

PARMELEE'S MILL

THE person who goes through the country on the railroads diverging from the city, and sees the fine farm houses and their pleasing environments, has no conception of the trials and privations which encompassed their beginning. As a rule, the pioneers located their claims near rivers and creeks. The clothing they wore, a small quantity of flour, meal, bacon, potatoes (the "eyes" to be saved for planting), salt, tea, coffee, a few dishes, an axe, a few tools, was all they had on arrival.

The first move was to get shelter. Often this was a rude cabin made of hoop poles, or a bark hut. A log cabin necessitated delay until men enough could be gathered for a "raising." The log walls up, there was not a board for roof, floor, table, shelf, seat or door. These must be supplied with the means at hand. Poles thatched with bark for the roof, a puncheon floor, or no floor at all, hoop-pole chairs with hickory bark seats, bedsteads of four stakes and poles with Linn bark interlaced, greased paper windows, doors framed from Walnut logs, put together with wooden pins, a wooden latch and wooden hinges, a rude fireplace of cobble-stones, with a split stick and mud chimney.

A shelter provided, poor at the best against storms and Winter cold, the next demand was for food. Few had plenty, some were scant. None could be had until a crop was made, and that was corn. Meanwhile, the supplies gave out, and mills a long distance off, the nearest necessitating a journey of seventy-five or a hundred miles, over bottomless roads, swollen, bridgeless streams.

Peter Newcomer, who settled near the river, below Barlow Granger's place, often had to go one hundred and forty miles to mill, and wait several days. G. B. Clark, who was one of the first Grand Jury in Polk County, had a claim near Newcomer's. He started on horseback to go to a neighbor's across the river, which

was high, to get a sack of com. Several hours after, the horse, saddle and sack were found, near the river, but the man, never.

Elijah Canfield, for many years one of the most prominent citizens of Camp Township, and his family, were all sick with malarial fever. Two died, and he was the only one able to attend the burial. The flour and meal were nearly gone. He started for Oskaloosa, leaving the sick in dire condition and nearly destitute of anything for bread making. While absent, he was sick; there were no mails, no tidings of him; the family became alarmed; the care of the farm devolved upon the debilitated wife; for want of care the cows became dry, thus cutting off an important food supply; and when he returned the family was in a deplorable condition.

Riley Thompson, on Four Mile, said he was often obliged to go to Oskaloosa for meal and flour, it sometimes taking two weeks from farm work. This made double work for the wife and mother of small children. The truck patch must be watched against prowling Indians; the meat house against wolves, which came out of the timber, often peering in at the windows or pointing their noses through the chinkings of the cabin; the cows had to be hunted from their distant wanderings in the brush or tall grass.

G. W. Hickman, who lived up at Beaver Creek, and who built a saw mill, I think in 1848, told me a few days ago at the Old Settlers' picnic, that sometimes, in bad weather, roads bad, streams swollen, there would not be any flour or meal in the house, and he had to go to Oskaloosa for something to make bread of, as Parmelee's mill had not begun even to grind corn. Sometimes he had to wait at the mill all day. If he got his grist ready at dusk, he traveled all night to get home to his hungry family.

Referring to Beaver Creek reminds me that the Indian name of it should have been retained. It was spoken as if written Ah-mah-qua, short accent on the second syllable. It was derived from the beaver. It is regretful that the Indian names of rivers and localities were not generally perpetuated.

Flour and meal often was scarce at The Fort, and some of the pioneers who are with us yet, and living pretty high, probably remember days when they were glad to get pounded corn or corn-meal bread. Said one to me, a few days ago: "I had been accustomed down East to the good things of life. I thought I could not

endure the cracked corn, or corn-meal bread, bacon, dried apples and dried peaches, but 'hunger is the best sauce,' you know. We got used to it. We had to. Sometimes, for a change, I would run over to Mr. James Sherman's and 'get a bit.' I asked her one day how she got such good things to eat. 'Oh,' she said, 'Jim gets them somehow; I don't know.' Jim was one of the merchants of the town; a brother of Hoyt."

