CYRUS A. MOSIER

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A CONSPICUOUS person among the early settlers was Cyrus A. Mosier, or Cy., as he was better known among them. He came here when eleven years old, with his father, early in 1848, who, in November of that year, entered several tracts of Government land in the northwestern part of the present city. One tract was on the north side of what is now University Avenue, between Thirtieth and Thirty-fifth streets, on which he built a log cabin, about ten rods north of the avenue and west of Thirty-first street. There he planted the first apple and peach orchard in Polk County, and in 1856 and 1857, raised an immense crop of peaches, "the most luscious and beautiful I over saw," said an old-timer to me a few days ago. The Winter of 1857 killed all the peach trees, since when peach growing has been abandoned in Polk County.

Cyrus was a farm boy, with all that the term signifies, but he very early manifested a desire to get an education. Schools were scarce. There was a log schoolhouse more than a mile north of his home, through the timber and brush, at what was known as "Hickman's Corner," and there he received his first lessons respecting the three "R's" seated on the soft side of slab benches. He soon graduated therefrom [sic], and attended a private school taught by Elder Nash for a short time, in 1853, and a select school in 1855, for a short time taught by John H. Gray, who was, in 1858, elected Judge of the District Court.

His school opportunities were of short duration, for he had not the means to defray the expenses. When not in school, his leisure hours were given to study and fitting himself for teaching—then his highest ambition.

He did not like farming. It was too isolated. He was not built that way, and he would break away. Sometimes he would go hunting and trapping up the river, or driving logs down the river to the

mill. He once told me he had walked on logs from the dam to Thompson's Bend. He was of extremely nervous, sanguine temperament [sic], and always busy. Father Bird, the first preacher here, had purchased the land from Locust Street north to Center Street, between Third and Fourth streets, and wanted to cultivate it. Cyrus drove an ox team to break it. Corn, potatoes, and hay were grown on it as late as 1864.

While he was preparing himself for teaching, he took up a system of stenography, or shorthand writing, then but very little known in the West. Without instruction, by perseverance and toil, many nights in the light of a "tallow dip," he mastered the symbolical pot-hooks, angles and curves, and so perfected his skill that he was able to do reporting. It was the custom in those days, there being no railroads, for the lawyers here to hire some person to take them around the circuit to the different places where court was to be held—the district covered nearly all the northwestern part of the state—and they frequently hired Cyrus to go with them and report the proceedings in their cases, for which he was paid five and ten dollars per day. It was a purely private clerical arrangement. He was thus employed at intervals for several years, and he became so proficient and reliable that, in 1862, be was appointed by Judge Gray as official reporter for his court. It was the first of the kind in the state, and he held the office for more than a score of years. I have no doubt be was the first resident of Iowa to practice reporting by stenography.

In September, 1854, he organized the first brass band. The town had become enthused with "Manifest Destiny," visions of the Seat of Government coming this way filled the air. Political enthusiasm also ran high, and a brass band was deemed necessary to give *eclat* to the times and occasions. It consisted of eleven members. Being in a reminiscent mood one day, he unburdened his memory of the aggregation, and its lost chords, thusly:

"Business had crept from the 'Point' along the cabin rows on First and Second streets, as far as Vine, and the population of the town had risen to the enormous figure of seven hundred, counting men, women, boys, girls, all told, suburban and close-in folks living out at Beaver, our friend Wash. Hickman, on his farm three miles

out, included. In 1854, remember the date, it was whispered about during the Grimes-Bates campaign for Governor, that we ought to have a brass band at The Forks when we had speeches by the candidates and others. Furthermore, we had begun to hope for the Capital; it was in the atmosphere that came across the two hundred miles of unsettled prairie to the northwest, and in the smoke that settled in the valleys in the blue October days. The old frames of wickiups scattered up and down North River and 'Coon, as well as far up the Des Moines, even into Minnesota, seemed to shout: 'The Capital is coming to The Fort,' and settlers were asking as high as five dollars per acre for their farms, whereon stood sod corn, shone the turnip patches, and rattled the buckwheat when the southwest winds of Autumn came sweeping through the tangled straw! Ten acres in corn, worth two-bits a bushel. Yes, we must put on city airs or never amount to anything; we must fill the skies with better wind, more musical than that which fanned the flames of the prairie grass and yearly devastated the timber lands, licked up the rail fences, as well as some pole cabins, the homes of pioneers. 'Time we had a band,' shouted the noted lawyers of those days, and the justices said, 'If the court understands herself, and she thinks she do, we will never 'mount to anything till we have a band—that's the p'int !' The wide-awake merchants—'Billy' Moore, B. F. Allen, J. M. and H. H. Griffiths, the Campbell brothers, and Pete Myers, Jesse Dix, the stove and tinware man; `Hod' Bush, the baker; all the doctors, especially Doctor Henry C. Grimmel, father of Doctor George Grimmel, now at Jefferson; the old Doctor Frank Grimmel, with his bulldog pills, and even Doctor J. C. Bennett, who once led the Mormon militia, for he loved fuss and feathers; Alex Scott, big-hearted, generous to a fault, were in the thickest of the blow. As soon as the ten who were to take the instruments and master them had paid in ten dollars each, the town, as a Committee of the Whole, went to work and raised another fifty dollars, making the magnificent sum total of one hundred and fifty dollars. One dollar, in those days, was bigger than one hundred dollars these times. The amount raised was looked upon as a princely sum. The instruments were bought at Davenport; part were secondhand.

