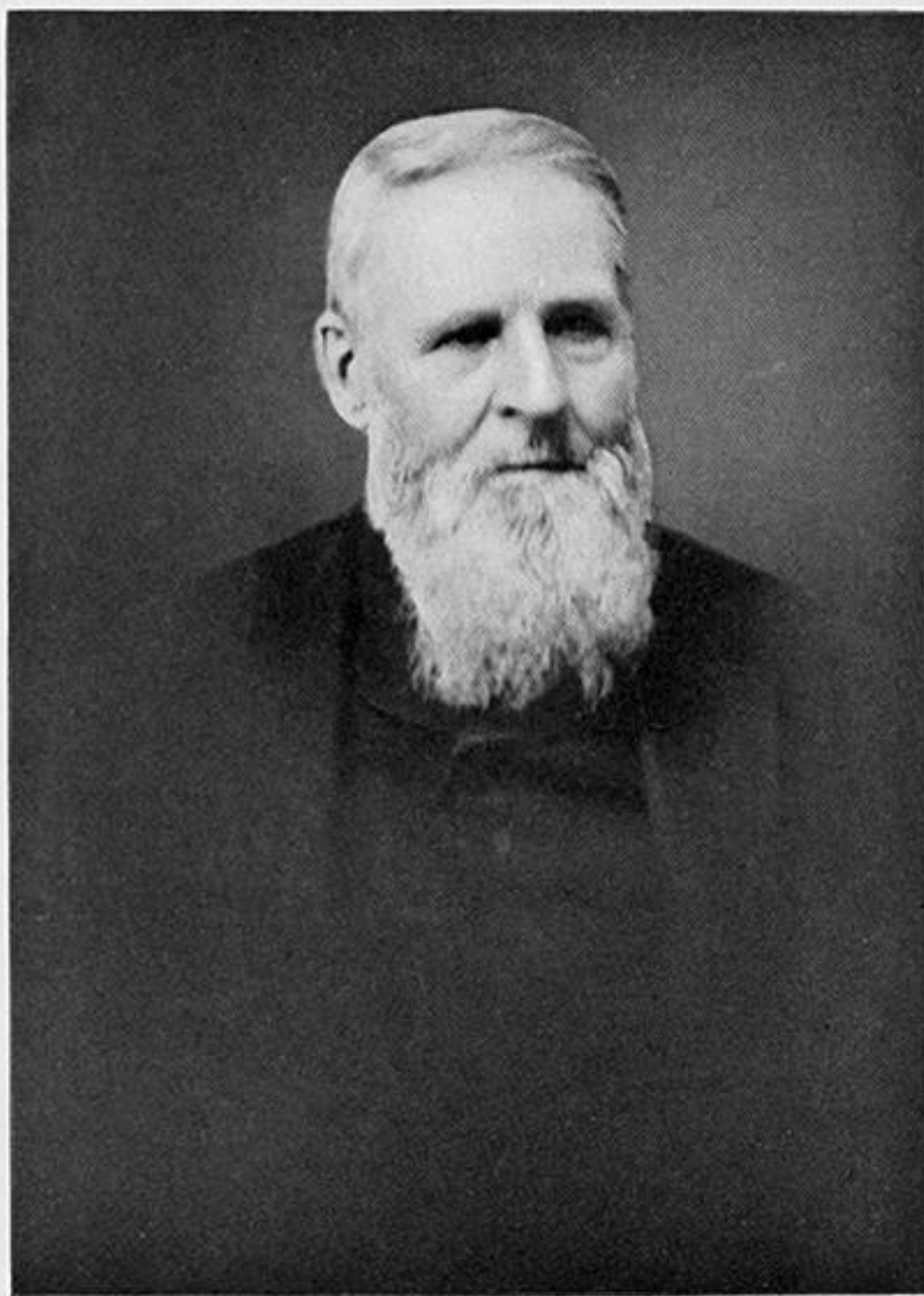

CURTIS LAMB

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A few days ago, I visited Curtis Lamb, a pioneer of Iowa, who, with his wife, was spending a few weeks with their daughter, Mrs. T. L. Blank, on Jefferson Street. I found him, eighty-seven years of age, active, hale and hearty, social, and prolific with incidents of pioneer days.

