

From: "Early History of Grinnell, Iowa

1854-1874

staying at home, don't know anything about straitened circumstances; I have been compelled to sleep with my feet out of bed half the time since I came to the state"—a climax in experience which is said to have silenced and dispersed the voluble story telling company.

CHAPTER VII.

Underground R. R.—John Brown—Cemetery—Deacons—A Race—Negroes in Grinnell—Many Deacons.

At an early day some very good but timid men, and others really sordid, greatly feared that the radical people here and their wide repute in aiding the fugitives from slavery would forbid Grinnell being, as they expressed it, anything more than a "nigger town."

What swarms of swarthy emigrants were pictured here, if slavery were at an end, perfuming the school houses, stealing, and governing the country with such a gross rule that white people would rebel and have to give away their property. It was answered, "We will take in the fleeing fugitive and if he chooses to stay he shall be protected; for a postoffice we will not vote the slavery ticket, nor for popular favor will we repress our convictions, let what will come to the town." The war: several worthy colored men enlisting for the Union, and the legal destruction of slavery, together with the general good behavior of the colored people wiped out any supposed reproach.

Several colored persons gained respectable standing as students, and two of their number, Dennis Thompson and Willis Rogers, are now south in their native country teaching. Emma Morgan, from New Orleans, the ladies of the Congregational society for several years supported, who gave good promise but was prematurely cut down by death. She was a light quadron, and not easily distinguished from her companions as this incident shows. On one occasion a stranger in the Sabbath school remarked upon the number, good order, etc., to which it was replied: we

—29—

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Grinnell - railroad  
Underground railroad

have young and old, and all colors, some very white for colored, and the stranger was asked to designate the colored girl in a large class; and on guessing the one at the end of the seat, of not unusual complexion, the response was, "No, no!! that is my daughter."

It is not denied that Grinnell was a notable Underground Railway station, which is estimated to have passed safely on to the Canaan of Canada a thousand persons. It was known from Texas to the Lakes, by the quiet Quakers and the consignees at Chicago and Detroit. It is safe to talk about it now, yet the spies have hastened the flight of many, helped on by money, horses and men, at least to the Quakers in Cedar county. At a large meeting in a slave state, in a place from which word had gone back of good treatment here, a reward of several thousand dollars was offered for the abduction or the head of one of the active abolitionists of Grinnell; and it is a curious fact that the person for whom the reward was offered, not five years later, met and served on a committee in congress with the president of that meeting offering that reward, who had become a staunch advocate of freedom, and to whom it was jovially remarked that he was ready to be abducted then, voluntarily, for half the reward offered.

It was here that John Brown staid several days, passing east, with a company of some 16 persons and as many horses. He was then on his way to Virginia, but it was not here known, though, with a flashing eye, he proclaimed that he "had a commission direct from God Almighty, which he was sworn to fulfil." It was evident that he was in deep thought, and, at a public meeting, scouted the idea of his course being dangerous, for it was a small concern when a man died if it was God's time. His equipment here, the arms, baggage, and proper border outfit, called to mind the story of the brigands and the strifes of feudal days. All were stacked and stored in what was then the Reed House, south of the railroad. If the rumors of the time had been credited we should have looked for carnage in our streets. Brown was prepared and had sent word to Workman, the Iowa City postmaster, and other valorous "Union-

—30—

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servers" in that city that "if they wanted to take him he would be that way when his horses were rested." His leaving here is well remembered. It was like the moving of an arsenal, so numerous were his guns and side-arms. Taking a sick child in his arms, whose sable mother was ill, and taking a front seat in a canvas covered wagon he waved a good-bye to Grinnell and a "God bless you for your money and your prayers."

The place of sepulture has a relation to the history of a town and is peculiarly associated with the tastes and sensibilities of a refined people. Those unfenced, neglected homes of the dead where there is not a designating memento, mound or a stone, are suggestive of gross materialism if not criminal neglect. In the year 1855 Mr. Grinnell donated the present cemetery site, of 12 acres, to the town, and George W. Crain, with others, laid out the lots. The aged Mr. and Mrs. Heald, the first deceased, were buried on the Bixby farm.

