



Jones County

Historical Review

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A rather wet ending to a long journey

Story and research
by C. L. "Gus" Norlin

The time was early 1850s, and the setting not unlike any number of other pioneer homesteads in Jones County, Iowa. The main figure in this story a mother of 14 children. This grand lady has left many descendants in the area, among them a grandson, C. J. (Fat) Matthiessen.

I first heard this story years ago. It was told to me by a second generation pioneer of this area, who has been dead quite some years. It had been told to him by his mother, who was a neighbor of the story's principal figure.

Jacob Matthiessen was an immigrant from Germany — that portion of Germany once being a part of Denmark. His reasons for coming to the United States, and specifically to Jones County, Iowa, were the same as hundreds of other industrious German farmers. It was a land of the unoppressed, where a good farmer could raise his family with the assurance they would be well fed, and that he might amass enough wealth to keep him in comfort in old age.

He had married in Germany some years before starting the trip to America. In fact he had two sons born in Germany, so Jacob, his wife and two sons, packed their worldly possessions and left the ancestral home area for a new beginning in the agricultural midwest of the USA.

Land was available for \$1.25 per acre, and it was still possible to make a choice of the good ground. Others had preceded him, and glowing reports of the area in Jones County, Iowa, called Wayne Township, tuned his moving-fever to a high pitch.

Fate was cruel on this treacherous journey, for Jacob lost his wife and two sons at sea. We would suppose they succumbed to one of the many diseases that plagued ocean travelers of that day. Most likely typhoid or dysentery.

Lonely journey

Grieving over the loss of his young wife and sons, Jacob continued the long and lonely journey. We can imagine his deep sorrow, for Jacob had so loved the young girl he married that he had relinquished



family wealth and title to marry her over the objections of his parents.

He arrived in the State of Illinois, after debarking the ship and making the inland journey by rail, river and coach. Records indicate that he spent a few years here, possibly as a farmhand, but long enough to have remarried. Eventually he pulled stakes in Illinois, and with his new wife and perhaps a child or two, and came to Jones County, Wayne Township, where he homesteaded in section 12.

He and his wife quickly improved their holdings, building a substantial cabin, the necessary farm buildings and hand dug a well that was to supply them with ample pure clean water.

Editor's note: In 1976, while cleaning out a road ditch embankment, Jones County maintenance workers uncovered what remained of this well. They filled it in and covered it over. It had measured about four feet square and 12 feet deep.

Jacob and his wife chose as the site of their homestead a spot not too distant from the banks of "Kitty Creek," for here ran ample water for livestock, and early records indicate the stream abounded with trout, large bass, and other edible species of fish.

The family prospered and grew, eventually numbering 14 children. All turned to doing the farm work, and here we learn how stalwart Jacob's wife really was.

It was common in those days, before the railroads, that farmers raising hogs and cattle would butcher a number of carcasses, chill and wrap them, then transport them by wagon or sled to Dubuque where they would be sold to the local markets for cutting up and eventually sell to the city shoppers, or sent down the Mississippi to St. Louis and other points.

We don't know what year, only that it was probably in April when the Matthiessens decided it was time to butcher hogs, and Mrs. Matthiessen would take the carcasses into Dubuque loaded upon a two wheeled cart, to which had been hitched a team of oxen. The journey began early one morning after the carcasses had been chilled during the night. A steady plodding of the oxen saw them arrive at the "12 mile house" by nightfall.

Here the team was undoubtedly unhitched, the yokes removed, and the oxen given an abundance of feed. Mrs. Matthiessen, we assume, took sleeping
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A rather wet ending to a long journey—

cont. from page 1
 quarters at the inn. The 12 mile house (still in existence today) was so named because that was the distance it stood west of Dubuque and east of Cascade. It was fronted by the old original Military Trail, and Lyman Dillon, who had plowed the original furrow to Iowa City in 1839, made mention of its existence in later years.

Some shopping

The following day, with journey completed and the hogs sold late that afternoon, Mrs. Matthiessen did some shopping. She purchased cloth for making clothes, some brown, unrefined sugar, probably a measure of sulphur for including in the spring tonics given so liberally in those days, (Editor's note: Even I can remember sulphur and molasses.) along with a few of the more relied upon patent medicines.

