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# JACKSONVILLE

## 125 Years Ago

*by*

WILLIAM H. MILBURN

*With Introduction*

*by*

CLARENCE P. McCLELLAND



JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS

1955



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125

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WILLIAM H. MILBURN  
1823-1903



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## INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most gifted and interesting Illinois men of the nineteenth century was William H. Milburn. Although blind from boyhood, he acquired a broad culture, and became an orator of unusual power. As a lecturer he was very popular, both in the United States and Great Britain. Among his friends were many of the most distinguished statesmen, writers, clergymen, and businessmen of his time. He was on particularly friendly terms with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Thomas Carlyle. He published four books which were good sellers in America and England. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Milburn traveled farther and during his lifetime was known to more people, many of them eminent in the English-speaking world, than any other person Central Illinois has produced; and no man knew life on the middle western frontier better or has written about it more interestingly.

Mr. Milburn was born in Philadelphia on September 26, 1823, the child of well-to-do and respected parents. When he was five years old, through a singular accident, he became blind and never again save in imagination and memory saw the beauty of the physical world; and toward the end of his long life he said, "I never saw the face of anyone to whom I spoke although I have preached and lectured for more than half a Century."

In 1838 the Milburn family moved to Jacksonville, Illinois. They made their home in a modest dwelling on East State Street almost directly opposite the front entrance to MacMurray College. The father opened a small store on the Square, and during the remainder of his life was one of Jacksonville's leading citizens.

William was fifteen years of age at this time and every spare minute that he could find he spent on his books. His father, realizing that the boy would never be satisfied with anything less than a college education, employed a tutor for him and in the autumn of 1839 he entered Illinois College. For three years studying under the most trying conditions, he

was able to keep up with his class, but in his senior year his health broke and he was obliged to leave his studies and live an outdoor life.

Illinois College, because of the rapid progress he made in theological and other studies, made him a member of the Class of 1845 and gave him his Bachelor's degree. In 1891 the College conferred upon him the honorary degree of Master of Arts and in 1894 the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

He served as Chaplain of Congress (both Houses) in 1845 and 1846 and again in 1853 and 1854. During the first Cleveland administration he became Chaplain of the House of Representatives serving continuously there until 1892 and in 1893 was elected Chaplain of the Senate. He remained in this position until his death in 1903.

The following paragraphs are taken from Chapter XXIV of Milburn's longest book, *The Lance, Cross and Canoe; The Flatboat, Rifle and Plough*, published in 1892. They describe Jacksonville as it was about one hundred twenty-five years ago.

James P. McCalland

# A Look Backward

**I**N my fifteenth year my father and his family removed from Philadelphia to Illinois, which was then the far West, for only a few scattered settlements had been made between the Great River and the Pacific Ocean. It was the middle of May, 1838. Our fortunes had been wrecked in the financial crash of the year before, and like so many others, we set out to find a new home and begin the world afresh . . .

Our journey from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh took about five days and nights; an all-day ride by rail to Harrisburg, two days and a half on the canal-boat to Hollidaysburg, a day in crossing the mountain on cars drawn up inclined planes by stationary engines, and then let down on the other side to Johnstown, and thence by canal-boat again to the site of old Fort Duquesne, at the junction of the Alleghany and Monongahela Rivers. Here a steamboat received us, and we floated down the beautiful river which John Randolph used to describe as "frozen one-half of the year, and dry the other half." At Cincinnati, we were reminded of the perils of western navigation, for only a day or two before, a handsome new steamer had been blown to pieces in front of the town, and nearly all on board perished miserably, drowned or scalded, to gratify the whim of the captain, who wished to display the speed of his boat, and, therefore ordered the safety-valves of the boilers to be closed. A week's voyage brought us to St. Louis, which prided itself upon a population of several thousand souls, but whose houses extended scarcely a quarter of a mile back from the river front. In walking the streets one's ear could hardly determine whether the town were French or English, for one language seemed to be spoken as much as the other, by blacks as well as whites, while an additional interest was lent to the place by files of blanket-wearing Indians stalking about silent as ghosts. St. Louis was then the headquarters of the American fur trade, and the peltries freighted in Mackinac boats as well as steamers, were brought to its levee from the head-waters both on the Missouri and Mississippi, and the *voyageurs* added another charm to the picturesque groups of the thoroughfares.

Another night and part of the day were passed on a steamer in the "Illinois River trade," and we reached Naples in time for the morning stage for Jacksonville, a drive of twenty-five miles across the river bottom up the bluff, through groves and prairies. It was our first experience of prairie-land, and although more than fifty years have passed since the drive on that summer morning, the impressions then created by the landscape of that new world are still fresh and vivid in my memory . . .

