cattle died on the way. It was their remains the surveyors found more than forty years later.

An incident during the surveying of Buena Vista County in the summer of 1856 proved the truth of the old adage, "Haste Makes Waste." A bluff old Indian fighter, "Uncle" Jack Parker, had charge of the work. He divided his surveyors into two groups, leading one himself, with the assistance of J. L. Ingalsbe, and gave the other to W. G. Allen. The parties were to work from opposite ends of a tract 42 miles wide east and west, pushing north to the Minnesota border. Anxious to take advantage of every hour of the sunlight necessary for their instruments, the men pushed ahead for 35 successive days. They averaged 30 miles

a day, hardly pausing even for meals. Then the trouble began. In Ingalsbe's own words, told in the Past and Present of Buena Vista County, this is what happened: "One day I closed out to where Allen's work should be. We could find no corner established nor any trail indicating previous travelers. I was engaged in reviewing my notes to find possible errors, when a scouting party brought tidings of a distant trail. I shouldered my instrument and reaching the trail, found it straight and evidently made by a surveying party. Trying the course I found it just ten degrees wrong, viz: north ten degrees east, when it should have been due north."

Ingalsbe knew at once what had happened. Allen had read his instrument wrong in blinding sun, and using this mistake as a basis for figuring, had marked the rest of his territory wrong, losing both time and money by his hurrying. Ingalsbe hated to tell Uncle Jack, but the mistake had to be corrected. Parker was furious. He ordered his men to stop work at once and start "in pursuit" of the other gang. He shouldered Ingalsbe's 16-pound rifle, "and swearing dire vengeance" demanded, "Where shall we find the cuss?" As Ingalsbe said afterward, "The question was not difficult for me to answer, but I thought it best to defer the meeting." The cooks took his hint and were late with breakfast. Then Ingalsbe continued to delay Uncle Jack as artfully as he could, plying him with questions about his adventures and persuading him to take some time off to shoot elk. Probably Parker saw through the ruse; anyway, some good shots at game restored his humor, and when at sundown the party's ox-teams rumbled into Allen's camp, all he said was: "Onstrap en hopple the critters, h'ist yer tents and jest lay fer a week tew see ef ye can't sort o' git rested." That was all. The other surveyors had agreed not to mention Allen's mistake: Uncle Jack handled that with tact and the work was completed satisfactorily.

Ingalsbe also wrote of meeting two men traveling with some oxen and a wagon. They said they had come down the Little Sioux and had staked out claims on all patches of timber, marking these by plowing a furrow around each. They wanted to know the number of the section in which they had located but Ingalsbe refused any information, considering that the people were "land sharks" who wished to acquire claims to sell to settlers for high prices.

Early in July the surveyors made camp on a knoll near the Little Sioux River overlooking the site of Sioux Rapids. On guard against hostile Indians, they surrounded their wagons and tents with rifle pits. Nevertheless during the night some Sioux led by Inkpaduta killed several of the

surveyors' horses and one ox. Ingalsbe went downstream with several men and found timber to make a single yoke for the remaining ox. While there, Ingalsbe says, "We came upon a rude foundation of a cabin with, I think, some name written on or near it. I have recounted all the indications of settlement found in the vicinity and whether this last mentioned was by some genuine occupant or a relic by the parties before mentioned, I have no knowledge, nor the name of any of the parties." Perhaps the people who had started to build the cabin had been frightened away by the Indians.

CHAPTER 2

A WILD LAND

Two other United States surveyors came through Buena Vista County in 1855. Their trail had led all day over the hot prairie country. It was early fall and the sun beat down with that golden but fierce intensity which ripens the corn in September and dries to crackling bronze the green seed pods of a multitude of plants. But there was no corn then, only grass. For weeks they had walked through it, up-hill and down-hill, until the soles of their shoes had worn slippery in the dusty miles of it and every step forward was an effort. Their nerves had become ragged as they pushed on, mile after mile.

Then suddenly they came to a green valley, shady and cool, where wild grapes ripened and prairie plums hung in red glowing clusters. In every thicket brownish hazelnuts bulged from their furry cases and the stiff crimson of the roseberry was bright above the thorns. The sun was going down behind tall cottonwoods. Their wide crisp leaves twinkled in the light and here and there a golden leaf, pointed and smooth as though dipped in yellow lacquer, slipped down from a great tree and made a splatter of color on the ground. Below was the river where clear cool water flowed along sanded shores -- a refreshing place for a thirsty and tired man to rest.

The surveyors knelt down to drink and to wash their burning faces in the cool water. They looked about them, realizing that there must be an abundance of game in this timber and along the river. They made camp for the night with one thought in mind. They liked this place and decided to stake out a claim to the land. This was against the law, however, and both of them knew it. It was a Government rule that surveyors could not take possession of any land while doing their work of making a survey. Surveyors were usually first on the scene in opening up a new region and it would have been an easy matter for them to take all the best locations as they went. Lane and Ray, for those were the names of the two surveyors, disregarded this rule. The next morning they drove stakes and posted notices, printing in large letters the words: "This Land is Taken by Lane and Ray." Then they went on with their work. The site they had marked was near the place where the town of Sioux Rapids was later to grow up on the Little Sioux River.

During the winter season the men came back to hunt and trap along the river. They built a log cabin near what was afterward called Barnes' Grove. After several months they

left again to go back East to make preparations for settlement. It was spring, 1856, when they came back through Fort Dodge. Here they were joined by a little band of settlers: William Weaver and his wife and her brother, Abner Bell, and a family named Totten. Lane and Ray now led the little party back to the Little Sioux Valley, where they had hunted. But the surveyors were eager to get rid of their illegal holdings and as soon as they had disposed of their land they went away again. The last of their claims was sold to a man named Templeton.

Before leaving the country, Lane and Ray did one thing which greatly helped in the subsequent development of Sioux Rapids. They were commissioned to lay out a military road from Fort Dodge west, and they ran it straight to the new settlement -- that is as straight as such an early road could be built. Swamp lands, marshes, and sloughs had to be avoided because no drainage systems had yet been built, and rivers had to be forded as there were no bridges. This old Fort Dodge road was used by many settlers and was afterward extended to Sioux City where it became the chief artery of travel for stagecoaches, covered wagons, traders,and farmers going back and forth to mill.

Of the group who came with Lane and Ray, Abner Bell was always called the first settler because he was the only one who remained. The others were driven away by the horrors of that first terrible winter in the new country. Everything seemed to be against them. Fierce blizzards came early in November to shut them in and by January the snow was so deep that even whole herds of elk perished from starvation. Every bit of grass on which they fed was covered by deep snow and every trail and road was hidden in the drifts so that it was almost impossible for the settlers to drive to Fort Dodge for their supplies. To make matters worse, the Sioux Indians went on the warpath. They were driven by starvation and by anger toward the whites, and traveled up the Little Sioux River with murder in their hearts. They stole guns, begged food, shot livestock, and terrorized the people all along the way. Finally at Spirit Lake they killed 32 people and took four women prisoners. Such terrible times drove people from their homes and some never returned. Why did Abner Bell remain?

Bell was 32 years old and unmarried. Without a family to worry about he could afford to trust to his own wits and his gun to protect himself. He was a good shot and a great hunter. The very day he arrived at Sioux Rapids he set out at once in search of game, leaving the other members of the party to start making camp. While they planted and sowed that first season and built their rude log huts he roamed up and down the river shooting and trapping. Beaver, mink, and

an occasional otter could be found along the Little Sioux and there were muskrats everywhere in the low places and in the ponds and swamps. His rifle always kept the larders of the settlers' supplied with fresh meat, and he made a good living selling the pelts and skins. He never took any land nor wanted any but made his home with the Weavers. In later years Bell built himself a small shack and ran a store. His stock in trade consisted of groceries, traps, powder and shot, or any other article a hunter might need.

Nelson Suckow said of Abner Bell: "He was a small man weighing perhaps 120 pounds, active and quick and as black as a Spaniard. He was always smoking a pipe and was inclined to be the contrary kind." He was restless and turbulent also, unschooled and uncouth, but he had a shrewd native humor and wit.

Bell always dressed very carelessly. At first he wore haphazard garments made by himself out of skins after the manner of the Indians but later when he bought his clothes readymade, he wore them until they were ragged and worn, and consequently was always considered an eccentric individual. He let his hair and whiskers grow also, never bothering to go to a barber shop, and in time his long black hair and black beard seemed to set him apart from the other settlers. But Bell made friends in spite of his queer ways. He was honest and fearless in facing the wilderness alone, and his keen blue eyes saw a lot of humor and adventure in pioneer life. As settlements became thicker he formed the habit of selling venison to his neighbors, and would make regular visits to each home, often spending the evening while he entertained the family with tales of his hunting experiences, his trapping exploits, or his adventures with numerous Indians.

Bell disliked Indians intensely. One day while making his round of visits he found a group of Indian men begging flour from a pioneer woman. The woman's husband was gone and she was much frightened. Bell knew a few Indian words and he burst upon the savages with a yell, mixing loud profanity with Indian dialect and war whoops, and scattering the natives in every direction with the sheer power of his angry voice. The Indians dashed to their ponies and rode away in haste. Bell then told the woman never to give an Indian anything but to drive him away as soon as he appeared.

This was the attitude of many of the settlers. To them all Indians were bad. The settlers made no effort to understand their grievances or to make friends with them, but drove them off with curses or clubs. The Indians on their part believed in revenge, and every hurt received from the whites by one of their tribe was carefully remembered and later paid back in kind.

One such revengeful Indian was Inkpaduta, the renegade Sioux chief. He was a big man, six feet tall and strongly built. The smallpox scars on his face made his expression look only the more cruel. For several years he had hated the whites and regarded them as his greatest enemies. They had taken the hunting grounds of his people, they had murdered his brother, Sidominadotah, on the banks of Bloody Run, and slain many of his kinsmen. Squaws who went begging for food had been driven off with whips. Now after the cold, hungry winter of 1856, Inkpaduta felt that the time had come to get even.

With a band of desperate followers he set out across Woodbury and Cherokee counties, leaving behind a trail of fear and pilfered cabins.

Finally the Indians arrived at the town of Peterson, just north of the line dividing Clay County from Buena Vista, and entered the home of A. S. Mead. There they not only killed Mead's livestock and destroyed some of his buildings but they also knocked Mrs. Mead down and carried off the daughter, Hattie Mead, 17, as a prisoner. They tried to take along also a young girl, named Emma, but she cried so lustily that they let her go and one Indian picked up a stick and whipped her all the way back to her father's cabin. A neighbor, Enoch Taylor, who was at the Mead home, was also knocked down. His son was kicked into the fireplace and had a leg burned so badly that he carried the scar for years. Mrs. Taylor was taken prisoner but she and Hattie Mead were allowed to return to camp in the morning.

Still the Indians had not killed anyone. They knew that the United States Government protected the settlers and they feared the great "white father" in Washington. So they went on to Sioux Rapids. Here they entered the cabins with threatening gestures and angry grunts and signs. They took Mrs. Totten and Mrs. Weaver prisoners and held them for several days. The men were beaten and treated badly. Anything the Indians wanted they took from the scanty stores of the settlers, who had no way of getting more food until spring came to thaw the snow. With ruthless waste they shot the livestock, cooked what they wanted and threw the rest away. Then suddenly, one morning, they were gone. The settlers breathed easier.

But a few days later word came down the river of the massacre at Spirit Lake. Now the people in Buena Vista County knew what they had escaped, and also what might yet lie in wait for them. They stayed close inside the cabins, almost afraid to go out after firewood. Abner Bell set out for Fort Dodge with another man to tell the terrible news to the people there. Weeks later there was another scare, when two men came down the river saying that the Indians had

started out on another raid and were moving toward Sioux Rapids. This was a false alarm but the people did not know that, and by this time they were so terrified that they imagined the worst. So they set out from their homes across the snow with starving oxen, and meager provisions. Some went to Sioux City, some got as far as Fort Dodge. It was a terrible journey for all and it is no wonder that few wanted to go back when spring came, even when they were assured that the Indians had gone back far into Minnesota. They could never forget the frightful hardships of that winter. Abner Bell was probably the only one of the original settlers who returned to Sioux Rapids in the spring.

All this trouble might have been prevented if the United States Government had maintained a military post in northwest Iowa to protect the settlers. There had been such a post at Fort Dodge for a few years but when the Indians had been moved out of Iowa, the garrison there had been disbanded. The Indians had always been wandering tribes and in spite of treaties still traveled for miles, looking for better hunting grounds. Inkpaduta and his band had not signed the treaties and so did not receive annuities like the other Indians. They still lurked in Iowa and when they could not find enough game they followed the trail of some settler, to beg or steal.

These very earliest settlers, who had been driven out by Indians, left not even the record of their names behind them. Governor James Grimes of Iowa wrote to President Franklin Pierce in Washington, D. C., requesting protection for the settlers who had been disturbed by wandering bands of Winnebagoes, Sioux, Pottawattamies, Omahas, Sacs, and Foxes. In this letter he stated: "I am reliably informed that the same Indians, but in increased numbers, have again pitched their tents within the State and are making preparations to remain during the winter. The Secretary of this State, General George W. McCleary, writes me that he has information that a large band of Sioux Indians have destroyed the settlements in Buena Vista County and forced the inhabitants to abandon their homes. He also writes me that these Indians are manifestly making preparations for war, and have been and are now making great efforts to induce all of the Mississippi River Sioux to unite with them in hostilities upon the whites. I hear from various sources that several runners have been sent by the Sioux west of the Missouri River, to those in this State, and in Minnesota, with war belts, urging the latter to make common cause with them. The result of all this is a great state of alarm along the whole frontier. The pioneer settlers are abandoning their homes and improvements, and are retiring to the more dense settlements in the interior of the State..." The governor asked for the establishment of a military post on the Big Sioux River near the northwest corner of the

State, and for at least two companies of dragoons or cavalry to protect the settlers.

Meanwhile the frontiersmen took matters into their own hands and organized the Little Sioux Guards. But there were no funds with which to buy guns and other equipment necessary, and the settlers lived so far apart that it was hard to get them together and to train them as a military unit. George Coonley, captain of the Little Sioux Guards, wrote a letter to Governor Grimes, dated January 2, 1857, three short months before the Spirit Lake Massacre. In it he mentioned the difficulties his company had experienced:

"The continued depredations of the Indians upon the inhabitants of Little Sioux Valley have made it necessary to arm in self defense. We have organized an independent military company comprising the inhabitants of Cherokee, Buena Vista, and Clay counties. We have the men but lack the guns Last winter the Indians passing through found the settlers unprepared and took nearly every gun in the above mentioned counties. They are upon us again this winter, burning houses and carrying off and destroying property. With 11 men we attacked 18 Indians but several of our guns being useless were compelled to retreat...During the month of December they have burned several houses and destroyed a large amount of property of settlers."

Even after the Spirit Lake Massacre not much was done to help the settlers. When the people of Fort Dodge heard of the tragedy they got together a company of almost 100 men from that place and from Webster City and set out across the melting snows to rescue any settlers who might be left and to punish the Indians. But the trip was so difficult that by the time the rescue party reached the lakes it was too late to do anything but bury the dead and return home. On the way back, this expedition was caught in a spring blizzard. The temperature fell to 34 degrees below zero and two of the men froze to death. The others suffered terribly and barely returned alive.

Four years later Governor Kirkwood asked the Federal Government for rifles with which to arm the settlers. He got a promise of 1,000 guns which would be sent to Keokuk, but whether any of these guns ever reached the settlers, 400 miles away from the Mississippi, is not known.

Nevertheless these discouragements did not prevent settlers from coming into Buena Vista County. They persisted in spite of every hardship. Even in August 1862 when the Sioux Indians killed 650 white people in Minnesota, the surviving neighbors were not driven away for long. They were too much interested in their new homes and the towns they

hoped to found. The State of Iowa was at last aroused. Governor Kirkwood sent Schuyler R. Ingham of Des Moines to do everything necessary to protect the people of the frontier, and the State Legislature ordered that a force of mounted men be raised to guard the settlers. Three companies of volunteers were rushed from Council Bluffs to Sioux City and a full company was located at Estherville. The old Sioux City cavalry company was sent to Spirit Lake and smaller bodies were stationed at Ocheyedan, Peterson, Cherokee, Ida Grove, Sac City, Correctionville, Little Sioux, West Fork, Melbourne, and Sioux City. Forts were built at Correctionville, Cherokee, Peterson, Estherville, Spirit Lake, and Iowa Lake.

CHAPTER 3

THE COUNTY IS ORGANIZED

It was fall again -- the fall of 1857. Some settlers moved west in ramshackle wagons that would hardly hold together for the trip, some drove smart carriages and spirited horses. Others drove mules, cows, oxen, ponies -- anything that would pull a load. Some had wagons neatly fitted with wagon bows and white canvas for a cover, while others cut willow saplings and bent them over the wagon to make the bows, and used old blankets, bed quilts, homespun coverlets or sheepskins for covering. Some had good guns, plenty of supplies and ammunition, and money to buy bright new Conestoga wagons painted blue, with stout wheels and waterproof wagon bodies which could be floated over rivers like a boat with no leaks to wet the settlers' supplies.

There were no roads then in the Fort Dodge country -- only grass-grown trails. All western Iowa was the Fort Dodge country -- all beyond the Des Moines River.

The creeks were shallow, the marshes narrower, and the grass stood brown and yellow, stiffened by the long days of drying heat. Hiram and William Brooke were driving acrosscountry from Cedar Falls. A settler from the neighboring county of Cherokee has left a description of the crossing, in Thomas McCulla's History of Cherokee County. There was a ferry at Fort Dodge, a ferryman, and a boat made of a cottonwood log hollowed out and sharpened at one end, rounded at the other. In this the settlers were taken across the Des Moines River. Farther down-stream was Des Moines, a small village then with only one brick building -- the new State Capitol. Wagons were floated across the river, or taken apart and carried in the ferryboat, a few pieces at a time.

"We came across the prairie", says that first settler, "when there were no roads whatever, and not a bush or tree of any kind with the exception of three or four cottonwood trees at the inlet of Storm Lake. There were no houses at Storm Lake at that time. We were guided from Sac City to Storm Lake by following the crushed prairie grass made by a man, who with a wagon, had made the journey shortly before. We camped on the lake shore to let our worn oxen recuperate for a few days and then went on to Cherokee." Now perhaps the man who had gone on before was a settler going into Buena Vista County. Perhaps it was the Brooke brothers themselves.

When these two brothers arrived in the country near Sioux Rapids they took four quarter sections of timber land with upland pasture land adjoining, and in this same place William Brooke lived for more than 50 years. Brooke Township was named for these two brothers. We can imagine the frightened curlews flying above their heads as they stopped the oxen, wheeling back in flight to take a second look, then stretching their wings up over their backs as they alighted safely again on the prairie. We can imagine the flocks of prairie chickens scattered by the sound of voices and running off through the grass, and the smell of fall in the air, the smoky blue of the sunset, the coolness of the night ahead.

The next spring another man came to the settlement on the Little Sioux. He was not a farmer but a town-builder. His name was Luther H. Barnes. He was what the farmers called a speculator, for he bought land with the idea of dividing it into town lots and reselling it at a large profit. Barnes had money and was intent on making more. His town was a paper town and he named it Sioux Rapids, not because he found any rapids in the river but because he liked the sound of the name. There were many towns like this all over Iowa -- towns planned on paper, named, surveyed, and divided into lots. Many never grew beyond the lofty dreams of their founders. So it was at first with Sioux Rapids. Barnes had bought the Templeton claim and large parts of two other sections and had laid out a city of great magnitude and importance. But the city did not grow according to his plan. So far there were only about 13 settlers who had come in.

W. S. Lee came in 1858, and with him M. S. Jameson. Lee was a New Yorker by birth and proved to be a shrewd business man who entered at once into the public affairs in the county. Moses Van Kirk came about the same time and settled on section two in Barnes Township. A man by the name of Cole built a log house on section six in Lee Township. This house was afterward owned by Stengrin Hesla, the "Shoemaker", as he was called, who settled on section one, Barnes Township.