High on her shopping list was an abundant supply of coarse salt, for it would soon be necessary to salt down the pork to be used by the family during warm months. What else was added to the list we can only guess at, but being a loving mother with a few extra coins on this trip, we can assume each of the children at home was to be remembered with some unique, but usable trinket.

After spending that evening in Dubuque, she left very early in the morning, it being still dark when the return journey began. Flashes of lightning and the rumbling of thunder in the far west heralded the coming of an early spring storm.

Not far out of Dubuque, she was met by the full fury of the storm and the rain came down by the bucket full. On they plodded, eventually arriving at the 12 mile house, but not stopping. The persistent plodding would bring them home to Monticello at near dark, and the children would be anxious.

It continued to rain and by now many of the small streams it was necessary to ford were beginning to rise. Few bridges existed, and these only on the traveled roads. The record indicates Mrs. Matthiessen had cut across country in order to bypass Cascade and shorten the distance.

What was a little rain? Better it be raining and springtime, than a blizzard with temperatures at 10 to 20 below zero. The journey had been made before under these conditions, and many times, along with snow and cold, there was the constant warding off of the wolf packs that followed a short distance behind. The smell of fresh meat assured the traveler they would have the company of wolves, and a few years earlier, even an occasional bear.

It was still a little daylight when the journey brought Mrs. Matthiessen within a

quarter-mile of home. The children, seeing her coming, had all run out to meet her, but they were stopped by the flooding condition of Kitty Creek. Lined up in a row the children stood upon the west bank and happily shouted greetings, and questions: "Momma, what did you bring us?"

Approaching the east bank, and anxious to cross, Mrs. Matthiessen hesitated. The creek was really at flood stage, swift and carrying hunks of prairie sod torn loose by the deluge from the swampy areas abounding around the stream farther to the south. To safely cross meant going many additional miles upstream, almost to Scotch Grove where the left branch of this stream had its source.

No problem had been encountered in crossing the Maquoketa River, for that stream was yet able to handle the rising waters of the rainstorm, and the crossing area at today's "Pictured Rocks" landing was easy to negotiate.

Dark was fast approaching. Were not the oxen powerful? Surely they would have no trouble in crossing the 30-foot Kitty Creek, even though the water was deep. The cart would float, the oxen would swim the short distance, and Mrs. Matthiessen could safely ride atop the cart bed.

Caution to the wind

Eagerness to get home before dark caused her to throw some caution to the wind, and with a crack of the bullwhackers whip, and a loud "ejah!!" she forced the team into the stream. Oxen, cart and cargo were almost halfway across with the

first lunge, but the rapid movement of water downstream immediately forced the oxen to lose their footing, and they struggled to swim the remaining distance while pulling the load.

Suddenly the cart rolled over, spilling the load of supplies, and while the children watched in horror, they saw their mother thrown into the churning waters. The oxen managed to reach the other shore and gain their footing. They were still hitched to the cart, which by now had rolled on its side, and the cargo spilled, went floating downstream and out of sight.

Mrs. Matthiessen, heavily dressed, fought valiantly to keep her head above water, and when nearly exhausted, finally found footing and was able to pull herself out. The children gathered around, thankful their mother had been saved. Sadness at losing the awaited supplies, and especially the "trinkets," was lost in the joy of Momma getting home safe after such a harrying experience.

There would be another trip to Dubuque in the fall. In the meantime, it would be necessary to pick up the very necessary supplies, such as the salt, in the sprawling little town of Monticello.

The prices would be considerably higher, for all supplies, were freighted in by wagon. No railroad had yet reached this area, but for now it was time to get Momma to the house and into dry clothing. Then she could tell them all about her journey to Dubuque and what she had hoped to bring them.

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'Another month will end my soldier's life,' Farwell writes

Editor's note: "The Farwell Biographies — 1751 to 1865" concludes in Volume 7, Issue 3 of the Jones County Historical Review.

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Camp near Richmond, Va.
May 11, 1865.

My Dear Wife,

We have made a long march from Raleigh to this place, and yesterday I had the satisfaction of taking a walk through the streets of Richmond, the Capitol of the Rebellion. I find it to be a large city, and a place of great importance. I do not wonder that the rebels held it for a long time, and felt when it fell, that all was lost.

The most valuable part of the city was burned by their own troops, the night they left, and it looks desolate enough . . . I stood the march very well, was somewhat lame, and at night very tired. We march from this place to Alexandria, and there our marching will be over. Homeward bound, where we will again resume the peaceful walks of life. I think now another month will end my soldiers life.

