



DANIEL TRULLINGER

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The pioneer of pioneers of Polk County and Des Moines was Daniel Trullinger, the only living man who was at Fort Raccoon when it was only a soldiers' camp. There was no cannon, no stockade, no block houses. It was not a fort, but simply a military camp, really more like a community of camping settlers; the difference being, they were sent here by Uncle Sam to protect from the marauding Sioux, the Sauk and Fox Indians, who had a reservation at or near where Avon now is, on what was called Keokuk's Prairie; also villages along Skunk River and Four Mile Creek. When Trullinger arrived, the soldiers were living in tents, having preceded him but a few days.

Born in Ohio, in 1818, Trullinger was raised on a farm, getting what education he could in the common schools of that day. From Ohio, he removed to Indiana, near Perrysville, where he and four brothers had small tracts of land. While there, he learned brick-making with his uncle, Benjamin Gordy.

In May, 1843, he and his brothers decided to come West, where land was cheaper and could be purchased in large quantities. Packing such necessary household goods, as pioneers usually did, into prairie schooners, with oxen for motor power, they started for Iowa, and June Thirteenth crossed the Mississippi at Fort Madison, and went on to Jefferson County, where they stopped near Fairfield, then the most frontier point, a few days, and where Daniel learned of the establishment of the new fort at Raccoon Forks.

Harking back to the event a few days ago, he said:

"With my wife and baby, and Uncle Ben. Gordy, an ox team and wagons, we left Fairfield, and five days later arrived at The Fort, the Fifteenth of June. We forded the river near where the Grand Avenue bridge is, the water being very low, not up to the hubs of the wagon wheels. The soldiers of the garrison had been here about three weeks, and were living in tents pitched

along the heavy timber belt which skirted the river, or about where Second Street is now. The day we arrived, they were putting the roof on the commissary store building, near Des Moines River, just north of the 'Coon. There was a sutler's store where the south end of Prouty's wholesale grocery store is now, and the logs up for a Guard House a little south and west of the sutler's store. Nothing had been done about dwellings, though logs were being cut for cabins in the timber on the east side of the Des Moines, and along the bluff on the west side.

"So soon as the sutler's store was ready to occupy, they began to put up cabins for dwellings. The first row was for the officers, along the Des Moines, where First Street is, and fronted west. They were double, with a portico between them, the entrance to each half being from the portico. Some were roofed with shingles, and some with clapboards. They had good doors, windows, and flooring, the material for which was hauled from Keokuk in Government wagons. The logs were cut and hauled by the soldiers. The cabins for the soldiers were along the 'Coon. The building was done by five carpenters, who came with the soldiers. All the necessary material for building was at hand, except brick, and that was my opportunity. My uncle was an expert brick-maker, and I had learned of him to make brick. We were just the men Captain Allen, commander of The Fort, was looking for. Brick was wanted for chimneys and fireplaces of the cabins and stores. There were no stoves. I at once went prospecting for clay, and about half a mile up Raccoon River found a deposit of clay and sand, and not far away a pond, about fifty feet long and nearly as wide—I think it was about the south end of what is now Sixth Avenue—with no bottom, as we tested it for at least sixty feet and found none, and I am told that the early settlers at The Fort said it had no bottom at all. My uncle built a mill to grind the clay on a rise of ground near it, and there we established a brick yard, making from two thousand to four thousand brick per day, of what was known as sand brick, and they were good brick, too. During that Summer, we made about two hundred and eighty thousand brick. For mortar, my son, Aaron, found a lot of stone lying on the ground along Four Mile Creek, which he gathered and burned, making splendid lime.

