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As editor of this newsletter for the society I get to choose what material goes into each one. For the final newsletter of this year I have decided to devote a few pages to the town of Drakesville in Davis County. Drakesville has never been a highly populated town but like all small towns it did and does have some interesting people who reside there. The articles I have selected are from several books and articles about the town. I have used the booklet, Drakesville, Iowa Past and Future 1886-1996 for the article on 'History of Drakesville, Iowa', the story about the Drakes and the Drakesville Bank Robbery were from the 1924 Pioneer History of Davis County, Iowa, published by Dillon Payne.

I hope you take the time to read these articles sometimes a name is mentioned that will help you in your research or just the story itself will give you a look into the live of you ancestor living in our county.

## History of Drakesville Iowa

Before 1843, white settlers were not permitted west of Van Buren County because of the treaty made with Sac and Fox Indians.

In 1846, John Adams Drake and his family came to Davis County and founded the town of Drakesville. The town was platted February, 1847 on Drake's land. Drake established a general store, later a packing plant, and milling business in Drakesville. He represented Davis County as a Whig in the State Legislature in 1852.

Later, Mr. Drake built a two-story house in Drakesville on the same lot, a small frame building for a bank. His banking methods were unique, for the use of checking accounts had not been invented, so for a small fee, farmers and merchants deposited their money in his safe and withdrew their own bills when money was needed.

Drakesville can boast as being the home of two Iowa Governors, Francis M. Drake and George W. Clark.

Drake's son, Francis M. Drake, organized two oxen trains to cross the plains for California during the Gold Rush and these originated at Drakesville.

The Christian Church was first organized in 1846. Before the church was build in 1853, a frame construction costing \$600.00, they had church in the log school house. The first minister was Levi Fleming.

During the Civil War Drakesville sent many soldiers to fight for the Union; but, was also a part of the Underground Railroad movement. A Mr. Wonn, who came here from Ohio in 1853, was an agent for the John Brown Underground Railway, and his house, made out of native timber, was a station for the underground. Negroes escaping North to freedom were sheltered and protected there and despite the attempt of several southern spies to find it, the Drakesville station was never found.

Drakesville Lodge #88, IOOF was instituted February 23, 1865 by D.D.G.M. Greenleaf of Bloomfield, but now there is no lodge in this town.

The Southwestern Branch of the C.R.I. and P. Railroad was built in 1871, and the depot agent was William Traux, later it was Louis Goodlander, he married Alice Grant. In 1947 the railroad tracks were relocated a mile north of town.

A City Park was made from the railroad right away, a shelter house build, cement slab for dance floor, baseball field, arena for horse shows and other sports, stage, seats and restrooms. There is an "Old Soldiers' and Settlers' Reunion" held for three days in the last weekend in July.

(This short history was taken from a booklet titled—Drakesville, Iowa Past and Future 1886 to 1996. Article was written by Dorothy Goldizen & Wilda Hardy)

### JOHN A. DRAKE

John Adams Drake was of English descent and traced the family name back to Sir Francis Drake and to the distinguished Adams family. He learned the carpenter's trade when young and later was largely engaged the the mercantile and banking buisness. He cam to Fort Madison in 1837 and was Probate Judge of the County. In 1846 he came

with his family to Davis County and was the founder of the Town of Drakesville. He there established a general store and his sons, J. Hamilton and Francis M. were there associated with him in that business and also in the packing and milling business. He later was engaged in the banking business in Drakesville for a long time. In the Iowa Legislature of 1852-53, he represented Davis County, being elected as a Whig. He had one son killed in the battle of Fort Donelson, and his son, J. H. Drake, as a banker in Albia for many years, and the son, Francis Marion Drake, removed to Centerville and was interested largely in banking, railways and finally Governor of Iowa. John A. Drake sprang from a physically strong and heroic stock and was a large fine looking gentleman of the olden style. His wife's maiden name was Harriet Jane O'Neal, born in North Carolina. Their family life was most admirable and they were beloved by their neighbors. Mr. Drake was the financial reliance of the people in that part of the County. He moved to Centerville in later life, where he died in 1880 at the age of 78 years. The following account of the robbery of his Drakesville bank taken from the Bloomfield Democrat will be of interest and also show something more of the heart qualities and kindness of Mr. Drake.

### **THE DRAKESVILLE BANK ROBBERY**

(From the Bloomfield Democrat. Written by D. H. Payne.)

