



LAMPSON P. SHERMAN

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One of the pioneers of Des Moines was Lampson P. Sherman, or Lamp., as everybody called him, who came here in 1849—the pioneers don't admit any person to their class who came here after 1849—a Buckeye by birth, a printer by trade, having served an apprenticeship in the office of the Cincinnati Gazette. He was a brother of General William Tecumseh Sherman, John Sherman, Secretary of the Treasury under President Hayes, and Hoyt Sherman, well known to residents of the city for the past fifty years.

Soon after his arrival, the Whigs stated (sic) a movement to secure a newspaper of their own faith. Judge Curtis Bates and Barlow Granger were publishing the *Star*, as the organ of the Democrats. A proposition was made to Lamp, to give him a certain bonus in cash, and secure him a good list of subscribers, if he would start a newspaper. He accepted the proposition, went to Cincinnati, purchased presses, type and material necessary for that purpose, shipping it by boat to Saint Louis, thence to Keokuk, and with teams hauled it to The Fort, himself coming with it.

He was to be given one-half of the bonus on his arrival at Cincinnati, and the list of his subscribers on his arrival with the outfit, neither of which materialized. Nevertheless, he started the paper in one of the barrack buildings opposite the *Star* office, on Second Street, near Vine, and named it the *Gazette*, in honor of his alma mater. The first number was issued January First, 1850. It was seven columns to a page, and showed the skill of a good printer, quite in contrast typographically to the *Star*.

The price of the paper was two dollars per year in advance, but the "advance" was what troubled him. It seldom or never came, but he gave the people a good, wide-awake paper, devoted largely to local matters, which

so cut into the circulation of the *Star* that within two months Barlow quit and Judge Bates assumed control of the paper.

The great stress with the people then was to get transportation facilities. Several columns every week were given to railroad projects. February First, a call was published for a mass meeting of citizens to select a committee to go to a convention at Iowa City and defeat a scheme to have a road from Davenport to Council Bluffs cross the Des Moines River fifty miles south, and follow the old Mormon Trail to the Bluffs. The committee went, and the scheme was frustrated. The River Improvement project was vigorously boomed, and the company severely prodded for their procrastination. The Loco Focos, as the Democrats were called, were bombarded with terms hardly compatible with Twentieth Century ethics. There were only four columns of advertising. There must have been a poet in town, for several merchants extolled their wares in rhyme. E. A. Wise & Company, "east side of Second Street, below Market," had this to say:

"LET HER RIP—SHE'S ALL OAK.

"Up rose the sun, and in majestic splendor
Climbed the Eastern slope. The white frost
Glittering upon her pendant grass,
Reflecting back her slanting rays.
Till all the broad prairie in mirrored beauty
Glistened. Far in the distance, dragging slow.
Like a wounded snake, its length along,
With pondrous strength, on slow-revolving wheels,
Its snowy canvas shining in the sun,
Is seen a mighty train of four ox teams,
Loaded to the guards with a most rich freight
Of dry goods, groceries and hardware."

February Twenty-second.—"In the north part of town the workmen are getting timber for a female seminary. In the west end of town the foundation of the new Presbyterian (sic) Church is laid."

That female seminary stood at the corner of Second and Locust streets, where the street car barn now is, and for many years was used as a cooper

shop and blacksmith shop. The timber for it was cut along the river. It was built by Father Bird, and in its Mrs. Bird taught the school. She was, indeed, a "mother in Israel" to the youth of that day. Many young men of the city in later years were proud to acknowledge her as a teacher.

Simon Casady received some of his first lessons in good behavior under her tutelage, but he could never understand why he was sent to a female seminary—he was only four years old—unless it was to keep him out of mischief.

The church stood on the lot next to the Western Union Telegraph office, on Fourth Street. It was burned in 1867. The seminary and church were the two extremes of the town.

March Fifteenth.—"The first barber has opened a shop."

April Sixth.—"The ferry across Des Moines River is in good order. Ropes have been put across, and teams can now cross in good order."