Timber was so scarce that many of the first settlers lived in sod houses or dugouts. A traveler at that time might have thought that the county was dotted with oversized gopher mounds, each with a man-made chimney from which smoke and fire poured as though it came from the inner regions of the earth. To build one of these sod houses, the homesteader would first dig down a few feet, cutting out a series of steps leading up to what was to be the front door. Then he would put up a framework built of as much lumber as he could haul for the rafters of the roof and the side walls.

Freshly cut sods packed over this made a warm shelter. The roots of prairie sod were so firmly entangled and thickly matted that they offered almost weather-proof protection. The doorway was covered with boards, skins, a rag carpet or an old quilt, and the window openings similarly stopped up until the occupant had a chance to drive to Fort Dodge and buy real doors and windows to set in place. In such primitive shelters the families of Buena Vista County lived while they worked to make the prairie yield them a living and money enough to buy lumber to build real homes. They used native grass for fuel, as described in the Past and Present of Buena Vista County:

"We could always tell when our neighbors were getting supper by the puff of fire that would come from the chimneys where slough grass was being burned. And everyone burned it, as coal was too high, and money too scarce. Twisted slough hay made a hot fire for a few minutes, and was used extensively. It would ignite at once and the fire would puff out of the top of the chimney, visible for miles on an evening. It was a comical sight also to see the people come tumbling out of the sod shanties when callers came, for all the world like a lot of gophers coming out of their holes."

Sometimes the grass burned right out on the prairie, and people had good cause to dread the "prairie fire." Occasionally stray bands of Indians would start a blaze to scare up game for hunting, and in the fall when the grass was as dry as tinder, it could easily catch fire accidentally. "When once started", says Past and Present, "the only thing to do for a man who was in their path was to save himself, and that as quickly as possible. During the season when they were frequent, the settler could expect to be awakened almost any night and see the sky painted red from the glow of the flame, his house full of smoke, and if the proper precautions had not been taken he and his family in danger. Imagine a sheet of flame from ten to fifteen feet high, sometimes a mile in width, rushing along with the wind, with a dull roar that could be heard for a long distance, and you have some idea of what such a spectacle was."

How Dr. W. D. Bailey of Storm Lake escaped death in a prairie fire has been told by his daughter, Mrs. India Butterfield, in the Pilot-Tribune for January 15, 1925. One autumn day when Dr. Bailey was out hunting he noticed a peculiar haze over the sky and he knew that the prairie must be afire. He had to act quickly before the flames rolled toward him over the horizon. "Dismounting from his pony", wrote Mrs. Butterfield, "he started a fire to meet the oncoming one. The smoke became so dense that he covered his nose and mouth with his cap. As the roaring fire came on it

parted at his backfire and went on either side of him and the frightened pony, leaving a blackened waste behind."

In those early years swarms of mosquitoes bothered the settlers and were a genuine menace. During the summer months, especially before the swamp lands were drained, they infested the region. Cotton clothing offered no protection from their stings and people had to suffer the discomfort of heavy clothes to ward them off. Sometimes at night it was necessary to build smudges and drive them out of the house with smoke before the family could go to bed. At a dance -- possibly the first held in the county at the Fourth of July celebration at Isaac Enders' home in 1861 -- it was necessary to fill an old kettle with smoldering and "ill-smelling material" and bring it into the room between each number to smoke out the mosquitoes and allow the party to progress in some degree of comfort.

Of course, prairie life had its compensations. In fine weather, almost everyone could appreciate the beauty of the spacious open country. Wild roses grew thick and, according to Mrs. Butterfield, the sunsets were "glorious", and the moonlight turned "the grass into billowy waves."

For the first few years elk, deer, and other game were plentiful. Often flocks of wild geese and ducks darkened the sky. In the winter the men would fish by cutting holes in the ice and killing the fish with spears as they swam near the opening. Trapping was a profitable occupation too, and high grade furs were shipped east from Buena Vista County. The women made practically all of the clothing for their own households, and they took bits of warm fur to trim coats and hats. It was not unusual for them to make caps and mittens of mink trapped in the vicinity.

While the settlers were locating homes, planting crops, and making the most of the natural advantages of the region, they grew increasingly anxious for a county organization, with officials elected to carry on the business of the county and a courthouse where taxes could be paid, law courts held, and other public affairs directed and managed.

Buena Vista County had been attached to Woodbury County for voting and judicial purposes until 1856. Then Judge A. W. Hubbard of Woodbury County appointed a committee of three men to choose a county seat. The only settlement at that time was at Sioux Rapids but the committee did not approve that site because it was so near the banks of the river. Instead they chose a location one mile south and marked off ten acres for the town in section 18 of what afterward became Lee Township. They called this place Prairieville.

But nothing happened for two years more. Then William S. Lee came out from the East and settled in "Trusty Gulch" just north of Sioux Rapids. He acquired the land at Prairieville and soon the townsite came to be known as Leesburg. He built a log house there which was used for a dwelling, for religious services, and for official purposes. But no real town nor courthouse ever materialized.

The actual organization of Buena Vista County took place in the fall of 1858 after Luther Barnes had prepared a petition and carried it to the district court of Woodbury County in Sioux City. The signers of the petition were Lennox Barnes, W. S. Lee, M. S. Jameson, Abner Bell, W. R. Weaver, Morris Metcalf, "Shoemaker" Hesla, Charles Metcalf, John W. Tucker, Moses Van Kirk, S. H. Packard, Luther Barnes' son-in-law, Barnes, Cole,and Arthur Reeves.

Woodbury County authorities did not grant the petition because they were not satisfied that the signers were a majority of the legal voters of Buena Vista County. Instead they ordered L. B. Crittenden to act as organizing sheriff and to post notices of township elections to be held that October. The settlers did not like this arrangement, and S. H. Packard and 21 other legal voters signed another petition objecting to it. This was granted after Luther Barnes had taken an oath that a majority of the legal voters in the county had signed it.

Lennox Barnes acted as organizing sheriff and posted notices that the election would be held November 15, 1858. At that time a number of officials were chosen: Sheriff, Abner Bell, County Judge, Arthur T. Reeves, County Clerk, John W. Tucker, Superintendent of Common Schools, Mordecai Jameson. The offices of treasurer and recorder, coroner, surveyor, drainage commissioner, township clerk, supervisor, constable, justice of the peace and township assessor were also filled.

The results of the election were odd in many ways. There were 17 offices to fill, 15 votes were cast for each, and yet the poll book lists show only 14 voters! One name is missing. Some of the men were evidently absent from the county. W. S. Lee, one of the leaders, neither voted nor ran for office. John Tucker, William Brooke, Hiram Brooke, and M. S. Jameson were successful candidates, but did not vote. William Weaver was elected to three offices while Mendel Metcalf and Aquilla Cook each had two.

One of the first acts of the new officers was to levy a six-mill road tax and bridge tax which brought in about $200 the first year. Another task was to lay off the county into townships so that roads and schools could be built, but this

was neglected for nearly 11 years during which there was only one big township -- Barnes. Probably the worry and hardships of surviving several unfavorable seasons caused the settlers to concentrate on more personal problems.

The winter of 1858-1859 was again a hard one and in early spring came another rumor of approaching Indians. The settlers had very little ammunition and some of their guns were as ramshackle as their wagons. Every kind of gun was used, muskets from the Revolutionary War, Kentucky rifles, squirrel shooters, shotguns, pistols, long guns, sawed-off guns, good guns and poor guns -- anything that would shoot. There were even some of the new Sharpe's rifles, breechloading guns to be used in the coming struggle of the Civil War. But they needed shot and powder to load the guns and during the long winter their supplies had been used up. S. H. Packard was a young and able man so he started off to Fort Dodge to bring home the ammunition. He reached the Des Moines River safely and started across but he did not know that the spring thaws had already weakened the ice. When about half way across he broke through, and though he saved himself from drowning, his feet were badly frozen before he could reach the settlement. Both feet had to be amputated when he reached Fort Dodge. He never returned to Sioux Rapids. When his father-in-law, Luther Barnes, heard of this tragedy he too gave up and soon afterward left the county, never to return. All that was left of his promised city were the stakes which marked the blocks and streets. The thrifty settlers soon gathered these for firewood and the land was once more taken over for farming purposes. The name of Barnes is, however, still remembered in the county, for the township and grove were named for him, and though the town itself was called Hollingsworth Ford for some time, the original name finally came back into use and the town, as Barnes had named it, began to prosper.

CHAPTER 4

THE SWAMP LAND CONTROVERSY

W. S. Lee returned to Wisconsin in the summer of 1859 and brought back with him the first members of the Norwegian colony which was to develop and help to build the community of Sioux Rapids. These five men were Knudt Stennerson, O. O. Rang, Christian Johnson, and Henry and Ole Gullickson.

Abner Bell and Henry Gullickson, both bachelors, moved into the upper story of Christian Johnson's log cabin. Gullickson was Mrs. Johnson's brother. The two men slept on the floor and cooked their meals on Mrs. Johnson's stove downstairs. They had a small ladder to climb up and down from their attic accommodations. Johnson's cabin was considered a fine home for the time. The walls were about three feet high on the sides and a man could walk through the center of the cabin without stooping to avoid hitting his head on the rafters.

W. S. Lee laid the first floor of sawed lumber in the county, in what was believed to be Buena Vista County's first frame house. He had the lumber brought from the village of Peterson where John Gilbert owned and operated a portable sawmill. Lee also dug the county's first well, in 1861. Up to that time he and others had obtained water from springs and from the Little Sioux River. Lee's well was probably similar to that described by W. F. Couch..." ten feet deep and shored up with what we called "nigger heads." The pump was not a pump at all, but consisted of a long pole with a hook on one end, by which the water was drawn up in a four foot well anywhere and have five feet of water." Surely to some of the settlers it must have seemed that the water on the ground was a full foot deep in the swamplands.

Buena Vista County's first murder took place in 1859. It was the result of ill feeling between Enoch Taylor and Ambrose Mead, who illegally claimed Taylor's land. Mead hated his quiet, industrious neighbor and sought to drive him off the desirable acreage. He watched Taylor and was ready at any time to start an open fight. Learning that a friend, J. Bicknell, had sold some rails to Taylor for building purposes, Mead got his son and O. M. Barker, a neighbor, and they went to the Bicknell claim and began loading the rails into their own wagon. Taylor came by and, seeing them, told them the rails were his. Barker became so angry with Taylor that he stripped off his coat, grabbed the younger Mead's revolver and stood prepared to fight. Surprised at this, Taylor closed with him, attempting to get the gun away from him. Barker resisted and Taylor soon fell,

mortally wounded by three bullets which were fired during the brief struggle. The news that Taylor had been murdered soon spread. Everyone was shocked and the new county officers were called upon to punish the criminal. Barker was followed to Spirit Lake where he was caught and brought back. There was no jail in Sioux Rapids so he was held in the Woodbury County jail at Sioux City.

In October of that year Barker was tried in Sioux Rapids and found guilty. He was sentenced to the Fort Madison Penitentiary but while on the way escaped from the Sheriff and fled to the eastern coast. From there he left the United States in a ship and was never again heard from. His punishment was exile instead of jail sentence. The Sheriff was charged with bribery but no one could prove that he had purposely let Barker escape and the matter was dropped. The trial and charges of this murder cost the new county of Buena Vista $2,000.

The next year Moses Van Kirk, the new county judge, gave a contract to James Gleason and John Stanley to build a bridge over the Little Sioux River at Sioux Rapids. Gleason and Stanley were to receive 5,000 acres of swamp land to pay for the bridge. According to Iowa law this contract was illegal because swamp lands were not supposed to be used to pay for bridges. The bridge was built by another contractor, Jasper Lindsey, but a flood the following year washed it out. The county was bonded for the sum of $18,000 to rebuild it and other bridges. Of this amount $12,000 went to Lee, who evidently took the second contract, and $6,000 went to Isaac Enders to bridge the sloughs and creeks of the county.

Few bridges were ever built and all this time the county's financial state grew worse and worse. The tax levies brought in little money, there were so few settlers, and improvements which were needed and voted always took more money than was in the treasury. County warrants were issued freely to pay bills but as these could not be redeemed in cash they depreciated in value until they were only worth from 20 to 30 cents on the dollar. Contracts had to be given on that basis and then the depreciated warrants were to be kept over for several years until the county could pay them in full and with interest. In this way the county was always losing money on contracts and was always in debt.

A county census in 1860 showed only 67 residents in Buena Vista and the population did not grow appreciably in the next five years. But some people came every year. The State census for 1869 showed a population of 242.

In 1861 Isaac Enders obtained a contract to build a schoolhouse in Lee Township, and Hiram and William Brooke took another contract to build a schoolhouse in section six in Barnes Township. Although a special election was called and the contracts were ratified, these buildings were never finished.

In the fall of 1861 John Cofer came from O'Brien County to open negotiations for the purchase of all the swamp land in the county. These lands were considered worthless at that time for not only did the settlers doubt that they could ever be drained but they considered land without trees as worthless anyway. Many of them thought just as old man Evans had when he said: "All these folks that are rushing to the prairies...will starve out and come back. God makes trees grow to show men where the good land is."

Two years earlier county officials had experienced a disagreeable episode on account of the swamp lands. They had hired J. S. Ringland to survey that territory. He was to be paid according to the number of acres surveyed. After 16 days of work, Ringland finished his report, sent it to State officials in Des Moines, and handed in his bill. Abner Bell immediately raised objections. He had been following the work of Ringland and his assistant and claimed that the two could not possibly have covered the entire county in 16 days with any degree of accuracy. Moreover, Bell stated that "during the time the men were supposed to be at work locating the swamp lands they were in fact lying in camp on a hill near Sioux Rapids, drinking whiskey, playing poker and telling stories."

Bell hurried to Peterson and had a lawyer draw up a written protest. Then, mounting his horse again, he rode almost day and night in the hope of beating Ringland's report to Des Moines. There is no actual record to show whether or not he was successful, but apparently he was, for no lands were patented to the county then or later.

Some time afterward, in 1861, W. S. Lee investigated the matter. John Cofer had then offered to buy all the swamp land in the county in return for a contract to build a courthouse. Cofer, a rather notorious land dealer, was no doubt a smooth and convincing talker, but he made the mistake of outlining his proposal to Lee. Lee liked the idea, and intended to use it for his own benefit.

How Cofer must have raged when he learned that Lee had tricked him! There was nothing he could do about it, however. Taking advantage of his office as county clerk, Lee persuaded the other county officials to deed to him the

right, title and interest in 64,880 acres of swamp and overflowed lands for the nominal sum of 16 cents per acre, in return for which he contracted to build a courthouse at Sioux Rapids and a bridge over the Little Sioux River at Linn Grove.

It may well be asked how such an astonishing agreement could be made, allowing Lee to have something more than 100 square miles, more than one-sixth of the county's total area. Even in the wettest times, Buena Vista County never had that much real swamp land. The explanation seems to be that the surveyors, who were paid by the acre, simply reported most of the timberless country which they considered worthless anyway, as swamp land.

Overflowed lands were granted to the State of Iowa by Congress in 1850, and again by the State of Iowa to each county in which they were located in 1853. They were to be competently surveyed and the report approved, but though such had not been the case in Buena Vista County, Lee was given the contract. He started work on the courthouse, having large numbers of trees cut down and trimmed, but for some reason he never did anything more. He left the lumber lying on the ground, to be picked up later and used by the settlers. By 1865 the affair had not made any progress. Lee had not built either courthouse or bridge. Instead, in that year, he turned his building contract over to Richard Ridgway, who had not come to the county until 1863. However, Lee had such a strong influence over the other county officials that they agreed to let him do as he wished. Lee at the same time retained the swamp lands which he regarded as already belonging to him. He resigned his position as county treasurer and went east to sell the lands, making an enormous profit. A man named Porter B. Roberts, who bought the most of the area, resold the land in small acreages.

Richard Ridgway did not build the courthouse or construct the bridge for which he had contracted. Like Lee, he cut some timber and let it lie around to be picked up by the settlers.

It was nearly 20 years later, in 1882, when all of the officials who had "run the county" were out of office, that the courthouse swamp-land deal was straightened out. Abner Bell was one of the principal witnesses for the county. In fact, people thought that Bell was really behind the legal action. Richard Ridgway and William Brooke were among the other witnesses. W. S. Lee himself swore that he had entered into contract in good faith, and knowing that the law did not authorize the exchange of land for courthouse purposes, stated that the building he had proposed to put up

was intended as a seminary. Bell contended that Lee had intended to build the courthouse, but in any case 5,000 acres of the swamp land were to be transferred to Lee only when "the building material for the courthouse was actually prepared and on the ground." Probably that was why Lee had cut the wood for the building but never had done anything else. The lumber was "on the ground." At any rate, the court decided against Lee and he and all the people who had purchased from him lost their claim to the lands.

What had the county officers used for a courthouse back in the 1860's when both Lee and Ridgway neglected to build the quarters for which they had contracted? The answer is simple. Lee's brother-in-law, George W. Struble, and Mrs. Struble and their children, moved to Sioux Rapids from New York in the fall of 1863. They built a two-story log cabin and made it a gathering place for the community. The county court convened in the wide living room, often adjourning to allow Mrs. Struble to set the table for dinner. The meals she prepared were enjoyed by the judge, the lawyers, the jury, and all the members of the court. The board of supervisors also met in this room. This was all very convenient to the scheming Lee. He or his relatives heard almost every word that was ever uttered about the business of the county and could thus control affairs for their own profit. Oliver Moore and David Farnam, two other settlers living in Sioux Rapids at the time, were also relatives of Lee. As if that were not enough, Charles Lee, a brother, moved to the county in 1861. In January 1862 he was appointed county treasurer.

Struble's cabin was well built. The door was fastened with a huge log chain and the windows had thick shutters of walnut, tough enough to withstand an attack from Indians. It is said that Struble acquired his land from a well known Indian called "Feather in the Lake." The 160-acre tract was located just outside of the limits of Sioux Rapids. Before long Struble replaced the cabin with a frame house which was later used for many years as a hotel. This was not the first hotel, for William Swiford built the first in the town, but it was the most popular and became known far and wide for its cheer. In its office or barroom many political meetings were held.

There were as yet no railroads, and the people of Buena Vista County were far from any lanes of communication and travel, except the stagecoach. During a blizzard in 1865, every sign of a road or a trail was "whited out." It was impossible to go to the mill, and when flour gave out the people had to grind their corn in a coffee grinder and live on that. As soon as the stage route was open again, Struble sent to Sioux City for a 50-pound sack of flour, which cost him $6.25. There was no flouring mill in the county until 1870.

During 1861, the year that John Cofer visited the county with his swamp-land proposal and Charles Lee came out to join his brother, the American Civil War began. For a long time there had been ill feeling between the people of the North and those of the South over the slavery question. During the election campaign of 1860 the Southerners had threatened secession and disunion in case Abraham Lincoln should be elected. Lincoln won, and on April 12, 1861, not long after his inauguration, Southern troops fired on Fort Sumter. This was believed to be the beginning of a well organized plan to destroy the Union. Three days later, on Monday, April 15, President Lincoln issued the proclamation declaring war on the South and asking for 75,000 volunteers. As it turned out, many thousand more men were needed, and the war lasted four years, much longer than anyone had anticipated. Following Lincoln's request, Governor Kirkwood of Iowa sent out a call for the first regiment from the State. Iowans responded and played an important part in winning the Civil War. However, Buena Vista County was still isolated and was slow to get news of the events happening in the outside world. There were so few residents, and these were so occupied with their own affairs, that none volunteered to serve in the army during that first year.

But in the summer of 1863, Charles Lee resigned his county office and enlisted, going to Burlington to enter the army for service during the rest of the war. At the time he left there was only $69.20 in the county treasury and a record of 13,000 acres of entered lands. The tax money collected that year amounted to $1,500.