Towards the end of our journey we drove up a long, gentle slope to the top of the "mound," whence there was a wide view of surpassing beauty. Houses and farms had begun to appear; and off to the southeast a pasture of a thousand acres was pointed out in which countless cattle were feeding. They as well as the great estate of which their meadow was scarcely a tenth, belonged to Jacob Strawn, the great grazier and drover who supplied St. Louis with beef-cattle, and was a representative man of the time, scouring the country far and near to collect his herds, and then driving them a hundred miles to market. It was said that he took but four hours' sleep, and often a part of that was in the saddle. He had begun life with nothing but his keen eye, quick wit, uncommon knowledge of his business, and tireless energy, and by middle age had become one of the greatest land-holders of the country, while few men were so widely known as he, and none were more respected in business. Of no man could it be more truly said than of him, that "his word was as good as his bond." I suppose he was the pioneer and founder of the great cattle trade of the West.

From the "mound" our road lay along a ridge after a while skirted on both sides by groves. A turn in the road brought us to College Hill and Jacksonville — the goal of our two weeks' wandering was before us; the new buildings of the college on our right and the house of Gov. Joseph Duncan — probably the largest and handsomest in the State at that day — on our left. The distance between Philadelphia and Jacksonville, which then took a fortnight to accomplish, can now be gone over in a little more than thirty hours.

The town was planted in the middle of a beautiful but not extensive prairie, the skirts of which were fringed with fine bits of timber, and along one edge of it there wound from southeast to northwest a sluggish creek, the Mauvaise Terre — called by the people the Movistar — which, after following its crooked way many miles, empties into the Illinois River. It received its name from the early French explorers, who thereby showed themselves poor judges of good land, for there is not on earth a richer and more fertile tract than that drained by the Mauvaise Terre.

An old geography described Schenectady, N. Y., as "a town of three hundred houses and fifteen hundred inhabitants, all standing with their gable-ends to the streets." Except for the gable-ends, the account might stand for Jacksonville when we entered it. There were a few brick buildings, store-houses, and dwellings, many more slight frame structures, but most were the primitive log-cabins, some of which were covered by clapboards, and not a few showing the solid stuff of which they were built. The "public square" was the center of the town, in which stood the brick court-house, and separated from it by a roadway, a two-storied market-house, the upper floor of which was given to the lawyer's offices and a newspaper press,

while from its gallery the politicians were accustomed to harangue the fellow-citizens gathered in the open space below. From that rostrum, or more properly speaking, forum — for in old Rome the forum was the market-place, where causes were tried and orations, political as well as forensic, delivered; and so the founders of the western town followed strictly the classic precedent in using their market-house for oratory as well as the sale of meats and vegetables; — from that forum, I often heard speeches from many of the most distinguished men of the West, when fledging their wings for a flight to Washington and national renown, one of whom, Abraham Lincoln, had gained the perch of immortal fame.

The sides of the square were filled with business houses, dwellings and offices, and from the center of each line started the four principal streets of the town running to the cardinal points of the compass, and named respectively, Springfield, St. Louis, Naples, and Beardstown — the place to which they led; while two smaller streets started from each corner of the square . . .

The population of Jacksonville and of the country tributary to it, all of which had come within less than twenty years, was drawn from almost every State of the Union, and from several countries in the Old World — England, Scotland, Ireland, and Germany. The two largest classes were from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and the other New England States and from Virginia and North Carolina, by way of Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio; and the line which separated the "Yankees" and "Southerners" was broad and distinctly marked. Little love was lost between them; and if there was not positive hatred, contempt, and scorn thinly veiled, were decided in each toward the other. A "picayune Yankee," "no account trash," "mighty small potatoes, and few in a hill," "people that would skin a flea for his hide and tallow," were common terms of reproach hurled at the sons of the Pilgrims from those who boasted descent from the "Cavaliers;" and the compliment was returned by "lazy," "trifling," "people that hadn't no schoolin'," "unfacilized creeturs, that had more pride than brains or money, and that set no store by edication and virtue."

The thrift displayed by the people from the "Land of Steady Habits," in close trading, sharp bargains, and an economical style of living, was held to be meanness by the less prudent Kentuckian, while his freehanded ways in business and housekeeping were considered by the other, "extravagance that tempted Providence." Many of the Southerners would swear, drink, and fight in the open day; the others rarely fought, drank only on the sly, and swore by periphrasis. The sins of the first were outbreaking and regardless of public opinion; those of the others were qualified by "what folks would say." The western man of southern descent boasted

that he didn't care "shucks" what people thought of him, and if "they said anything he didn't like, he'd make 'em swallow it, or die tryin';" "if he wanted to chop wood on a Sunday, or ride his filly in a quarter-race for money on Saturday, he reckoned it was his lookout, and nobody else's." He kept one or more dogs to hunt coons and 'possums by night with his boys and a party of friends. He was a dead shot with a rifle, and claimed that he could pick out a squirrel's eye at a hundred yards. He liked sport and holidays, and when mellow with corn whiskey, delighted in a rough-and-tumble fight. Notwithstanding his show of free and easy ways, the chances were that he was as keen in a trade, shrewd in a swap or bargain as any other man, "for he had cut his eye-teeth in old Kaintuck and allowed that the man who beat him in business would have to get up a good while before day-light." He called all his neighbors and acquaintances, even the most eminent citizens, behind their back or to their faces, by the diminutive of their first names, as boys do—Joe, Jack, Billy, and the like—and his talk was apt to be highly spiced with idioms, slang, and not seldom with oaths. He was careless in dress as in speech; his laugh as well as his talk was loud, and you could often hear his guffaw at a good story a quarter of a mile away. Notwithstanding he would get as "mad as hops," and thunder out his gibes in a torrent, his prevailing tone was that of good humor.

