

FIRST THINGS IN DES MOINES

On May Twentieth, 1843, Captain James Allen, with four officers and forty-four soldiers, arrived at the forks of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers, on the steamboat *Ione*, the first steamboat to reach The Forks. It landed where the west end of the Court Avenue bridge now is. The mission of the soldiery was to establish a temporary military post. With them came four civilians, Doctor John S. Griffin, who was made Post Surgeon; J. M. Thrift, a discharged soldier, father of the present Adjutant General Thrift, who was made Post Tailor, and Charles Worthington, who was assigned to duty as Blacksmith. His shop was on the bottoms near the 'Coon, and in the rear of the soldiers' quarters. That was the roster of Fort Raccoon, as Captain Allen had named the post.

J. M. Thrift was the only one of the post roster who remained and became a resident and citizen of the new community, and therefore was the first white man of record in and for Des Moines.

First Political Meeting—February Fourteenth, 1846, to select candidates for the several county officers to organize Polk County.

First Election—April Sixth, 1846.

First District Court—April Sixth, 1846, in one of the log barrack buildings on 'Coon Row.

First Clerk of the District Court—Perry L. Crossman.

First Sheriff—"Uncle Tommy" Mitchell.

First Church Organized—Methodist, January Fifth, 1845.

First Sunday School—Organized, with seven children, in the Spring of 1845, by B. T. Hoxie and the Reverend Ezra Rathbun.

First Sermon—Ezra Rathbun, at the funeral of a child of Colonel Grier, September, 1845.

First Church Building—1848, on Fifth Street, a two-story frame, where the Iowa Loan and Trust Building stands, for the Methodists.

First Presbyterian Church—Organized the first Sabbath in June, 1848, under rather unique circumstances. Reverend Thompson Bird came to Fort Des Moines the January previous, as a missionary of Des Moines Presbytery, and at once began arrangements to organize a church of the New School faith, and for that purpose a meeting was held in the fourth cabin from the right end of the row, along the west bank of Des Moines River (see Frontispiece), which had been occupied as one of the officers' quarters, and now the southwest corner of First and Vine streets. There were five cabins in the row, and they fronted west. The following is the record of the meeting, made in the handwriting of Father Bird:

"FORT DES MOINES, IOWA,
"JUNE, FIRST SABBATH, 1848.

"According to previous notice, publicly given, on the Sabbath above named, the following persons were, at their own request, organized into a church under the name of the Central Presbyterian Church, of Fort Des Moines, Iowa, to-wit:

"Mrs. Anna P. Bird, Samuel Kellogg Kirkpatrick and his wife, Mary Kellogg Kirkpatrick, Mrs. Ruth Jane Shell, Mrs. Francis Guerant, Mrs. Hannah Yates."

Simultaneous with Father Bird's movement, there was another inaugurated by John S. Dean, and several families, who lived on the East Side, to organize a church of the Old School faith, to be known as the First Presbyterian Church. They fixed upon the same day and hour selected by Father Bird, but a severe storm the Saturday night previous did such damage to some of their cabins, it was necessary to postpone their meeting until repairs could be made, and it was not held until late in the afternoon, after Father Bird's meeting had adjourned. It was held in the two-room cabin of Mr. Dean, which stood fronting the east bank of Des Moines River, nearly opposite the new City Library. The record says: "According to understanding, a number of Presbyterians (Old School), met together at the home of John S. Dean, and, after mutual consultation, agreed to be organized into a church, to be called the Presbyterian Church of Fort Des Moines. The Reverend Samuel Cowles presided. The following persons were recieved (sic) upon certificate as members: John S. Dean and wife, Mrs. Nancy Dean; Miss

Hannah C. Dean, William Garrett and wife, Mrs. Mary Garrett; Miss Margaret A. Garrett; James H. Finch and wife, Sarah J. Finch; Abram S. Dean and wife, Ann Dean; Mrs. Eleanor B. Garrett, Miss Sarah Frederick, and Mrs. Esther Myers."

"Uncle Johnny," as he was called, did not propose to recognize the West Siders, as was his rule, and soon after his church organization, the name was changed to "First Presbyterian Church," to distinguish it from the Central. November Fifteenth, 1857, they were consolidated as the Central Church.

First Physician (Civilian)—Doctor Thomas K. Brooks, September, 1845.

First Frame Building—Two-story, at southeast corner of Third and Market streets, by David Solenbarger, in July, 1847.

First Brick Dwelling—Corner Fourth and Court Avenue, where the Valley National Bank now stands, by L. D. Winchester, in 1849. "Billy" Moore was married in it.

First Tavern on the East Side—W. H. Meacham's log cabin, near east end of Grand Avenue bridge, in 1845.