I have had no letter from you since leaving Raleigh. The last received contained your likeness, and Luna's, and Mary's photographs. I think the artist who took Mary's picture had better quit the business immediately. I like Luna's appearance very much, she is a sweet little girl. Yours is good, but it hardly does you justice.

I intend to have some photographs taken when I have a chance, as I have promised some to my friends here in the army. I am not very fleshy now, and I fear will not take a good picture.

The weather is warm, and all dislike to do any more marching, but there is no help for it, and I think it will be ten or twelve days before we get through. I suppose there will be a grand review at Washington, before the army is disbanded, which will be better to look at, than to take part in.

I do not know if we will be mustered out in Davenport, or Washington. If Davenport, I may send for you to meet me there. Buy yourself such things as you may need for yourself and the children for the trip . . . I have not made up my mind at all as to what course I shall pursue in the future, and probably will not until I see you.

Affectionately yours,
S. S. Farwell.

Oskaloosa, Iowa, May 12th,
1865.

Dear Brother Marcus,

I had a letter from Sewall this evening written the 28th of the month. He did not know then that they would so soon receive word to march north, but expected they would have to make another move against General Johnson's army. But he thought the rebels would soon give up, and the soldiers would be home by the Fourth of July. I am anxious to get a letter from him at a later date, and know when he expects to get home now.

My delight at the prospect of his being on the way home almost unfits me for everything, even for making the necessary preparations to receive him. I am watching the papers closely, hoping to get some news of the Fifteenth Corps.

I wrote you a week ago, and requested you to send me some money, but you may not have received my letter. I would like at least fifty dollars, as I must get spring clothing for my family . . . Hoping that Sewall will soon be here to attend to our affairs, I remain as ever, your sister,

Malinda Z. Farwell.

Camp Alexandria, Va., May 21,
1865.

My Dear Wife,

We arrived here yesterday, and day after to-morrow we expect to form a part of the grand review, which is to take place at Washington.

There is some difficulty about our being mustered out. You know that we were delayed by Colonel Smyth from being mustered into service until the 13th of October, although the company was in camp a long time before that . . . A statement has been made of the case, and sent to Washington, which we hope will bring an order for our discharge . . . I have not stood this last march very well, and am tired.

I know that you must be anxious to know about my coming, but I do not see that I have any more information to give. If the application is granted, I may be home by the 10th of June.

May 25th.

I presume by to-morrow you will read the account of the grand review we had yesterday, and I do not doubt the papers will do it full justice. Being one of the army reviewed, it does not become me to say much about it, but it was a wonderful success, and I am glad to learn that the appearance of Sherman's army astonished the Eastern fellows, who supposed that army to be an undisciplined mob. It was a

proud day for us to thus march through the streets of the capital of our nation, welcomed by thousands of people . . . Their enthusiasm was most extraordinary, and was manifested in every possible way.

S. S. Farwell.

On this review of all the troops who had served in the war, the Army of the Potomac, lead by General Meade, took six hours to pass the reviewing stand. It was a great army of 65,000 soldiers, showing perfect drill, and discipline. Flowers were showered on the different regiments, and commanders, and the crowds who filled the streets, platforms, and all available window space were wild with enthusiasm.

The next day was a beautiful one. Sherman wrote in his Memoirs: "Punctually, at nine A.M. the signal gun was fired, when in person, with General Howard, and my staff, I rode down Pennsylvania Avenue, the crowds of men, women, and children, densely lining the sidewalk . . . we were followed closely by General Logan, and the Fifteenth Corps. When I reached the Treasury Building, and looked back, the sight was simply magnificent . . . The column was compact, and the glittering muskets looked like a solid mass of steel, moving with the regularity of a pendulum."

Grant wrote, "Sherman's army was not as well dressed as the Army of the Potomac, but their marching could not be excelled. They gave the impression of men who had been thoroughly drilled to endure hardships through long, continued marches, through exposure to any climate, without the ordinary shelter of a camp."

They also displayed a sense of humor in expressing what they had been through. Each division was followed by six ambulances, representing a baggage train. In the rear of a division would come a captured horse, or mule, loaded with hams, bacon, cooking utensils, and poultry . . . After another marching line of men would come a negro family, the mother carrying a black baby, the father leading a mule, packed with the rest of the children, from neck to tail.