Good neighborhood was a prime article of his religion; if he had anything particularly toothsome for dinner he never enjoyed it to the full unless it was shared with guests, and until his wife had sent a part of the luxury to the houses of one or more friends. In the sickness or trouble of his neighbors, no man could be more sweet in sympathy and unwearied in helpful attentions. If he became converted and renounced the world, he joined the Methodist, Baptist, or "Christian" church, or if of the Scotch-Irish stock, the old school Presbyterian. Before joining the church he had read few books, but after that act he became a devout student of the Bible, and of such literature as would help him to understand it better. Apart from its molding power over the spiritual life and experience as well as the moral conduct and standards of these early settlers, the influence of the Sacred Volume in educating their intellect and faculties of expression has been incalculable. Without the heat and light which flow from it as from the sun, and the life which they communicate, the men of the West, whether their blood had its fountain north or south of Mason and Dixon's Line, would still be laggards in the race of civilization.

The prejudice in the mind and heart of the descendants of the South towards the sons of New England had shown itself in their long and bitter opposition to the first great work of internal improvement in Illinois—the Illinois River and Lake Michigan Canal—because, they said, it would

flood the country with Yankees, and to the name Yankee they prefixed not a few unsavory epithets. Unfortunately, the best known type of New England, at that early day, was the peddler of wooden clocks, tin and other wares, whose wagon pulled up in front of nearly every log cabin throughout the West, while his "slick jaw" and "everlasting jabber" "bamboozled" old and young, and in the end they found "they had paid dear for their whistle." Moreover, the early ministers, teachers, and professors going as missionaries to the West, were in the habit of writing home to friends and the public print, dismal and heart-rending accounts of the benighted heathenism of the Mississippi Valley, and savagery of its inhabitants, from which nothing could redeem them but the money and the labors of New England people. These dreadful pictures, of course, found their way back to the West, inflaming the ire and embittering the hostility of those who considered themselves caricatured and belied. The reserved manners and cautious speech of the people from a colder climate were more than distasteful to the outspoken men whose blood was hot . . .

Another root of bitterness which separated them was the difference of their views about slavery. Notwithstanding most of the better sort of people had quitted Kentucky and Virginia because of their dislike of "The Institution," and the wish that their children should grow up in a free State, while the plainer people wished to escape the odium of not owning and working "niggers," and of being rated as "poor white trash" by both masters and slaves; nearly all men of southern birth held an "abolitionist" to be the vilest of mankind, and had a shrewd suspicion that almost every man from New England was tainted with insane and incendiary opinions on this burning question. The rancorous feelings which had been stirred to the depths by the agitation of 1823-24, as to whether the Constitution of Illinois should be changed so as to admit slavery, and the slender majority of 1800 against it, had not yet died out; and the death of the Rev. Mr. Lovejoy by the hands of a mob at Alton, in 1837, had thrown fuel on the smouldering embers and caused the flame of excitement to glow for many years. The terms Yankee and Abolitionist were considered to be interchangeable, and both were a stone of stumbling and rock of offense to the Southerners—not to say a "stench in their nostrils." . . .

I may as well set down here some of the new words and phrases which I found to be the current coin of the country, and show into what queer forms the Queen's English has been twisted on the frontier. Not long after our arrival, a boy of my own age invited me to share with him the freedom which kind-hearted Gov. Duncan had given to range through his watermelon patch. On our way I asked if we should find many; he answered, "Thousands, lots and gobs and mortal slathers." Invited to dine, my host said as we came to the table, "Holp yuself to whatsomdeve

ye like, for if you don't holp yuself; nobody'll holp ye to yer meals' vittels." "He's a cavortin' on a high horse," was said of a man trying to put on style. "I'll be consarned if she's not a tarnation fine gal," would be said of a pretty young woman. "You needn't be tryin' to bullyrag and scourge me unless you're spilin' for a fight; and if you are, I reckon you'll find me an owdacious scrouger that'll jist bodiacerously split you right open down the middle." "You onery low-down dog," answers the person thus challenged, "ye needn't try to get shet of me with all yer tom-fool brag; I'll knock you into a cocked hat soon'r'n ye kin say Jack Robinson."

