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IN 1854, Bishop Matthias Loras, of Dubuque, purchased two lots at the corner of Sixth and Locust streets, paying eight hundred dollars therefor (sic), and donated them to the Catholic Church. G. A. Plathe was sent here as a parish priest. In 1856, two small frame buildings were erected on those lots for church and school purposes.

Father Plathe was a benevolent, courteous, conscientious man, and entered upon his labors with zeal and was highly esteemed. He was physically frail, the labor was hard, his strength failed, he relinquished the field, and was succeeded, in 1860, by John F. Brazil, or "Father" Brazil, as everybody called him, a grand, good man, who exerted a powerful influence for the uplifting of not only his own parishioners, but society generally. Though firm in his religious faith, he was tolerant toward all that would develop his theory of good government—education, industry and sobriety. He was kind, courteous, affable, energetic, public-spirited, and always diligent in advancing the welfare of his church, his schools and the city. A notable instance occurred during the memorable contest in 1870 to prevent the larceny of the Capital of the State, in which for once Des Moines was united, for it was her against the State. After years of struggle and strife with rival localities to secure to Des Moines the Seat of Government, a proposition came before the Legislature to provide funds for the erection of a new State House. A formidable opposition developed, which evidently expected that by defeating the measure the removal of the Capital to some other locality would be possible. The bill was in charge of Hon. John A. Kasson, who fully understood that the subject demanded the exercise of his best judgment, skill and diplomacy. There was intense enthusiasm in both houses. By good management, he worked the bill to a third reading in the lower house (it had passed the Senate), beyond which he dare not attempt to go, for he

discovered that with every member in his seat he could get but one or two majority. For three weeks he waited a favorable opportunity to fix the day for a final vote. One of the men he relied upon was inclined to dodge, and on the morning of that day he discovered he was not present, and was told that enemies of the bill had, the night previous, taken advantage of the bibulous inclinations of the man, and attempted to put him in a somnolent condition, to last several hours. Knowing that Father Brazil had great influence with the man, he hurriedly sent a messenger and carriage to him, requesting him to find the man and bring him to the State House at once, and not let him get out of his sight. The good father responded instantly.

He found the man down by 'Coon River, sitting on a log, evidently ruminating over the deceitfulness of the liquor dispensed in this city, and shortly after had him in his seat on the floor of the House, just as the final roll call was being made. Everybody was keeping tally, the clerk gave ample pause for responses, and when it was ended there was a tie—there was one vote short—the man on the log had not answered to the call. Father Brazil, standing behind him, seized him by the collar, exclaiming: "Stand up, sir; be a man, and vote." He arose and voted "Aye." The victory was won, and the shouts and cheers that followed shook the building to the foundation. That ended the Seat of Government fight.

Father Brazil quickly discovered after his arrival here that his charge must yield to the progress of events, and, with excellent foresight and judgment, he purchased half a block at the corner of High Street and Sixth Avenue, a tract at the corner of Sixth and Grand avenues (then Sycamore Street) and a large tract at Fourth and Ascension streets, and awaited future demands.

In 1864, he displaced the frame buildings at Sixth Avenue and Locust Street with a brick edifice, now stores and offices, which was dedicated as St. Ambrose Church. It was also used for school purposes until 1872, when a three-story brick school building and a residence adjoining for teachers at Sixth and Grand Avenues were erected, and the foundation laid in a small way for the present magnificent Mercy Hospital, at Fourth and Ascension streets.

Father Brazil gave to his school special care. Often I saw him going about the streets, and, finding children idling or playing

“hookey,” he would march them to the schoolhouse with a reprimand they did not forget.

In 1891, the magnificent stone church was completed at Sixth Avenue and High Street; the hospital, after several enlargements, lavishly equipped, was completed in 1894, but Father Brazil did not live to enjoy the fruition of his hopes and ambition; he died suddenly in September, 1885, at near the noon of life, widely mourned. But the churches, schools, hospitals and many other beneficent things he founded, cherished and labored for, are eloquent testimonials, not only to the two thousand communicants of his church, but to the community at large, of his noble character and spirited interest in the welfare and betterment of the community in which he lived.

As the governing head of his parish, he ruled with firm hand. He would shake the plate before a member of his congregation if he did not contribute what he thought he should. And yet this dominant trait in his character was accepted by his parishioners with reverential spirit, for they knew he was always striving for their advancement and improvement.

May Fifteenth, 1904.

Transcribed from:

PIONEERS OF POLK COUNTY, IOWA AND REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS

by L. F. Andrews

Volume I

Des Moines, Baker-Trisler Company, 1908