



J. K. HOBAUGH

JOHN K. HOBAUGH

In the very early days, one of the best known men in Polk County was John K. Hobaugh, a Buckeye production, though his ancestry dated back to 1793, in Pennsylvania.

Born in Washington, Logan County, Ohio, April Seventh, 1820, where his parents resided until 1835, when they moved to Grant County, Indiana. They were poor, yet with very limited advantages, John acquired the rudiments of an education in the log schoolhouses of that section.

When fifteen years old, he was apprenticed to learn the shoemakers' trade, at which he worked during the Winter. In Summer, he did what he could find to do, always industrious and frugal. On reaching his majority, he turned his back to his boyhood home, and set out in the world's race for himself. He worked on a farm for twelve dollars a month during the Summer, and in Winter did shoemaking, with rail-splitting as a side line. With economy and industry, he accumulated sufficient money to purchase forty acres of timbered land, which he cleared for cultivation, and on which he labored during the growing season. When his crops were gathered and stored for the Winter, he went to his bench and lasts, where he worked until Spring opened. Thus he continued until the Spring of 1853, when he disposed of his property in Grant County, loaded his household goods into a wagon, and, with his good wife, headed for Polk County. Arriving here, he went up to the Indian Creek Settlement, in the extreme northeast corner of the county, through which flows the creek southeasterly across the county, and from which the settlement took its name. The creek was skirted with a timber belt, an important factor with a pioneer settler.

From 1843 to 1845, settlers came into the county and settled along the various streams of water, for the emigrant from the East could not be

induced to settle on the bleak, broad, open prairie. He must have a house to live in, fuel for heating, fence rails to enclose his cultivated fields, and water for his live-stock. There were no railroads to bring lumber from Eastern markets, and no coal for fuel. Thus the county was divided into settlements, as Big Creek, Four Mile, Camp Creek (including those on Mud Creek and Spring Creek), Skunk River, Indian Creek, Beaver Creek, and Walnut Creek. So it was, the civilization of the county began along the rivers, and as time passed, spread out over the prairies.

Hobaugh purchased one hundred and sixty acres in the extreme northeast corner of the county, and entered a claim for eighty acres more. The land was not far from the creek. It was in what was originally Skunk Township, which embraced what is now Douglas, Elkhart, Franklin, and Washington townships, but in 1851, the settlers petitioned the County Commissioners to change the name—it was too odorous—to Elkhart, and it was done.

When Hobaugh arrived there were but four families in the township, an area of twelve miles square. He built a small log cabin, with board roof and puncheon floor, turned over the prairie soil for the first crop of sod com, and began life in true pioneer style. When Winter came, snow blew through the chinking of the cabin logs, so that sometimes two inches of snow on the floor was the greeting for bare feet crawling out of bed to start the morning fire for breakfast. Provisions in the culinary department sometimes got scarce, and Fort Des Moines was twenty-five miles away. A want of bacon, however, was compensated by prairie chickens, quail, squirrels, and rabbits, which were abundant. Good, wholesome bread could be made from corn ground in a hand mill. The hardships and discomforts were accepted complacently by him and his helpmate, with the firm faith that they would have a good home some time.

Hobaugh at once became active in civic affairs, and to boost things. In January, 1854, he went to Keokuk with three teams, and came back with them loaded with dry goods and groceries, which were readily disposed of among the settlers, and was the first attempt at merchandising in the township.

In June, 1856, he laid out and organized, on his own land, the town of Peoria City. He opened a general merchandise store, founded schools and

churches, a postoffice was established, mechanics opened shops, and two years after it was laid out, had a population of over two hundred. It was in a prosperous, flourishing condition, and the trade center of a large area, when, in 1864, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad started in its wild rush from Marshalltown to win the big bonus offered in gold by the Union Pacific to the first road across the State of Iowa that would make connection with it at the Missouri River. Towns were deemed of little importance. Even Des Moines, the Capital of the state, was ignored. Its line was run about a mile north of Peoria City, and a station named Maxwell established. That fixed the doom of the ambitious young Peoria City. It dwindled away, lost its postoffice, and finally its place on the map, which was only one of several similar instances.

Early in 1856, the settlement had so increased that Hobaugh wanted to centralize and individualize its government. He, therefore, applied to Judge Napier, the County Judge, for a township organization. The Judge thereupon ordered that Congressional Township Eighty-one, Range Twenty-two, be organized into a civil township, and an election held March Third, to elect the proper township officers. He appointed Hobaugh a Constable to give the notice of election, and make the necessary preparation. He also gave the selection of a name to him, and he chose "Washington," the name of his old home town in Ohio.

The election was held at Peoria City, and Hobaugh was elected Justice of the Peace, and held the office for five years, when he resigned, because the duties of the office conflicted with his more important business affairs.

In 1860, the Legislature, to get the county government nearer the people, transferred the control of public affairs from the County Judge to a Board of Supervisors, consisting of a representative from each civil township in the county, and in 1862, Hobaugh was elected from Washington Township, and served two years.

In 1863, he was elected Road Supervisor of the township, his duties being to keep the roads, * * * in as good condition as the funds at his disposal would permit, and to place guide-boards at crossroads, and the forks of the roads, * * * a requirement more honored

in the breach than the observance in those days, as the funds invariably failed to materialize.

In 1863, the first fine schoolhouse was erected. He was elected Township Treasurer, and had charge of the school fund. He held the office six years.

Politically, he is a Republican, but not a politician. Though he has held many public offices, it was in response to the will of the community where he lived, regardless of politics.

Socially, he is the friend of everybody, and held in high esteem throughout the county. He is public-spirited, schools and churches being special objects of his activities, financial and otherwise. Whatever promotes the betterment of the social life of those around him receives his hearty support.

Religiously, he is an active, exemplary Christian, and member of the United Brethren Church. There being no church of that denomination near him, he has given aid and support to all others.

Now, at the age of eighty-six, he has accumulated sufficient to enable him to have a surcease of watching the rise and fall at the stockyards, the puts and calls of the grain speculators in Chicago, spends his Winters at ease in California, without a thought or care for the shoes and soles of his old friends and neighbors, which so tormented his adolescent years.

Transcribed from:

PIONEERS OF POLK COUNTY, IOWA AND REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS

by L. F. Andrews

Volume II

Des Moines

Baker-Trisler Company

1908