The constant struggle to pay expenses, raise crops and keep on the watch for hostile Indians took most of the settlers' time and energy. The Sioux, led by Little Crow, rose against the whites in New Ulm, Minnesota, in the summer of 1862 and the massacre that resulted was enough to scare the people of northern Iowa and put them on guard. It was not surprising that Buena Vista residents felt little interest in the Civil War, of which they knew almost no details, and which was being fought hundreds of miles away.

Finally, as more men were needed in the Union army, a draft went into operation and in Buena Vista County two men were drawn, Oliver Moore and Henry Gullickson. Neither went, for substitution was allowed. Moore sent George Ditton as a substitute, and when Gullickson was not accepted, Knudt Stennerson went in his place. Both men survived, but Peter Holland, who in 1864 resigned his job as one of the county supervisors and joined the army, was killed and buried in Tennessee. The rest of the people, at last aroused and anxious to help with the war, voted a bond issue of $20,000 to help transport fighting men to the front.

CHAPTER 5

PIONEER PERSONALITIES

During 1862 a serious election fight involved the community and was not settled until the following year. W. S. Lee and George Killam were rival candidates for the office of county treasurer and the contest was heated. Both men fought hard to line up the 20 voters that comprised the total strength of the county: it was even asserted that votes were bought and sold. Sometimes cash, or a cow, was exchanged for the promise of a vote, but both candidates went to bed that night before election uncertain whether the votes they had bought were really theirs or only bad promises. Each man doubted his neighbor's word. Even when the ballots were counted, the men accused one another of having tampered with the ballot box. Killam began legal proceedings against Lee, but finally gave up, sold his farm, and left the county. Lee had won again.

In 1866 another election fight started. A cry went up that the same set of men were holding office year after year, and that a change should be made. When Richard Ridgway had been elected treasurer the previous year, he had been prevented from serving, at the point of a gun, and Oliver Moore was allowed to have the office. Now Abner Bell and Hubbard Sanderson decided to fight the office holders -- W. S. Lee and his friends. Every voter was asked to come out and vote. They came, and came well armed.

It was the October election. The air was crisp and cold and the men were angry as they stood on street corners watching and talking. Open battle was expected to break out at any moment if the main body of citizens did not win, for the election was a fight to the finish. No more fraud and misuse of public funds was to be tolerated. Even Uncle Michael Hollingsworth, who was a Quaker and a peaceful citizen, came to the polls armed and ready to battle for his rights.

The long day drew to an end, the polls were closed and the votes counted. Bell and Sanderson had won. The citizens were jubilant over the result and celebrations and congratulations were in order. But some of the people were still angry, and an ugly rumor started that the old officers should be lynched. That night M. S. Jameson and Oliver Moore left the county, taking with them every record which had any bearing on their past financial transactions. They also took the minute book, in which the record of the doings of the board of supervisors was kept, and the county seal. They went to friends at Fort Dodge and said that the citizens of Sioux Rapids were threatening them. These friends

decided to organize an expedition to go back and help them and to restore them to the offices they had lost. But it was not long before the real story of what had happened reached Fort Dodge and the expedition was immediately abandoned. No one would help the dishonest officials and at last Moore and Jameson were indicted in the district court of Clay County for wrong conduct in office and warrants were issued for their arrest. But then the guilty ones had disappeared. Their cases were finally dismissed.

The new board of supervisors met November 16, 1866, and declaring the office of clerk vacant, appointed Abner Bell. The county was then eight years old and so far had no permanent records. Thus all the facts gathered up to this time have been set down as given from memory by Abner Bell on the one side and W. S. Lee on the other. As far as Bell was concerned, it was said that his writing was "frightful" and his spelling still worse, but at least he could read it himself.

Since the county had no courthouse, and Bell did not wish the Struble home to be the permanent meeting place, he set about providing other quarters. He built a sod house up against the Christian Johnson log cabin, where he had been living. It was 14 feet square and seven feet high. He moved into it, made himself a bed of poles and willow boughs, made a straw mattress, and used his buffalo robe for covering. He also obtained a stove so he could make pancakes and was thus "independent." Nelson Suckow, son of Lars Suckow who settled at Sioux Rapids about that time, wrote about Abner Bell in the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune for February 26, 1931. After he was snugly fixed in the sod hut, says Suckow, "the hardy old pioneer then invited the board of supervisors (of which my father was a member) to use his home for a courthouse, which they proceeded to do. It remained the official meeting place of the county government for a long time.

"The place was pretty well crowded, sometimes, but Bell had boxes to sit on and the supervisors brought their dinners with them. They always adjourned for dinner, at which time Bell mixed up his batter and made himself a meal of pancakes. If any of the officers forgot their lunch they would steal some of the pancakes when Bell turned his back."

At about this time, 1868 or 1869, F. M. Mills was publishing the Iowa State Register in Des Moines. Day after he saw the long and continuous stream of wagons and prairie schooners drawn by oxen and horses passing through Des Moines on their way to Kansas and Nebraska, and he decided to give Iowa a little publicity and turn the tide of immigration nearer home. He sent a man to the Sioux City land

office to make a map of every northwest Iowa county, showing all the land which had not yet been taken. When this map was brought back, he printed a pamphlet showing the map and a truthful description of the land, written from the surveyor's notes. He then met every team coming into Des Moines and gave each driver a booklet. When the settlers read this description of the fine farm land in Iowa they drove into the Fort Dodge country with plans to stay. And they did stay, more and more of them. Mills' literature had an almost immediate effect, for by the fall of 1870 the records at the Sioux City land office showed that every section of land open to settlement had been taken. It is said that Buena Vista County grew fastest of all the counties. From 242 people the population grew to 1,160 the first year and by the second was well over 2,000.

Linn Grove, in Barnes Township, was named by the surveyors who camped at the site in 1855. They admired the heavy growth of linden trees in the woods there and so called the spot Linn Grove.

The man who was most energetic in promoting the growth of Linn Grove had arrived from New York in the spring of 1866. He was Moses Sweet, an experienced miller who was at once attracted by the possibility of water power development on the Little Sioux River. Realizing that future settlers would need lumber with which to build homes, he bought the northwest quarter of section 8 from Hiram Julbert, paying $2,000 for it. Within a year or two he had built a dam and a framework of hewn logs on which to put the machinery he had shipped in. With this he turned out hardwood framework that was still in use in various buildings many years later.

Before long he decided to use the water power to grind flour and about 1876 excavated a long ditch since known as the millrace. The dam was thrown across the river just below the race head, resulting in approximately a six foot head of water for power. Sweet built new quarters about 15 rods down from the race intake at the river.

A number of Scandinavians were attracted to this locality. One of the first was the Hesla family, which moved to Barnes Township from the northeastern corner of Iowa in 1866. They took up a half-section homestead, and their son, O. L. Hesla, lived on the property almost continuously for more than 60 years.

The first settler in the southern part of the county was Daniel B. Harrison, who in 1867 located at the west end of Storm Lake. That fall George Holt arrived and made his

home near the Harrisons, and two years later, in the summer of 1869, a post office was established with Daniel Harrison as its first postmaster. Charles Pomeroy was congressman from the district at that time and helped to put the petition through. A postal route was then established between Sac City and Sioux Rapids by way of Storm Lake and was continued until the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad was built through the north part of the county.

How many settlers were already in Sioux Rapids when Storm Lake was first settled? We cannot name them all but a few we do remember. There was the Hollingsworth family who came on a summer day in June and stopped to eat their first meal in the shade of a big willow tree which remained a landmark for many years. The family included Michael Hollingsworth, the old Quaker; Isaiah Hollingsworth, his son; and his son's wife and their children, and Nurse Hollingsworth, who was said to be the only doctor west of Fort Dodge for years. This family lived for about a year in a double log house which had been used for a fort. In the fall of 1865 they moved to their claim outside of town in Barnes Township. Here each year Hollingsworth and his son would break and plant a few acres. They raised only the crops the family needed because there was no market for surplus grain or meat until the railroads were built.

Another settler was John Franklin Clough who served in the Civil War as a member of Company I, Twenty-seventh Iowa Volunteer Infantry, and fought in the battles of Shiloh, Vicksburg, Pittsburg Landing, Bull Run, and also at Pleasant Hill and Holly Springs. After the war he returned to his family at Waukon, Iowa, and in the spring of 1866 they moved to Buena Vista County. When Clough entered the army he was strong and well but after his long service and constant fatigue from long marches his health was poor. The family lived in a sod shanty for the first years and had to drive 70 miles to Fort Dodge for supplies. In spite of these hardships Clough was made county supervisor and worked hard to build up a good community.

It was a boy from Norway who helped to build the first store in Sioux Rapids. He was Henry Jacobson who had come to America when he was 12 years old. Later with two other young men he started for Buena Vista County and at Sioux Rapids in 1869 they opened the first store. The nearest railroad was then at Fort Dodge and they went there to get supplies. They used four yoke of oxen to haul their goods and when crossing a bad slough would put all of them on one wagon to pull through the deep mud. One day they traveled only four miles because the trail was so poor. It usually took a week to make the entire trip. Sugar sold for 20 cents a pound, tea at $2.50 a pound, flour for $7 per 100

pounds ,and salt at $10 a barrel. By the time the store was ready for business the settlers were ready to buy. Ox teams were kept busy hauling goods all summer and many a pioneer woman was glad to buy new calico for a bright dress without spending a week going to Fort Dodge for cloth. Later Jacobson started the first creamery in the county. Torkel Torkelson was another Norwegian to reach the county at an early date. When he started for Sioux Rapids with his family the Civil War was still in progress and he had to obtain permission from State authorities to go from one state to another. In November the family reached Fort Dodge where they remained during the winter. In the spring of 1863 they reached the Little Sioux River where they built a log cabin and spent the summer. But in the fall they heard rumors of Indian troubles so they again moved into a house, on section 8, where the settlers had fortified a place, prepared against attack. Three families lived here together -- the Torkelsons, the Johnsons, and the Stennersons. Here they lived for three years and then Torkelson built another cabin on the farm he had taken in section 9. On this farm the family lived ever afterward, always adding to their land holdings and to their buildings and livestock. Torkelson often heard wolves howling at night and would occasionally see a herd of deer or elk and sometimes even buffalo. Ox teams were used in crossing the sloughs because the cattle were more quiet and patient and would keep on wading,while horses feared the deep mud holes and would start plunging and turning wildly to get their hoofs on solid footing.

John Russell Howe worked as a farm hand first near Peterson and then came to Buena Vista County and took a quarter section of land which he entered as a homestead. He bought a team of oxen for $150, paid $60 down, and gave his note for the remainder. Later when he was unable to pay the note, Stephen Olney, who held it, let him work it out by chopping wood, hauling hay, and in doing other jobs. Later Howe went to Sioux City to help a man locate and prove his claim but the man failed to pay him so he came back home. He tried to buy flour but was refused credit and had to haul grist from the mill for a friend in order to get some. The next year he took a yearling steer to Sioux Rapids and by selling this animal was able to buy his winter supplies. His family used hay for fuel, cutting the long slough grass and twisting it up into bundles, and piling it up for the winter as others did.

Dr. Stephen Olney was the first practicing physician in Buena Vista County. He came there very early and at first busied himself with helping with the accounts in the treasurer's office and surveying in the county, because he had only a few patients. His practice grew, however, until often he had to work all night driving over the prairies to

look after the sick throughout a wide area, braving blizzards and rain storms to relieve the suffering of more and more people as the population grew. In 1872 the young doctor married the daughter of William S. Lee and later moved to South Dakota, but still kept his land near Sioux Rapids.

B. O. Christenson also came from Norway, and started the first furniture store at Sioux Rapids. In October 1872 he arrived in the town and built his store, hauling the lumber from Newell. He took O. K. Hogen into partnership with him but even with their combined resources they were almost out of funds when the store was finished. They had only $100 left with which to buy furniture. Besides this the financial panic of 1873 left the county hard pressed for any money at all. Farmers were obliged to pay for any goods bought with black walnut lumber which brought only a low price on the market. The finest quality of black walnut sold for four cents a foot for dry lumber, three cents for green. After 1880 the business prospered, but Christenson finally sold out to a larger firm and started a cabinet shop of his own. He had learned this trade in Norway as a boy apprentice.

William Brooke, another early settler, proved in later years to be the savior of his community. There were about 35 people living at that time near Barnes Grove but Brooke had come earlier and had stored away several hundred bushels of corn. When winter blizzards came, after a summer in which grasshoppers had destroyed the corn. Brooke gave corn to his neighbors, rationing it out according to the size of the family, and so this Sioux Rapids settlement got through a hard winter.

In June 1869, shortly after the first settlement at Storm Lake was made, a group of citizens petitioned the board of supervisors to lay off the county into townships so that roads and schools could be established. Before this there had been but one large township, Barnes, in the county. In July, therefore, the supervisors met. The place of meeting was an unfurnished store building and they used sawhorses for chairs and a work bench for a council table. J. D. Adams, Daniel Harrison, and W. S. Harlan were the committee sent from Storm Lake. Before reaching the meeting place this delegation stopped at Struble's Hotel in Sioux Rapids and found W. S. Lee and Dr. Stephen Olney hard at work on a prospective township map which divided the county into seven townships, four in the north and three in the south. They thought this was fair as the northern part of the county had been settled since 1856 and the south part only since 1867. The population in the north half was, of course, much greater.

After some discussion of the matter, Lee Olney and the committee left the hotel to go to the supervisors' meeting. There the rivalry between the two communities started. The Storm Lake committee asked for an equal number of townships for both sections, but since each township elected a member to the board of supervisors the Sioux Rapids people wanted to keep a majority on their side. So in spite of the protestations of the committee, Dr. Olney's map was adopted by the board, and seven townships were created.

The board named the first township Lee, in honor of W. S. Lee. Harrison and Harlan selected Storm Lake as the name for their first township. Poland Township was named by Dr. Olney from a place in Ohio, his former home, and J. D. Adams named Nokomis Township for the place from which he had come. Brooke Township was named in honor of William Brooke, and George Struble named another township Coon, after the name of the stream which flowed through it. The name Barnes was retained as the name of the township in which Sioux Rapids was located. These names were recorded that day and were never changed.

Later, however, Elk Township was set off from part of Nokomis, and in 1872 Fairfield was set off and also Newell, Maple Valley, Grant, Providence, and Emma, which was later named Scott Township. Lincoln Township was created in 1873, Hayes in 1877, and Washington in 1878. The Atlas of 1904 shows these 17 townships. Later Storm Lake Township was incorporated with the city of Storm Lake, making 16 townships in the final organization of the county.

CHAPTER 6

LOCATING THE COURTHOUSE

No town had ever grown up as planned at the site of Prairieville, a mile from the river, and finally the people of the county realized that it would be better to build the courthouse at Sioux Rapids. Up until 1869 the courts and boards had met in the Struble and Bell homes as described, or in other houses or storerooms. Even in 1870, when the grand jury of the first term of district court ever held in Buena Vista County met on May 5, the members gathered at the Struble home, where they held their session in the corn crib. James M. Hoskins, one of the jury, later wrote: "There was little use for the jury. After casting about and investigating all the crimes that had been committed in the community, we finally brought in a charge of larceny against a boy who had stolen a jack knife. We worked hard four days this was the only crime we could be sure of. Judge Henry Ford of Sioux City was presiding and after hearing all the evidence in the case he sent the young man to the reform school for a short time. After adjournment the court, bar, jurors, witnesses and all who remained would gather about the big table and play poker. There was not much ostentation or formality about court proceedings in those days."

In January 1870, the treasurer, Hubbard Sanderson, had his office in his home several miles from Sioux Rapids on the east side of the river near the Clay County Line. Ole Johnson, the auditor, also had his office in his home, although that was more than two miles southwest of Sioux Rapids. Ryan Hard, the sheriff, had neither office nor jail. O. H. Dahl, clerk of courts, conducted business at his home a mile south of Johnson's, and people had to go to the hovel of O. H. Storla, the county recorder, half a mile from Dahl's, to inspect the records. The Storla family lived in a dark one-room cave-like sort of place, crowded with children. But here in this gloomy place the early records and land titles were kept.

The population of Buena Vista County was still small and scattered, and it was hard to get anything done. All felt the need for a courthouse, but found it difficult to agree upon the building. A site had been given to the county in 1869; it was in Block 12, Sioux Rapids. A contract was drawn up calling for a courthouse 26 by 36 feet, two stories high with three rooms downstairs, a hall, and two stairways. On the second floor there was to be a court room and several smaller rooms for offices.

N. W. Condron won the bid but for some reason the people were not pleased and they secured a writ of injunction from the court, stopping the building proceedings. The injunction was dismissed at the May, 1870, term of district court, and Condron was permitted to go ahead. He finished the courthouse in October of that year at a cost of $4,945. It was a relief and a satisfaction to the people when the building was finished. Already the lack of adequate quarters had caused serious trouble, for in August 1870, the county treasury had been robbed of nearly $4,000.

Hubbard Sanderson, who was elected during the voters' rebellion of 1866, was still treasurer. W. S. Lee was away, trying to sell his thousands of acres of swamp land to men in the eastern states. Abner Bell and Sanderson were good friends at the time of the election but a year later had quarreled. Sanderson had refused to pay some county warrants issued by Bell. Bell took the matter into court, sued, and received a judgment for full payment. But he still felt indignant that Sanderson had questioned his honesty and, as he was clerk of the county, he wrote the whole case in his minute book and told exactly what he thought of Sanderson. He also told how Hub Sanderson had sworn, and called him a liar. After this fuss became known a suit was started against Sanderson and he resigned from his office. L. F. Clark was appointed to fill the vacancy but afterward the matter was cleared up, Clark resigned, and Sanderson was reinstated. Sanderson was also reproved for allowing his son, who had not qualified, to act as his deputy in the treasurer's office.

With the robbery, Sanderson was in trouble again. The county money had been locked in a desk in his home but the lock was an ordinary one, easily broken. The desk stood in a lean-to shed built as an addition to the main house and was not occupied at night, so it was an easy matter to open the window, enter the room, break open the desk and take the money. It is thought that this desk was the one ordered when Abner Bell was still clerk of the board, for in his records it was noted that the board should "make an order for the clerk to get Richard Ridgway to make two desks, as students, only larger, with draws and dores to lock; one for the clerk and one for the treasurer." This ancient desk was the one broken when the county funds, $3,718.90, were taken.

The affair of the robbery led to the resignation of Sanderson once more and this time, although he made good most of the money, turning over $2,250 in warrants which he held, he was not reinstated. No one really believed he had committed the theft, but it was an unfortunate happening. L. A. Clemons was elected treasurer and the board purchased a new iron safe at a cost of $1,100. From that time on the county funds were secure.

The courthouse attracted much legal work, and it was natural that the organization of the Buena Vista County Bar Association took place in Sioux Rapids. The group was formed February 21, 1872, with seven attorneys participating; two from Sioux Rapids, two from Newell, and three from Storm Lake. J. E. Wirick was chosen president and G. S. Robinson, secretary.

The little town was then booming and seemed, to people who had lived there at the beginning, to have made great strides since the first few houses had been put up. An anonymous writer in the Sioux Rapids Press, June 11, 1885, left the following glimpse of community life in 1870:

"Among the inhabitants was a lawyer with a long head and a lame leg who entertained us in primitive style in a mansion built of sun-dried bricks. A young and inexperienced doctor boarded at the log hotel on the hill and wanted to sell us a homestead claim in the suburbs, four miles distant, for $400.

"Then there was no church edifice or resident preacher, and but little to betoken the progress that has been made. A strolling preacher reasoned of righteousness, repentance and judgment to come in a small building which was crowded with the lame lawyer and his 29 neighbors."

In the fall of 1868 William S. Lee returned to the county after selling his real estate in the East. He immediately got into trouble with his old political enemies and again left, but came back the next year to live at Storm Lake. He did not again take part in county affairs and finally retired to live peacefully in Sioux Rapids until his death. In the meantime the new railroad had linked up the south half of the county with the outside world and no sooner was the courthouse built at Sioux Rapids than the people who were rapidly settling the country by the lake demanded that the county seat should be moved into their own territory.