"When Ed. Clapp drove his express into town, at sunset, one beautiful September day, in 1854, freighted with bacon and United States mail, some three or four weeks old—judging from the skippers, the bacon was the oldest—he brought a box of horns, brass horns, mind you, some few copper, not many, else the horns might not all have arrived, though Ed. was always, as to-day 'safe and sound' on the horn question, and strictly reliable. But those old wagons often caused the breakage of cooperage, especially while standing in the tall grass on the eastern side of Skunk, waiting for the water and mud to go down. The news of the arrival of the box soon spread; the members of the band-to-be quickly gathered and opened the box, and, after some discussion as to the fitness of things, an assignment of the instruments was made, as follows:

"William Boyd, E flat bugle, leading instrument.

"Doctor Henry C. Grimmel, low E flat trumpet, similar to cornet.

"Thomas Boyd, ophecleide, heavy bass instrument.

"L. D. Karns, trombone.

"James Hall, trombone.

"Cyrus A. Mosier, B flat bugle.

"Alonzo F. Dix, B flat bugle.

"Horace M. Bush, French horn.

"Wiliam Deford, French horn.

"John B. Boyd, bass drum.

"George Sneer, snare drum.

"Our first trombone, Karns, the tailor, he who made 'Billy' Moore's fine broadcloth wedding suit, took the heavy task of teaching us to read notes and play the simplest scale. He had been a member of a band, and could play the trombone to perfection. Our first meetings were held in Doctor F. C. Grimmel's office, on the Commons, where the Catholic School now is. The old rail fence had been removed from the field where Doctor George Grimmel, as a boy, plowed corn bare-footed. The office fronted on what is now Grand Avenue. It was so small there was not breathing room for us, and the chaos of sound soon deadened our senses, and we had to find another place. We went to the old first Court House, but there were so many demands for it—it was used as a place of worship

by all the churches except the Methodist and First Prebys-terian, and for public gatherings and the court—that we were soon forced out. We then interceded with the Trustees of the Fifth Street Methodist Church, to permit us to meet in their little frame meeting-house, where the Iowa Loan and Trust Company Building now is. As we had no big fiddles, nor wicked little dance fiddles, and Deford was somewhat of an exhorter, 'Hod' Bush, and, I think, two or three others, were Methodist—in fact, we all leaned that way, for a majority of the pretty girls in town attended that church—we readily got the consent.

"The house was open, and as cold as a barn. It had once been tipped over by a cyclone, but straightened up and propped by poles. A small Franklin wood stove was all the means for heating. We arranged the old-fashioned, high-backed wood benches around the stove as support for our music and the sconces, in which were placed the 'tallow dips,' which we snuff-ed with our fingers. The teacher—we had secured Professor Hess, of Saint Louis, a master of all brass instruments—who beat time with the wooden stove poker, and scolded us in sev-eral languages beside Dutch when our breaks were so bad as to excite his disgust. But we pounded away there until we were able to appear in public."

The band was a notable acquisition to social affairs in the town, with its aid in celebrations and the many schemes for raising funds for different societies, but after a few months it collapsed, as one of the members once said, "for want of wind." Of the eleven members, not one is now living, Cyrus being the last survivor.

In 1856, Cyrus began teaching Winter school in the rural districts, and so continued until he began court reporting, in 1858. He was a prodigious reader and always a zealous student. He early began to investigate the subject of Indian mounds, so many of which existed in the Des Moines Valley, and that of the Mississippi. There were fifteen of them on the plateau abutting the two rivers here, one near the corner of Fourth and Walnut, on which "Billy" Moore built his dwelling-house; another where the Court House now stands (the Sacs and Foxes had a war dance there in 1854); another at the corner of Fourth and Court Avenue, opposite The *Register and Leader* building. The others were scattered

in various localities. His research, investigation, and travel convinced him beyond a doubt that the Mississippi Valley was once a populous empire, millions of whose subjects repose in mound sepultures scattered over our valleys and prairies; that we to-day tread on the ruins of a civilization older than that of the Aztecs, of a people divided into stationary communities, who, centuries in the past, possessed the arts of semi-civilized life, who worshipped the elements, whose form of government subordinated the masses to hereditary power, as revealed in marks they have left. To what race they belonged has not been revealed, but, reading from archaeological investigations made, the conclusion is that, after centuries of warfare, they were driven southward into Mexico by the ancestors of the Indians.

In 1867, Cyrus was elected County Superintendent of Schools, but resigned during the second year of his term because the duties of the office interfered with his court reporting.

In 1889, he was appointed by President Harrison a special agent of the General Land Office of the interior Department at Washington. In 1893, he was removed by President Cleveland, to make room for a Democrat, but in 1897, was reinstated by President McKinley, and held the office three years, when he resigned because of failing health. The duties of the office were of responsibility and trust, requiring the supervision of Government land in Washington and other territories, to prevent the sequestration of timber by the lumber hog, or minerals, and other encroachments upon the public domain. The conditions of living were such his health became seriously impaired. While in this service, he made a large and valuable collection of curios.

He was an active member of the Old Settlers' Association, and always added zest to its gatherings by his presence and reminiscent lore.

Socially, he was genial, a good mixer, a rapid-fire talker, and took part in whatever was doing for the enjoyment and pleasure of the community. He was a charter member of Emanuel Consistory, Number Two, A. A. S. R., of the Masonic Order, organized in 1867. The last few years of his life were embittered by physical disability.

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