

SAMUEL GRAY

Deserving of mention as an old-timer, who came to Polk County at the beginning of things, was Samuel Gray, or "Uncle Sammy," as everybody called him.

Born in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, June Nineteenth, 1811, of Cork Irish parentage, on the father's side, he passed the years of childhood with his parents, who removed to Jefferson County, Ohio, when he was quite young. His father was a weaver, and Samuel had little to do but attend the common school. When nearing his majority, he learned the trade of plastering, which he followed in Ohio until 1848, when, in the Summer of that year, with his wife and eight children, and a friend whose family consisted of twelve, started with horse teams for Fort Des Moines. The journey required forty-three days. Their arrival was equal to one-fourth of the population of the little hamlet, which consisted of one hundred and eighty-five persons, largely children. With the exception of three small wooden frame buildings, all the residences were the log cabins which had been occupied by soldiers of the garrison. Two merchandise stores, one that of E. W. Sypher, who had been selling goods at the Trading Post and moved to Second and Vine, and the other that of B. F. Allen, constituted the business of the town. There were several so-called "groceries," run under permits granted by the County Commissioners, in which spiritous liquor was the principal stock in trade. Martin (X) Tucker's log tavern on Market Street afforded rest and sustenance for strangers "in the most hostile manner," as he used to say.

"Uncle Sammy's" first job was plastering Doctor F. C. Grimmel's house, which he had erected where Saint Ambrose Church now is, then far outside the limits of the town, surrounded with heavy timber and hazelbrush, and in which he had been living several months unfinished, to get out of the old Guard House of the garrison, his first home.

There was a rapid influx of settlers and increase of buildings, so there was a brisk demand for plastering, but "Sammy" was hampered seriously by the scarcity of lime, as it had to be hauled by teams from Keokuk, or wait the desultory arrival of a river steamboat. His large family necessitated hustling for support, but he was active, energetic, companionable, a true type of the pioneer, a good workman, and soon got into favor with the community.

In January, 1850, he made a contract to plaster the first Court House, which stood where the Union Depot is now, for one hundred and forty-five dollars, the work to be done before April following.

In September, 1850, at a meeting of citizens to organize the first school district in Des Moines Township, he was elected one of the School Directors, and at a meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, November Twenty-first, an order was made that, "For the purpose of keeping a district school, the court-room of the Court House belonging to Polk County, William Jones and Samuel Gray take possession of said room on the Twenty-fifth day of November, A. D. 1850, and to retain the same four months, and deliver said room to the Board of Commissioners in as good order as it shall be received, said Jones and Gray to pay for the use of said room the sum of four dollars per month." That is the first record of a township district school in the county. Charles L. Anderson was employed to teach the school. The amusing incidents of his engagement and examination for fitness will be found in the sketch of Madison Young, Secretary of the School Board. (Volume II, page Fifty-three.)

In 1850, "Uncle Sammy" also ran for Justice of the Peace, against L. D. Winchester. Both were Democrats, but the latter won out. The vote was:

Winchester	99
Gray	<u>86</u>
Total	185

At the August election, 1851, Gray was elected County Treasurer and Recorder, the two offices being then combined, and on the Eleventh, entered upon the duties of the office as the third Treasurer in succession.

In those days, a public office was deemed more an honor than an emolument. There were not Whigs enough in the county to get an office, anyhow. As an indication of the salaries of the county offices, the record of the quarterly accounting in January, 1852, between B. Rice, County Judge; Samuel Gray, Treasurer and Recorder, and Hoyt Sherman, County Clerk, shows the salary of

Rice, November, 1851, to January Fifth, 1852	\$ 84.40
Gray, October Sixth, 1851, to January Fifth, 1852	137.00
Sherman, October Sixth, 1851, to January Fifth, 1852	<u>137.00</u>
Total	\$358.40

Cash received in part payment for services:

Gray	68.95
Sherman	<u>68.95</u>
Total	\$170.50

Balance still due them on salaries is as follows:

Rice	\$ 45.80
Gray	68.05
Sherman	<u>68.05</u>
Total	\$181.90

From this report, it will be seen that the salary of the Treasurer was less than six hundred dollars a year. The difficulty in those days was to get men to take the offices, and they were mostly selected on their qualifications and popularity. The three officers reported here were well known and personally very popular. Hoyt Sherman was a Whig, and was selected because of his superior clerical ability, Rice because of his excellent business capacity, and "Sammy" because everybody was his friend.

October Twenty-fifth, at the first meeting of the first Town Council of Fort Des Moines, and held in the old Court House, he was elected Town Treasurer. In 1853, he was reelected, but soon after resigned, as he was

getting too many irons in the fire.