Here marched sixty five thousand men, in fine physical condition, who had just completed a march of two thousand miles in a hostile country. Division, after division, carrying their soiled battle-torn flags. They were showered with flowers, and each corps commander made a stop at the reviewing stand, and was presented to the president of the United States . . .

cont. on page 4

Farwell tours Washington, D.C.

(cont. from page 3)

Sherman wrote: "Many good people had looked upon our Western soldiers as a sort of a mob . . . but then the world realized that it was a great army, in a proper sense, well disciplined and commanded. It was no wonder that it had swept through the South like a cyclone."

READY TO GO HOME

The western army remained in Washington for a week after the review. Now the war was over every soldier was anxious to go home. Sewall Farwell wrote to Malinda:

"I have spent two days in Washington seeing the sights. The Capitol Building is a grand structure, worthy of a great nation, whose congress meets within its hall. The Patent Office is a place where much time might be spent with profit. As my stay was so short, I did not attempt to learn anything more than the magnitude of the display of inventive genius . . .

The Smithsonian Institute is another wonderful place, where the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, and animals, and serpents of the earth, and the ancient works of man, can be studied. I also went to the White House, being admitted to three rooms. They had lofty ceilings, crystal chandeliers, beautiful windows, and mirrors . . . I will try and open the rusty hinges of my mouth, and tell you all about these things when I get home."

This first glimpse of Washington, no doubt, made a deeper impression on this western young man, than it did in after years, when its ever growing beauty, and wealth became familiar to him.

Louisville, Ky., June 5th
1865.

Dear Brother Marcus,

You see that we have been transferred from the East to the West, and have nearly completed the grand circle of conquest entered on by this army in 1862.

We left Washington the last of May, and came to Parkersburg by rail, then took a boat for this place. All along the route we have received the most flattering attentions. Even here a Louisville, where troops have been so often passing, the people line the streets, cheering us, and calling, "There are the boys who did it!" . . . It is the feeling this army calls forth wherever it goes.

S. S. Farwell

But this feeling of pride in his fellow soldiers received something of a shock, when Sewall received a letter from this brother he was fond of, and who had been very kind during the war, a letter cautioning him against giving soldiers his home address, when they should start for

Iowa, passing through Chicago.

Marcus was going East on a business trip, and Lucia, who was sometimes hysterical over trifles, had become alarmed, for fear some of Sewall's friends might come to her door, expecting to be entertained. She was from Vermont, and had never understood pioneer hospitality, then the returning soldier was already becoming a problem . . . These "boys," who were returning men, after three or four years of uncivilizing army life, really possessed with the idea that they had saved the country, and its people, were really disturbing to those who had exercised restraint in the matter of patriotism, living comfortable lives, and making fortunes while they were away. Some of these men were crude, some were dissipated.

Such vast numbers coming back, demanding places among those who really were getting along so well without them, would no doubt effect business conditions seriously . . . Marcus Farwell wrote this letter to pacify his wife, and he no doubt regretted it when he received Sewall's reply.

Dear Brother Marcus,

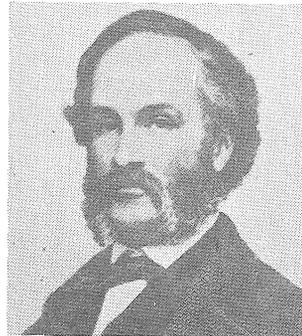
I have just received yours of the 15th. I am sorry that you are borrowing trouble over what I would under no circumstances do. You should know me better . . . I have never thought of taking anyone to your

home, unless it might be Colonel Jenkins, or Major Stremming, for a call, and ten to one, they would have declined the invitation.

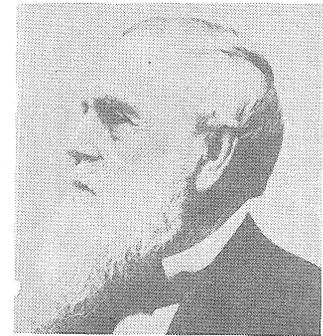
As for the boys of my company, many who have known you, it would please them could they go to your store, and have you take them by the hand, and tell them with how much interest you have watched their movements. If you would give them a glass of beer, and point out to them some honest place, where they could buy clothing for themselves, and a few trinkets to take home to their families. That would completely satisfy them, and me too. But we have not received our discharge yet, and when we pass through Chicago, you will be in the East, and not be troubled by us.