The hours of the day were told by the motions of the heavenly bodies—so many hours before sun-up, and so many after sun-down; and after the rising, it was one, two, three hours by sun, and so on until noon, which was always called dinner-time; and after that, three, two, and one hours by sun—and people were as accurate in numbering the hours as if they had referred to watches and clocks, and were rarely at fault even in cloudy or rainy weather. The time for beginning evening service, whether at church or other gatherings, was early candle-lighting, or, as it was more popularly called, "yearly candle-lightin'." An object thought to be particularly fine or handsome, was called a "jewholloper;" anything ingenious and new was "a sharp contraption," and whatever smacked of fraud was a "hooken-snivvey." . . . "Scrumptious" signified very good. "Rinctum-rhino" was hard cash, and so was "spondulics." . . . "I never cross a river till I get to it," and "I never swap jack-knives while swimming a horse over a river," were two sayings of the famous backwoods preacher, Peter Cartwright, which, adopted by Abraham Lincoln, have passed into proverbs; and, by the way, many of Mr. Lincoln's best stories and idioms were derived from the old preacher . . .

Account also must be taken of the lawyers, doctors, and other men of education, as well as the ministers and teachers, who helped to spread sweetness and light among the masses of the people. Nor must the influence of politics be forgotten. Many men from all sections ranged themselves under the banner of "Old Hickory," as General Jackson was called; and an almost equal number from both north and south were as enthusiastic for Henry Clay. These leaders stood as the representatives of the political doctrines of their opposed parties, and while a majority of voters on both sides knew little or nothing about the currency, the tariff, and other vital questions, they were ready to work, vote, and fight for the champions in whom they believed. Their untutored minds were slow in grasping the ethical and practical questions at issue, but pinning their faith to their leaders, and espousing the cause known as Whig or Democratic, not that they knew or cared much for the principles involved, but because they rendered a homage that bordered upon worship to the commanders in



the conflict, and thus through the heat of enthusiasm, the ice of ignorance was melted and the soil of their intellects was mellowed to receive and germinate the ideas of political truth.

"Feller-citizens," exclaimed a Western stump orator, "What was Henry Clay when General Jackson was a fitin' the enemies of his country, and lickin' the British out'n their boots at the battle of New Orleans, and a kiverin' hisself, and every feller under him with everlastin' glory; what, say, was Henry Clay? Why, he was a playin' bluff with the crowned heads of Europe, and bettin' his millions on his hand, and nary a pair in it," referring to Mr. Clay's stay in Europe as one of our plenipotentiaries to negotiate the treaty of Ghent, which closed our last war with Great Britain.

Of course, the Democrats received this with whoops and yells, until they were out of breath. The Whig orator answered: "Feller-citizens, supposin' Henry Clay did play cyards with the kings and queens of Europe! didn't he break their bank, and bring all their money home with him, an' gev it to the poor, never a keepin' a cent of it for hisself? Wasn't he sent over to beat'em at every game, an' he did it? What's whalen' a few Britishers, a few sodgers and generals, alongside of beatin' all the kings and queens? With such men as he had, such dead shots, General Jackson couldn't a helped whippin' the British; but it took a man of giantic intelleck to clean out the whole crowd of crowned heads,—an' that's what Henry Clay did. Now, let anybody say which is the best man for President of these United States,—him that trounced the British sodgers, and killed a few officers, or him that busted the whole royal family." Then it was the turn for the Whigs to shout until they were black in the face . . .

I have spoken of our market-house, or forum, where on almost every Saturday, if the weather allowed, when the country people came to town to trade, crowds were gathered to hear the orators, old and young, discuss the political topics of the time—local, state and federal. Among our own politicians and lawyers were Murray McConnel, our wheel-horse of the Democracy, his son-in-law, James A. McDougall, afterwards a Senator in Congress from California, Josiah Lamborn Lane, like Prentiss of Mississippi, and only inferior to him in eloquence at the bar and on the stump, and like him prematurely cut off, and by the same cause. Now and then uncle Peter Cartwright would make a Democratic speech when he came to attend his quarterly meeting, and Brother Newton Cloud, a popular local preacher living on Apple Creek, and often a member of the Legislature, would also favor the crowd with Democratic doctrines. On the other side we had Col. John J. Hardin, one of the most gallant gentlemen, powerful stump-speakers, admirable and noble men whose names

have shed luster upon the early days of Illinois. His brilliant career was cut short on the field of Buena Vista, in the Mexican war.

Abraham Lincoln used to call him "more than his father," and said that his debt to him was greater than he owed to any other man. Young William Brown, afterwards known as "The Judge," and young Richard Yates, just out of college and beginning the practice of law, tried their 'prentice hands from that gallery. Judge Brown left the law and politics, and the eminence he would be sure to gain, to become a banker; but Richard Yates, or "Our Dick" as he was affectionately styled, went to the Legislature, to Congress, became War-governor of Illinois, United States Senator, and achieved a popularity among the people of his State second only to that of Mr. Lincoln himself. Had his self-restraint been equal to his popular gifts, he would no doubt have filled the presidential chair. From other towns, such as Springfield and Quincy, we had Stephen A. Douglas, even then beginning to be called "The Little Giant," who only a short time before had been teaching a country school in a log-cabin in an obscure part of our county; James Shields, afterwards a General both in the Mexican and our Civil wars, and a Senator in Congress, I think, from three different States. John A. McClernand came to us from Shawneetown, made speeches in private as well as in public, married one of our girls, filled a seat in Congress, and distinguished himself as a General in the Civil war.

