

A TALE OF OLD TIMES

Being a Reminiscent Article by
James H. Twogood Formerly of Jacksonville.

(By James H. Twogood.)

We got tired of hauling the best of the Winter wheat to Chicago, 80 miles away, and exchanging it for groceries at 50 cents per bushel. We only had coffee then on Sunday mornings. Good farm hands received \$12 a month, although I have worked for as low as \$8. In May, 1842, I rented a ranch on shares and moved back to Chicago.

The Chicago Daily Journal was established in 1844. At that time it was the leading journal of the state. Dick and Charley Wilson were the proprietors in 1848. I became acquainted with Charley, who was several years the younger. At that time he was a very diffident, bashful young man and so awkward in company that he did not know how to hold his hands. I persuaded him to attend J. B. Robinson's balls which were given at the City Hall, a brick building located in the middle of State street, between Lake and Randolph. The lower floor was rented for market and the upper floor at the south end was used by the city council. The north end was used as a big dance hall. The music was furnished by Putnam's quadrille orchestra.

In 1883-84 Robinson ran a theater in Boise where the capitol building now stands.

Well, after a good deal of persuasion I finally succeeded in getting Wilson to attend Robinson's balls. It did not take long to "thaw" him out and to get that refrigerator expression off his face and it soon got out so that he could speak to a real live woman!

It was in November 1841 that I drove a team to the ratification of William Henry Harrison's log cabin convention at Rockford, Ill.

The war with Mexico commenced to brew in 1849 but there was nothing doing but "growl" until Zachary Taylor got to the Rio Grande, opposite Matamoras, March 28, 1846. In April, 1847, I enlisted with four other boys from our shop. Mother said, "No!" Two of the boys returned in 1850 and I was always sorry that I did not go, and then from there on to California. Today I might have been a rich man or perhaps lying six feet under ground—you can't generally sometimes tell!

After Zachary Taylor established his dental parlors in Old Mexico it did not take him long to extract all the venomous teeth in sight. With that job done he thought he would take a run up north and see if all the folks were "to home." He found them and got himself in trouble—they made him president. Taylor beat both Cass and Van Buren and of course his election had to be celebrated in due style. Dick Wilson had succeeded in getting a young cannon and dragged it out on the public square, which was bounded by Clark, Washington, LaSalle and Randolph streets. Wilson got very much excited. He was making that gun pop for all there was in it and more, too, and it rattled like a Gatling gun. I remember he had off his hat, coat and vest and his face was begrimed with sweat and powder. He was perfectly frantic, just as though the existence of the nation depended on that gun. In his excitement the perspiration was oozing out of every pore and running into his eyes so that he could hardly see. He seemed to entirely lose sight of the fact that the gun was getting hotter and needed swabbing out. It

took four persons to work this cannon after it was unlimbered—the powder boy passed the "noise." Wilson rammed it home, the man behind the gun primed and when the man with the long slim rod—red on one end—brought it into requisition, there was something doing.

At this juncture Mr. Wilson rammed a cartridge home and there was an explosion immediately. The ramrod went off, likewise one of Mr. Wilson's arms. Although standing within 30 feet I could not tell if the gun was touched off before giving Mr. Wilson time to withdraw the rod or if it was premature. I met Mr. Wilson many times after that on Lake street carrying an empty sleeve. Mr. Wilson's heart and soul was in the work of being an old line Whig. You seldom ever met a more nery man than Dick. His last words were: "Keep her a-going boys," and he fell in a dead faint. It was a horrible sight and one that I will never forget.

I would say to the old-timers that Zack Taylor's career was cut short. He was inaugurated March 4, 1849, and died July 9, 1850. William Henry Harrison served from March 4 to April 7, 1841.

I called on Charley Wilson April 9, 1851. The next day my brother, O. B. and I started out west to find sunset and gold. I told Charley that I would let him hear from me enroute, and the following is a copy of the first letter, which was reprinted in a home paper. Who of you readers can produce a clipping from a newspaper that you wrote nearly 57 years ago—more than the average man's lifetime? There are but few of the early timers of 1837 left in Chicago.

The following is the clipping referred to, exactly as it appeared in the paper to which I sent it:

Correspondence of the Chicago Journal.

Iowa City, April 21st, 1851.

Friend Wilson:—We arrived safe in this great metropolis to-day en route for Oregon. We came via Rockford and thence down Rock River on the east side. We found good roads and as good a farming country as need be, all the way down to its mouth. We crossed the Mississippi river at Rock Island, and stopped at Davenport. It is quite a stirring little place and built up mostly of brick, as is also Stevenson on the opposite side of the river. There is more Germans here, according to the population, than there is in Chicago. Moline is a very flourishing little town, situated three miles above Rock Island. Its quite a manufacturing place. There were two men lodged in jail at Davenport, a few days since for passing counterfeit tens on the Wisconsin Fire and Marine Insurance Co. They had passed some three hundred dollars. Corn is worth 25 cents per bushel; oats 30 cents, and wheat 50. We did not see any good Winter wheat until we got below Dixon on Rock River. There is a little in this state, but not very good. We have met with but one Oregon team on the way, and that was an ox team in a miserable condition. There is but few teams on the road and those are mostly cattle. We have four good horses, a light wagon and our baggage does not exceed ten hundred. We have no difficulty in driving 30 or 40 miles per day. We have been one week on the road and think in one more we will be able to make the bluffs, although we have a good many rivers and small streams to cross, but so far they all have good bridges or ferries. Cedar river between here and Muscatine is two thirds as large as Rock river, and Iowa river at this place is about the same size. There is some 30 or 40 Californians encamped just below here, from Wisconsin. This being the last point in the settlements,

I shall not have another chance to write until we reach the bluffs, when I will write you again.

Yours &c. J. H. T.

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