I am sending seven hundred and fifty dollars to you. Send a hundred dollars to Malinda. I would send it from here, but it is safer to send through you . . . I want you to realize that I have the most profound feeling of gratitude to you for all the brotherly, kind attentions and favors you have bestowed on me, and mine since I have been in the army. My heart has often risen to my throat, and tears to my eyes when I have thought of this. Of all my relatives, you are the only one who has shown my wife, and family, the least attention and kindness in my absence.

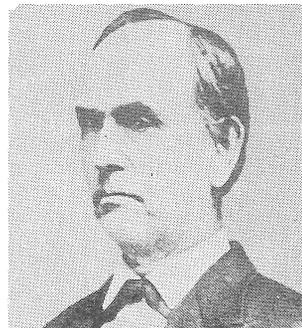
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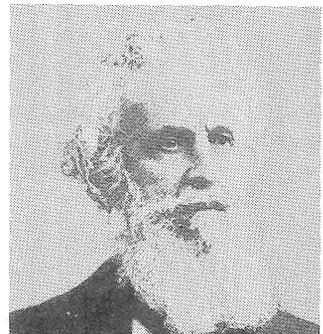
JAMES W. GRIMES



JAMES HARLAN



AUGUSTUS C. DODGE



GEORGE W. JONES

Four prominent men who were good friends of Farwell.

'The Farwell Biographies—1751 to 1865' concludes

(cont. from page 4)

The mails have ever been freighted with letters, and papers from you, showing how much you thought of my interests and comfort. Never will I forget the kind words in these letters, although I have been obliged to burn them, as we marched from place to place . . .

I suppose the citizen can never understand the soldier. At Washington, thousands of soldiers marched in review past wealthy, well-fed people, who had gathered from all parts of the country to witness the spectacle, and many of the soldiers were hungry. They had not been allowed a stick of wood, with which to make a fire to boil coffee that morning. Their breakfast had beenhardtack, washed down with water. If they had been given a cup of hot coffee, how differently they would have looked back on that day.

The trouble lies in the fact that the simple needs are overlooked. The soldier is offered whiskey instead of food. He gets drunk, and he is at once a demoralized animal, and decent people want to get rid of him. The soldier is often a victim of war. It demoralizes many men. They become reckless, and shameless, a menace to society.

Louisville, Ky., June 27th,
1865

We expect to be mustered out of service today, and will start for Iowa this evening. We go to Davenport for final pay, and settlement. There is little hope of our being home for the Fourth of July, although we may. Malinda will meet me at Father's with the children.

The boys of Company H made me a present of a beautiful sword on Sunday. On it is inscribed: "Presented to Major S. S. Farwell, by his old comrades of Company H, 31st Iowa, U. S. A., June 25, 1865."

On it are the names of most of the battles in which we have been engaged . . . Coming from my comrades, at the time of parting, this is of peculiar value.

I hope that you may have a pleasant trip East, and that the rest will be of benefit to your health. Yours truly,

S. S. Farwell

Malinda Farwell did not go to Monticello. She knew that Sewall would probably go on with his company, expecting to meet her there, but she had made up her mind that he must come to her. He must see how she had been living while he had been gone. He must meet her family, and her friends. It was to be a new beginning for them, they must be alone, to have a chance to talk things over by themselves.

It was the middle of July. She was looking for a letter from Sewall, in which he would tell her when he would come. He might be delayed in closing up the business of the company.

It was a warm morning; the children were playing barefooted in the grass . . . She had made them new summer dresses. When Sewall came Mary would be dressed in pink, and Luna, with her blue eyes, and light reddish hair, looked better in blue. She was saving the new dresses. This morning they wore rather shabby ones, but they were good enough for play.

She must scrub her kitchen floor; it would be warm work. As she looked out at the barefooted children she laughed, and then pulled off her own shoes and stockings . . . Malinda had pretty feet. She looked down at them approvingly, and the wet floor felt good to them.

She had just finished her scrubbing, when she heard Mary call: "Mama, a man

is coming into the yard!"

Small Luna took one look at the tall man in blue, "with a mustache on his face," and hastily scurried around the house, like a scared rabbit, to the motherly arms of her aunt Kate. As yet, a father had never had a place in her young life, and at this time she felt no need of one.