On the other side we used to hear the brilliant O. H. Browning from Quincy, Lisle Smith from Chicago, probably the most finished and graceful orator at the bar and on the hustings Illinois has ever had; Mr. Butterfield, from the same city, a great lawyer and an equally great wit; Col. Edwin [Edward] D. Baker, scarcely second to Lisle Smith as an orator, who was elected from our district to Congress, in 1844, resigned his seat in 1846 to become Colonel of a regiment in the Mexican war, entered Congress again from another Illinois district, removed to California, and practiced law, thence to Oregon, where he was elected to the Senate of the United States, was later appointed Brigadier-General in the Civil war, and in 1862 [1861] was killed at the head of his brigade in the battle of Ball's Bluff, Va. No man of all the throng delighted us more by his speeches than "Old Abe," as Mr. Lincoln was even then familiarly styled. His tall, gaunt, awkward form, clad in homely, careless dress, his clear, simple, convincing logic, his inimitable stories brim-full of wit, humor and pathos, clinching his argument, his unruffled good nature united to make him a prime favorite with every "Sucker" audience, even in those early days.

Speaking of Mr. Butterfield, I must put down two or three stories. At the beginning of the Mexican war he was twitted by a political adversary with having opposed the last war with Great Britian, in 1812, and would

no doubt, oppose the present war. He answered, "the experience I gained in 1812, and afterwards, leads me to welcome pestilence, famine, war, and all the other inestimable blessings brought us by the Democratic administration."

In 1842, as counsel for the Mormon prophet, Joe Smith, arguing a writ of *habeas corpus* before the District Court of the United States, at Springfield, Illinois, he moved for the discharge of the Prophet from custody. So great was the popular interest in the case, that Judge Nathaniel Pope, father of Gen John B. Pope, held court in one of the legislative halls of the capitol, and around him were grouped many of the most beautiful girls of the State, while Joe Smith was attended by his twelve apostles, and the courtroom was crowded with the most eminent lawyers and citizens of the commonwealth. Mr. Butterfield, dressed with exemplary neatness in the blue and buff of the old Whig party, rising to speak, paused, ran his eyes admiringly from the central figure of the judge along the rows of lovely women on each side of him and said: "May it please the court, I appear before you today under circumstances novel and peculiar. I am to address the 'Pope' (bowing to the judge) surrounded by angels (bowing still lower to the ladies), in the presence of the holy Apostles, in behalf of the Prophet of the Lord."

In 1848, General Shields returning from the Mexican war, where he had been wounded several times, became a candidate for the United States Senate, defeated the eminent Judge Sidney T. Breese. One of the General's wounds had been caused by a musket-ball entering his right breast, passing through the lung, and coming out of his back. The morning after the election, one of the judges of the Supreme Court, expressing his astonishment at the result, said: "It was the war, and that Mexican bullet that did the business." "Yes," answered Mr. Butterfield dryly, "and what an extraordinary, what a wonderful shot that was. The ball went clean through Shields without hurting him, or even leaving a scar, and killed Breese a thousand miles away."

The boys of my age took the liveliest interest in the political speakers and their harangues. Each one had his hero, and shouted for him with all his might — some for Douglas, others for Lincoln — and taking sides enthusiastically upheld the cause of party and chieftains with arguments and sometimes blows. When the unequalled excitement of the log-cabin and hard-cider for the presidency in 1840, with its battle-cry of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, swept over the country, all classes, save a few of the staunchest Democrats, were carried into the Whig ranks. Never have I known the enthusiasm of the boys raised to such a pitch as in that campaign. You may be sure that when they enter heart and soul into a political contest, the cause they espouse will win. The picturesque features

of that memorable struggle—the log-cabins adorned with coon-skins, furnished with barrels of hard-cider and plenty of gourds with which to drink it, set on long wagon-beds hauled by many yokes of oxen, surrounded by shouting crowds on foot and on horseback chanting the campaign songs, each chorus rounded up with “three times three” for “old Tippecanoe and Tyler too,” paraded through the streets of every village, and from county to county, through the wide West—kindled a flame of excitement which carried everybody, especially the boys, off their feet. A passion for politics, such as inflamed the western boys fifty years ago, I must believe to be as good for them as the rage for baseball and sculling matches, perhaps a little better . . .

Our town—or burg, as it was commonly called—was rich not only as the seat of a college for boys,\* but of an academy of high grade for girls,† presided over by the venerable John Adams, who had been for many years head master of Phillips’ Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, and whose presence among us, both in the day school and Sunday school, was an inestimable blessing, doing much to soften and sweeten the manners, elevate and refine the character of the girls. The college (Illinois) was founded and manned by a small body of New England men, chiefly from Yale, who had come out a few years before as pioneers in the cause of higher education. The body of the fifty or hundred students came from Illinois, Missouri, some from States farther South, and a few from the East; except boys from the town, most were sons of New England parents. Not a few of them “worked their way” through college, as it was called, *i.e.*, taught school a part of the year and attended college the rest, worked on farms, chopping wood and the like . . .

