

DOCTOR JAMES CAMPBELL

A NOTABLE character among the pioneers was Doctor James Campbell. He was a hustler from the start, and had a hand in everything going on about The Fort—politics, trade, real estate, amusements—everything which made up the wild, bustling life of that early period. He was a man of many eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, good-hearted, blunt of speech, and of peppery temperament.

He came to Iowa on horseback, in 1839, stopped for a time in Van Buren County, and came to Fort Des Moines early in January, 1846, the second physician in the Settlement, Doctor T. K. Brooks being his predecessor. There was not business enough for two doctors, and Brooks having a little the advantage, Campbell, so soon as the first lot of soldiers left the garrison, opened a grocery in the Guard House, which stood near what is now the corner of Vine and Third streets. A grocery in those days consisted of a room with groceries on one side and a bar on the other for liquors, for whiskey was as staple as corn bread and bacon. The Doctor, with more refined taste than usual, ran a partition through the room, in the south side of which was the bar. In those days, liquor drinking was more popular than it is now, men of very circumspect habits indulged, even church members. One day, a man who, twenty years ago, was one of the best-known and most popular in the country, a pillar of the Methodist Church, who held some of the highest offices in the gift of the people, went down on Second Street to get groceries. His Methodist tenets slipped a cog, and he loaded himself up with more wet goods than dry, until he took in more than he could carry on a straight line. Steering himself to Campbell's place, he went in, declaring he could whip any man that did not weigh over one hundred and forty pounds, reeling against the Doctor, as he entered the door. "That's just my weight," said the Doctor, as he gave him a side-winder straight from the shoulder,

which landed him out on the sidewalk, where the Doctor sat down on him and was giving him a vigorous pummeling when bystanders pulled him off, and the incident was closed. Nothing more was said or thought of it. That was the way of those first-comers. It was like the Doctor, thirty minutes after, to have invited his victim in to "take something," for he was generous in treating, but never drank himself. The good Methodist was never known to patronize the liquid side of a grocery after that event.

Later on, the Doctor removed to the northwest corner of Vine and Second streets, where he opened a grocery and amusement hall, the first in the town. He was a good fiddler, and furnished the music for dances in his amusement hall, and some lively hoe-downs were had there. Fiddlers in those days were in good favor with the young people. "Uncle Jerry" Church, who once laid out a town down the river which was to be the Capital of the state, was a good fiddler, and often furnished music at social functions. On one occasion, a reception was given to Joseph Williams, of the Territorial Court, at the home of Doctor Brooks, on the East Side, where the Judge boarded when he came here to hold court. "Uncle Jerry" was there with his fiddle, and the Judge, who was a good musician, jolly and full of fun, assisted him with a clarinette (sic), as the orchestra for the dances.

During the first ten years, Second Street, from Market to Walnut, was the great thoroughfare of the town, and there was considerable rivalry among business men in building and improving it to hold the trade there. When the Original Town was platted, Vine and Walnut streets were made seventy-four feet wide, and there were to be boulevards. Court Avenue was made ninety-six feet, and sometime was to be the leading business street. All other streets were made sixty-four feet. Second Street, however, held its own until 1859, when G. M. Hippee built a big store on the southeast corner of Court Avenue and Third, and Hoyt Sherman another on the opposite corner, when trade began to move westward.

In 1855, the Doctor built a large three-story brick building near 'Coon Point, where he established an Eye and Ear Infirmary, the first brick business building in the town, and for many years it was cited as an evidence of the manifest destiny of The Fort, but at last its subsidence came from that very destiny made manifest.

The Doctor was inclined to sporting, and while the Indians were here, pony and foot racing was a frequent amusement, and at times not a little exciting, for the Indians were fond of racing, especially after they had received a payment from the Government. They were inveterate gamblers, also, but they were not up to the tricks of the settlers, and their money soon vanished. The race course started between Fourth and Fifth streets, where the Kirkwood House is, and extended a little southwest one-fourth of a mile. After the Indians left, the settlers used the track, and the races were lively, scrubby, and open to anybody who had a horse, for it was about all the amusement in Summer there was.

The Doctor had a small sorrel mare, not handsome, but a complete bundle of nerves and energy. As a sprinter, she was a mighty deceiving beast to lots of over-zealous natives, who thought they knew a good thing when they saw it, and staked their dollars and watches on the other horse. When the first Methodist Church was built, where the Iowa Loan and Trust Building is, it blocked the race track, and it was abandoned.

In the Fall of 1845, when Keokuk and his bands left Iowa for the last time, Poweshiek, whose lodges were on Skunk River, balked. He was a good friend of the white people, a frequent visitor at The Fort, and well known to the first settlers. He was very arrogant and independent, and inclined to resist his removal to Kansas. Instead of going there, he, with his forty lodges, camped on Grand River, just north of the Missouri line. The white people soon became excited over their coming, and threatened extermination, which only incited the Indians to retaliation. Rumors came to The Fort that conditions there were serious. The Doctor, J. B. Scott, and Hamilton Thrift, who knew Poweshiek, one day in February, mounted horses and rode one hundred miles through deep snow, over trackless prairie, to Poweshiek's encampment, where they found trouble brewing. The old chief and his braves were holding dog festivals every day, which meant war. He was surly and inclined to be ugly, but Scott gave him a long talk, which, as the Doctor recalled it, was substantially as follows:

"My friends and myself have come a long distance to help you out of this trouble. We are your friends. If you persist in your

purpose of making war on the whites, many of your squaws and papposes, as well as your braves, will be butchered. The remainder will be driven out in the cold and snow, to perish on the prairie. It would be better for you now to break up your lodges and go in peace to the reservation in Kansas, which the Government has provided for you."