The railroad, however, was the big event in 1870. Early in July the road was completed from Fort Dodge to Storm Lake, and on the Fourth there was a big celebration at the western end by the lake shore, with a platform framed and bannered with tree branches and bunting. L. J. Barton presided over the ceremonies and S. W. Hobbs was the speaker of the day. Four days later, on July 8, the last spike was driven linking the railroad to the Sioux City line. This occurred a few miles west of Storm Lake and again there was uproarious rejoicing. A great number of visitors were on hand to witness the scene, some of them having come on the excursion train for the Fourth of July celebration. The

driving of this last spike linked together the thriving towns of Dubuque and Sioux City, and all stations along the way.

This line was later acquired by the Illinois Central. Three new towns were laid out along the line -- Newell, Storm Lake, and Alta, and the rivalry began at once between them as to which one should become the county seat town.

Storm Lake was built where muskrat houses looked like scattered haystacks, blue flags bloomed beside the blue water, and in springtime the air was filled with the wild voices of returning water birds. The city was laid out with wide, cheerful streets, and trees were soon planted along the avenues. For a long time growing boys rejoiced that there "was hardly a tree in it big enough to switch a kid with."

Newell was well situated for business because it was on a main highway of travel, but it was handicapped in the beginning by being at times almost surrounded by water. It was said that to sink Newell out of sight it would only be necessary to go around it with a hay knife and cut it loose! The land was so level that there was little "fall" and the water would not drain away naturally, so at last a system of artificial drainage had to be worked out. A canal or large ditch, nine and a half miles long with four miles of branch ditch, was dug to carry off the surface water, roads were built up high and dry, and the whole community started toward an era of prosperity.

Another town was laid out, west of Storm Lake. It was called Alta in honor of Altai Blair, daughter of John I. Blair, an official of the railroad. This Spanish name also meant "high" and was particularly appropriate because the new community was built on the second highest point of land in Iowa -- 1,513 feet above sea level. It was second only to a promontory near Lake Okoboji. The elevation at Alta was a divide separating the Missouri River and its tributaries from the Mississippi River. The divide extends north to the Okoboji region and may be traced on the map. On one side of this imaginary line all the rivers run toward the south and west. On the other side they run toward the south and east. Thus although the region about Alta is flat with few high hills, there is a gradual slope downward in both directions from the town.

The town was a little slow in getting started. The only occupant was at first the section foreman; then came the station agent and with the actual operation of the railroad, J. M. Tibbets started a general store, handling dry goods, medicines, and hardware brought from Fort Dodge. A little later Sanders Furlong bought an interest from Tibbets and became postmaster.

P. G. Peterson came out from Chicago in 1872, and while his wife started a hotel he began to sell land for the railroad company. Peterson soon got the reputation of being a hustler, and no wonder! He drove a fast team, and when he had got a prospective buyer ensconced in his buggy, whipped up the horses and drive at such a speed that the would-be purchaser did not dream how far from the station they were going! Thus, according to the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune, "Elk, Maple Valley, Nokomis and even Diamond and Pitcher townships in Cherokee County were settled by 30 Swedes, Danes and Norwegians, who thought they were getting a farm close to town, when in fact they were a dozen miles out. But they were not deceived in the land, the uniform quality made selection easy."

In September 1872 the people of Storm Lake petitioned the board of supervisors for removal of the county seat to that place. At the same meeting appeared petitioners from Newell with a similar request for their town. This made it a triangular affair with Sioux Rapids and Newell combining their votes to defeat Storm Lake. After that the choice lay between Sioux Rapids and Newell and the county voted again on the question. Of course the citizens of Storm Lake wanted the county seat moved south, but not to Newell. They voted to keep the county seat where it was, hoping that another day would be more favorable for a relocation in their own town. Naturally there was some hard feeling among the residents of the different places. The Past and Present of Buena Vista County states that "Any Sioux Rapids politician showing his face at Newell about that time would probably have gotten it pushed in, as the people of that town were so sure of themselves, and counted so heavily on the friendliness and expressed desire of Sioux Rapids to have the county seat located at Newell, that they had erected a brick building to be given to the county for a courthouse providing their town was chosen."

The issue was not again taken up until 1876, when petitions were received from Alta and Newell. Storm Lake did not enter the race at all. This time Newell people prepared pledges on which they obtained the signatures of many Sioux Rapids people in the determination to hold them to their word and to receive their votes. But Alta seemingly played the same role in 1876 that Storm Lake had in 1872. The vote was split, neither town would vote for the other, and Sioux Rapids won again in the game of politics and kept the county seat. Newell lost hope after that and made no more attempts, but Storm Lake was only gathering strength for another struggle. Circumstances helped the Storm Lake cause, for on January 1, 1877, the Sioux Rapids courthouse burned to the ground, and everything was lost except the records of the board of supervisors and the county safe. Now was the time for another effort.

As soon as the winter was over the people of Storm Lake and vicinity held a mass meeting and decided to campaign for the relocation of the county seat. A committee of five was appointed to manage the campaign, the citizens were to provide funds for the committee, and all were to work together with no argument nor questioning. The committee's part was to find out what county officials or candidates were favorable to relocation of the county seat at Storm Lake and to make friends for the town. In an effort to influence county office candidates it was decided that no one from Storm Lake should run for office. This action rapidly brought results. Newell and Alta could no longer hope to gain the county seat for themselves so were willing to swing their votes to help their neighboring town. That fall a motion to rebuild on the old location in Sioux Rapids was lost by a county vote and the fall court was held in a schoolhouse.

During the previous summer, with the help of business men and citizens of Newell, residents of Storm Lake had organized the Storm Lake Building Association and had planned to build a city hall, 30 by 36 feet, and two stories high. Now, with the petition for the relocation of the county seat, they presented the county with a ten-year lease on the building.

The written proposition was as follows: "To the county of Buena Vista in the State of Iowa: The Storm Lake Building Association of Storm Lake, having procured a lease to the southeast quarter of Block 16 in the town of Storm Lake aforesaid for the purpose of erecting a building thereon to be used for courthouse and council room purposes for a period of ten years, hereby tenders to said county, free of charge, a lease of said premises and of the building now being erected thereon, for a period of ten years, subject to a lease of the courtroom of said building for council room purposes when required for court or county purposes and subject to forfeiture in case said building is not used for courthouse purposes within one year, or in case said county shall erect a permanent courthouse before the expiration of said lease." This proposition was signed by the president of the association, A. R. McCartney, and by the secretary, H. Applington.

Since the county would have to go to heavy expense if a new courthouse were to be built at Sioux Rapids, the board of supervisors at once accepted the Storm Lake proposition and named one of the members custodian. At the October election the question of relocation came up for the third time. This time Storm Lake won with an overwhelming majority of 908 votes to 206 votes for Sioux Rapids.

The transfer of the county property began in October 1878. The board of supervisors met October 14 to canvass the vote of the county and thereafter declared that the people were unmistakably in favor of the removal of the county seat. The very next day Storm Lake sent wagons and drivers to Sioux Rapids to remove the safe, the record books, and the furniture. It was reported in the Storm Lake Pilot that William Harris and Henry Hanks hauled home "the forty hundred pound safe" in which the county funds were kept and that other men with teams -- Cummings, Stanton, Tuller, Okey, Smith, and McCartney brought furniture and records. Many Storm Lake citizens accompanied the caravan to guard the property and see that all was orderly.

The committee feared that the Sioux Rapids people might offer some resistance and they took along two barrels of apples and other refreshments as a peace offering. But nothing happened. Sioux Rapids extended no welcome to the jubilant visitors, neither did she offer reprisals. If the peace offering was accepted nothing was said about it. In spite of the quiet, however, Storm Lake residents did not breathe easily that night until everything was safely under the roof of the new building and in their own territory at last. For eight long years the struggle had been going on, in fact the relocation of the courthouse had been the main issue in each county election. Now that it was settled ill feelings soon disappeared and a friendly atmosphere was restored. Finally, in 1888, the ten years of the lease were up. The old courthouse was by then far too small to accommodate the increasing business of the county. Offices were small and dark and the courtroom was inadequate. The three-story building planned was to be made of pressed brick with adequate offices, fireproof vaults, courtroom, jury rooms, and consultation rooms. The estimated cost of this new building was $25,000. A special election was held in May and the result was too close for comfort -- 737 for the new courthouse and 725 against it, but it was a victory. The outlying towns were strongly opposed because of the cost which would increase their taxes. The contract was given immediately to J. M. Russell of Storm Lake and the building was started. It was a handsome structure, set in the center of the square and surrounded by magnificent trees.

CHAPTER 7

LIFE ON THE IOWA FRONTIER

During all this time things were happening. Schools and churches, store buildings, and homes were being built. Unfavorable weather conditions had to be overcome. The blizzard of March 1870 came and went, said by some to be the worst storm in the county, until the blizzards of 1880-1881 rode in to set new records of fierceness and cold. Then came the grasshopper years from 1876 through 1878, when crops were wiped out and many farmers lost hope in the new land and traveled east again, looking for their former homes.

Some experiences of the period were vividly recalled long afterward by John Wart, in an article printed in the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune for February 26, 1931. Wart had then lived in the county more than 61 years, 50 years of that time on section 24, Newell Township, where he "raised black cattle and red pigs and good horses." Wart and his parents and his brother came to Buena Vista County in 1869, a little ahead of the railroad. They left New York in April, traveling by stage, but "wound up walking into the county the most of the way from Fort Dodge, following the railroad stakes, wading and swimming the Big Lizard and the Little Lizard and the Cedar River before there was a house or a furrow plowed, where Fonda now stands." Mrs. Wart waited at Fort Dodge until her husband and sons located a place to stay -- the upper part of a sod house. They bought oxen and a wagon, and returned to get Mrs. Wart and convey their household goods to their new abode.

While living in the sod house, the men of the family went back and forth from Fort Dodge, hauling lumber for a frame house. They laid out a trail to Fort Dodge and for a long time, "all of the travel west to Dakota and to the northwest went over this trail. Well, it did not take long to build the house. We clapboarded three sides and on the west side we just put building paper on the studding and tacked lath on it about a foot apart. It was not rubberoid, just common tar paper and we put brown paper on the inside. When winter came and the wind blew in, the paper warped up and the wind blew harder in the house than it did outdoors."

As a stable had to be built for the oxen and there was much timber on Sunk Grove Island, three miles away and surrounded by water from 40 to 80 rods wide, the boys swam across to bring back the wood. Their father cut crotches in the logs and after the framework was up, covered it all over with slough hay. It looked more like a haystack than a barn.

John Wart trapped muskrats that winter. "I would go out early in the morning," the Pilot-Tribune quotes him,"and stay until dark and all I had for dinner was a roll of corn-meal pancakes stuffed in my pocket and they tasted as good to me as pie or cake does now but my hands smelled a little ratty when it froze up." Finally the boy had about $300 worth of skins tied up in bundles. He put them in the attic, but when the snow began to melt after a storm, it dripped on the pelts which had to be removed for drying to the room where the family ate and lived. The skins were spread out until there was only a path left on the floor from the stove to the cupboard and table, and Mrs. Wart had an uncomfortable time trying to get meals with the skins right there before her.

The blizzard of March 14, 15, and 16, 1870, was terrible. "The snow was so deep in the house we could not start a fire," Wart continues, "so we stayed in bed the last two days and slept with our clothes on for we did not know what minute the house would blow away. We thought it a long time. Our beds were loaded down with snow. After the storm we crawled out and started to shovel out."

They dug a path to the barn and had to break in the door and dig through the snow to the cattle, which they found still alive and standing with their backs against the roof. It took a long time to free them from their frozen prison and, "when I took the first ox out in the cold he shivered... and we had to get a bed quilt and put it on him to keep him from freezing to death." The deep snow had to be carried out of the barn in a washtub. After the place had been cleared, the oxen were kept wrapped in quilts, given a drink of melted snow and hay to eat, and the animals pulled through.

Nevertheless the family felt discouraged and if they could have sold the muskrat skins would gladly have started back to their old home in New York. A little while after the blizzard, a man from Sac City came to buy the furs. He paid $825 for them. Almost immediately past hardships were forgotten!

Before long, railroad graders began work on the first railroad through the region, the Dubuque and Sioux City, afterward to become part of the Illinois Central. Gangs of men spread out over every mile to lay the ties and rails. The first passenger train went by the Wart house on the way to Newell and Storm Lake July 4, 1870. As the father of the family watched the little engine puff by, hauling one car, he remarked, "I don't know how that looks to you, but it looks good to me." It looked good to everybody!

In another article in the Pilot-Tribune, W. F. Couch stated that one could ride a horse 50 miles in any direction and never see a house, a tree, or a fence. He told the story of how a neighbor, M. D. Watkins, who lived near Newell, got lost while mowing. He had hitched his fine team of bay horses to the mower -- the first in the vicinity -- and started out to mow hay. After going half a mile down into the hollow, he realized that he was lost. The "blue joint" reached up high against the horses. Watkins stood up on the mower. Then he climbed up on the backs of the animals, and still he could not orient himself. The day was cloudy. Finally he turned the mower around and started back along the swath already cut until he reached a point where he could get his bearings.

"Nate" Couch traded a span of small horses for two yoke of oxen and had started to break up the land when one of the oxen died. Couch then made a single yoke for the odd ox and went right ahead working with the three animals. He broke 30 or 40 acres that first year. His boys followed with an axe, chopping a hole in the center of every third sod, dropping in the corn, and giving it a "lick" with the butt of the axe before going on to the next. For the next several years Couch marked the corn rows each way with a corn marker, and during the planting season his son dropped the seed into the cross, to be covered over by two men following up with hoes.

Squirrels, gophers, and blackbirds dug up the seed and as a precaution Couch would soak the seed in thin coal tar to make it less attractive to these biped and quadruped marauders.

The ponds and sloughs provided nesting places for all kinds of game and birds. From there in the fall emerged sandhill cranes, wild geese, brants, ducks, and prairie chickens, in such numbers that they had to be driven from the crops by the watch dog, named Shep. When he made his morning and evening rounds, the game would rise up in clouds from the edges of the fields. So many sandhill cranes would settle on the prairie that from a distance they looked like great flocks of sheep. The mosquitoes, too (we are told today) were so enormous that they might have been mistaken for blackbirds!

The greatest curse of all was the grasshoppers, which came in countless numbers in 1876. For several days they were so thick one could hardly see the sun. The grain was stripped everywhere, but the Couch family managed to save about half of their crops by dragging long ropes crosswise with the wind over the fields. The hoppers, once forced

back to the empty prairie, would never face the wind to return. But they were followed almost immediately, of course, by others which came with the wind.

The Couch boys had a real thrill one day in 1876, when they hitched up the two young red oxen, Tom and Jerry, and hurried to Newell to buy a horse collar. Just as they reached town they saw a long train pulling into the station. They tethered the oxen and hiked to the tracks where soldiers were getting out of the cars for a little exercise. The smart-looking men in uniform stepped down to the street, marched briskly down one side and back on the other. The boys had not thought there were so many soldiers in the world. Then they noticed a distinguished-looking officer with longish hair, and a stylish lady who clung to his arm. The crowd that was watching supplied the news that this was General Custer, on his way out west with his soldiers to fight the Indians, and the pretty lady, his wife, was going to accompany him as far as possible. The Couch boys had to explain why the trip to town had taken them so long, but they were always glad afterward that they had seen the train and the passengers, for this was the last trip for General Custer and for most of his men, who were massacred by the Indians at the Big Horn River late in June 1876.

The boys unexpectedly had another glimpse of a national figure a year or two later. They were tending a smudge fire near the stable of a neighbor named Ballard, to keep the mosquitoes away from the stock. Ballard was absent for the night. It was getting late and possibly the boys drowsed a little. Suddenly something wakened them and Sam rose to stir up the fire. As he poked it, the flames flared up and revealed a line of eight horsemen, all drawn up abreast. In a flash the mysterious riders, who had approached almost noiselessly, wheeled their horses and vanished into the night. The two boys rubbed their eyes and wondered whether they had been dreaming. Shortly afterward Frank and Jesse James and some other outlaws were captured at Northfield, Minnesota. The Couch brothers always thought that these men were acquainted with Ballard, who was from Missouri, and had perhaps ridden up to talk with him, or possibly ask for shelter. But seeing the unfamiliar face of Sam Couch in the firelight, and not knowing how many other persons might be waiting in the darkness behind, they had hastened away without stopping to inquire.

After the railroad came through, it was followed by more people, homes, schools, churches, stores, and blacksmith shops. John Wart told how his father got a compass and with its aid and a law book, called Every Man His Own Lawyer, worked up quite a trade helping settlers get located at $25 a claim.

Among the first to settle on the shore of Storm Lake were the Baileys, Dr. W. D. Bailey, his wife, Martha Ellen, and their four small children. Like the Wart family, they preceded the railroad. They had to camp in a tent for months before their house was ready. Sometimes during the winter several families would move into one cabin and burn the other houses for fuel. When the snow began to fall, they tied ropes from the kitchen door to the barn to guide them during the storms which were sure to follow. And, as the wind swept in from the lake on washdays, the women fastened small rocks in the corners of each piece hung up to prevent it from being blown off the clothes line.

Later the Baileys bought property on Cayuga street. A willow switch brought from the lake shore was stuck into the ground; in time this grew into a large tree which drooped over the wall into the yard.

John Ludington was perhaps the first man to settle on the north side of Storm Lake. He took a claim there in the summer of 1868. At first the town was to be located on the southeast shore and would then turn the title over to the railroad for a town site. Then he refused to give up the land, thinking perhaps that he could sell town lots. After that the railroad changed the location of the town to the north central lake shore and there the town was laid out.

At the time the lots were sold the only buildings on the site were the real estate office of Barton and Hobbs and the Selkirk House. Two months later there were 83 buildings in the new town.

The first dance in Storm Lake was held in the little hotel put up by T. S. (Uncle Tommy) Smith at the early site, three-quarters of a mile southeast of the town later located by the railroad company men. Smith's two sons, James and Augustus, kept a store there, too. Afterward the hotel was moved to the new location at Storm Lake.

The first new Storm Lake lots were sold on August 11, 1870. During the previous month the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad had completed the extension of its line west from Iowa Falls to Sioux City. When all the work was finished the working parties from both ends of the line met one and a half miles west of Storm Lake to celebrate the occasion with appropriate ceremonies. The construction gangs had worked respectively west from Iowa Falls and east from Sioux City, until they came together. Then the first four spikes toward the completion of the road were driven by Messrs. Barton, Vincent, Phelps, and Carson.

Storm Lake was staked off into town lots, sites mainly controlled by the Sioux City and Iowa Falls Town Lot and Land Company, whose incorporators were led by John I. Blair.

The lot sale gave rise to many problems, especially since it was known that Blair and other eastern capitalists were to be present, and Blair was to start auctioning off the first lots. As the day was wet and disagreeable, the selling took place indoors, in the Thomas Selkirk House. Blair worked energetically, calling particular attention to lots that he thought suited certain businesses. Corner lots north of the railroad track on Lake Avenue were the first to sell. Afterwards the others went rapidly.

Aurelia Blair Wirick was the first child born in Storm Lake. The date was December 7, 1870. Her father, Edmund Wirick, had brought his family from Illinois to western Iowa in 1869 and, after prospecting along the line of the railroad, bought a lot at the original sale in August 1870. At that sale John I. Blair, a heavy stockholder of the railroad, promised to present a town lot to the first child born there. The next month Wirick had brought over his wife and two children, Leora and Frank, to live there. And in the following December, after the birth of the new daughter in the Wirick home, there came a letter containing a deed for the promised lot and a name for the child -- Aurelia Blair Wirick. The name was given in honor of Blair's daughter who had recently died. The Wiricks were much surprised by their good fortune, especially on learning that the lot was well located. It was across from the place where the courthouse was to stand some years later. When Aurelia was eight years old, her father built the Park Hotel. Here, at the center of Storm lake, she spent her girlhood days. As a young woman she was married to Dr. J. W. Lawrence of Sioux City.