Hard as our lines were, we had plenty of fun, for the West in those days was the land of humor, and the love of it. He was the best fellow who cracked the most jokes, told the cleverest and aptest stories. Abraham Lincoln drew the exhaustless fund of his anecdotes and pay sayings from the soil of our life and the social atmosphere we breathed, and was our representative man. We were a jolly Democracy, free-hearted, open-handed, with no pride of birth, station or money.

We knew no restraint nor conventions of older societies, but stood on a level where every one did that which seemed good in his own eyes, spoke his mind in such English as he could command, and feared nobody, from our most eminent citizens, Gov. Duncan, familiarly called “Governor Joe,” and Col. Hardin, called “Col. John J.,” down to the boys whose heads were covered with coon-skin caps, and their bodies

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\* Illinois College, founded in 1829.

† Illinois Female College, founded in 1846, now MacMurray College.

with blanket overcoats, the legs of their trousers tucked in the tops of their boots, while they waded about in the deep, black, prairie mud. Almost every man worked with his hands, and was not ashamed of it; and almost every boy lent his mother a lift in the business of the house, and his father at the shop, store, or in the field. They cut the wood, drew the water from the well and carried it to the house, milked the cows, fed the hogs, took care of the horses and oxen, and learned to turn their hands to anything. Nearly every one of them carried a pistol, dirk or bowie-knife, owned a rifle or shot-gun, and used it as an expert on quail, prairie-chicken, rabbit, and squirrel, sometimes bringing down a deer or wolf. Most men and boys chewed tobacco, smoked corn-cob pipes, and the use of whiskey was by no means uncommon. I remember a rebuke administered by a staid old New Englander at church to some tobacco-chewing boys who sat next to him and expectorated freely on the floor; with a significant look, but without a word, he stopped and began to roll up his trousers as if prepared to wade through a muddy slough; the chewing ceased.

In my boyhood I often visited Springfield, where one of my recreations was to "loaf" in front of the store of my old friend, Mr. James Lamb, at the southeast corner of the public square, about one o'clock, when people were on their way from dinner, and where Mr. Lincoln was almost sure to stop, and a crowd soon gathered to hear his stories. He would tell one or two, and this would call out one and another of his friends, and that never failed to remind him of a fresh one, and thus the fun went on sometimes for hours — indeed, until time to go to supper — while all the unemployed men and boys in that part of the town, often amounting to hundreds, were gathered to listen to the yarns; and the shouts of laughter called out by "Old Abe's" sallies of humor and grotesque descriptions, could be heard half a mile away. In the hot summer afternoons he would take off hat, coat, and waistcoat, and in shirt-sleeves become not only a story-teller but an actor representing the scene and parties he portrayed. The land has never had such a *raconteur* to suit the taste and humor of a western crowd as he; and the discipline he thus acquired did not a little toward giving him that almost unequalled style of speech in the courtroom, on the stump, and with the pen, — a style sure to go to posterity, and live when most of the elaborate and stately declamations of the Senate, rostrum, and bar, are forgotten. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

The Rev. John Milton [Mason] Peck, a Baptist minister from New England, entered Illinois as a missionary about 1817, while it was a territory, soon made a home for himself, which he called Rock Spring, about thirty miles east of St. Louis, and by virtue of his devotion, energy,

and talents, became, and for many years continued to be, one of the most influential and honored citizens of the country, doing more than almost any other man of his generation to advance the highest welfare of the people, and to bring into the land the best kind of settlers. He wrote not a few books, and was, I suppose, the first literary man of the commonwealth. In 1834, he published a *Gazetteer of the State*, which was issued from the printing office in Jacksonville; and in the summer of that year, made a journey with his own horses and wagon, and an equipment for camping out, from his home at Rock Springs, to Chicago, about three hundred miles . . .

When he reached Chicago, he saw Fort Dearborn surrounded by a huddle of log-cabins, with here and there a house of brick, containing a few hundred inhabitants, whose chief business was trading with the Indians and waiting for the future. His page glows with the fervor of prophecy while he tells the governor that during that year as many as two hundred sloops and schooners and two steamboats, had entered the mouth of the river, and adds, "Your excellency may think me crazy, but I venture to predict that by the year 1900, or soon after, a railroad will connect Chicago with St. Louis, and, perhaps, even places more remote." No doubt all men outside of Chicago who read Mr. Peck's prediction, even the governor, set Mr. Peck down for a dreamer; for Egypt, as southern Illinois is called, had as little respect, in those days, for Chicago, and the lands about it, as they now have for it.