First Tavern on West Side—Log cabin on Market Street, used as a blacksmith shop by the soldiers, to which was added a frame addition in 1846, by Martin X. Tucker, as he was called. He signed his name with an "X" and somebody else had to write the rest of it.

First Drug Store—In the old soldiers' Guard House, by Doctor F. C. Grimmel, October, 1846, corner Third and Vine streets.

First School—April, 1846, in one of the log barrack buildings, by Miss Davis. She had to suspend school in July, 1846, while the District Court was held in her schoolroom.

First Public School—Organized November, 1849.

First Public School Building—Erected in 1855, at the northwest corner of Ninth and Locust streets. It required two years from start to finish.

First Regular Mail—Arrived March Third, 1849, by special messenger on horseback.

First Postoffice Building—A small, one-story frame, northeast corner of Second and Vine streets, built by Hoyt Sherman, Postmaster, in 1850.

First White Male Child—Son to John B. Scott, an Indian trader, on the east bank of Des Moines River, near Vine Street, born in January, 1845.

First White Female Child—Born to a settler, Frances Michael, October Twentieth, 1844.

First Death—An infant child of Lieutenant Grier, of the garrison, September, 1845.

First Marriage License—Benjamin Bryant and Elvira Birge, June Eleventh, 1846.

First Census Taken—July, 1846; population, one hundred and twenty-seven.

First Record of Sale of Town Lot—August Fourteenth, 1846.

First Mortgage of Record—June Twenty-ninth, 1847.

First Ice Dealer—Ed. R. Clapp, 1846.

First Meat Market—"Uncle David" Norris, on Second Street, 1846, though John Hays always claimed priority to Norris.

First Town Council—Met in Court House, October Twenty-sixth, 1851.

First President of Town Council—"Father" Thompson Bird.

First Newspaper—*The Iowa Star*, June Twenty-sixth, 1849.

First Daily Newspaper—*The Register*, January Thirteenth, 1862.

First Stage Coach—July First, 1849.

First Mill—By W. H. Meacham, on the East Side, in 1846, near where the casket factory now is. It was run by horse power.

First Stove Store—By Jesse F. Dicks, Number One, Mechanics' Hall, Second Street, 1849.

First Coal Dug—By soldiers of the garrison, in 1843.

First Lawyer Admitted to Practice in the District Court—William D. Frazee, September, 1846.

First State Capitol—Opened January Eleventh, 1858.

First Fraternal Organizations—Masonic, January Sixteenth, 1850; Independent Order of Odd Fellows, April Twenty-sixth, 1850; Knights of Pythias, February Twenty-second, 1871; Ancient Order of United Workmen, February Eighth, 1875; Legion of Honor, July First, 1879; Grand Army of the Republic, March Twelfth, 1878.

First Tailor—J. M. Thrift, on Second Street, 1845.

First Citizens' Store—By B. T. Hoxie, on Second Street, corner of Vine, 1846.

First Plasterer—Samuel Gray, 1848. He plastered the first Court House.

First Photographer—G. L. Reynolds, 1856.

First Ingrain Carpet—Brought by Mrs. Captain West, 1849.

First Full-blooded Irishman—Michael McTighe, who came in 1854. He ran the Shamrock House, on Second Street, between Market and Vine; was a member of the City Council from 1861 to 1877, and, with Michael Drady, ran the old First Ward to suit themselves. And Drady is still with us, his head full of stories galore of those old days. They were a jolly, hustling couple.

First Amusement Hall—Built by Doctor M. P. Turner, on Court Avenue, adjoining *The Register and Leader* Building, in 1856.

First Iron Foundry—By H. N. Heminway, in the Fall of 1856.

First Steam Boiler Works—By N. S. McDonnell, near the east end of Court Avenue bridge, and he is still running the business at the same place. The first boiler made went into Heminway's foundry.

First Brass Band—By C. A. Mosier, in 1855.

First Piano—Was brought by Captain F. R. West, in 1853.

First Drayman—Michael Kennedy, 1853.

First Steam Power Printing—By John Teesdale, 1859.

First Carriage—Built by O. W. Munsell, for Captain West, in 1867.

First Brewery—George Hierb, at corner of Seventh and Center street, 1855.

First Time City Was Lighted With Gas—July Sixteenth, 1865.

First Fire Company Organized—A volunteer, 1865.

First Railroad Passenger Train—August Twenty-ninth, 1866, the Keokuk and Des Moines.

First Street Railway—1867, built by Doctor M. P. Turner.

First Carload Wheat Shipped from City to Chicago—By Warren & Graham, September Fourth, 1867.

First Railroad Bridge—Built by the Rock Island, 1868.

First Velocipede—By Wesley Redhead, July Twenty-eighth, 1869.