The planners of Storm Lake looked to the future. They made all of the streets 100 feet wide, and extended Lake Avenue, the city's main thoroughfare, to a width of 120 feet.

L. J. Barton and Samuel Hobbs opened the first bank in town. Later James F. Toy, who came in 1870, started a lumber and implement business, then took office as cashier of the Storm Lake Bank, the first to be established under State banking laws. James Harker was president and J. A. Dean vice-president. Toy soon started branch banks in Alta and Sioux Rapids.

Other pioneer business men were Phil Schaller, for whom the town of Schaller was no doubt named; Senator Robinson, later Supreme Court judge; Lot Thomas, who became district

judge and then Congressman; Edgar E. Mack, who became senator and then chairman of the Republican State Central Committee; A. D. Bailey and James De Land and J. E. Buland, prominent attorneys, and also William Milchrist, one of the best known lawyers in northwest Iowa, who later located in Sioux City.

Growing prosperity brought with it better living conditions and even touches of luxury. The James Harker home on Lake Avenue in Storm Lake was the first brick residence in Buena Vista County. It was built by the Harkers in 1875.

CHAPTER 8

DAYS TO REMEMBER

Storm Lake was incorporated in 1873 and the first municipal election was held that spring. S. H. Hobbs was elected mayor. The town's growth was assured in 1878 when it became the county seat, and from then on it was destined to be Buena Vista's leading city.

The people had hoped for additional railroad facilities and on July 6, 1871, Storm Lake Township voted 44 to 15 to help with the construction of the Maple Valley Railroad from Jackson, Minnesota, through Storm Lake to Onawa. This road, however, which would have given the city a connection with the great Union Pacific system, was never built.

Thomas Selkirk, the hotel keeper, opened a stage line on a semi-weekly schedule from Storm Lake to Spencer July 4, 1871, and by the following spring the schedule had been increased to a daily service. Regardless of what particular community the settlers lived in, whether in Storm Lake, Newell, Sioux Rapids, Linn Grove, or Alta -- all now had a chance to participate in various endeavors of mutual interest. One of these was the county fair, toward which steps were taken on May 3, 1873, when the Buena Vista County Agricultural Society bought 35 acres of land from Judge Early of Sac City. The acreage was favorably situated about three-fourths of a mile west of Storm Lake, near both the lake and the railroad. Rainy and chilly weather were drawbacks, but an enthusiastic crowd attended that first fair, held on September 23 and 24, 1873. The awards were said to have been "liberal." The exhibitor with the most entries was J. D. Adams of Nokomis, who showed a half bushel of rye, one Berkshire boar, two sows, three Chester White boars, four sows, and three grade sows. It had been mentioned that premiums were given for "almost anything, from stallions to crayon drawings" and that one diploma was awarded for good penmanship. We do not know whether any prizes were given for cattle, although presumably some were offered. It was at about this time that William Miller started raising stock near Storm Lake, exporting beef cattle and importing Shorthorns from Scotland. Miller is said to have been the first man in the United States to import this breed, which was to become a great favorite. Operating the Lakeside farms for many years, he crossed the ocean 71 times in his quest for good cattle.

The Buena Vista County Fair was continued for five years, and from then on was held only irregularly, whenever someone attempted to revive it. "Bad luck, hard times, and

grasshoppers" are said to have made "financial mincemeat" of the venture. It was later revived at Alta and put on a permanently successful basis.

During these years the timber was still so scarce in the county that during the early seventies the Board of Supervisors allowed exemption from taxation to the amount of $500 for each acre of reforested land or for each mile of hedge planted. Thus the black prairies, almost entirely devoid of trees, gradually turned green with numerous groves.

As more and more crops were being planted and harvested the wild life quickly disappeared, particularly the prairie chicken, which had been slaughtered by the thousands. Two dealers advertised in the Storm Lake Pilot of September 15, 1875, for 10,000 prairie chickens for which they would pay two dollars per dozen. The birds, to be acceptable, had to be "neatly drawn, stuffed with fine hay and delivered in good order." With destruction taking place on such a wholesale scale, it was no wonder that within a few years this species had gone almost entirely.

The newspaper, the Storm Lake Pilot, had been established early in the town's history, in the fall of 1870. During the previous year A. H. Willits had visited the Board of Supervisors and enquired as to what inducements he might expect if he tried to start a paper. He was assured the official printing of the county but a money bonus, which Willits felt necessary, was apparently not forthcoming, and so he let the matter drop.

But in 1870 Colonel Vestal, a Civil War veteran, and his brother-in-law S. W. Young, ventured to publish a weekly journal. Taking their inspiration from the wind-tossed waters of the lake, they called their sheet the Storm Lake Pilot. The symbolic name and the paper both prospered and soon had taken a leading place among the journals of northwest Iowa. His excellent war record had won Colonel Vestal many friends, and he was a versatile writer. The paper was strongly Republican. Partner Young was in charge of the mechanical department, and succeeded in getting out a neat and well printed job.

Both men had a flair for showmanship and launched the Pilot with a build-up which insured popular interest from the outset. The leading men of the community were invited to be present when the first copy of the first issue was taken off the press on October 26, 1870, to certify as to its authenticity. Some time later this copy was sold at public auction in front of the Pilot office. Crowds gathered to see the fun and to hear prominent citizens compete with one another for the privilege of owning that first

issue. Bidding was brisk. Finally the price climbed to $100. The crowd pressed forward. Somehow that bit of newsprint held up before their eyes had become a precious article. It was part of the history of Storm Lake. The bidding went on -- "105 -- 106 -- ."

"Anyone else, anyone else? Do I hear 110? Do I hear 107? Going, going, now at 106 dollars!"

The auctioneer's hammer crashed down and the sale was over. The first copy of the Storm Lake Pilot had been sold for a sum that might justly have been called a record anywhere.

As Barton stepped up to take possession of the paper and the onlookers admired or secretly envied his ability to make money and spend it so effectively, they could not guess what a different picture he would present a little less than four years later. In August 1874 the banking and real estate firm of Barton and Hobbs had to close because funds to the amount of $22,000 were missing. Tax receipts and school funds amounted to $8,000 and the remainder consisted of private deposits. Many persons, particularly old people, including many in Sac and Ida counties as well as Buena Vista, were left destitute by the crash, which had taken their life savings. The town of Storm Lake suffered a mild panic, from which reverberations echoed all over the region. Barton and Hobbs had been considered cornerstones of the community, a key position vouched for by the firm's continuous two-column page-length advertisement in the Pilot. No one blamed Samuel Hobbs, the second partner, perhaps because he stayed and faced the trouble while Barton, as the paper naively remarked, "was suddenly hard to find." He disappeared, but was traced as far as the Northwestern railroad station in Carroll, Carroll County, and from there on he was lost to the history of Iowa.

In the meantime, the citizens of Storm Lake had enjoyed a more pleasant experience. This came with the arrival July 1, 1873, of a real steamboat, the J. D. Eddy, named for the Storm Lake station agent of the Illinois Central. The boat had been built by Rouse and Dean in Dubuque after the model of the best and fastest yachts constructed on the Clyde, in Scotland, and shipped to Storm Lake on railroad flat cars. She was made of iron, with a length of 47 feet and a seven foot, six-inch beam. Her carrying capacity was 75 to 80 passengers.

A trial run was made about noon that July 1, and the shores of the lake were ringed with people who stood watching the boat move briskly out over the water. Apparently many were suspicious, for only 45 accepted the invitation to go aboard for the next trip.

The steamer had arrived in good time for the Fourth of July celebration, and on that day was booked for an excursion which took 55 persons forth on the lake. The Storm Lake Glee Club and String Band had gone aboard and the organ that had been installed droned out its musical accompaniment. Colonel Vestal of the Storm Lake Pilot, who was one of the passengers, set down his pleasure at the occasion in print: "The melody of voice and instrument mingled with the music of the waves, and as the vessel 'walked the waters like a thing of life', and we looked out on the broad expanse, or watched the waves chase each other for very joy, we could not help thinking of the pleasures and enjoyments which Nature and the art of man have provided for mankind." It was a great day for all the people. A real "show boat" was chugging about in the clear blue waters. Music, gaiety, and color had been brought to the quiet of the inland lake.

The boat was operated by the Storm Lake Navigation Company, J. S. Eddy, master, J. M. Russell, engineer. Trips were made Wednesdays and Saturdays, leaving the wharf at the foot of Lake Avenue at 4 p. m. The fare was 50 cents a single trip, with a strip of five-trip tickets available to commuters, and with unused portions transferable.

The Fourth of July was always an exciting event in those early times. Merchants would gather in back rooms of various stores weeks ahead of the holiday to decide how Storm Lake should celebrate. The question was a momentous one because the merchants felt they owed it to the community to put on a "grand and glorious" celebration. Committees would then be appointed and work would begin. Money was collected by various persons and contributions of from three to five dollars apiece would be made. Some individuals, who gave $10, were considered very generous. From $400 to $500 was necessary to put on a good Fourth. The Holiday was the day people looked forward to most and it continued to be so until the coming of the automobile satisfied the desire to travel on the road rather than to stay in their own community for the day.

W. C. Skiff, one-time county treasurer of Buena Vista County and a former Storm Lake merchant, has told the story of those old July Fourths. The celebration started at dawn, when "Forty guns at sunrise shot off from an anvil by Ben Skeels in front of his blacksmith shop, and by Schulz Martine from an old cannon opened the day." Later in the morning as folks came from all over the vicinity on foot, by top buggy or spring wagon, "you would see Orval James on his high-stepping bay horse. He would be wearing a red sash over his shoulder and what a gallant picture. Sitting bolt upright in the saddle he appeared every bit the part of a

cavalry officer. He was the marshal of the day. He led the parade!" Or perhaps the marshal would be Dr. W. D. Bailey, astride his white pony, Billie.

In the gala procession through the streets of town you would see Kelly Yerington and Norman Crowell with their baseball suits on, all ready for the big afternoon game. Baseball had come to Storm Lake in the spring of 1874, and was considered a "glorious sport" for spectators and an "after supper pastime for those who 'enjoy' broken fingers and black eyes."

And that morning you would see Don La Grange "all dolled up in his new spats, blue shirtwaist and red tie, Elizabeth Walpole with a sweet smile and all fixed up with a pink dress and a sack of stick candy, and...Emil Journay wearing his band suit. He played in the Storm Lake brass band which furnished patriotic music for the day." Paddy Fisk would be there in a blue fireman's suit, for he was on police duty.

Business men sponsored the parade and the floats. The most popular entry was usually an elaborately decorated wagon filled with curly-haired little girls or very young women representing the original States, all grouped about a glamorous Goddess of Liberty.

After the parade had passed, people would gather at the band stand to listen to a speech by James De Land, Tom Chapman, Let Yerington and some other orator of the region. One of the ladies would then read the Declaration of Independence and both speech and reading would be interrupted frequently by loud explosives fired by the children, until it was often impossible to hear the speaker. Few cared, perhaps only the man or woman with the speech in hand.

At 12 o'clock the roast ox was served. Each person paid for a steaming plateful and it was such a bountiful feast that all could be served generously.

The program would be resumed again at 2 o'clock. Sports events on Lake Avenue included foot races, three-legged races, sack races, and potato races. Spectators could sit down and rest on planks placed near the sidewalk. Usually there were so many people watching that each person would have to stand up and push his way to the front to get a good view.

A baseball game between Alta and Newell and a picked team from Storm Lake almost always found a place on the afternoon program. "It was no small job to get an umpire -- the kind required -- for his judgment must be bad and his

eyes worse" -- according to Mr. Skiff. "Storm Lake had to win that game in order to win the $25 prize."

After the game picnic baskets were brought out and families ate their suppers in the park near the lake shore. When it was dark enough everyone gathered to see the display of fireworks, usually shown at the south end of Lake Avenue. Captain C. F. Aikin often took charge of this part of the entertainment. An old windmill tower, which had been set up for the occasion, served as a high platform from which to send up Roman candles and sky rockets; there, too, pinwheels and other pieces could be displayed. Sometimes a mass of fireworks would catch fire and go up in one grand blaze of light. A "bowery" dance, perhaps begun late in the afternoon when the dimming sunlight filtered through the leaves of the bower of branches arranged as a canopy, continued all evening. Up to the last the sonorous tones of Tom Stanton, or whoever called out the square dances, competed with the roar of the giant crackers or the hiss of the Roman candles. Then the regretful strains of "Goodnight, ladies, we're going to leave you now", put an end to the evening. Fiddles were tucked back into their cases, picnic paraphernalia was gathered together, and in the buckboards, going home, drowsy heads were leaned against companionable shoulders or on piles of clean, sweet-smelling straw.

But sometimes July 5 was almost as much fun as the Fourth. For in order that the merchants would not have to carry the left-over supplies of fireworks, the men of the town staged sham battles that evening. The west side of the community would be pitted against the east side. On one occasion the battle started when Walt Stock came riding down Lake Avenue on his spotted pony. He was from the east side, and came challenging the west. As he drew closer, the west side broke loose and soon captured him. Then the battle started with firecrackers flying and Roman candles going off at unexpected intervals and places. It was exciting but dangerous and everybody knew it. All went well, however, until Dr. J. H. Lawrence, who later married Aurelia Wirick, suffered a broken leg while trying to dodge a sky rocket. After that the mayor put a stop to this type of post-Fourth celebration.

CHAPTER 9

THE EDITORIAL OUTLOOK

The winter of 1880-1881 was a severe one for all of Iowa. Nearly every community suffered from the deep snows and prolonged cold spells. The northern part of the state was hit especially hard. Snow drifts blocked the roads, stalled the trains, and caved in buildings, and both people and livestock lost their lives in a blizzard.

An eastbound passenger train was snowbound for three days within a mile of the town limits. Most of the men in the neighborhood worked together to dig the train out. Three men who had tried to cross the frozen lake on foot were caught in the storm, and were never heard of again.

To offset the grimness of the scene there followed weeks and even months of excited speculation and amused anticipation, all because a mysterious young man had appeared from the East and registered at the Commercial House as George Burton of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Perhaps the following story by Normal H. Crowell, a former resident of Storm Lake, belongs to the realm of folklore or fiction, but it seems worth telling. The highlights given here were taken from an article that the Pilot-Tribune of January 3, 1929, reprinted from an El Paso, Texas, paper.

The self-styled Mr. Burton went to a local newspaper office, identified by Crowell as that of the Cornet, and applied for a job. When he failed to get one, he rented an office and had a hand press, paper, ink, type, and other materials shipped in. Soon afterward the first issue of the Lance rolled off the press and Editor Burton hired two boys to carry it to every family in town. Almost immediately, in Crowell's words, "every family in town was sitting up clutching its feverish brow. Eight hundred and fifty male citizens of the place were particularly attracted to the new sheet because they saw, on page four, in large type, their names just under an array of headlines that required no diagram or explanation as to their importance." They ran:

"To the eight hundred and fifty fellow citizens listed below, all of whom now subscribe to this paper's contemporary, the editor extends greetings.

"The Lance is with you. It will print the facts. It will print the truth about the facts. The editor will use no white wash.

"Why drink dishwater when you can get champagne?

"As these names subscribe for the Lance they will be removed from the list. The last man in will get a writeup that will make him hump like a caterpillar to stay in town."

In an editorial headed "All Hail Gentlemen. And My Competitor, Too," Publisher Burton set forth a few remarks about himself. He wrote: "The Editor is a stranger and you will want to know something about him. He is a young man of 27, unmarried and not even in love; someday he hopes to marry some charming young woman, settle down in a cozy home.

"But honesty compels him to recite a few facts that must be taken into consideration. Although I am not a natural born criminal, I once stold a horse. Although I am not a fugitive, I am badly wanted by a certain prominent person in the east. And to be candid, I am using an assumed name."

Naturally, people didn't want to miss the chance of reading such original and magnificent weekly entertainment, not to mention seeing the names regularly printed in big letters as nonsubscribers. As Crowell says, "What was a dollar and a half compared to a chance to be in on a lynching bee? The counter at the Lance office tinkled like the United States mint."

At the end of three weeks, only 13 names appeared in the list of those who had failed to subscribe, but these were printed "in coal-black letters an inch high."

The editor took note of this unlucky number and inquired genially in his column, "Aside from the value of the Lance as a news medium, it would really seem the part of wisdom to subscribe to it rather than to see the story of your grandfather's demise in print -- eh brother?... Or perhaps Mr.....prefers restitution of certain property to its rightful owner to separating from a dollar fifty for the Lance....If the gentleman who plays poker Saturday nights and sings loudly at church next morning will kindly step forward, we will thank him and give him a receipt....By the way, Brother A., did you burn all those letters or did you overlook one? You certainly need the Lance quick...Thirteen men are treading on mighty thin ice this week."

Soon the editor and his versatile talents had become a legend. For dress occasions he wore a swallow-tail coat, said to have been the first seen west of Fort Dodge at the time. He could play the accordian and shoot like a cowboy. One day two strangers passing through town, possibly on a commission for some of the local residents, lingered across

the street from the Lance office and one blazed away at the window of the newspaper shop. Immediately Burton emerged with a gun in each hand, and collected the spurious Colt revolver as well as $5 for a new pane of glass before starting the aggressors on their way out of town.

When his rival editor publicly satirized Burton's talent, the young man suddenly appeared on the main street with two guns, a gunny sack of empty tomato cans, and the sheriff to act as witness. He set the cans up on the plank crossing the middle of the road, drew back 25 paces and started shooting. After neatly picking each can off with a bull's eye shot, he calmly gathered all together again and quietly went back to his office.

Burton's pointed editorials and plain speech made him the target of attack from time to time. Once a gambler he had exposed as dealing "from the top, bottom, or middle of the deck with either hand", allowing other players a chance about like that of "a rabbit with a hyena", started after Burton breathing fire and brimstone. He went into the Lance office wearing a white starched shirt - people in the street awaited him in joyous anticipation. He came out shortly with the words "I tried to lick the editor" printed across his back in six-inch letters. Escorting him was Burton, armed with a press wrench. They went as far as the depot, where the gambler was urged to buy a ticket to Chicago and assisted onto the next train. He was never seen in Storm Lake again.

This editor did not reserve all his ammunition for the wolves of the community. He attacked the sheep as well. After attending church one evening, he went home and wrote an editorial exhorting the minister of that particular congregation to wake up his flock with some straight from the shoulder talk instead of putting them to sleep with "a violet-scented talk on brotherly love." The pastor, on reading this constructive comment, immediately invited the editor to occupy the pulpit the following Sunday and show how he would conduct the service. Burton accepted the challenge, which he announced to the public in some hastily printed handbills.

The church was crowded that Sunday with people who could scarcely restrain their excitement as Editor Burton came in the door, strode up to the pulpit, tossed his hat on a chair and, briskly rubbing his hands together, sat down while the minister announced the opening hymn. After singing, prayers, Bible lesson, the taking of the collection, and the morning solo (procedures sat through by the congregation with ill-concealed impatience) Brother Burton stepped forward and began: "Friends and enemies -- and I can't tell

you apart at this distance -- I have been asked to fill this pulpit on this occasion. I assume the task and accept the responsibility." What followed lived up to the highest expectations of the critical but palpitating audience. Editor Burton had a vocabulary and vocal delivery of which Billy Sunday himself might have been proud in his day. Among his mildest remarks were the following: "You are being slowly chloroformed by your preacher -- and it is all your fault. You tightwads refuse to pay him enough to support his family....You need a preacher six feet four high and weighing two hundred pounds to get behind you with a cattle whip....Fear of dismissal has been held over the heads of the preachers in this pulpit for years. Think of it, you cowards. Afraid to pick on some one your size, you bulldoze your preacher! Shame on you!"

Strange to say, the minister himself and the congregation survived the ordeal, though when it was over, "each individual felt like a pincushion."

The advice was constructively followed. Within a short time the pastor's salary was raised. The church membership was enlarged and by the following year had almost doubled.