A native of Posey County, Indiana, in 1827, when nine years old, with his parents, he went to the lead mines near Mineral Point, Wisconsin. The trip was made down the Ohio and up the Mississippi on a flat-boat, so crowded with household goods and live-stock of immigrants as to make traveling disagreeable and uncomfortable. While going up the Mississippi, the boat became disabled and was laid up for repairs two weeks. The passengers were landed on what is now the Iowa side of the river, glad to escape their over-crowded quarters, so he may be rightfully cited as a pioneer of the state. He resided in Wisconsin until 1850, when, with his family, he started for California, but stopped for the winter at Kanesville, now Council Bluffs, with the Mormons. During the Winter, he went on a hunting trip northward and discovered the Little Sioux River. He decided the country there was good enough for him, and in the Spring of 1851, went back, made a claim, lived in a tent while he built a log cabin, the first in what is now Woodbury County, and became the first white settler.

In 1855, having heard of the new town of Sioux City, he concluded to go and look at it. Of that, he said:

"After looking at the site, I decided to move there, and in the Summer went over to cut hay and put it up, to feed my oxen while I cut logs for a house during the coming Winter. I drove into Sioux City along a ridge between the Floyd and Missouri rivers, thinking I could get down near the point, but it was too steep. I turned back, and finally, about nine o'clock, got to Doctor Cook's, who kept a kind of stopping-place in a hewed log house,

which stood on the east side of Perry Creek, near the mouth. The next day, I made arrangements for my hay and returned home. The next Winter, I went back, chopped down trees on the Nebraska side of the river, there being none suitable on the east side, and my little boy, with oxen, hauled the logs on the ice to where I wanted to use them. The next Spring, in 1856, I went over with 'Abe' Livermore, James McGinn, an Irishman, and one other man, to hew the logs and build the house. 'Abe' made the shingles by hand out of Black Walnut. 'Jim' and I sawed the boards for the sheathing with a whip saw, from Maple logs, enough to cover a house 16 x 20, the first sawed lumber made in that county. The flooring was shipped from Saint Louis, and cost seventy dollars. In May, I moved my wife and four children into the completed house. I can now only conjecture where it stood, but it was on the second bottom, and about two blocks from the Missouri River. I took in a few boarders and some transients, land speculators, free with their money, the Land Office being nearby, and the house was always full. At the end of six months, I sold out to Judge Moore, one of my boarders, for fifteen hundred dollars. A. M. White had a preemption claim for one hundred and sixty acres where the city now is, and, as someone had to live on it, he offered me a ten-acre interest in it and the use of a new frame house if I would take it and board him. I accepted the offer late in the Fall. On the Eighth of January, my second daughter was born, the third white child born in Sioux City. During the Summer of 1857, several frames for houses were brought in and put up, one large one was put up by a man named Benham, and furnished for a hotel, which he named the Pacific. Soon after, Judge Moore traded the town of Niobrara, which consisted of a lot of stakes driven in the ground, and several imposing plats, for the hotel, and persuaded me to run it a year for a rental of one thousand dollars. No papers were drawn for transactions in those good old days. A man was almost insulted if asked to sign a note. A man whose word was not as good as his note was very much looked down upon."

Asked if he had any experiences with Indians, he replied:

"Yes, I read your sketch in *The Register and Leader* several months ago, in which you stated that you met Ink-pa-du-a-tah at Wabashaw a short time

before the Spirit Lake Massacre. I think you are mistaken, for he camped on my place in Woodbury County, and went from there up to Cherokee, and from there to Peterson, then to Spirit Lake, where the killing commenced. I traded with him and his tribe for three successive Winters, they camping on my claim not far from my cabin, two miles north of where Smithland now is, in Woodbury County. The second cabin I built is still standing, and is preserved by the Woodbury County Old Settlers' Association.