April Twenty-sixth.—"The first Whig Congressional Convention is called to meet at Ottumwa."

Early in April, the rush to California began. There was a continuous line of wagons from east to west, as far as the eye could reach. The gold-hunters from Polk County crowded into gaps in the train, many of them never to be seen again. If a wagon broke down or a horse or ox was sick, they dropped out of the line, and the gap was quickly closed. If a person sickened and died, without shroud or coffin the remains were laid in a shallow hole by the way-side, a benison to the wolf and coyote. All along the route, Smallpox was scattered among the settlers, game cards strewn, fragments of glass bottles, which, emptied of their "hell broth," were dashed against a wagon wheel. The ferry here was crowded, excitement was intense, as everybody wanted to get across first. For the week ending April Seventeenth, six hundred and seventy-five persons and two hundred and fifty-two wagons had crossed; the next week, one hundred and ninety-nine teams and five hundred and forty men; the next week, one hundred and fifty-six teams and four hundred and fifty-nine persons; the next week, one hundred and thirty teams and three hundred and sixty-three persons; the next week, seventy-three teams and one hundred and eighty-four persons, when there was a falling off. The total record kept was one thousand and forty-nine teams and

two thousand, eight hundred and thirteen persons.

May Twenty-fourth.—Notice is given that because "no teams can be got to haul the paper from Keokuk, there will be no *Gazette* next week."

Lamp. was pre-eminently practical, never a star-gazer. The dilatoriness of church-going people on the Sabbath troubled him. He ascribed it mostly to the family clock, of which many families had none at all. Some attendants would get to church barely in time to receive the "benediction." There were no church bells, and he recommended the ringing of the tavern bell to call out the people.

June Eighteenth.—"The hunters who went up 'Coon River for elk calves, returned with five calves. They captured nine, but four escaped. They say deer and elk are plenty, hut no buffalo."

November Fifteenth.—Lamp, called vigorously for money. Said he had not received enough to pay for the white paper he had used.

December First.—He became the apostle of good seed corn, for he says. "With plenty of good seed and well cultivated, no part of the world can beat Des Moines Valley." Thus he ante-dates "Dick" Clarkson as an apostle of seed corn.

At the expiration of six months, paying expenses with an income from only four columns of advertising, payable in store orders and elastic promises, Lamp. concluded he must have help. A meeting of citizens was held, at which it was agreed to assume one-half the indebtedness of the establishment and furnish an outside business manager. Under the reorganization, the name of the paper was changed to *State Journal*. The patronage was small, the population of the town being less than five hundred. The Democrats held all public offices and took the spoils, but the paper was continued to August Twenty-sixth, 1852, when it was suspended, and Lamp. retired, having lost every dollar he had invested in the enterprise.

I asked him once how he got along with a newspaper in those early days without the means and conveniences necessary to that business, to which he replied: "Very well during Summer time, but when Winter came, and the snow blew in through the cracks between the logs, filled the type with snow, froze the ink and paper 'heap' which had been dampened for printing, it was rather discouraging. With kettles of live coals set under the press to keep it

thawed out, we could get out the paper, then they would come over from the *Star* office—they preferred to sit around the grocery fires and swap yarns than keep their own office running—borrow the ‘forms’ of our paper, take off the heading, put on that of the *Star*, and print their paper. No, they didn’t take my editorials; they cut them out. The greatest trouble we had was with the mails. Sometimes we could not get an Eastern mail for two or three weeks. There were no railroads; the river was frozen; no regular stage lines; money was scarce, and at times it was hard sledding to keep things moving. It took forty days to get news from Washington.”

In 1851, the people at The Fort petitioned the County Judge for an election to determine whether or not the town should become incorporated. The petition was granted, and an election ordered to be held Septembr (sic) Twenty-third. Lamp. was named as one of the clerks of the election. The vote was forty-two for, and one against incorporation.