First Street Pavement—Cedar blocks, 1882, on Walnut, from First to Fifth.

First Furniture Dealer—C. D. Reinking, 1848.

First Brick Dwelling on the East Side—By Doctor T. K. Brooks, 1851.

First Brick Business House on the East Side—Near Fourth and Locust streets, 1856.

First Brick Building—Doctor "Jim" Campbell's Infirmary, at 'Coon Point, 1849.

First Brick Building on Court Avenue—Sherman Block, at Third, 1856.

First Brick Building on Walnut—Northwest corner of Third, 1855; known as Exchange Block.

First Frame Residence on the East Side—By Colonel J. M. Griffith, at the northeast corner of Sixth and Walnut.

First Barber—John Chalmers, a Scotchman. He attempted to fill his lamp one evening with camphene, when it exploded. He was carried into the cabin of Elder Nash, which stood on Walnut, a short distance west of the Exchange Block, and died in a few hours.

First Shoemaker—Nat. Campbell, 1845. He had a small log shop near the present corner of Sixth and Cherry, and made good shoes.

First Power Printing Press.—A Guernsey, 1856, was run by hand, on which the *Citizen*, a Free Soil paper, was printed. It existed one year, and then joined the multitudinous wrecks of early newspapers.

First Express Company—The United States, May, 1856.

First Locomotive Entering City—A Manchester built engine, the Marion, Number Eleven, August Twenty-eighth, 1866. It hauled a load of rails to complete the track to the East Side, for the Valley Road.

First Court House—Commenced in 1848, completed in 1850; stood where the Union Depot now stands.

First Incorporation of the Town of Fort Des Moines—1851.

First Incorporation of City of Des Moines—1857.

First Time Court House Was Lighted by Gas—January Seventeenth, 1864.

First Recorded Total Vote of the Town at a General Election—Two hundred and forty-four, in 1852; population, five hundred and two.

First Steam Power to Drive Machinery—Put in a mill by C. C. Van, 1849.

First Meeting of the Legislature in the City—January Eleventh, 1858.

First General Merchandise Store—Built of logs, by Robert A. Kinzie, where the Sherman Block is, at Third and Court Avenue. He could sell goods to anybody but Indians, being prohibited by the commander of the garrison.

First Mayor of the City of Des Moines—William H. McHenry, 1857, familiarly called by old-timers, "Old Bill," to distinguish him from his son, now a Judge of the District Court.

First Hook and Ladder Company—1865.

First Bridge—A pontoon, at Grand Avenue, 1856, then known as Keokuk Street on the east side of the river, and Sycamore on the west side.

First Bridge Proper—A trestle, at Market Street, 1857.

First Bridge at Court Avenue—1858.

First Bridge at Walnut Street—1866.

First Bridge Across the 'Coon—1862, built by Doctor M. P. Turner.

First "Grand Social Event"—A fancy dress party, Winter of 1859, at the home of Edwin Sanford, on Seventh Street, below Mulberry, then the most fashionable portion of the town. About sixty invitations included all the society people. It was a hilarious aggregation of fun-makers. I don't think Mrs. Judge Rice, "Friday" Eason, C. W. Keyes, B. F. Allen, John A. Kason, or Mrs. Bina M. Wyman, then a most sedate and circumspect schoolma'am, have forgotten it. There was real, solid enjoyment in the social events of those days, such as is not to be had in these days.

First Cemetery—At a point near the northeast corner of Third and Locust, and extended north nearly one block. The first burial in it was the child of Colonel Grier, in September, 1845. It was subsequently removed, as were all the four bodies interred therein.

First Name of the Postoffice—"Raccoon River," and it so remained until 1847, when it was changed to "Fort Des Moines."

First Bank—B. F. Allen, on Second Street, 1855.

First Citizen Blacksmith—William H. DeFord. His shop was on Elm Street, near Third, in a log cabin.

First Flock of Sheep Brought to Polk County—Pastured on the Commons, where the Court House now stands, and westward. Doctor "Jim" Campbell brought them.

First Log Cabin Built by a Settler—On the west side of Fourth Street, between Market and Elm, and was conspicuous until 1868, for three large Cottonwood trees which stood near it.

First Systematic Deep Coal Mining—By Wesley Redhead and John Gibson, in 1870.

First Tannery—In 1847, two men, named Roberts and Kane, built a log cabin for a tannery at the corner of First and Walnut streets. They dug a large cave in the bank of Des Moines River, in which to keep oil, grease, and "stuffing." They got oak bark on Terrace Hill, where Fred. Hubbell lives. The following Spring, the river flood carried away the contents of the cave, the cabin was sold and moved to give place to the Demoin House.

First Business College—J. W. Muffly, 1864.

July Twenty-second, 1906.

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by L. F. Andrews

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