"In my dealings with Ink-pa-du-a-tah, I found him perfectly honest, a good neighbor, and true friend.

"In the Spring of 1856, after Sioux City was started, I moved there, to send my children to school. I rented my farm to Mr. Livermore, and when the Indians came down the next Fall, as usual, they found me gone, and the new settlers did not want them there. A company of white men formed and went to Ink-pa-du-a-tah's camp while the men were out hunting (some were hunting with bows and arrows) and there were nineteen guns left in the camp. When the white men appeared, the squaws and children took to the woods. The white men tore down the tepees, took the guns and ammunition, and went home, intending, it was said, to go back later and return the guns and tell the Indians what they wanted. They evidently did not understand Indian nature, for when they went back the next morning, the Indians were gone, having moved in the night.

"Insulted and injured, as they felt, it was no wonder the Indians concluded to borrow some white men's guns in the same way theirs had been borrowed. At Cherokee, they went into the houses and took the guns and some provisions, but hurt no one. They then went on to the next white settlement, Peterson, twelve miles, where they took more guns and provisions; then on up to Spirit Lake, where, at one of the first houses, the people were scared, and a man shot an Indian. Then the fighting and killing began.

"It was, and still is, hard for me to realize that my old friend and neighbor, whom I never knew guilty of a mean act, could have sanctioned the cruel, bloodthirsty deeds committed during the horrible Spirit Lake Massacre.

"In our neighborhood, at first, there were but three families within a radius of twenty miles. It was necessary for our men to go with loads to Kanesville, now Council Bluffs. The third man would stay and do chores for the two absent men. The women and children would stay at my cabin. Sometimes, for days and weeks, my wife and four children would be intrusted, as you might say, to the care of Ink-pa-du-a-tah and his band. I could relate many acts of his kindness. He would come to the cabin, and ask if anything could be done. If logs were needed for the immense fireplace, he would send up squaws to carry them in, and the table was supplied with the choicest of their fish and venison. He taught me the Sioux language, and many hours have we set together by my fireplace, exchanging knowledge of our languages. My pronunciation of one word always afforded him great amusement. It was the word signifying the internal ear, or ear-hole. I could not speak it right, and he would lean back and laugh heartily. It finally became his invariable custom to pronounce that word for me when he wanted to bring the lesson to a close. He called me Ah-si-a-tah (accent on the second syllable), which means, so far as I could understand it, 'many good things in one person.' "

Asked how he first met Ink-pa-du-a-tah, he replied:

"I came to Iowa in 1850, took a claim in Township Eighty-six, Range Forty-four, on Little Sioux River, in what is now Little Sioux Township, Woodbury County, about thirty miles southeast from Sioux City, and built a log cabin. In the Fall of 1852, about twenty miles north, were some Indian camps. One day, a Spaniard, named Joe Maryville, came to my cabin with a horse and sleigh, and two Indians on their way from Sergeant's Bluff to these Indian camps, with blankets and other goods to trade with the Indians. He also had some alcohol. They stopped at my cabin over night. I made them bunks on the floor, as comfortable as possible. While there, Joe doped the alcohol with water, all it would bear, and went up to the Indian camp. He first traded his blankets and other stuff for furs, and the next morning let go the firewater. Knowing the nature of the stuff, he deemed it prudent to get out early, and went to 'hitch up,' but his horse was gone. Concluding it would take the back track to my stable, where it stopped the night before, he took

the trail, arriving about ten o'clock, where the horse was having a good feed and waiting for him. He mounted him, and went back to get the sleigh. By that time the dope had got in its work, the Indians were fighting drunk, and having a regular knockdown and drag-out. The squaws had taken their papooses and gone to the timber for safety.