“We worked every day in the week, as Captain Allen was anxious to get the buildings all completed before Winter set in, and we had to keep the fire going under the kilns, anyhow. A day’s work was from sunrise to sundown. There were no labor unions, and no holidays. There were no churches, nor preachers. In fact, the only way we knew when Sunday came was seeing the soldiers lined up for drill and inspection, and a general cleaning up of the camp. There were nearly three hundred soldiers in the camp, about one third of whom were cavalry, or Dragoons, as they called them. They were all a rugged, honest lot of fellows, used to roughing it, and ready to fight Indians or anything else that ran up against them, though they were quiet and orderly about the camp, for they had to be, as Captain Allen was a strict disciplinarian; but sometimes, Lieutenant Grier, who had more direct charge of the boys and had more humor in his nature, would give a little relaxation—if the Captain was not around.

“There were no settlers in the county that Summer, as the whole country was under military control. Alexander Scott, Alexander Turner, Peter Newcomer, and William Lamb, came in about two weeks before I did, and Captain Allen gave them permits to cultivate tracts of land to raise provisions for the camp. They immediately broke ground and planted corn as they plowed. Lamb, I understand, sowed the first wheat and oats in the county. They got good crops, which had to go to the soldiers’ camp, as they were not allowed to sell a bushel to anybody. Scott’s land was on the east side of the Des Moines, extending down near the starch works. Lamb and Turner were east of him, and Newcomer was on Four Mile Creek. Subsequently, they filed claims and made farms of their land. Aside from these, we had no neighbors except Indians.

“Inside the garrison or fort, aside from the soldiers, there were only the carpenters and bricklayers. There were only five women during that Summer—the wife of Doctor Griffin, the post surgeon; of Lieutenant Grier, of two carpenters, and my wife—so we didn’t have any women’s clubs or society doings. There were no amusements except occasionally the soldier boys would play fiddles, yet everybody was happy. It was like a big family working together in harmony, sharing with each other their fifty cents a day

wages, tobacco, and whiskey. In fact, as the days were long, when night came everybody was ready to go to bed. We had little use for the tallow dips Uncle Sam furnished for lights. The Doctor and five women were kept busy, for there was much sickness from Fever and Ague. At one time, there was less than two dozen men in camp able to work.

"We had good living, and the cabins, when completed, were comfortable. The Government furnished rations of sugar, flour, bacon, ham, codfish, rice, other provisions, tobacco, and a pint of whiskey free to every person in the camp, daily—the women, though, were not allowed the whiskey. It wasn't the kind you get now. If a man got drunk with it, he wasn't sick a week afterward. A good deal of it, however, went to break the 'shakes.'

"The men worked hard: wages were low; the common laborers got fifty cents a day, the bricklayers one dollar, the boss carpenter two dollars, the boss bricklayer one dollar and seventy-five cents, but all got the daily allowance of rations and a cabin for a home, as fast as they were completed. Attached to every cabin was a small garden.

"One great trouble we had was to get mail. The nearest postoffice was Fairfield, and the only way to get mail was by sending a soldier after it, and of course newspapers and reading-matter were scarce.

"During the Summer, Captain Allen was talking one day about fixing a point nearer The Fort, where mail could be deposited, and finding a man to take charge of it. I recommended "Uncle Tommy" Mitchell, whom I had known for some time. He accepted him, and gave him a permit to select a tract of land to cultivate, which he did the next Spring, at a place south of what is now Mitchellville, known as Apple Grove, from a large grove of wild crabapples, on Camp Creek. It was a good place, as the wagon trails from Keokuk, Iowa City, and Fairfield came together a few miles eastward. He put up a large log cabin, settlers soon began to come in, and travel increased so that he opened a tavern and did a big business.

"No, the Indians were very peaceable and quiet. Squads of them frequently came into the camp, and the brick-making was a great curiosity to them. They would sit around for hours and watch the operation, jabbering

away, and some could talk good English. They were great to ask questions. There were three bands, numbering about one thousand. Keokuk had a large village on his prairie, which was just north of where Avon now is, and not as pictured at page Three Hundred and Sixty, in Fulton's 'Red Men of Iowa,' as lying from Des Moines River eastward to the starch works. There were bands along the Skunk and Four Mile Creek. They were friendly, and seemed to realize that the soldiers were here to protect them from their mortal enemy, the Sioux. Sometimes they would go up north hunting, and get on the territory called neutral ground, the Sioux would get after them, and the soldiers would be called out to drive the marauders off. One day, a Sioux chief came to Captain Allen and proposed to join his soldiers, kill all the Indians on the reservation, and then let the white people have it. When the Captain told him he was here to protect them and keep the Sioux where they belonged, the old chief gave a grunt and went off in high dudgeon.