Malinda caught a glimpse of Sewall, as he bent over Mary. In panic, she looked down on her bare feet, and soiled dress, then, like Luna, she turned to run away . . . but Sewall had seen her, and caught in his arms she laughed and cried hysterically. Laughing at being caught in such a ridiculous plight, then crying with joy, because he had come back to her in safety, at last.

The trail grows dim

Dear Editor,

I am doing some research on distant relatives who moved to Jones County, Iowa, around the 1840s to 1850s. Can anyone help in locating graves, records, or, maybe some old-timers even remember those whom I seek.

Louann (Secrest) Brown, wife of James Brown; Lydia Anne (Secrest) Welch, wife of Noble Welch; Joseph Anderson Secrest, Francis Marion Secrest. These were all members of the Joseph Secrest family of Fleming County, Ky., and all, I believe, took up permanent residence in Jones County during the 1840s to 1850s.

Sincerely
William B. Secrest Jr.
4614 N. Bond
Fresno, Calif. 93726

Editor,

I am doing ancestral research, attempting to find information on the following people who came to Monticello, Iowa, Jones County, from Switzerland in the late 1800s.

JOHN GOTTLEIB BINGGELI, born July 15, 1841, in Bern, Switzerland. Came with wife about 1883 to Monticello, died Jan. 23, 1911. ROZINA BEUTLER BINGGELI, born Jan. 25, 1843, Switzerland, died March 6, 1931, in Monticello. JOHN BINGGELI, son of John Gottlieb and Rozina, born Jan. 21, 1877, married PAULINE BALSIGER, born Dec. 22, 1882; they moved to South Dakota.

Pauline Balsiger's parents: CHRISTIAN BALSIGER, born May 16, 1851, in Switzerland; came to USA about 1867. He died May 10, 1916, in Monticello. ANNA LETCHER BALSIGER, wife of Christian Balsiger, born May 30, 1852, in Switzerland, died May 17, 1935, in Monticello.

Any information on the four family names, BINGGELI, BEUTLER, BALSIGER and LETCHER would be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,
Linda D. Strick
1815 W. 24th St.
Topeka, Kan. 66611

Editor,

I am attempting to trace two Rider (possibly Ryder) ancestors who migrated from New York State, circa the 1870s, to Monticello, Iowa.

These were Charles M. Rider, born June 6, 1838, and Samuel G. Rider, born Nov. 10, 1853. They were sons of Gilead and Betsey (Hunt-Reed) of Malone and Ogdensburg, New York. Nothing more is known of them, except for this one slim lead: that they settled in Monticello, Iowa.

Of paramount interest of course, is whether these two early settlers have any descendants, and if so, where they might be. Does anyone know where they might be buried?

Sincerely,
Louise (Ryder) Young (Mrs.)
2850 Bethany Lane
Ellicott City, Md. 21043

Editor,

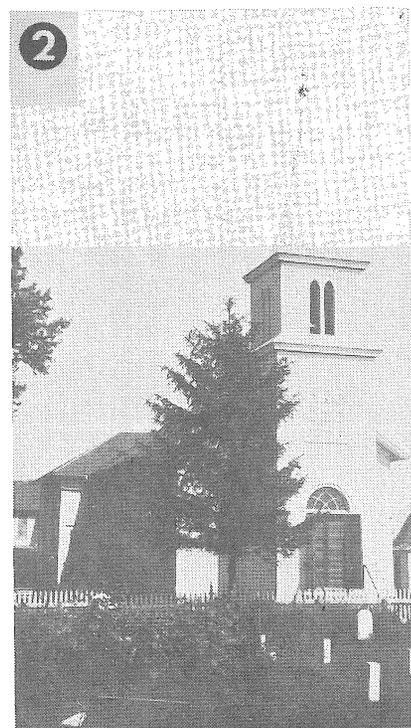
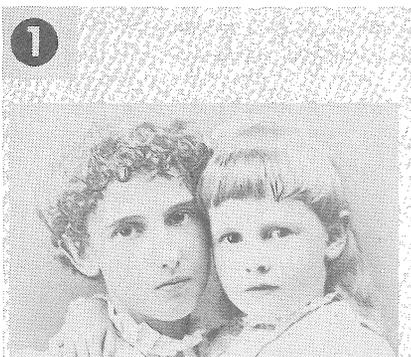
I recently received a copy of the newspaper obituary of my grandmother, whose maiden name was Jessie Dorcas Cameron. The article states she was born in MONTESALA, Iowa, March 4, 1870. I find no such town in Iowa by that name, and assume it should read Monticello. Can anyone enlighten me. Is the name familiar to that area?