"There were two bands of Indians. Ink-pa-du-a-tah was the chief of one band, and Wah-se-bo-be-do chief of the other. In the affray, a brother of Ink-pa-du-a-tah was killed, and Wah-se-bo-be-do badly wounded by stabbing. Joe finally succeeded in stopping the fight, and persuaded the two bands to separate, Inka-pa-du-tah to go north, and Wah-se-bo-be-do to go south, where help for his wounds could be secured. Muz-ze-min, a Medicine Man, had a tepee not far from my cabin. He was an uncle of Wah-se-bo-be-do, who evidently knew where he was, for he sent an Indian boy down to his tepee to tell him that he was wounded, and his band was coming down with him. Muz-ze-min told the boy to go back and meet them, and tell them to bring Wah-se-bo-be-do to the white man's cabin. Muz-ze-min then came and told me what he had done. I said that was all right, though most of our conversation was in pantomime, as I had not then learned much of the Sioux language. After some time, I saw the Indians coming. Wah-se-bo-be-do was walking very feebly, and when he came to our porch, he seemed too weak to step up. I went out and helped him in, and set a chair, but he motioned to the floor. My wife hastily put a straw bed and some blankets on the floor, and he lay down. All this time Muz-ze-min sat with his elbows on his knees and face covered with his hands. After a while, he went and sat down by Wah-se-bo-be-do, leaned over, said a few words, and kissed him. After a short talk, he examined, with much tenderness, the wound, which was a stab with a knife, and had pierced one lung, from which air and blood escaped at each respiration. My wife brought bandages, and Muz- ze-min dressed the wound with some powders of his own make. They then went down to the tepees which the squaws had pitched, where they stayed all night. I think they were afraid Inka-pa-du-tah would come down from the north, for they all left for Sergeant's Bluff the next day, and I never saw Wah-se-bo-be-do again, though I was told he recovered.

"Not many days after, I was at work in the timber, when the children came rushing to me in great excitement, saying the house was full of Indians. Hurrying home, I found them there, their faces covered with war paint, and in an apparently ugly mood. Feeling sure it was the band that had fought Was-se-bo-be-do's band, and knowing I had aided and befriended their enemy, and not understanding a word of their language, I was somewhat puzzled to know what course to pursue. I set to thinking mighty fast to decide what to do to pacify them. Knowing the surest way to a person's good nature was through the stomach; that the Indians were fond of turnips; that I had some good turnips stored away, I got a quantity and distributed them around. Each took one and laid it on the floor, without uttering a word or a grunt, which was a bad sign; neither did they offer me a pipe to smoke, for they were all smoking, which was another bad sign. Meanwhile, the children played around, and their mother went on with her work, as if she was undisturbed. After an hour of this suspense, Inka-pa-du-a-tah picked up his turnip, the others following him. After eating their turnips, he came and shook hands with me first, and all the others followed. They then went to their tepees, not far away, where they remained all Winter. We became quite friendly. Ink-pa-du-a-tah taught me their language, and I taught him our's, and the white man's ways. My cabin was always open to him, and he became a firm friend of my wife and children. For three successive Falls, he returned and camped on my place, and traded with me. He told me they went north every Spring to where the wild ducks and geese laid their eggs, of which the Indians are very fond. While with me, they would hunt and trap. I loaned them a lot of steel traps, and they always returned them in the Spring before going north. They would trade me elk, deer, otter, mink, beaver, wolf, fox, and other skins, and venison hams, which I took to Council Bluffs, then called Kanesville, ninety miles distant, where I sold them for cash. I remember one lot of furs and four hundred hams which brought six hundred and eighty dollars in gold. With the proceeds of the sales, I would buy a general stock of Indian goods, together with provisions for my family. Sometimes I would have three or four yoke of oxen hitched to my load, making two trips during the Winter

and one during the Summer, as the Summer trade did not amount to very much, with only roving bands of Yankton Sioux.