By that time Editor Burton had departed for points East. According to Crowell's story, the Lance abruptly ceased publication with a final issue carrying only one item, a reprint from an eastern paper:

"Cincinnati, Ohio, Nov. 12 -- Gilbert Warburton, president of the Green Diamond Coal Mining Corporation and owner of the famed Blue Grass Racing Stables, died at his country home today.

"Mr. Warburton leaves a widow and one son, George Warburton. His fortune is estimated at $15,000,000. It was left equally to his widow and son."

The editor's last comment was: "My father is dead. Goodbye all!"

The office of the Lance was said to have been left as it was, untouched, until 1883 when it was destroyed by a fire which wrecked half the business district of the town.

The editor of the Pilot-Tribune, in printing the story of this Don Quixote, suggests that it be left to the early settlers of the community to determine how much of it was fact and how much was fiction. It would be difficult to get the truth in 1942 -- sixty years later, even it it were possible to interview all old settlers on the subject.

Some of the story may be true in substance with names, dates, and details altered in friendly disguise. Research failed to disclose the publication of either a Cornet, or a Lance at Storm Lake. The Pilot was founded in 1870 as already narrated. On May 18, 1877, the Storm Lake Sentinel was issued by Charles H. Fullerton, editor and publisher. Wegerslev and Walpole's Past and Present of Buena Vista County (1909) states that this paper "was independent in politics," and from reading its files it is apparent that its principal joy in life was to prod the Pilot. It had a short life and succumbed after a little more than a year. This might have been the original of the Lance, or perhaps the whole story is fiction, presenting what Mr. Crowell wished someone had done.

Journalism in those days was conducted on a more personal plane than is known to modern times. The county history quoted above contains several passages on that very subject, asserting that editor and reader both gloried in the war of words, and, "how joyfully did two rival editors enter the fray. The files of the newspapers published in the county during the eighties and nineties are replete with bickering and strife from week to week. It is a source of wonder in this day that the readers tolerated it, but they seem to have enjoyed it as much as the editors, and the keener the thrust the more enjoyment did all concerned get out of it."

Jerome Rose, familiarly known as "Posy", started the Storm Lake Tribune in 1877 and published it until 1881. That year he sold it to P. D. McAndrew, who two years later sold it to Sutfin and Perkins. Sutfin had been a partner of Colonel Vestal's with the Pilot and bought Young's interest in 1881. L. H. Henry was a later owner of the Tribune. He sold it to Thomas Walpole in 1896. Walpole and a partner named Smith acquired the other Storm Lake paper and consolidated the two under the name Pilot-Tribune, which soon established itself as a leading newspaper in the region. Walpole, who secured full control in 1904, sold an interest in 1906 to C. H. J. Mitchell. These two men cooperated in the publishing of the paper for a number of years.

Norman H. Crowell, a resident of Texas since 1917, contributed some rhymed recollections entitled "Tempus Fugits" to the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune for February 26, 1931. Among the verses was one describing Editor Walpole:

The man who first showed
me the great type lice trick
Was two men in height and
a half a man thick.

I'll never forget him. -- Tom
Walpole by name --
Since the lesson he gave me
I've not been the same.

Crowell and his wife, Grace Noll Crowell, whose poems found a wide public among readers of women's magazines and other journals of large circulation, were at one time residents of Buena Vista County.

In an era when public interest was becoming awakened to the merits of good journalism, the Pilot-Tribune, as edited by W. C. Jarnagin, won both State and National honors. In 1923 the Sigma Delta Chi, journalistic fraternity at Iowa State College, awarded it their cup for distinguished community service. The University of Iowa School of Journalism in turn presented their cup to the newspaper in 1928 as the best all-around Iowa weekly newspaper. The Pilot-Tribune in 1930 won a cup presented by the Publishers Auxiliary in a contest sponsored by the National Editorial Association for the best front page of all county newspapers and second place for the best weekly newspaper. In 1932 it was ranked by the National Editorial Association, as the best weekly newspaper in the nation.

The Sun, published at Storm Lake in 1884 by L. E. Lange, and the Buena Vista Vidette, launched in 1885 by C. Everett Lee, were both Democratic papers. Lange soon moved the Sun to Laurens in Pocahontas County where it was well received. The Buena Vista Vidette became a militant Democrat organ, published for a number of years by Freeman A. Brown, a Storm Lake merchant. Brown, however, disagreed with the national party on the monetary question in the campaign of 1896 and disposed of the paper after the election. A. A. Smith, who acquired the controlling interest, enlarged the plant, the paper, and the circulation until it led all the others. In 1904 he sold to Miss Elizabeth Sohm, and Storm Lake had the distinction of having a woman newspaper publisher.

Still another journal, the Storm Lake Enterprise, had been started in 1897 by Bethards and McAnulty to represent a particular faction of the Republican party. It did not last long.

Elizabeth Sohm Morcombe, who successfully built up the Vidette, has told something of her own story in its columns. She began to work on the paper July 5,1901, as a bookkeeper and reporter at three dollars per week. She had previously served as editor of the Buena Vista College Tack. Some time later A. A. Smith sent Miss Sohm from the Vidette to take charge of the Alta Observer and to "kill the paper as soon as possible." The young woman bought it instead but it

died nevertheless and had to go out of business. She returned to the Vidette and bought that in 1905. At the time she was getting $16 a week, which was then considered good wages for a girl. She later confessed: "The new owner had some time that first year! Buying a plant with no money is no joke. Friends,however, came to her assistance and she issued as security a mortgage that really was no security... Matters picked up and the owner began to plan a building and purchased lots on Lake Avenue.... But alas, a disagreement with the Board of Supervisors caused a sudden dislike to Supervisors in particular and to newspaper work in general, and she determined to throw up the much desired business career and join the ranks of housekeepers. She was married in 1908 and leased the plant. In a year, what had been accomplished in several was undone. The owner was forced to return, begin to repair damages and start anew on a dream for building. The lot was purchased in 1913. The building was begun.."

Early in June 1917 J. R. Bell, at one time owner of the Alta Advertiser, visited the office of the Vidette and offered Mrs. Morcombe $12,000 in cash for the paper; he also said he would buy the building then under construction for an additional $8,000 or more, and would invest $5,000 in extra equipment for the plant. Bell said he liked the town of Storm Lake and though he had hunted all over the western part of the United States, he had not found any place that suited him so well. With some reluctance Mrs. Morcombe accepted his offer. With the issue of June 28, the new editor and publisher took charge; the name of the paper was changed from the Buena Vista Vidette to the Storm Lake Register. Many improvements were made and this journal proved very successful. It was edited in 1942 by L. B. Watt.

The Alta Advertiser had been founded by C. T. Steever, a man of many business enterprises, who decided to start the paper in 1876. In the beginning he published it only once a month, but as the editor's "vigorous and trenchant style" attracted many readers, and business and advertising patronage increased, the paper was converted to a weekly. It was independent in politics, with a leaning toward the Democratic party. In 1883 the Maggs brothers purchased the plant and paper from Steever and took A. Smith into the firm. From then on the journal was to be Republican. But in a short time there was another change. Thomas Walpole bought out the Maggs' interest, and when Smith was elected county recorder, Walpole remained sole proprietor until 1888. During this period the Alta Advertiser was ably edited, as Walpole was a business man of ability and learning. However, various changes were bound to occur. C. H. Wegerslev acquired an interest, Walpole finally sold out to him, and he published the paper with various partners. Walpole and

Wegerslev collaborated on the Past and Present of Buena Vista County, a history published by the S. J. Clarke Company in Chicago in 1909. W. R. Coyle was editing the Alta Advertiser in 1942.

Newell's first newspaper, the Times, was founded in 1872 by Col. John T. Long, who often met Colonel Vestal of the Storm Lake Pilot to debate popular subjects of the day. People enjoyed the verbal duels but were not so ready with financial support for two newspapers in the county, and the Times did not last long. Will H. White founded the Newell Mirror in 1875. It proved successful. H. C. Gordon and J. P. Lawton, who took the paper in 1893, further developed it. This weekly independent journal was being edited in 1942 by Alva O. Noble.

Sioux Rapids had a paper by 1875, the Echo, founded in that year by D. C. and W. R. Thomas to represent both the town and the northern part of the county. It lasted two years before announcing its own demise in an editorial which complained of the lack of patronage. In 1881 W. S. Wescott founded The Press and published it for two years before selling to Acres, Helms and Blackmar. Several changes of ownership followed before the paper was acquired in 1891 by B. W. Talcott, foreman of the Storm Lake Pilot. In 1897 he sold it to a corporation of business men who consolidated it with the Republican, established by J. M. Hoskins. C. C. Colwell acquired the paper and operated it for two years. In 1900 it was consolidated with The Press under the name of Republican-Press. Colwell, with the association of J. E. Durkee, issued this journal until 1907 when the Ryder-Sherman Printing Company became owners. In 1942 the paper was known as the Sioux Rapids Press, and was edited by G. M. Sherman.

The Linn Grove Independent first made its appearance May 2, 1890, issued by the Independent Publishing Company, and edited by Frank S. Lane. The paper was said to have been breezy and interesting, and supported one hundred per cent by the business men of the town.

Two of the newer towns to acquire newspapers were Marathon and Albert City, both railroad towns. The second railroad to be built through Buena Vista County was the Chicago and North Western, running east and west through Marathon, Sioux Rapids, and Linn Grove, and constructed during the years 1881 and 1882. In 1881 a narrow gauge railroad had been planned from Spirit Lake southward to connect with the Illinois Central line. On this road a town had been laid out in Poland Township to be used as a station. This town was called Marathon. The narrow gauge railroad was not built, but that same year the Chicago and North Western was surveyed through the same territory and officials of the

road were easily persuaded to establish a town on the site which had previously been chosen for the other road. Thus Marathon was located.

When the Milwaukee railroad was built from Spencer to Fonda in 1889, Albert City was named as a station. The land selected was on the farm of George Anderson. He sold the tract to the Townsite Company, which offered lots ranging in price from $575 to $650. The Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune says of the town's beginning: "Business houses were planned and it was no time until the rat-a-tat-tat of hammers was heard and buildings were being erected. The filling of Main Street was a big issue, as it was extremely low. In fact tame ducks were often seen swimming up and down Main Street. At times there was so much water that it was impossible to drive horses through the street, making it necessary to drive a roundabout way in order to get to the business section. The merchants found rubber boots very necessary in going to the boarding house."

Originally the town was called Manthorp, for George R. Anderson's former home community in Sweden, but as this name was often confused with that of Marathon, it was changed to Albert City. The name was suggested by Albertine, which was the Christian name of Mrs. George Anderson. Many of the residents were Scandinavians who had already been living in the community for some years. Probably some of these were members of the Albert City Improvement Association which in March 1900, to make the community attractive, adopted a resolution "that there should be a reserve of ten feet in front of each lot in which to plant ornamental trees and build a walk, the walk to be four feet wide and outside of this a space of six feet to be left in the middle of which trees are to be planted about a rod apart....This space may be sown with lawn grass and kept in nice order. It will give a beautiful appearance to our city."

A newspaper, the Albert City Pioneer, was established March 29, 1900, with Turrill and Lovejoy as publishers.

One of the oldest institutions in Marathon was the Marathon Republic, founded in 1890 by H. E. Willey. Merle R. Fish, who acquired the paper in 1917, was still publisher in 1942.

CHAPTER 10

RELIGIOUS AND EDUCATIONAL GROWTH

All this time the prairie sod was being turned under and more and more crops were planted and harvested, while in the towns, or at suitable sites between new homes, churches and schools were built. As the seasons came and went and the people toiled week-days in the fields, on Sundays braving sun or blustering winds to travel miles to the nearest church, one might think with Emerson: "Out from the heart of nature rolled the burdens of the Bible." Before church buildings were put up, religious services were often held in the schoolhouses or, as was the case at Newell, stores where the congregation had to sit on boxes and nail kegs.

It was a point of honor, too, to go regularly to school, no matter how far the children might have to trudge through slush or dust. August Anderson, who with his brother and parents, the P. T. Andersons, moved to Scott Township in 1877, said: "My brother and I had to walk two miles to school, but we hardly ever missed a day if it was ever so cold and stormy, and we, as well as the other school children, never knew what it was to wear overshoes, because we had none to wear."

There were many good times, too, to which the young folks especially looked forward. In the winter spelling bees, singing schools, and debating societies met at the schools, and participants and spectators alike thought nothing of walking four miles or more for such entertainment. In the summer there were school and Sunday school picnics along the shores of the lake or on the banks of some lazy stream where the girls might be teased to take off their shoes and stockings and lift up their long skirts to go wading in the water. There was often an elaborate round of entertainments in the fall and through the holiday season -- lectures, socials, oyster suppers, and at Christmas, when evergreen trees were ceremoniously cut down and hauled to classroom or pulpit to be set up and decorated with nuts, strings of popcorn, and little candles of many colors.

The first ministers were usually itinerant, like the circuit rider who reached Sioux Rapids every now and then, and often stopped at the pretentious George W. Strubles' log cabin. That two-story home was for five years the county courthouse, meeting place of the board of supervisors, and community place of worship. As a rule the circuit rider had very little money and only a scanty supply of clothing. Such deficiencies did not hamper his thought processes or

his manner of delivery, however, for he could preach powerful sermons. Once, when he had on only a shirt and a pair of trousers, being minus coat, collar, and shoes, he turned to one of his followers and exclaimed, "Well, Brother Thomas, I preached for all there was in it, didn't I?"

On another occasion the minister had been promised $20, but at the last minute not enough money had been collected, and a substantial sum had yet to be raised. The men present thought of an easy way out. They simply held a friendly poker game and the loser, George Struble, had to make up the necessary deficit.

As many of the earliest settlers of Buena Vista County were Scandinavian, they brought with them the religion almost universal in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark and among groups from those countries. Ole Enderson Hesla, who settled in Section 36, Barnes Township, in 1866, was called the "moving spirit" in the organization of the Little Sioux Valley Lutheran congregation two years later. Ole O. Brown presided over a meeting called for September 26, 1868, and Ole Hesla acted as secretary. The other persons present included Ole Johnson, Sever A. Knudson, Anders Aslagslon, Halvor Olson, Olson Dokken, Arne K. Stake Ole K. Stake, O.H. Storla, Halvor K. Stake, and Anders Mikkelson. Meetings were held in what was known as the Dahl and Brown schoolhouse, with the Reverend Nils Amlund in charge of the services. The group built a church in 1880.

Around Albert City, the community first known as Manthorp, the Lutheran Congregation was organized April 14, 1873. Twelve families met for that purpose at the D. A. Danielson home which, being only 12 feet square, compressed the faithful into very close quarters. However, intermittent services had previously been held there by a Norwegian minister from Sioux Rapids. This pastor had baptized Ida Bergling, born August 5, 1870, the first child born among the church members there. The congregation built its first church in 1887. Five families organized the Swedish Free Church there in 1880. The Swedish Mission Evangelical congregation was organized on February 15, 1887, but was first known as "The Christian Association of Fairfield Township, Buena Vista County, Iowa."

The Storm Lake Pilot for May 24, 1870, announced, "Five church organizations have established themselves in Storm Lake. They are the Universalist, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Catholic."

About seven months later, December 27, it reported, "There are now thirty-seven schools in Buena Vista County. Teachers are drawing from $35 to $45 per month. Newell has the largest school, with forty-two scholars."

Newell's first church was the Congregational, organized October 21, 1871. Its building, put up in 1872-73, was used also for five years by the Methodist Episcopals, whose own church was erected in 1877. The Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized May 11, 1884, and the Danish Baptist Church in October of the same year.

Roman Catholic services were held at Newell by a priest from Fort Dodge in 1872, and during the next ten years a priest from Storm Lake celebrated the mass in private homes. The church was organized in 1882.

Storm Lake's first Protestant church, built for the Presbyterians, for a time also housed the Baptist and Methodist congregations. It was a pretentious structure of Gothic style and cost $2,284. Part of the money obtained for building purposes had been secured on the understanding that the church should be debt free on its dedication day, but on that date, November 17, 1872, the amount of $247.15 still had to be raised. This sum was subscribed in 25 minutes' time, and the ceremony went ahead as planned.

The First Methodist Church was dedicated in October 1875. It was a wooden structure, with a foundation of granite built from boulders found along the lake shore.

By January, 1880, the Storm Lake Pilot reported that the place was fast "becoming a City of Churches." "In fact," it continued, "we do not believe there is a place of equal population in Iowa that can point to an equal number of churches."

A few months later the paper described a social affair sponsored by the ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This was to be a "Neck Tie Sociable" held at the City Hotel, and everything was to be done "to make the occasion one of enjoyment and pleasure to all who may attend it. It is understood that the ladies will make two neckties, wear one, and put the others together, and let the male portion of the assembled throng select from the pile, and take the lady wearing one of the same color to supper. Come, everybody, have a good time, and ten cents pays the bill."

While one can easily realize the spontaneous merriment that such an entertainment might cause, it is also possible to imagine what heart-burnings, what secret currents of emotion, could result from the wrong young man picking out the wrong tie. What exquisite agony, what refinement of mental torture could be suffered by the girl who, bravely wearing her colors, had to watch her hoped-for escort select those matching the tie stitched by someone else! It is to be hoped that the good ladies of the church helped tide over any awkward situations.

There was choir practice, too, for as the various denominations built churches of their own and installed pianos or organs, it became possible to indulge in group singing with adequate accompaniment. Often choir practice was the only opportunity for music-lovers and they put extra ardor into their renditions of the hymns and religious "pieces" -- solos, duets, or quartets.

At Sioux Rapids, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church was organized May 11, 1871, with C. W. Johnson as leader. This group built its first church in 1882.

Methodist services had been held in homes in this community as early as 1859 -- probably by the "strolling preacher who reasoned of righteousness, repentence and judgement to come" -- but it was 1872 before Rufus Fancher, a homesteader, was authorized by the conference to take charge. A church was erected in 1876.

A council of pastors and delegates from neighboring churches met on November 4, 1875, to help organize the Sioux Rapids First Congregational Church. The first building was put up in 1881 and seven years later converted into a parsonage upon the dedication of larger quarters.

The Reverend V. Bloodgood of Spencer organized the Sioux Rapids Baptist Church August 11, 1881. A portable steel frame building served as a meeting place for the Seventh Day Adventists when they banded themselves together locally in 1902. The first Lutheran sermon in Grant Township was preached at the home of Jacob Ernst August 27, 1871. A visiting pastor, the Reverend Theodore Mertens, came every few weeks and held services in the Coon Township schoolhouse.

The Zion Lutheran Congregation was organized in September 1879. Twenty acres of land was purchased and here a church was built. It was dedicated September 7, 1884, with the Reverend William Laner as the first resident pastor.

As the first principal settlement in Buena Vista County, Sioux Rapids had a school as early as 1856. The Independent School District was formed in 1870, an event of which Wegerslev and Walpole's history says: "The district was formerly composed of a part of Lee Township, but the independent district included with this also a part of Barnes Township. The forming of the district in this way was vigorously opposed by those living across the river who favored a district including the town only. There were several residents across the river who would add materially to the strength of the school, if the district could be made to extend over their territory. The townspeople saw this, so they wrote up their proceedings, sent them to the legislature, and had them legalized and published as a law before the residents

across the river were scarcely aware of what had occurred." A new and larger building was made necessary in 1882 when the Chicago and North Western Railroad came through. Sessions were held in the Methodist Church until the new school could be opened in 1883. A. S. Newcomb was the first teacher in the independent district and when a room had to be added to the school to accommodate the increased number of pupils, his wife took over this classroom.

Miss Alma L. Gates taught Storm Lake's first school -- 15 pupils who met together in private homes for the beginning sessions, at times in S. D. Eadie's residence, and again in the West house on Cayuga Street, between Second and Third, where the opening session of November 21, 1870, was held. Colonel Vestal was so enthusiastic over this progress that he wrote in the next issue of the Storm Lake Pilot (November 23): "This is an epoch in the history of this city to which future generations, when Storm Lake has her twenty thousand, thirty thousand, aye, even fifty thousand inhabitants, with schools, academies, and colleges of the highest grades, will look back to with profound interest. We have been particular in stating the time and place so that in future years there shall be no dispute as to when, where, and by whom the first school was organized and taught."