The first born child in the town was Frederick Samuel, son of Dr. Thomas Holyoke; during that same year he was buried on Dr. Holyoke's grounds. Mrs. Christina Patterson, living west of Sugar Creek, was stricken with apoplexy, and deceased in the winter of 1855, was the first interment in our cemetery. How vivid is the remembrance of climbing up the steep hill to the summit, and how solemn that hour, placing the sod in the bitter winter blast on the first made grave in our new cemetery! Through all the tall hazel thicket the chill wind seemed to sigh in sympathy with a mourning family, and sing a dirge to the departed, in solemn dedication of a sacred spot to be the home of our dead.

A fence was soon built, and family enclosures were made, tombstones erected, trees and flowers tastefully set by the hands of affection, where before only chance wild flowers were rooted, when a sweeping prairie fire brought sad desolation to the grounds which it required several years to recover. Later substantial improvements began under the mayoralty of Hon. H. G. Little, by whose energy and su-

per vision the grounds were enlarged to give symmetry and diversity; new streets and alleys were worked, trees set, and such tasteful adorning entered upon that to Mayor Little, more than to any other person, is lasting gratitude due. The cemetery now, regarding seclusion, elevation and undulations, is a spot of rare beauty, every year becoming more attractive as the flowers bloom, the evergreen borders are set, and tasteful monuments erected, indicative at once of a refined taste and a pleasing recollection of the honored dead, not less than a proper concern for that spot where we shall all soon sleep our last sleep.

It should not be omitted that the carpenters of Grinnell erected the tasteful cemetery cottage and that the ladies gave the proceeds of a fair towards ornamentation; nor should the artistic labors of J. G. Dodge, Esq., and others, be forgotten.

The marked and at least nominal religious character of the people is illustrated by an unusual number who have held some official position in the church. For some time the race in numbers, deacon and ministerial, was not unequal. An accession would occasion the jovial remark, the ministers are ahead; and then a new arrival, the deacons are ahead. Since one class may have found a mention it will not comport with strictly historical fidelity, to leave the other class of officials undesignated; and should these sketches find their way eastward the parties named will be more readily recognized by the honored prefix.

If any below are improperly classed it may be ascribed, in compliment, to their coming up to the Pauline standard, to-wit: "The deacons must be grave; not double tongued, nor given to much wine; not greedy of filthy lucre, the husbands of one wife." In this array, in which it is hoped—in the one denomination of which we now speak—there are no omissions, we find: Deacons A. Whitcomb, Wm. N. Ford, S. N. Bartlett, James Hubbard, Sumner Bixby, L. H. Marsh, G. Gardner, S. Meacham, T. B. Clark, P. G. C. Merrill, S. Sherman, J. S. Dawes, E. L. Lit-

tle; and of those arriving since comparisons were made there are B. Timmerman, M. Chafee, Charles Platt, and J. Clement, making a total of 17. This array of heads of families—we have no bachelor deacons—gives occasion to deny the old proverbial comparison as to deacons' daughters and to dispel the popular apprehension as to their waywardness; for, so far as is known, they have not only escaped the discipline of the State Reform School, but, conducting themselves with becoming gravity, have attained eminently respectable positions in society.

That this is no fanciful numerical comparison, as every early resident will observe, I have but to name the other class, which we have here, in their chronological order of arrival: Grinnell, Hamlin, Loomis, Herrick, Rouse, Hathaway, Reed, Cleaveland, Cochran, Kasson, Chamberlain, Brainard, Woodworth, White, Kennedy, and Leavitt, being 17, just a numerical counterpart to the deacons; making no enumeration of the College Faculty and the land owners whose interests were here, as Campbell, of Illinois; Lane, of Belle Plain; Fraser, of Ohio; Cushman, of Massachusetts; Mr. Jones, and now deceased Dr. Day, Professor Ripley, and Rev. Mr. Barton.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### The First School—More Arrivals—The Wool Industry.

The arrivals in 1855 were many and the improvements significant of energy and a promise of material growth. A second store was built and located on the corner east of the then Bailey House which has had many occupants, among the number A. K. Lowrey, Charles H. Spencer, and Geo. W. Crain, and was, in its present aspect, enlarged into a dwelling by Mr. Ellington. The stone house now occupied by Mr. Scheiller, that of Mrs. Hays, Mr. Thomas, David Sutherland, Deacon Bartlett, Deacon Whitcomb, J. B. Grinnell, S. E. Harris, Wm. N. Ford. The T. B. Clark residence, now owned by Mrs. Carney, and the Twin House south of the railroad, and several others were erected which were hardly tenantable for the winter