"The third Fall on my claim, in 1853, two Indians of Ink-pa-du-a-tah's band came to my cabin and told me the Indians were coming, loaded down with furs, and wished I would go with a wagon and lighten their load. I yoked two yoke of oxen to a wagon, loaded up with some corn meal and other goods, and went up in company with Sam. Day, who was staying with us at that time. We met the Indians about six miles north in a small open prairie. After shaking hands with all the warriors, we decided to come back about a mile, where there was timber and water, and there we camped. The Indians built a big fire, the squaws pitched the tepees and prepared a supper. Having taken our own food, Sam. and I ate together. After supper, business was lively. As fast as I could scoop up corn meal in a pint measure, an Indian would take it and hand me a package of muskrat skins, five in a package. I counted them the first few times, but soon grew tired of that, and just threw them into the wagon as fast as I could. I was never cheated by them. I traded wool blankets, heavy mackinaws, for buckskins, getting ten buckskins for a blanket. After finishing trading, we retired peacefully for the night, and everything was quiet until daylight. We were early astir, and after breakfast, moved southward. When within three miles of my cabin, the Indians said they would camp there, the grass in the woods being still green and fresh for their ponies. Sam. and I went on home.

"A few days later, Ink-pa-du-a-tah came and told me there were 'min-ne-has-ka' (white men), 'num-pah' (two), in a small grove a mile and a half east of their camp, who had whiskey to sell to his men; that they had come to his camp with bottles of whiskey, and treated his warriors, and given them to understand by signs that they had a barrel of whiskey to sell. He said he did not want his men to have it, as they would get mad and fight. He asked me what he should do; should he go and break the barrel? I said, 'No,' that I would go up to his camp that night. That was all I said, but he went away perfectly satisfied. That evening, quite early, I, with my hired man, Zachary Allen, went to the Indian camp. I wanted to get positive evidence the men

were selling whiskey to the Indians. I told the Indians to dress Zach. and myself like Indians, and we would go with them and get whiskey. They had lots of sport dressing us up, and we made quite respectable looking Indians. We put blankets over our heads, drawn tight about the face to hide our beards. After donning our garments, we were much surprised to see how much larger we seemed than the Indians. We went over to the white man's camp, and found two Spaniards with a big bonfire. They invited the Indians to come nearer and get warm. They passed around a little whiskey, but soon detected us, and I heard one of them say to the other in an undertone: 'I wonder who told those fellows we were here?' They would do nothing more that evening, and early the next morning they were gone.

"I relate this to show that Ink-pa-du-a-tah really wanted his men to be sober, industrious, and law-abiding. He often asked me: 'Have my men ever stolen anything?' and I could always answer, 'No.'

"No, I never saw Ink-pa-du-a-tah after the massacre at Spirit Lake."

Noticing that he spoke Ink-pa-du-a-tah's name different from its usual appearance in print, I asked why. The reply was: "That is the way it was always spoken by him, with the accent on the third syllable."

Politically, Lamb was a Whig and Abolitionist. He cast his first ballot for William Henry Harrison, in 1840, and has always been a Republican. He is an enthusiastic supporter of Roosevelt, and a firm "Standpatter;" is not a politician, though he keeps himself thoroughly posted on current events through the papers; has never asked a public office, though he helped to organize Woodbury County, was elected the first Justice of the Peace in the county, which office, or some other township office, he has held continuously since. He takes an active part in educational affairs, and has been a member of school boards many years.

Socially, he is not connected with any of the fraternal organizations, though he is fond of company, a good conversationalist, of genial temperament, and deservedly popular.

Religiously, in his earlier years, he affiliated with the Methodists, but later denounced all creeds, and during the past few years has been a close student of the Bible; has repeatedly read the "Millenial Dawn," a series of books by Russell, and firmly believes they are all true.

Physically, he retains all his faculties to a remarkable degree. The retentiveness of his memory is surprising, and valuable to a compiler of the history of his county. He some time ago retired on Easy Street. For diversion, he cultivates a garden, which is the pride of his life, and he is getting anxious for the lion of March to let go his grip so that gardening may begin.*

April First, 1906.

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*Died suddenly, January Third, 1907.

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