The pupils who had enrolled on the opening day of school were the following: Emma West, Libbie West, Anna B. Guilford, Angeline Wirick, Josephine Selkirk, Alice Riley, Mary Hoyt, Caroline Hoyt, Willie West, Frank L. Wirick, Thomas Selkirk, John Hoyt, and Marcellus Perkins. Several days later these original students were joined by Allen Gates, John Bailey, Willie Bailey, and Lora Bailey.

In 1871 a small frame building was put up for a schoolhouse and there the teacher, Miss Honeywell, presided. Next a hall above the Smith brothers' store was used for a school and then the Baptist Church was put into service for a year of week-days to provide sufficient classroom space. By that time the school had grown so large that a new brick school building was started. This was finished in 1875.

Although the earliest records of the Newell schools are missing, it is known that a school was organized in 1870 in a building about a half-mile from town. The following year sessions were held right in Newell. In 1878 a two-story brick building, that had been built when it seemed that the town might have a chance to be county seat, was put to use by local authorities as a school. If this building that might have been used as a courthouse was to stand there as a monument to lost hopes, the people might as well make some good use of it.

Miss Jennie Carter taught the one-room school opened at Alta in 1874. In this year, when two teachers were needed, (these were Ira C. Harlin and Emma Wilson) classes were held in various parts of town, for some time in the Swedish Lutheran Church. Six years later a four-room school was built in the south part of town.

At the time of the World's Columbian Exposition, J. W. Jarnagin, in charge of the educational division of the Iowa exhibit, offered a series of prizes to be granted at a preliminary display in December 1892 at the State Teachers'Association in Cedar Rapids. This was to stimulate interest in the school work exhibit at the World's Fair. The first prize for the best display from rural schools went to District No. 8 of Nokomis Township in Buena Vista County.

There was a township school building in Linn Grove in 1892, attended by the smaller children of the town, while the older pupils had to go to an old building across the river. C. L. Ward, O. L. Hesla, H. E. Loe and O. A. Mikelson formed the independent school district of Linn Grove in this year, and arranged adequate quarters for all the students. A larger building was put up in 1894. Miss Julia Brown was the first teacher in the independent district.

Albert City, being one of the newer communities, did not organize an independent school district until June 8, 1901. That fall, classes were held in a country schoolhouse a short distance from town while Albert City's own building was under construction. When the new school was opened in January 1902 the teacher, Miss Margaret Adair,had 38 pupils.

When the Marathon school district became independent in 1893 and a new two-room schoolhouse was built, no one could imagine that in ten years this community was to introduce something entirely new in education. But it was so. A new type of school was started in Buena Vista County, and in every town arguments for and against it arose. This is how it came about. In the spring of 1903 five district schools near Marathon were added to the Marathon Independent District. The old school building in the town was torn down and a new one of pressed brick erected at a cost of $20,000. That fall, six drivers were hired by the school to bring rural children to this school. Six school routes were planned. Such was the start of consolidated schools in northwest Iowa. As the years went by many other communities adopted the plan which was proving very successful. Drivers were often older pupils who lived on the route: they found that it was not difficult to gather up the children on their routes and get them to school on time. Naturally the older boys were eager to obtain positions as drivers, especially as this work constituted a paying job. At first, and for

some years, horse-drawn hacks and carriages were used to transport the pupils to school. Then when the automobile became practical and roads were improved, large motor busses were adopted.

By this union of town and country schools, the rural pupils had the same advantages as the town pupils and, more than that, both combined had more advantages than either would have had separately, for the building of the centralized school was larger and more convenient, had more equipment, and a more complete course of study. Better teachers could be obtained for the larger schools and a school spirit could be fostered. The whole community was drawn toward one center and so became more unified. Thus in one step or one series of steps public education was improved, high schools were accredited, and advanced education stimulated.

Meanwhile, the whole county had benefited from another stimulus to higher education, the Buena Vista College established at Storm Lake in 1891. In October 1890 the Presbytery of Sioux City had been set off from the Presbytery at Fort Dodge and a joint commission of 12 members had met at Storm Lake July 8, 1891, to discuss plans. The commission finally accepted an offer of the Storm Lake Town Lot and Land Company of an acreage and suitable buildings for the new college. Long before this it had been planned to start an academy somewhere in the region. Cherokee and Fort Dodge had made offers and Fort Dodge had been chosen. That had been in the fall of 1885. The Collegiate Institute had been started at Fort Dodge at that time, with President F. J. Kenyon in Charge.

Five years later, however, this school was given up because it seemed an unsuccessful enterprise. Attendance was good, but the accomodations were insufficient and the collection of funds was always a worry. Thus, when the Storm Lake Land Company offered to donate eight acres of land and buildings to the value of $25,000, it was decided to move the college to Storm Lake and take advantage of the generous proposal. Thus the organization and incorporation of Buena Vista College was accomplished. As long as the property and equipment was used as a college of liberal arts it was to remain the property of and under the control of the Board of Trustees; otherwise, it was to revert to the Storm Lake Town Lot and Land Company.

The college was situated in the southwest part of town, on an attractive elevation sloping down to the lake. The main building was of brick and measured 90 by 72 feet. It was three stories high. The walls were trimmed with cut stone. This main hall contained nine recitation rooms, a chapel, a library, and reading room and ten smaller rooms for various classes and groups. Other buildings were added in later years.

Buena Vista College, though Christian, was conducted on non-sectarian lines, and students and faculty belonged to a variety of congregations. The curriculum of liberal arts and normal school training was gradually expanded to include art, music, commerce, and physical training. Standards were raised to meet the increasingly rigid requirements of Iowa colleges and by 1911 Buena Vista was fully accredited, with credits acceptable to the graduate schools of the State and to the Iowa State Board of Education. As a member of the Iowa Conference, the school participated in football, basketball, and track events. A popular semi-monthly paper, the Track, was established in 1895, and proved of permanent value.

CHAPTER 11

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The year 1893 was long remembered by people everywhere throughout the Nation, chiefly because of the financial panic which caused the collapse of fortunes and the abandonment of schemes of building and promotion.

Many persons in northwest Iowa had another reason for recalling the date. That summer the Pomeroy cyclone made its disastrous appearance. It was on a hot, sultry afternoon two days after the Fourth of July had been celebrated that tornadic forces first seemed to be gathering. The air was quiet, the atmosphere sticky and oppressive, and newly washed clothes hung limp and damp on the line. There was no sign of a breeze stirring -- only the waiting hush of the heat. Late in the afternoon the air darkened, clouds rolled up over the sky, and an angry, greenish light appeared in the west. A storm was coming up, but no one guessed what kind of a storm it was to be.

Then the wind struck. Out of the west came a roar of fury and the whirling vortex of the storm shot toward the earth. Straight as an arrow it clove its way eastward. Onlookers stared with whitening faces, then turned and dashed for shelter. The swirl of dust and debris seemed to blot out of the world.

Fifty-five miles of destruction were left as the wind cut its pathway across Cherokee, Buena Vista, Pocahontas, and Calhoun counties. At Pomeroy in Calhoun County the damage was most severe. That town was so utterly swept away that the cyclone was named for it. Sixty lives, out of a population of about a thousand, were lost in the storm and many more persons were injured. The cyclone's path was about a half mile wide. The crops in its track were left a total loss and homes were smashed to kindling. Growing corn was whipped to ribbons or torn from the ground and small grain was left as though it had been mowed by a careless hand, with here and there a tuft left standing. Fences, posts, and farm buildings were swept cleanly away. Trees were torn up by the roots or twisted off and stripped of branches and leaves. The roads were blocked with fallen trees, and heavy rain made travel even more hazardous.

The storm seemed to increase in intensity as it swept along, and unlike the usual tornado with its balloon-shaped cloud and its long funnel sweeping the earth, this Pomeroy storm seemed to have four descending vortices which twisted, swayed, and bounded like black dervishes as they raced on

their way. Barns were ground to splinters and mixed with the bodies of horses, cattle, and hogs. The ground for miles around was strewn with farm machinery. Chickens, completely stripped of feathers, walked about with an air of dazed astonishment.

With demoniacal fury the storm descended upon the farm home of Jacob Breecher and his five-year-old daughter, Dora. Joseph Slade was seriously injured there and died the next day. Donald Hill's barn, sheds, and windmill were destroyed. J. H. Wadsworth was injured and his buildings were demolished.

W. R. Clemons in Maple Valley Township had just returned from Alta when he saw the storm coming. He hurried his wife toward the cellar and followed her. They got down safely but just as he reached the last step Mr. Clemons put up his left hand to steady himself and at that instant the house was torn away and with it the muscles of his left arm. In spite of the shock and the pain of his mangled arm, Clemons guided his wife, who was also badly injured, out of the cellar and across the fields to the home of their son. On the way, they had to pass the bodies of their livestock that had been killed. Clemons died two days later.

Another victim of the storm was Charles Totman. He had sent his family to the cellar and then bustled about the house, probably closing windows or getting lights and wraps for those below. The wind struck before he could follow the others to safety and in an instant the house was whirled from its foundation and smashed to kindling. Later Totman was found in the farmyard with severe internal injuries. He died the next day, July 7. His family were all slightly injured, while the barns and machinery about the place were scattered.

Residents of Storm Lake watched with fear as the storm approached. First it became as dark as night, then the hurricane struck and the spires of the German Methodist, and Catholic churches were snapped off. Luckily the center of the storm missed the town and hit the lake, whirling the water up into a tall column that moved swiftly forward like a ghost running through the rain and wind. The excursion steamboat, bought years before, was the only thing destroyed. After the wind had passed, a tidal wave rushed back across the lake, flooding the southeast shore, drowning 70 head of stock and wrecking a hen house, leaving the chickens strewn about in all directions.

Near Newell the barns of three farmers were blown away and a schoolhouse was twisted into bits. Then, before crossing the line into Pocahontas County, the satanic whirlwind took one last fling at Buena Vista, striking the farm

of John Slayman and sending the buildings sailing into the air. Every member of the Slayman family was hurt, but none were killed. Then the storm passed over and vanished in the direction of Pomeroy where its terrible force was spent. East of Pomeroy the black cloud lifted and disappeared.

But this darkest of all days passed. So too did the period of financial worry, and finally the new century dawned on what seemed to be a new world. Rural mail delivery was started and telephone lines were extended out into the country. Some new towns came into being -- Albert City, with its mixture of Scandinavian and German residents, and Rembrandt, and Truesdale. Rembrandt was originally laid out on the Barney Orsland farm, in 1899, and called Orsland in honor of the owner. The place had served as a work camp to house employees during the construction of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad from Storm Lake to Winthrop, Minnesota. The town was later renamed for Rembrandt, the Dutch painter. The rich farming land of the surrounding country produced surplus crops of marketable quality and quantity for the local livestock.

Truesdale was another Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad town and was named for an official of the company, W.H. Truesdale. In 1901, when the place had only 14 inhabitants, Jacob Lorey was named postmaster.

There were several other country post offices on crossroads during these years; Racine, Crozier, Leverett, Elkton, Blaine, Hire's Grove, Hanover, Mayview, Menoti, Northam, Peach, Plum, Sayre, and West Scott.

With the county prospering and new communities growing up, people began to think more about social and educational gatherings in which all could participate. One of these was the Chautauqua. In the years prior to 1903 efforts had been made to hold summer assemblies at Elm Park, near Storm Lake, but not much had been accomplished although there had been lectures at the various camp meetings held by the churches. Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver and Champ Clark had spoken at the lake but there had been no regular course of lectures or entertainment. Finally in 1903 the Reverend W. J. Carr of the Methodist Episcopal Church and three other men planned the Storm Lake Chautauqua, to be held in the shady park by the lake shore. This Chautauqua was the first in this section of the State and was such a success that later many other towns prepared similar programs. Among the lecturers who came to Storm Lake for these summer sessions were William Jennings Bryan, Robert La Follette, Booker T. Washington, Billy Sunday, and John Vance Cheney.

Another important and highly popular event was the Buena Vista County Farmers' Institute, organized May 11, 1893. It was the custom to meet for a day's session in January or February of each year and the meetings had the practical value of an interchange of ideas and experiences combined with talks by prominent speakers, the judging of contests, and entertainment features centered particularly around home talent. The young people of the various communities participated in school exhibits and presented short skits of music or programs of topical interest. An agricultural short course kept the men well posted on the latest theories and methods, while the women learned helpful tips from domestic science demonstrations. The livestock show usually attracted many entries of cattle, swine, horses, and poultry. This farmers' institute was popular from the first and was destined to continue for many years.

During these years steps were taken toward acquiring a library for Storm Lake. In 1902 the Reverend E. E. Reed, president of Buena Vista College, began to interest people in getting a favorable hearing for a proposal to secure a Carnegie library. He devoted two years to this work. At first a proposed location was considered on the college campus; then in March 1904 a board was organized to seek for and control the library's affairs in connection with the city council. With the assistance of donations and a Carnegie fund, a building was erected and formally opened to the public September 29, 1906. Miss Ethelyn Bailie was the librarian. Closely identified with the library was Miss Elizabeth Walpole, one of the pioneer daughters who had watched over and helped foster the growth of the town. She later became the Storm Lake librarian and held that office for a period of 30 years until her death in May 1941.

Another splendid building was erected in Storm Lake in 1906, and dedicated Sunday, September 30. It was the Methodist Episcopal Church, constructed of red brick with a granite foundation. It was 70½ by 101½ feet and cost $26,000. The congregation had made this possible with their enthusiastic cooperation, and when some additional funds were found to be necessary to pay for a pipe organ, $820 was raised in 20 minutes. The instrument was installed in March 1907 in plenty of time for the Easter service. It had been eagerly anticipated by all the music-lovers of the vicinity.

An event also of interest to religious circles was the installation of a melodious new bell in the tower of St. Mary's Church. This took place Tuesday, March 20, 1906.

The people were finding new ways of getting relaxation and keeping up with the outside world. Most novel was the

viewing of moving pictures that were occasionally brought to town on a traveling circuit. At Storm Lake such pictures, produced by the Edison Company, were shown for the first time in July 1900 at the auditorium. This was pronounced a "most interesting exhibition" but probably no one then dreamed that some day it would be possible to go to the movies daily if one wished, or that special theaters would be built all over the country, just to house cinema audiences.

No one in the vicinity had yet seen an airplane, but there had been considerable discussion of the subject, so much so that the following item was reported in the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune for August 15, 1902: "A box kite, flying over the city Tuesday morning attracted great attention. The uninitiated thought it was a new-fangled flying machine and they gazed at it in open-mouthed wonder." It was years later, in 1919, that such a machine was actually owned in the region. Albert City was the first town in Buena Vista County to have an airplane. Albert Sundholm, a young local man, attended the flying school at Fort Dodge, and when he returned a company was formed at Albert City to buy a new Curtiss plane. Soon Sundholm was taking his neighbors aloft to get a view of the prairie. And, during the campaign for the consolidation of the public schools, he circled the city with "Vote Yes" painted on the fuselage.

The first automobile at Albert City was F. L. Danielson's "Queen", acquired about 1908. Soon there was to be competition for it. The local paper for September 28 of that year, said; "C. R. Larson will not be outdone by any of the other boys. He has ordered through F. L. Danielson a 'high wheel' auto, or 'horseless carriage'. Albert City with autos galore, a ball team which is seldom beaten, the place of big picnics, and church conventions, is getting up in the world and shows signs of being quite a town some of these days."

Everywhere, improvements were made. People had telephones, and water, and sewage systems and gas plants for light and heat were built. Streets were paved, larger buildings went up, and stores and business houses were enlarged and improved. At Storm Lake a canning factory was started and put into operation in August 1905. About the same time, the Storm Lake Butter Tub and Tank Factory was opened.

Several communities were damaged by fires which temporarily retarded commercial and civic activities, but the damaged areas were quickly rebuilt. Truesdale, which in its few years of existence had already had one disastrous fire, was the scene of another on June 29, 1907. Just at

midday flames raged through the Johnson lumber yard, burning the entire stock and the office building. The Skewis grain elevator nearby caught fire at the same time and was entirely consumed with its contents of 2,500 bushels of oats and 200 bushels of corn. Part of the $30,000 damages was covered by insurance. On January 10, 1908, H. W. Kleeb's drug store building at Truesdale was burned down.

Dr. D. H. Nusbaum's $8,000 sanatorium at Storm Lake was completely destroyed early on the morning of June 20, 1909, by fire which originated either in the water heaters or was caused by spontaneous combustion. The flames leapt to the old Illinois Central station but were there quickly put out.

The Western elevator and power house at Sulphur Springs and 2,500 bushels of oats were burned in a $7,000 fire at Sulphur Springs, March 9, 1910. A few months later, early in August of that year, the Newell creamery was burned to the ground. The stockholders of the organization had just met to discuss plans for a new building but had decided to wait until the following spring before starting construction. As the Pilot-Tribune reported, "Fate had other plans" and the interested persons revised theirs to conform to the new circumstances.

Part of Linn Grove's business district went up in smoke on the night of March 27, 1911, when a blaze broke out in the hall of the Modern Woodmen of America. It quickly spread to neighboring buildings -- a butcher shop, warehouse, and barber shop. Fire fighters demolished an old bandstand to halt the blaze in one direction. Fortunately no one was hurt, and at the livery stable the horses, as well as the harness and buggies, were all saved. Insurance covered most of the loss.

It was some years later, in 1917, before Storm Lake's big fire occurred. This broke out on Thanksgiving morning and almost completely ruined the Storm Lake Lumber Company offices, the O'Banion building, the Masonic Temple, the L.S. Dlugosch store, and the Steffen garage. The Commercial National Bank was partially destroyed, and the roof of the Milwaukee depot was consumed by the flames. The losses amounted to $150,000, and were covered about half by insurance.

During the next few years various events of interest mirrored community and county activities or changes.

A carload of fingerlings was unloaded and deposited in Storm Lake October 12, 1909. Black and silver bass were included in the shipment as well as pickerel, pike, crappies, perch, and sunfish. A large rearing pond for pan fish was

to be operated on the west side of the lake. It had been stocked with fish as early as 1877, when the State Fish Commission had 25,000 trout brought from the hatchery at Anamosa.

The new Lakeside Presbyterian Church at Storm Lake was dedicated January 18, 1914. During the same year the old high school was razed and a new one built on the same site.

In May 1916 President R. D. Echlin of Buena Vista College launched a whirlwind campaign to raise $100,000 for increasing the institution's endowment. By August the entire sum had been raised in the region of northwest Iowa, and a similar campaign was planned for the following year. By 1918 an endowment of $200,000 had been secured.

In October 1918 the people of the vicinity had a chance to look backward and enjoy a representation of life in their pioneer days. This was made possible by the Daughters of the American Revolution who at that time presented a pageant at Storm Lake depicting scenes in Buena Vista County in the early years of its history. This event was all the more appreciated because a new phase of history was in the making. The United States had been engaged in the World War since April 1917. While a large number of men from the county were in active military service, the citizens on the home front were loyally performing many patriotic deeds.

During America's participation in the World War in 1917-1918, Buena Vista County furnished 1,250 men. About 50 gold stars indicated those who died or were killed in service and of this group of brave soldiers several were cited for particular action. One of these was Oliver P. Byam, instructor in the 146th machine gun battalion, who moved his platoon through heavy artillery and machine gun fire 400 meters in advance of the front line and from there opened fire on the enemy. He was later killed while leading a patrol. John L. Humphrey was gassed twice and wounded once, nevertheless he returned to the front, where he fell July 18, 1918. A posthumous Croix de Guerre was presented by Marshal Foch with the accompanying citation: "He gave evidence of the greatest bravery in all of the conflict and showed the finest loyalty to his comrades."