It was some time before he could be induced to accept the good advice, as he feared if he left his encampment he would be stigmatized as a coward, and that he could not endure, but he finally comprehended the true situation, promised to move, and soon after, he and his lodges were beyond the border of the state. The timely arrival of those three friends, and their wise counsel, undoubtedly saved the old chief much trouble, and possible extermination.

In August, 1847, the Doctor was elected the second County Recorder and Treasurer, and served two years, when he sought a re-nomination. As the voters in the county were nearly all Democrats, a nomination was equivalent to an election, but Ben. Bryant, who ante-dated the Doctor, wanted the place. A consultation was held by the Old Guard, and, though the Doctor received a good indorsement (sic), Ben., as a cripple, having lost part of his feet by freezing, won the sympathy and vote of the county.

Prior to 1857, the county records were so badly kept that it was almost impossible to interpret them, and it was only after a long, diligent search, and much labor by Amos Brandt, when he was County Auditor, that the fact of the Doctor's election was established. For instance, during the Doctor's legal term, instruments are recorded bearing the names of other persons as Recorder. On one page, appears a chattel mortgage by G. W. Gaston to John Hadden, which reads:

"One cow and sucking calf, marked with slit in the right year [ear], two horses; one sorrel horse seven yers old with a blase in the fase, marked on the right fore pastern joint by a cut from a wagon running over it; one bay horse blind with both eyes—age not nown; and a clame of two hundred acers on the Des Moines river, Boon and Dallas county split by the seposed county line boundry.

"Received and recorded by Peter Myers, deputy for John Myers."

Sometimes Peter signed himself as Recorder.

I spent many an hour in the basement of the old Court House, seeking among the rubbish and confused mass of papers piled on the floor or packed in boxes, to trace some historic incident when I was reporting for the press. If you will go down to the present Court House, on Third Street, you will find in the basement old and valuable records covered with sand, dust, and filth, and rotting with mildew, a disgrace to the county.

The Doctor was an active member of the Settlers' Claim Club, which, during the first three years, was practically the governing power of the county respecting settlers' rights, Polk County not being attached (sic) to any other county for election or judicial purposes. It was, *de facto*, an independent civic community, and, as the venerable Judge, "Old Bill McHenry," used to put it: "We was a law unto ourselves."

In 1858, the Doctor was a busy participant in the State House location fight between the East and West Side. He evidenced his interest by subscribing five thousand dollars to the War Fund, and when the East Siders were haled before the Legislative Investigating Committee to defend the charges of bribery and corruption made against them, and tell who got the swag, if any, the Doctor was called as a witness, and testified as follows:

"Question.—Did you reside in this city at the time of the location of the Capitol?

"Answer.—Yes, sir; on the West Side.

"Question.—Had you any conversation with the Commissioners, or either of them, at the time of the location of the Capitol, or soon after?

"Answer.—About a week after the location, I had a talk with Crookham in regard to the location—don't know the exact words—not half of it. We were talking more or less about the location made and about lots. I don't recollect his saying how he got them or how he paid for them—don't recollect how many there were. I understood him to say he had some lots over there—the East Side—and was going to have them surveyed before he went away.

"Question.—What was your reply when Crookham said he was going to have his lots surveyed?

"Answer.—I said if I were he, I would have them run off and get the deeds before I left, or something like it.

"Question.—What was your understanding, how he got them?

"Answer.—I thought then for locating the Capitol. He did not say so. I wish I knew more of it. I would tell it. I would like to blow it higher than the sky.

"Question.—Do you know whether any of the Commissioners received anything in lots or money?

"Answer.—I do not. I did not hear from whom the deeds to Crookham were to come.

"Question.—When you had this conversation, why did you say he had better get the title right before he left?

"Answer.—It would be my way of doing business.

"Question.—What led to this conversation with Crookham?

"Answer.—I think I said we would have given more on this side than they gave on that. I recollect asking how much they (the Commissioners) got over there for themselves.

"Question.—What reason had you to think they would accept offers, or were in the market?

"Answer.—Beause (sic) I thought no reasonable, disinterested man would locate it over there."

In the very early days, good, old, rye whiskey was the favorite tippie with the pioneers. They could stand up under a large quantity of it, for it was not such rotten, hair-pulling, venomous stuff as we get now. There were also a lot of "light drinkers" about The Fort, who called themselves "temperance men." In 1849, Abe Shoemaker, who kept a "grocery" on Second Street, sent to Keokuk for a ten-gallon keg of ale for the "temperance men." On the forthcoming Fourth of July, the temperature was torrid. When the teamster gave the order for the ale, he was told that if he attempted to haul it to Fort Des Moines in the hot sun, it would explode and blow him skyward. "Just put in five gallons of whiskey, and it will go all right," said the seller. The whiskey was put in. It arrived all right, was on tap early the next morning, and before eleven o'clock every "temperance man" in the town was at home in bed, utterly oblivious to what occurred during the remainder of the day, and in the list there were some very prominent,

circumspect individuals, whom it would now be improper to name, neither would it help the temperance cause.

Socially, the Doctor was a hail-fellow generally. There were no social distinctions in those pioneer days. He was a wide-awake business man, a vigorous booster of the town, and, with Tom McMullen, laid out an addition to the Original Town, acquired two or three fine farms, and before his decease retired on Easy Street.

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