Isaac Cooper, well known to everybody here ten years ago, once had to go to Oskaloosa for corn meal. The rivers were swollen, and he floated his corn across them on logs. He had to stop several days at the mill, sleeping in his wagon.

In 1847, Parmelee's mill, on Middle River, about ten miles from The Fort, began grinding corn. For many years, it was the only milling point for all Central Iowa.

John D. Parmelee came here in March, 1843, as a fur trader, and in May following, came soldiers for the garrison, Captain Allen commanding. He was an uncle of B. F. Allen, the well-known banker, who was induced to come here through the influence of his uncle.

Immediately upon arrival, the Captain and Moses Barlow began the building of a mill on Middle River, near where Carlisle now is, to saw lumber for the garrison buildings. Parmelee, who was a well-educated, wide-awake Vermonter, soon after began to speculate. He obtained permission from Allen to make and improve a large claim along the Des Moines River, and adjacent to the saw mill—just the spot for a large town—possibly the Capital of the state—according to John. He quit the fur trade and purchased Barlow's interest in the mill, which identified Allen more closely in his projects, and he became quite prominent about The Fort.

Soon after the purchase of Barlow's interest in the mill, Captain Allen died, and Parmelee got possession of his share. In 1847, changes were made so as to grind corn, which was a godsend to the whole country. The County Commissioners expressed their appreciation of the new industry by ordering that it be not assessed for taxation. Running day and night, the mill could not clear the yard of waiting customers.

Late in the Fall of 1848, two buhrs were put in to grind wheat, and Parmalee invited everybody to come and see flour made, stating that a big jug of whiskey would be on tap for visitors. Hundreds went with grists. They went into camp to stay. Elijah Canfield, whom I have mentioned, was there; said he went early, but when he got there the whiskey jug was empty. The mill was not completed. There were no elevators, no bolters. After the wheat was ground, it was carried upstairs by hand, to a rude device for bolting, a slow process, indicating a long wait for grists. Meanwhile, Daniel Moore, an old millwright, who had a claim nearby on which was a field of corn, was working day and night putting in elevators, bolters and fixtures, the campers refusing to give him a recess. To help matters, they cut and shocked his corn. When completed, the mill was run to its full capacity day and night, yet the yards were never clear of waiting teams. In a few months, from overwork and bad management (Parmelee having acquired a liking for "corn juice," spending much of his time at the "groceries" in town), it got wobbly, out of order, and finally broke down, a terrible blow to the settlers, who at once made a joint effort to have it repaired. Judge Burns, a good millwright in younger days, was urged to do the work, and in behalf of the settlers, assented. In two weeks, he had it ready to start, and called for John to see it go, but John was at The Fort, dallying with Bacchus. His wife, an estimable woman, sent a servant to get him home, but, instead, he joined John. A second messenger was sent, with no better result. Finally, she sent the miller, who found the three on a regular "bust," but he got John home and into the mill, where, bracing himself up by a post, he roared out: "See, boys; see how she chaws!"

Not long after, the mill passed out of his possession, his beautiful "future Capital" site faded away, he went to Colorado and died. The mill gradually succumbed to other mills, which, in 1848-49, sprang up nearer The Fort, for sawing lumber, grinding meal and flour. Many of the pioneers were mechanics and millwrights. With their assistance, on the creeks and streams of the county, small mills were built, rude in construction, some of them never under cover, and they soon wore themselves out, but they

were of great benefit to the settlers, averting a large amount of trouble, expense and want. There were five on Big Creek, four on Four Mile, two on North River, two on Beaver, one on Walnut, two on Des Moines, near Saylorville.

In 1850, the Hall brothers, who built the dam at Center Street, had a large saw and flour mill on the West Side. The logs were floated down the river, and often so many that a person could walk on them to Thompson's Bend. Meacham also had a small mill on the east side of the river to grind corn. Later, Dean & Cole had a large steam flour mill near the east end of the present Locust Street bridge. C. C. Van and B. F. Allen had a large steam flour mill just south of the 'Coon, near the present covered bridge, so that, in 1850, there were about twenty mills scattered over the county, sufficient to supply the local demand.

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