Eva Delbridge of Storm Lake, a Red Cross nurse, enlisted on November 8, 1917. She had charge of the surgical department of base hospital Number 114. There was a number of other nurses from Buena Vista County, also several women stenographers and office workers who replaced men and thus released them for service with the armed forces.

The people of Buena Vista County did everything they could to help the Government during this tense period. They over-subscribed four of the five Liberty Loan quotas, they formed a County Council of National Defense (besides many smaller patriotic groups) and through the Red Cross helped make surgical dressings, hospital supplies, and knitted articles. College men were trained for military service at Buena Vista College with the Students Army Training Corps, while many of the alumni were serving overseas.

Armistice Day, November 11, 1918, brought happiness to Buena Vista County, just as it did to so many other parts of the world. The men began to come home again and to go on with their civilian life. They also formed Posts of the American Legion. One of the first groups was the Edward William Hartman Post No. 12 of Marathon, named for a gold star man.

CHAPTER 12

THE MODERN SCENE

An editorial in the Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune for August 6, 1920, observed: "Storm Lake will be 50 years old next Wednesday, August 11, for just 50 years ago the first lots in the town were placed on sale at public auction on that date. There have not been any arrangements made for a semi-centennial celebration, but the date will mark an important landmark in the city's history nevertheless. Fifty years ago the site of the town was a bleak and windswept prairie, with only one building. Today it is one of the most prosperous and beautiful towns in the State, with a population of 4,000." Storm Lake was well built up with smart business houses and homes, and tall, attractive trees lined the paved streets.

Vigorous industries had been established: a canning plant employing 145 persons and furnishing a local market to growers of corn and vegetables, a wholesale fruit house, a butter tub factory, a poultry packing plant, a telephone system, and two newspaper and job printing plants. To this were to be added a packing plant with a capacity of 2,400 hogs a week, and a livestock sales barn.

The combination of automobiles and paved roads enabled visitors from distant points to enjoy the charm of the Storm Lake itself, with its bathing beaches, picnic areas under spreading trees, summer cottages, and fishing facilities. There was a country club located along the bluffs and in the neighborhood were such scenic spots as Lake Shore Drive, Sunset Park, Chautauqua Park, and Manawa Beach.

Land in the county had been selling at enormous prices. A "new high" was reached on May 27, 1919, when W. L. Geisinger's farm near Storm Lake was bought by Charles Keister, another farmer, for about $55,000; 118 acres at $466 per acre. This record price was surpassed on June 16 of the same year when George Smyington sold his farm near Alta for $470 per acre.

On May 18, 1921, the history of Storm Lake was reviewed in a symbolic pageant put on by the teachers and pupils of the town. The scene represented various phases of legend or fact from Indian days to 1870 and on to 1921. According to this presentation, the lake owed its name to an Indian episode rather than to the generally accepted story of the old trapper whose tent was blown down in a high wind. This more romantic explanation depicted the unhappy love affair of a Sioux maiden who, being forbidden to marry her favored suitor from another tribe, attempted to elope with him, crossing the lake in a canoe. A storm upset the canoe and the lovers

were drowned, although a swimmer sent in pursuit was saved. The saddened and angry chief thereupon declared, "Henceforth, oh deceitful, laughing water, thou shalt be scorned by the red men of the Sioux. No pleasing name shall be thine." And he called the body of water "Storm Lake."

The source of this legend is unknown. Very likely Elizabeth Walpole, who collected most of the material used in the pageant, took poetic license and elaborated the story told in the pamphlet, Settlers' Guide, issued in 1872 by those early real estate dealers, Barton and Hobbs. The original version told of Indians naming the lake Storm Lake after several of their number had been drowned when their canoe capsized during a sudden squall. No romance was mentioned: perhaps it was invented by the pageant directors who knew that similar legends of unhappy Indian lovers are identified with many parts of Iowa.

Among the other scenes realistically portrayed was Main Street in 1870, where farmers and hunters gathered to watch the first copy of the Storm Lake Pilot being auctioned to L. J. Barton for $106 and the first load of wheat sold to station agent J. D. Eddy at 75 cents a bushel. John I. Blair was shown presenting little Aurelia Wirick, the first child born in town, with a deed to a lot. Successive phases of the pageant highlighted the hardships of the pioneers, the development of rural life, and the establishment of education, religion, civic beauty, and finally, an Ideal Town. Tribute was allegorically paid participants in the World War by representations of Liberty, Union, Equality, Justice, and Love. In the final scene, the Spirit of the Ideal Town was shown by the water, ready to return to the mist from which she had been called, while the characters representing the Past moved over a symbolic bridge linking that Past with the Future. Pledging themselves to the welfare of the community, they dropped floral offerings into the water, in tribute to the Ideal Town, Storm Lake.

The 1920's were years of growth -- business, building, and social expansion. There were new schools and churches and civic improvements, not only in Storm Lake, but throughout the county.

At Buena Vista College, a gymnasium named Victory Hall was erected in honor of the institution's 209 men who served in the Army, Navy, and Marines, during the first World War. It was a Gothic style brick and stone structure, 60 by 100 feet in size. The running track, requiring about 22 laps to the mile, was so constructed that it could be used as a gallery when entertainments were given on the 30 by 40 foot stage. Bradford Athletic Field was constructed along the lake shore and was named for S. C. Bradford of Des Moines,

who had donated an addition of 21 lots to the college. A large amphitheater was erected.

Some other buildings had been added to the campus and included the $10,000 Ladies' Hall and Mather Hall, the music conservatory donated by Mrs. Flora Mather of Cleveland, Ohio. The president's home, called the Stuart-Miller house, was presented to the college by the Reverend William Miller of Des Moines and Mrs. Louis Stuart of Audubon.

In 1928 the library in the new Science Hall at the college was named the Fracker Library and dedicated to Professor George F. Fracker. During that same year a new form of self help was inaugurated in the basement of the Science Hall where various articles of light hardware were manufactured and assembled. These utensils were sold and the proceeds used to pay current expenses of the college and the help of the students thus engaged. Such a procedure was in keeping with the college motto, "Education for Service." The course at this time being taught included liberal arts, music, art, dramatic speech, and pre-professional and normal school training.

A bond issue of $170,000 was floated in 1926, bringing the school's indebtedness to $385,000 in 1931 when Henry Olson took office as president. By midsummer of 1941, President Olson was able to announce that all indebtedness had been cleared and that the last outstanding bond, part of the 1926 issue, had been donated to the college by Walter G. Stock of Storm Lake.

A new high school for Storm Lake students was put up in 1928 and 1929. The building in use since the eighties had been demolished and replaced in 1914, but 14 years later more adequate facilities were needed and the fine new school, financed entirely by the people of Storm Lake, was put up.

The Marathon Independent School District, including nearby towhship districts consolidated in 1903, built a new $40,000 high school and gymnasium in 1927. It was one of the best school buildings in the country.

Another source of pride to the people of Marathon was the excellent public library, in a building of its own. It was the outgrowth of a modest beginning made in 1919 by the Tuesday Study Club.

Buena Vista's first County Play Day was held May 4, 1923, at Storm Lake under the auspices of the Commercial Club. All schools in the county joined the demonstration showing the work in physical education which the pupils and teachers had been doing during the past year.

Several months later it was announced that the Newell schools had helped win the big silver loving cup offered nationally to the State which most successfully conducted the "Modern Health Crusade." The work was directed by the Iowa Tuberculosis Association. Newell students were among 300,000 school children throughout Iowa who participated in the practical health program. The next year, in September 1924, the educational journal, Midland Schools, ranked the Buena Vista County schools first in the State. The number of pupils, attendance record, salary of teachers, percentage of teachers holding state certificates, tax-raised funds, and the value of the buildings, in comparison with those of other counties, formed the basis for the decision.

Another important health step had been taken with the establishment of a modern hospital at Storm Lake. The movement was started in 1922 when Dr. J. A. Swallum donated an excellent site of lake front property on the condition that actual construction work on the hospital be under way within five years. Six other local physicians, Doctors E. F. Smith, J. H. O'Donoghue, H. E. Farnsworth, A. G. Gran, E. D. Banghart, and U. S. Parish, each pledged $1,000 to the cause.

A successful community hospital was established at Alta in 1920. The building and equipment of 15 beds and five bassinets were owned by the community and were so well managed that the project became self-sustaining. A few years later, Alta with its homes, schools, churches, and library was cited by the Rural Life commission as a community "far above the average."

For the churches, the modern years were devoted to building, expansion, and the summing up of work accomplished in past years by the various church denominations. The handsome new Lutheran Church at Lake Avenue and Third Street in Storm Lake was dedicated on August 21, 1921. It was built of brick and Bedford Stone, and cost $28,000. In the tower was placed the first bell used in the town, originally located in December 1872 in the belfry of the first Presbyterian Church.

A less happy occasion was the conflagration in Brooke Township late one night just before Christmas 1923. The church burned and nothing was saved: even the huge bell was melted into a shapeless mass. A new Presbyterian Church was dedicated at Alta, February 22, 1925. Subscriptions and money to the amount of $12,500 were taken in during the day's services, enough to clear the church of debt and provide for a fine pipe organ.

St. Mary's parochial school was dedicated at Storm Lake on June 1, 1927, by Bishop Edmond Heelan of the Catholic diocese of Sioux City, who also celebrated High Mass in St.

Mary's Church. The bishop congratulated Father William Cooke, the congregation, and also the Protestants of Storm Lake who had helped to build the schoolhouse. Nearly four months later, on Sunday September 25, 1927, the cornerstone of the new Church of Christ at Storm Lake was laid. It contained a copy of the Bible, the roll of membership, history of the church, and copies of both Storm Lake newspapers.

At Sioux Rapids, the Congregational Church burned in December 1927. Fire started in the basement early one Sunday morning and the fire bell was soon rung out, but despite "heroic efforts", the building could not be saved. Flames had spread between the walls, and the dense clouds of smoke made fire fighting difficult. Two organs and some of the furnishings were carried out. A new church was built the next spring. Members of the Little Sioux Valley Church, three miles northwest of Rembrandt in Buena Vista County, celebrated the 60th anniversary of its founding by special programs from October 4 to October 7, 1928. This was the church that had been organized in September 1868 by a group of Norwegian settlers of the Lutheran faith, headed by Ole Enderson Hesla.

More than 1,000 persons attended the dedication of St. Peter's Lutheran Church at Newell in September 1930, with the Reverend C. H. Seltz presiding. The attractive Gothic building was surmounted by a 1,400 pound bell. Rembrandt's new Methodist Episcopal Church was dedicated, debt free, on March 15, 1931.

Storm Lake was the scene of various civic improvements. In June 1927 a modern new band shell costing $4,000 was dedicated at the west end of Sunset Park. Of brick construction, it was said to be the "last word", ideal for its purpose of enhancing music appreciation. Karl King's band of Fort Dodge opened the season with a gala concert: there was community singing, and Judge James De Land made an address. On May 29, 1927, Memorial Sunday, a monument to the Storm Lake and to the other Buena Vista County boys who died in the World War, was unveiled in Chautauqua Park. It was the gift of the women's Service Star Legion of Storm Lake. A copper box placed in the base contained the history of the Service Star Legion. The names of the World War veterans of the county who died in service were inscribed on the bronze plate. Nearby were two other memorials, the statue "The Pioneer", given by the Tuesday Club, and a granite boulder dedicated to the pioneers by the Buena Vista Chapter of the D. A. R.

In the spring of 1930, the board of park commissioners built a log cabin at the gateway to the "City Beautiful", at Evergreen Park. A large stock of tourist literature for the

information of visitors was provided and the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce arranged to keep office hours there during the summer.

The county still suffered from occasional weather extremes. A severe sleet and ice storm swept over Storm Lake in February 1928, damaging the trees and the telephone wires. Thousands of dead limbs were broken from the trees and so many telephone poles and wires were knocked down locally and in the country that service was badly crippled. Possibly because of this, engineers of the Bell laboratories and members of the development and research department of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, on the following May 28, installed the first type "D-A-I" carrier system between Omaha and Storm Lake. This type, sometimes called the "flivver" carrier system, eliminates some wire stringing and includes an auxiliary amplifier.

Unusual weather struck the county again early on the morning of May 9, 1930, when a tornado, preceded by rains and a hailstorm, roared in from the southwest. It was the first time a "twister" had struck directly at the center of the town of Storm Lake. The Pomeroy Cyclone had jumped over it, but it made up for that by leaving an "awesome path" of destruction in its wake. The property damage exceeded $25,000, but fortunately no lives were lost and no one was seriously hurt.

Agriculture was given added impetus by the merging of the Farmers' Institute, usually held in February, with the Fall Festival. The combined events, scheduled annually for October at Storm Lake, proved very popular. Although the original county fair at Storm Lake had failed after a five-year trial, the movement had been revived at Alta in 1886 and after that was held each fall without a break. The farmers always looked forward to attending this exposition at the end of the threshing season. The years immediately following 1924 were particularly successful. People everywhere were enjoying good times; race awards and premiums had been increased and a new exhibit hall and cattle barns facilitated the displaying of all classes of entries. C. E. Cameron, secretary of the Buena Vista County Fair, had the distinction of also serving for more than 25 years as the president of the Iowa State Fair. Cameron's keen interest in horse racing not only contributed to his successful management of both organizations, but led to his being chosen president of the American Trotting Association in 1931.

Buena Vista County was the home of some outstanding people in the professional and business world. The Pilot-Tribune announced on April 12, 1928: "Storm Lake is enjoying a unique distinction -- it is at present furnishing

presidents for four Iowa organizations. It is possible that some other town equals this record but if so, the Pilot-Tribune does not know of it and believes that Storm Lake is setting a record." The officials named were the following: W. C. Jarnagin, president of the Iowa Press Association; W. F. Park, president of the Iowa Master Builders Association; George F. Schaller, president of the Iowa Bankers Association; and Mrs. Lucy Bowers, president of the Iowa Service Star Legion.

George F. Schaller, president of the First National Bank at Storm Lake from 1922 to 1934, served as director of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago from 1930 to 1934, and was president of the latter institution from 1934 to 1941.

There was also the noted jurist, F. F. Faville, who had opened a law office at Sioux Rapids in 1892. He soon became mayor of the town and followed up this success by becoming the Buena Vista County Attorney in 1894. In that year he moved to Storm Lake. There he made his home and there his two children, Marion and Stanton, were born. In 1918 a disastrous fire at Storm Lake destroyed his law library, strengthening his decision to go to Fort Dodge to practice. While there he was elected to the Supreme Court of Iowa. Judge Faville was a distinguished speaker and in the course of his talks advanced many constructive ideas. One of these, expressed publicly at a Storm Lake gathering, was that the United States Government should institute a Department of Peace, and that a Secretary of Peace should hold a responsible position in the presidential cabinet.

Another statesman from Buena Vista County was George Alfred Carlson, who was born at Alta October 23, 1876, and died at Denver, Colorado, December 7, 1926. Carlson was elected governor of Colorado in 1914.

William C. Edson, a former mayor of Storm Lake and president of the Board of Trustees of Buena Vista College, was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in the State Legislature in January 1925. He had twice previously been elected representative -- in 1918 and 1920.

Alta was the home of the astronomer David E. Hadden, who cooperated with the United States Weather Bureau as a voluntary observer of the weather and the solar system. He equipped an observatory at home and began to accumulate and classify data used in long range weather observation, and formulated a theory of forecasting weather in cycles that received much attention. In April 1934 Hadden received a grant from the Carnegie Institute at Washington, alloted to him for an analysis of his meteorological observations.

Tribute to the educational system of Buena Vista County, particularly that of consolidated schools which had become widely known in scholastic circles, was paid in the spring of 1926 by a distinguished Englishman, A. B. Neal, a research scholar from the London County Council. While studying American educational methods, particularly those used in the rural districts, Dr. Neal asked to be allowed to come to Buena Vista County and to stay in rural homes and ride back and forth on the school busses. During the course of his week's sojourn, he made a report of each Buena Vista County school, accompanied by a photograph of the building, a ground floor sketch and plan, the number of pupils, classes, and course of study. Dr. Neal made several talks before local business and civic groups and remarked: "I wish to go on record as saying that these three one-teacher schools I visited in this county are seldom if ever excelled. And one of them in particular was conducted in such a way that it will always linger in my memory. The teacher was the same as a mother to those children and the good she is doing is of priceless benefit to them."

In November 1939 A. E. Harrison, who was then starting his twenty-fifth year as Buena Vista County superintendent of schools, was elected president of the Iowa State Teachers Association. It was the first time this particular honor, rarely achieved by county school superintendents, had come to Buena Vista County. Mr. Harrison had always been keenly interested in rural students, and placed significant value upon such extra-curricular activities as athletics, dramatics, and the editing of student newspapers. He was a most ardent advocate of the use of State and Federal aid for Iowa schools.

Through the changing years, Buena Vista County established itself as a place of vigorous growth and persistent prosperity. Even in 1932, in the midst of the nationwide depression, Storm Lake's three banks remained open, and asked for no moratorium. While banks in many other communities in the United States were closing daily and businesses were going bankrupt, Storm Lake had no bank failures and no bank closings until the national "bank holiday" declared by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 4, 1933.

All through the depression years Storm Lake citizens carefully watched the financial structure of their community. In September 1932, 2,000 tax payers met in Chautauqua park to declare themselves against tax sales and farm mortgage foreclosures. A committee of three was appointed to mediate between loan agencies and farmers: it included A. R. Browne of Alta, Sugebret Grodahl of Albert City, and W. F. Porath of Newell.

Even the drought of 1934 and 1936 could not discourage the people, who kept building steadily for the future. The Storm Lake Packing plant, a $100,000 investment, was opened for public inspection late in October 1933 and began actual operation shortly afterward. The city's new post office was dedicated March 7, 1936. The Porath Hospital, a $75, 000 modern private structure, was built at the corner of Fifth and Cayuga Streets in Storm Lake and opened August 13, 1938. The $45,000 Vista Theatre presented its first show the evening of October 1, 1938. A sanctuary for wild life was established at Storm Lake, and dredging was started to deepen the lake and remove tons of silt from the bottom. On October 11, 1938, Governor Nelson Kraschel of Iowa made a speech to the people of the county and the northwest part of the State, outlining plans for the creation of Storm Lake State Park and for the reclaiming and beautifying of the lake itself. A million pike fingerlings were deposited there May 3, 1939. Actual dredging of Storm Lake began in September 1939, with the object of removing 5,000,000 cubic feet of silt.

In the month of September 1939, a war had begun in Europe that spread and engulfed many other countries. It became evident that new armed forces would be needed to defend the United States, and to raise these forces a training service law was passed in 1940.

On October 16, 1940, nearly 3,000 Buena Vista County men between the ages of 21 and 36 registered at their regular voting places to comply with the Selective Service Training Act. The holders of numbers drawn in the national lottery at Washington, D. C., on October 29 were to be called up for a year of training in the United States Army. Carl W. Zwemke of Alta, who had the first number drawn, 158, had a heart ailment and was placed in a non-military classification Joseph L. Herzenach, Sioux Rapids, and Allen Saathoff, Storm Lake, had the other two Buena Vista County numbers drawn that morning, 192 and 105 respectively.

Between November 1940 and July 1941, 136 other young men from the county were to leave for army service. By November 12, eight had voluntarily enlisted for the year of military training. They were Clifford Oliver Johnson, of Albert City; Walter Hartman, of Marathon; Cyrus Orville Hickman, of Rembrandt; and Marlyn Fethkenher, Ned Madson, Rudolph Carlson, Charles Toohey, and Leo Keith Wall, all of Storm Lake.

An important step that meant much for the community was taken by the citizens of Storm Lake at a special election held there October 22, 1940. At that time they voted

$30,000 in bonds for purchasing a municipal airport. The vote was 1,311 for the proposal and 112 against it, more than ten to one in its favor. A tract of 150 acres just north of town was purchased in 1941 from H. V. Geisinger, and the construction of a hangar was begun. Thus Buena Vista County looked to the completion of the first cycle of its growth, from ox teams to airplanes.

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