John A. Drake was one of the early settlers in this County. He was well to do and engaged in mercantile business in the town of Drakesville and became a large land owner. In his later years he sold his store and opened a small private bank in the town. The principal business of such a bank in those days was to keep the money of his customers in his safe. The farmers would deposit their money with him, and when they needed any money, would come in and get it in cash. In all their dealings people carried the cash in their pockets and paid it out and made their own change. The present system, so near universal, of paying by check was not then invented. Mr. Drake reared a family of fine children. One son, Francis Marion, became a brigadier general in the Civil War and located in Centerville, Iowa. He became wealthy by his railroad enterprises. He built the M. I. & N. R. R. through Iowa, the Belt Line around Chicago and in that was associated with his son-in-law, the late Theodore P. Shontz, later of Interborough and Panama Canal fame. Later General Drake became Governor of Iowa.

John A. Drake and his wife lived in a large two story brick house and in the corner of the same lot was a small two room, one story frame building used for the bank. They were getting old and feeble and the duties of Mr. Drake in the bank were not arduous and were just enough to keep him from rusting out. Mrs. Drake looked after her own household cares, as was the custom in former years. Their children were married and gone. There happened to locate in the town a man of the Uriah Heep character. He engrafted himself into the good graces of the town, and soon became secretary of the Christian Church and treasurer of the Masonic Lodge. He cultivated the friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Drake and became a trusted servant and member of the family. They treated him like a son and he helped Mrs. Drake in the home and Mr. Drake in caring for the bank building, the horse and cow, and doing chores. In fact they became genuinely attached to him. One morning a stock buyer came to the bank very early to get currency to carry with him to buy some stock. This man, Sam Latham, was sweeping out the bank. Mr. Drake took some packages of money from the safe, gave the cattle buyer what cash he wanted, then closed his safe. Later in the day he missed a package of money, containing \$1000. He could not account for the loss, but it never entered his head to suspect Sam. He said nothing and let the

matter pass as an unsolved puzzle. Later, perhaps about the year 1875, one Saturday Mr. and Mrs. Drake went to Centerville to spend Sunday with their son, General Drake. Sam was left to care for the home. On Sunday night about midnight a grandson was coming into town on horseback, after seeing his girl, and when about a half a mile away, saw a light in an upstairs window in the Drake home. Quickly thereafter the light went out and all was dark. When he came by he discovered the bank building on fire and gave the alarm. A crowd soon gathered and found the fire was just fairly starting and put it out. Papers had been piled in the corner of the back room and saturated well with kerosene and blazing up to beat the band. It was conclusive that it was the work of an incendiary. After a time Sam came out of the residence, apparently just awake, and rubbing his eyes to see what was the trouble. The safe was locked, Mr. Drake in Centerville, and nothing further could be done until he came home. It was later found that the figures of the combination to the safe were kept by Mr. Drake in the upstairs room of the residence where the light had been seen to come on and go off so quickly. On Monday the old folks came home and General Drake with them. The safe was opened and it was found that \$5000. in currency had been taken out and a hand full of paper had been set on fire and put in the safe, and the blaze had gone out when the safe door was closed. No damage was done by the fire to anything in the safe.

General Drake was a lawyer himself and soon concluded that Sam knew where the combination to the safe was kept, had taken it from the room and was putting it back in its place, when his nephew saw the light come on and go off so soon. He suggested his suspicions to his father and mother, but they spurned the idea and took it very much to heart that their son had such a suspicion. It happened that a young fellow from Bloomfield was seen going through a field near town that morning early and he was arrested on suspicion. He sent for me and I went over to appear for him at a preliminary hearing before a Justice of the Peace. On my arrival, General Drake came to me and told me his suspicions and fully exonerated my client, but said he wanted the hearing to go on so he could use Sam as a witness and pump him for all that was out. He asked me not to object if he asked leading questions, and to help fix the blame on Sam if possible. I explained the situation to my client and we went on with the hearing. Of course the affair was an event for the little town and everybody flocked in to hear the court proceedings. The drift of the questions put to Sam by General Drake and myself made it plain that we suspected Sam. That seemed so preposterous to the people who knew Sam that a murmur of disapproval was very evident. But the trial developed nothing definite in incriminating Sam. He was meek as a lamb, did not get offended at the drift of our inquiry, and the ones taking umbrage at us most were his brother Christians, Masons, and friends, which were legion. Of course my client was discharged by the court and Sam was acquitted by public sentiment.