At the August election, 1853, he was reelected County Treasurer and Recorder, and put on record the original deed of the United States Government to the County Commissioners for the land in which the "Original Town of Fort Des Moines" was located. Although dated April Tenth, A. D. 1849, it was held up pending disputes arising from the platting of the town in July, 1846, and selling of town lots immediately thereafter, for it was discovered that the town plat, the west line of which was Eighth Street, lapped over on the pre-empted claims of Richard Holcomb, Doctor P. B. Fagen, "Jim" Campbell, and others; that the Commissioners had given the town land lying west of Seventh Street embraced in those claims, and to which the Commissioners had no right nor title. Many of the lots had been sold, and before legal title to them could be given, the pre-emption claims must be confirmed by the entry and sale, through the United States Land Office, which, being done, the Commissioners purchased the pre-emption claimants' interest in the overlapping lots, and secured title to the town plat, all of which required time. When done, the Government deed was recorded. As the town is still growing, and business encroaches upon land set apart in the plat for "Market Square," and "Public Square," and the title to some of the reserved places has been questioned, I give the deed as shown by the record:

"THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

"Pre-emption Certificate Number 11924.

"To All to Whom These Presents Shall Come, Greeting:

"WHEREAS, Andrew Groseclose, James Mount, and Thomas Black, Commissioners of Polk County, Iowa, have deposited in the General Land Office of the United States a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Iowa City, whereby it appears that full payment has been made by the said Andrew Groseclose, James Mount, and Thomas Black, Commissioners aforesaid, according to the provisions of the Act of Congress, of the Twenty-fourth day of April, 1820, entitled, 'An Act Making Further Provision for the Sale of Public Lands,' for the Lot Number Five, of Section Four, Lot Number One, and the northwest quarter of the northeast fractional quarter of Section

Nine, and Lot Number Five of Section Ten, in Township Seventy-eight, north of Range Twenty-four, west of the Fifth Principal Meridian, in the district of lands subject to sale at Iowa City, Iowa, containing one hundred and forty-four acres and thirty-three hundredths of an acre, according to the Official Plat of the survey of the said lands, returned to the General Land Office by the Surveyor General, which said tract has been purchased by the said Andrew Groseclose, James Mount, and Thomas Black, Commissioners aforesaid; now

"Know Ye, That the United States of America, in consideration of the premises, and in conformity with the several Acts of Congress, in such case made and provided, have given and granted, and by these presents do give and grant unto the said Andrew Groseclose, James Mount, and Thomas Black, Commissioners aforesaid, and to their successors, the said tract above described; to have and to hold the same, together with all the rights, privileges, immunities and appurtenances of whatsoever nature thereunto belonging, unto the said Andrew Groseclose, James Mount, and Thomas Black, Commissioners aforesaid, and to their successors and assigns forever.

"In Testimony Whereof, I, Zachary Taylor, President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made [SEAL] patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

"Given under my hand, at the City of Washington, the Tenth day of April, in the year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States the Seventy-third.

"By the President:

"Z. TAYLOR.

"By Thos. EWING, Jr.,

"Secretary.

"S. H. LAUGHLIN,

"Recorder of the General Land Office.

"Recorded, Volume Three, Page One Hundred Seventy-two.

"Filed May First, 1855, at Two O'Clock p. M., and recorded same day in Book G, and on Page Five Hundred Sixty-five.

"Samuel Gray,
"Recorder Polk County, Iowa."

At the close of his second term as Recorder, in 1856, Gray entered eighty acres of school land and forty-three acres of the so-called river land in Bloomfield Township, laid aside the trowel, and began the building of a home. He erected a good dwelling-house, barns and sheds, cultivated the land, invested in about eighty lots on the East Side, and was prosperous.

The Eighth General Assembly, by an Act passed March Twenty-second, 1860, abolished the County Commissioner system, under which county affairs had been managed, and provided for a Board of Supervisors, to be composed of one representative from each township in the county. At the November election of that year, Gray was elected the first Supervisor from that township. Under the provisions of the statute, the Board was required to decide by lot, at its first meeting in January, the term of each member, one part to hold one year, the other two years; in the shuffle, "Sammy" drew a one-year term.

In 1883, it was discovered that a large body of stratified coal existed beneath his farm. He therefore leased to a coal company the right to dig the coal for twenty years, which put him in affluent circumstances, and he retired from active business to enjoy it.

Politically, he was a Democrat of the Jacksonian variety, and always ready for a tilt in any political scrimmage that came up.

Socially, he had the temperament of the typical Corkonian; was jolly, always bubbling over with humor and Celtic wit; open-hearted, public-spirited, and esteemed by everybody who knew him—and that embraced the entire county.

July Twenty-first, 1907.

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