My first visit to the "Garden City" was seven years after Mr. Peck's, when it had grown to be a village of about five thousand inhabitants, as unsightly as one could anywhere be seen on the muddy soil of the New West. In addition to billious fever and the shaking ague, its inhabitants had had already one or two attacks of the fever of land-speculation and "wild-cat" money, which had left them barely alive, with only hope for physic and to bank on. They were looking forward to the completion of the canal which should unite the waters of Lake Michigan with those of the Illinois River, and thus open a highway of commerce to St. Louis and New Orleans. I once asked Thomas Carlyle the meaning of the word "navvy" which he had used, but which was Greek to me. "Oh," he exclaimed, "the navvy is the man who digs canals and is our modern miracle worker. A company of your Methodist brethren, at Yeddon, in Yorkshire, a dozen miles or more from the sea, was pouring forth their supplications at a prayer-meeting, when one of them cried out, 'Oh Lord, we beseech Thee to crown us with Thy mercy, and make Yeddon a sea-port.' In due time the navvy came, a canal was dug, Yeddon became a sea-port, and the miracle was wrought." And so, when I saw it first, Chicago was on tip-toe, big with hope, waiting for the accomplishment of the miracle at the hands of "Paddy, whose country was his wheelbarrow."

When I quitted the boggy, expectant village, it was in a good mail-coach, drawn by a brisk team of four horses, with the accompaniment of the driver's cracking whip and resounding horn; but at the end of twelve miles, we were requested to alight and bestow ourselves in a "prairie-schooner," as the long box-wagon, covered with a cloth of tow-linen, was called, and in this we joggled the rest of the hundred miles to Peru, at the head of navigation on the Illinois river, where we exchanged our schooner for a little stern-wheel steamer.

Between Mr. Peck's first visit to Chicago and my own, the Legislature of Illinois, sitting at the capital—Vandalia—which name, by the way, was bestowed by three commissioners, one of whom had read in some old book that the Vandals were the most enlightened race of savages with whom history makes us acquainted, and persuaded the other members of the board that it was, therefore, the appropriate name for the capital of Illinois—had in its sessions of 1835-36-37, authorized a stupendous system of internal improvement by which the settled parts of the State were to be grid-ironed with railways so that almost every farmer was to have immediate and easy access to the great markets of St. Louis and New Orleans. One of the principal lines was to run from the southern end of the canal to Cairo, thus opening the way by the Mississippi to New Orleans; while from the end of the canal to the northwest, the line was to run to Galena, and Dubuque, Iowa. Innumerable lines were to cross the State from east to west. Taxation for these improvements, however, was not to be thought of, for the people were not willing that a mill should be added to their present rates.

The budding statesmen at Vandalia, among whom were Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, then on their first political legs, insisted that the money to carry out these works, and also to finish the canal, could be raised upon lands derived from the Federal government, and borrowed upon the bonds of the State at the east, and in Europe. The old saying, "millions for defense, but not a cent for tribute," seems to have been translated into "millions upon bonds, but not a cent to be paid." The only one of these schemes which reached fruition, except the canal, was a railway from Meredosia, on the Illinois River, to Jacksonville, a distance of little more than twenty miles, afterwards extended thirty-five miles farther to Springfield, which had meanwhile become the capital of the State; for nominal reign of the Vandals had ended. There were two locomotives on this line carrying passengers and freight at the rate of ten miles an hour, but one of them blew up, and the other landed in a ditch. Transportation, however, continued a while longer by the help of mules, but even this ceased; we returned to the dirt-roads after the bubble burst, and the State found itself hopelessly in debt, with nothing to show for it . . .

The earliest settlers of the West, coming from heavily-timbered districts, made their homes in the groves, and set to work to fell the trees and "clean the brush" to open their farms, while near at hand were the endless prairies, waiting for the turning of the sod; so strong is the power of habit and lessons learned in the past, so small the power of intelligence and recognition of the needs of one's present surroundings. It takes time and discipline for men to learn the use of their eyes, and the brains behind them; most prefer to see through their ears, and yield themselves slaves to the traditions of the past.

Not a few of these pioneers were "squatters," shiftless people, unhappy except on the farthest verge of the frontier, who could not bear to see the smoke from neighbors' chimneys, and "took up lands," as it was called, in the hope of selling out their pre-emption right and then moving farther west. When Col. Hardin went to Jacksonville, in 1832, he called upon a squatter's widow, living in a miserable cabin on the eastern edge of the village, to ask if she would be willing to sell her forty acres. "Sell" she answered, as she knocked the ashes from her corn-cob pipe, "I reckon I will, if ye'll give a decent price. We used to live in ole Noth Calina, till neighbors got thick; then we struck out for Tennessee, so we could be by ourselves; but neighbors cum agin; then we moved to Western Kaintuk and they followed us there. At last, we struck out for the Illinois, and kept on till we thought we were out of reach of people, and squatted right here; but now they've cum and stuck a chunck of a town right down alongside of us, so I can hardly breathe. My ole man's dead, and me and the boys want to get to a decent country, where there haint no interlopers; and we'll be mighty glad to sell our 'forty.'" The Colonel bought the land, and the squatters wended their way toward the setting sun . . .