Sincerely,
James Rodney Kirkpatrick
726 Royal Ave., Apt. No. 50
Medford, Ore. 97501

Who are they? Society photographs

Editor's note: The photographs which appear on the following pages are intended for the enjoyment of Jones County Historical Society Members. Some of the pictures can be identified, others cannot. The Society is requesting help from its members in identifying these photographs.

If you can identify any of these photographs, please contact Society President, C. L. "Gus" Norlin.





President's message

Another season has drawn to a close, and the Society can again be proud of its accomplishments during 1981.

The Society marked as its primary project for this season, the acquisition and moving of the "Sutton" or Clay Center School from near Canton, where it had stood and served that community of Clay since about 1857. It now rests upon a new foundation at the Museum complex — Edinburgh.

Much restoration needs be done, and we are hopeful that groups or individuals will turn to and help both financially and physically with this job.

I'm going to put a plug in here for an ingenious Jones County man. This is "Buster" Wilslef of Wyoming who along with his crew did the actual moving of the school. I didn't know "Buster" had expertise in building moving, so when it came time to have it moved I contacted a couple different "professional" house movers in a more distant city.

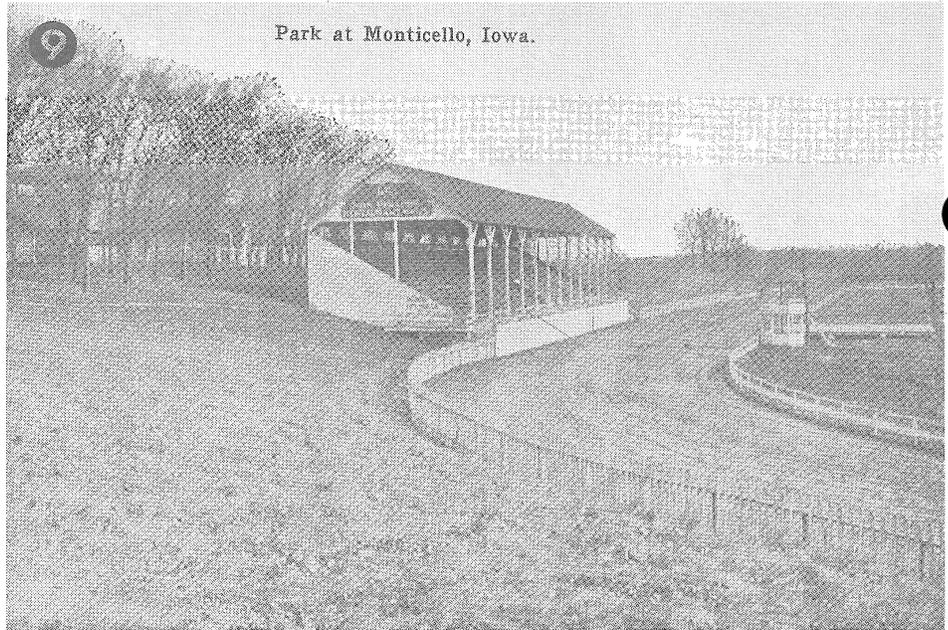
After looking it over, and the distance to be traveled, they gave me a fair, but rather more than we could afford price. After thinking it over, they commented that due to the extreme age and type of construction of the school building, they may have quoted a low figure.

Bill Reade of Onslow, a member of the Society board suggested we contact "Buster" and see what he thought. Buster took a look, said "I can move it, with no sweat, and it will cost about half what you have been quoted." We took pictures of the operation, and like Buster said, "It was no sweat."

The Society's "EDINBURGH" days, held the 13th of September, was another great success. Competition for drawing the public on that day was fierce, there being five other well advertised events within a 15-mile radius. No doubt, having the Ghost Garrison of the Iowa Dragoons on site to demonstrate "Soldiering" during the 1840s helped to draw the crowd.

Issue four of this volume should be in your hands shortly.

Sincerely,
C. L. "Gus" Norlin, president



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Monticello, Iowa 52310

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