September Twenty-seventh, another election was held to select three persons to form a charter for the town, and Lamp. was chosen one of the three. October Eleventh, they made return to the Judge that they had prepared a charter for the “Town of Fort Des Moines,” and fixed three boundaries of the town corporation. October Eighteenth, another election was held, at which boundary Number Two, which had been fixed by the survey made in July, 1846, and known as the “Original Town,” was adopted by a vote of twenty to six. What would people now think of three city elections in one month?

At the organization of the first Town Council, Lamp. was elected one of the Councilmen. There being no wards, the Councilmen were elected from the body of the people. Father Bird was made President of the Council. The meetings were held in the Court House where the Union Depot now is. The first meeting was held October Twenty-fifth. The labors of that Council were such as required the exercise of great deliberation and good judgment. There were no bridges, and no money to build them with; ferries had to be provided, and the foundation laid for the government of a civic community. It must be conceded they did their work well. They served one year and four days, without fee or hope of reward, and, singularly enough, not one of them

was elected to the next Council.

In 1851, he was elected Justice of the Peace, and served one year.

In December, 1851, he took a helpmate and began married life in a two-roomed house at northeast corner of Sixth and Mulberry, opposite the street car waiting-room. In 1856, they built a house on Ninth and Pleasant, the place being now occupied by the Central Christian Church. This was long known as the Sherman home. Its associations and the memory of its hospitality are dear to the hearts of many of the old settlers of Des Moines and Polk County.

In 1854, he was elected Mayor. The town had begun to grow in self-esteem, and the Council to put on dignity. At the first meeting it ordered that "members who fail to attend the regular meeting of the Council shall pay a fine of fifty cents, unless excused by the Council."

In 1854, he became connected with the Hoyt Sherman & Company Bank, remained with it and its successor, the Iowa State Bank, for several years.

In 1856, when the State House scrimmage came on, he stood up for the West Side, and subscribed three hundred dollars to the "war fund."

In 1867, he was appointed United States Revenue Collector for the Fifth District, and held the office several years.

When the Equitable Life Insurance Company was organized, in 1867, he was one of the incorporators, and was elected its first Vice-President. He took the eighth policy issued by the company.

On leaving the Revenue Office, he retired from active business.

In 1858, he was elected City Treasurer, and served one term.

On Christmas evening, 1867, was celebrated his silver wedding, with that of "Billy" Moore, a pioneer merchant, and Doctor W. H. Ward, a pioneer physician, at the residence of "Billy," who was married by Elder J. A. Nash, a pioneer, in the old Winchester House, which stood where the Valley National Bank now is. Sherman was married by Father Bird, the first preacher in the town, at the residence of James Hall, corner of Court Avenue and First Street. Doctor Ward was married in Warren County, by Sanford Haines, a pioneer Methodist preacher.

The Old Settlers' Association completely surprised the celebrants with the presentation of a silver set to each couple, Judge W. W. Williamson making the presentation to Sherman and wife, Judge William Phillips to "Billy" and wife, and Judge Casady to Doctor Ward and wife. Father Nash—Father Bird and Elder Haines having deceased—responded in behalf of the recipients, for such expression of esteem and favor from the old settlers.

Politically, Lamp. was a Whig, without frills or isms. He fought the battles of the party in the ranks, when there were no spoils or emoluments, and sought no offices, yet the records show he was often called by the people of the town to places of trust and importance.

Socially, he was reserved, genial, and popular. He was actively interested in and identified with the inauguration of the public school system, and during the early Fifties was one of the officers of the School Board, who erected the first school building, at the corner of Ninth and Locust streets. Lamp. believed the newspaper, the school, and the church were the most important factors in forming the character of a civic community. He was not a member of any secret society.

Religiously, he was educated in a Catholic school, but he never united with any church. His wife being a zealous member of the Baptist Church, of which Elder Nash was pastor, he regularly attended that church.

He died in November, 1900, leaving a widow, the only survivor of the Sherman family of four brothers.

December Seventeenth, 1905.

Transcribed from:
PIONEERS OF POLK COUNTY, IOWA AND REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS
by L. F. Andrews
Volume II
Des Moines
Baker-Trisler Company
1908