My second visit to Chicago was in the summer of 1846, five years after the first. The town had nearly doubled its population, and, notwithstanding its low, swampy level was maintained, was beginning to take on some of the aspects of a young, enterprising city. Log-cabins were supplanted by houses of brick and frame, some of the churches were of brick, in which the music was led by melodeon and choir. Board sidewalks were laid in some places, and logs at the street crossings, on which one might skillfully avoid the perilous mire, while strangers had better accommodations at improving hotels. The number of steamers from Buffalo and other ports on the lakes was multiplying, but for transit on land you were still obliged to depend on the stage-coach and prairie-schooner, over roads well-nigh impassable in winter and spring, for the canal was not open for business until two years later, nor did a mile of railway enter the city until 1851 . . .



Let me turn again to the home of my boyhood—Jacksonville—which may stand as a representative of towns in the great valley. In the fifty-four years I have known it, the population has grown from fifteen hundred to only about fifteen thousand, a normal development. Forty years ago a valued friend of mine\* with whom I was in college, a practicing physician as he has been ever since, started a small club of men and women for the study of Plato's writings. From that time to this the club has met every Saturday morning, except for two or three months each year in the heat of summer, and the leader of the club was pronounced by Mr. Emerson "the greatest living Platonist on either side of the water." Out of that assemblage of serious-minded persons intent upon things not seen or handled except by the spiritual part of man, innumerable clubs have risen in the town—literary, conversational, scientific, artistic, a microscopic, a natural history, a Shakespearian, an art, a Browning, a historical, and I know not what other clubs besides a Sorosis, among the first, if not the very first, established in the country. Almost everybody in the town, old and young, men and women, laying claim to education and liberal tastes, belongs to one or another, or several of these associations. The intellectual and social force of the town has crystalized in an "Akademie" where several hundred people gather once a month in a hall built by the founder of the Plato Club, to hear and discuss papers written by resident and associate members from all over the civilized world, on the deepest questions of philosophy and science, in a serious and enlightened spirit that would do credit to the most advanced learned societies of the planet.

To this town had naturally gravitated many of the benevolent institutions of State, the school for the blind, one of the hospitals for the insane, besides a private retreat, a school for the deaf-mutes, the largest and foremost upon earth; and there are also a school of art, a conservatory of music, as well as Illinois College for boys, and two colleges for girls. The houses of the better class of people are tasteful and commodious, but not expensive or ostentatious, and almost every one surrounded by well-kept grounds and gardens, while the principal streets are embraced with avenues of trees that would do credit to New Haven. The best and handsomest structures in the town are the churches, in which is conducted as orderly, solemn, and uplifting a service of song, prayer, and sermon, as can anywhere be found.

A considerable body of Irishmen and their families have made homes for themselves in and about the town, and constitute a Roman Catholic parish of not far from three thousand souls; while a colony of Protestant

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\* Hiram K. Jones.

refugees from one of the Portuguese islands, simple, industrious, honest people, settled there a number of years ago. The mass of these foreign-born people are quiet, good citizens, and their children, undergoing the drill of an almost perfect system of public schools, are gradually becoming Americanized, informed and reformed by our national traditions, usages, and hopes, taking as keen an interest in elections, and not a few of them as anxious to promote the welfare of the country by filling offices, as those who, through their forefathers, boast a longer stay on this continent. Nor must I forget the colored people, enough of whom live there to support several churches, and constitute a quiet, orderly part of the community, while their children answer the summons of the school-bell, and are treading the paths which lead to the heights of intelligence, self-control, and self-respect.

A corresponding advance has been made throughout the country. The shiftless farming of the early time has given way before the better methods and the best machinery of the later time. Instead of the log-cabins of the old days, with their wretched out-houses, you now see commodious and even handsome dwellings, great barns, well-appointed stables and cow-houses, large orchards, and all the signs of thrift and comfort.

A few years ago, at an annual meeting of the "Society for Home Studies," in Boston, a paper on Shakespeare was read by Miss Gicnor, the secretary, which called forth great praise, and Dr. O. W. Holmes and Mr. Longfellow, who were present, declared it to be—for freshness and vividness of statement, excellence of illustration, force, and finish of style—one of the most remarkable essays they had read. It was written by the wife of a farmer living not far from Jacksonville, who excused herself to the secretary for what she called her "poor article," by the statement that she had, on the day of writing it, cooked the breakfast and dinner for a large number of her husband's hands in the harvest-field, scrubbed the floors of the dining-room and kitchen, and then set herself to writing the piece . . .

Thus have I seen a poor western village, where books were few and opportunities for culture scanty, grow into a seat of good letters, good manners, and high principle; where old jealousies and asperities have been softened or have vanished altogether; where the standards of education, morality, and religion have grown steadily higher, the horizon of life widened, and its values immeasurably increased by faith, reverence, and charity. The changes which have taken place in the town and county I knew so well in boyhood, have been going on at the same rate and with the same results in thousands of towns throughout the great valley; and who can doubt that they will continue and increase?









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