Before General Drake and I separated, he told me that he had no doubt of Sam's guilt and believed that some evidence would be found making a good case against him. He asked me to retain lawyers in Bloomfield for him in the case, especially Mr. Jones, in whom Sam had great confidence and to whom Sam was sure to go if he got into trouble. He further said his father and mother were getting quite old, would grieve over the matter and that he would stay a few days and look after the case. He said to tell Jones if Sam came to him to induce him to give up the money, and give Sam a chance to skip and that would be best for the old folks. I retained the attorneys and delivered the message to Mr. Jones. That night after Sam had retired to his bed, the General and a double fisted nephew dressed themselves in sheets and pillow cases as ghosts, and went to his room. The carried dim lights, waved their arms and muttered in broken sentences and danced around Sam's bed very much as McBeth's witches danced around the boiling cauldron. They perhaps used the same language: "Double, Double toil and trouble: Fire burn and Cauldron bubble; Like a hell-broth boil and bubble." Sam did not follow the example of McBeth. He did not say: "Tell me thou unknown power, whate'er thou art; What need I fear of

thee; Who can impress the forest, bid the tree Unfix his earth-bound root, till the wood Of Birnam rise? Thou art too like the Spirit of Bancho; down!"

Sam did not talk back to the witches. He turned his face to the wall and kept his equilibrium and meek silence. He did not think the hollow log in Mr. Drake's timber would ever speak, nor the glass jar hid in the weeds would ever disclose the guilty secret.

Well that scheme failed and the General was not yet satisfied. The next morning before breakfast he went down to the barn where Sam was milking and feeding the stock. He found Sam in the feeding entry and grabbed him by the throat, threw him down on the floore and jumped on him savagely and told him he knew he was guilty, and that he would choke him to death if he did not confess and return the money. Sam gulped out that he was innocent and that the General might kill him, but he would not confess. Mr. Drake choked him until he was black in the face and run out his tongue, and the General got scared for fear he would kill him. The plan having failed the whole incident was passed by to await further developments.

These events happened in the early spring. Sam continued to live with the old folks and enjoyed their unshaken confidence. It was soon learned that Sam had made some unusual expenditures. He had presented his sweetheart a rather expensive gold watch and chain, and made presents to her and others and to himself, but this was only a straw in the wind. During the spring and summer Sam was engaged in cutting and hauling wood from the near by timber to the Drake home. It seems that one man, at least, in town concluded that Sam was guilty. One day he took his gun, presumably to hunt, and followed Sam's trail into the timber. There he found where Sam had tied his team and let it stand and stamp from time to time while he was chopping. This man took a circuit around the spot looking for a hiding place where Sam could cache his money. He found a hollow log with leaves filling the open end, and began poking into it, and there found a large roll of currency. He reported the matter to Mr. Drake and his son. On counting the money they found only \$700 or \$800 and not the \$5000 they were looking for. They concluded that Sam had taken the \$1000 on the morning Mr. Drake had missed it, and that some of this deposit had been used to buy the gold watch and other articles. On the strength of this find, General Drake again took charge of the matter and came to Bloomfield and had Sam arrested.

Sure enough, as predicted, Sam came to Mr. Jones for advice. Jones knew of the circumstances and the evidence against Sam and told him that it looked to him as if they would convict him. He suggested that the old folks were feeling so distressed that if the money was returned he believed they would let him go. Sam acted on the suggestion and went with Jones and the deputy Sheriff and Gen. Drake and disclosed to them where he had hidden the \$5000. They found the money all there in a glass jar, hidden in the grass and weeds in a fence corner. The parties all came back to Bloomfield. The case had been held in suspended animation during the meantime and Sam had escaped espionage for two hours or more, and in the interim, Sam Was told that a man was going with a team and buggy to the Rock Island Railroad at Belknap, five miles away and there would be room for him. The case was called later in the day, but Sam was not under bond and failed to appear. General Drake proved to be the Sherlock Holmes.

Drakesville lost its Uriah Heep and was forced to conclude that Sam was a wolf in sheep's clothing. Quite a number of years after I found where Sam had gone. He happened to locate in a town in Nebraska with a banker in it, who had formerly lived in Iowa, and knew the Albia banker, son of Mr. Drake. Sam had worked his rabbit foot on the people there and became Post Master and trusted employee of Uncle. Some trouble arose between him and this banker, and on some papers seen by the banker the name Albia was written. The banker wrote to Hamilton Drake at Albia and asked him if he ever knew a man named Sam Latham and soon after got a letter telling all about the circumstances of the bank robbery. The news got out, came to Sam's ears, and, not long after that, Sam vamoosed the ranch, and where he went deponent sayeth not.