"In October, the buildings had nearly all been completed; there was no further demand for brick, and I decided to leave. Captain Allen offered me ten dollars a month, rations and cabin, but I thought it was not enough, and declined. I returned to Fairfield, and went into the teaming business. In April, 1846, I left Fairfield, to go to my brother, Eli, who had bought a large claim where 'Trullinger's Grove' is, in Franklin Township. On the Sixth, I arrived at 'Uncle Tommy' Mitchell's tavern, where they were holding the first election in Polk County, to elect county officers.

" 'Tommy' said he was mighty glad to see me; that I was just in time to vote, and I threw my vote into his hat. I hadn't been in the county fifteen minutes. Everybody voted who wanted to, and no questions asked. Some came fifteen miles. After voting, they went home and left 'Tommy' to count the votes. That was the trust and confidence the pioneers had in one another. It wouldn't do nowadays, I think.

"I stopped with 'Tommy' three days, went on to my brother, made a claim for one hundred and sixty acres near him, broke and planted twenty-four acres, and in the Fall sold out and returned to Fairfield, and went into brick-

making and teaming. I remember that in 1849 I hauled a load of corn and some provisions to 'Uncle Tommy'—he had got short, his tavern consuming more than his farm produced—and on the way, in Jasper County, I ran up against the Quaker Commissioners the Legislature had sent out to locate a site for the new Capital of the state. They had laid out a big town on the open prairie, no timber or buildings in sight, nor any water within five miles. I didn't think it was a very good place for the Capital.

"I also remember hauling young hogs weighing about one hundred and fifty pounds, butter, eggs, and potatoes to The Fort. I had to get a permit to sell them from Captain Allen, and he would fix the maximum price on them—the pork at fifty cents, butter fifty cents, and eggs twenty-five cents per dozen. I could sell below his price, but not above it."

In 1864, Trullinger got the gold fever, and, with a friend, started for Montana, but when he got to Julesberg, changed his mind and went into the mountains to prospect for gold, but found it too hard work, and went to Denver, where he ran against a man from the East with a slaughter house, meat market, and grocery, worth two thousand dollars, who was suffering from Nostalgia—that is, he wanted "to get back home." Trullinger offered him one thousand dollars for the outfit, got it, and ran it nine years. Subsequently, he speculated, prospected, burned charcoal, and bossed silver mines in Colorado until 1879, when he came back to Iowa, bought a big farm in Calhoun County, held it until March, 1900, when he came to Des Moines, invested his surplus shekels in town lots, and made his home with a widowed daughter on Morton Street—a few rods east of the Danish College, where he spends his time at ease. In Summer, he cultivates shrubbery, flowers, fruit, and vegetables, which, as I saw them a few days ago, indicate that he knows how. He is rugged, active, has perfect health, can do a good day's work, eats three square meals a day, has no use for breakfast foods or patent concoctions for old age, and the day I visited him I found him on a ladder trimming his shade trees.

Politically, he is a Hardshell Democrat; never voted any but the straight ticket, except once for his old friend, Ford, a Whig, for Treasurer of Jefferson

County. He is a Standpatter, and says if he was a Republican he would vote against Cummins for Governor, because he is opposed to more than two terms for any state officer, on principle. He never sought a political office, though for several years he held the office of School Director, consequent upon his active interest in educational affairs and public schools.

Socially, he is genial, frank, and conversational. An hour's recital of reminiscences of people, conditions, and circumstances he has rubbed up against in his long life is replete with interest, and a pleasing diversion.

Religiously, he is not a member of any denomination, though he attends the Christian Church from choice.

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