

Farm Column

I. S. Bailey, Editor.



John B. Lucas Writes a History of the Lucas Family

Henry Lucas was a slave and bought the freedom of his wife and children. This history is written by his son, John B. Lucas, for the writer of the Farm Column.

To give a correct history of the life of Henry Lucas and family would be to give a history of slavery, which neither space nor time will allow at this writing, but a brief history of the principal events of his life might be of interest to those who have a desire to know something of the first colored family who ever lived in Poweshiek county.

In the year 1811, in February, Henry Lucas was born on a plantation near Abingdon, Va., belonging to a man who was an officer in the Revolutionary war by the name of Col. John M. Preston. He was named Henry Lucas or Preston, as all slaves were known by the name of their owners, though sometimes they were called by the name of their parents if their parents were known. All children born were the property of the person who owned the mother of the child. It mattered not who the father of the child was, and a great many of the fathers of the slaves were white.

Henry Lucas was the son of a very large black man who had formerly been owned by a man by the name of Lucas, hence the name Lucas. Col. Preston allowed this slave whose name was Cain Lucas to marry one of his slave women whose name was Phoebe. Now this Phoebe was one-half white, being the daughter of a white man and a slave woman. Their marriage

was without license as the law of slavery prohibited license as the slaves were only chattels and could be separated at any time by their owners. The marriages were of various types; some were performed by their masters, some by an old and honored servant, and some by a minister of their own race, by a gathering of slaves and a broomstick in the hands of the mother. The contracting parties were required to join hands and jump over the broomstick together. Those marriages were usually on Saturday night and their honeymoon on the Sunday following.

Cain and Phoebe were allowed a log cabin in the quarters of the plantation. They had a large family of children, two girls and 10 boys. Henry was the sixth child. His childhood was the same as other children on that great plantation. His mother was an industrious, God-fearing woman, and taught her children to be honest and faithful. He had very little to wear when a boy. His raiment was a linen slip, a garment in one piece without arms, and reached a little below his knees.

When he was 12 years old he was made a mill boy. He rode a horse or mule to mill with a sack of corn in front of him every day and often the corn would fall off and he would have a mighty hard time getting it on again. Some-

times it would rain and the only cover he had was a tree and often boy, mule and meal were soaking wet when he got back.

When he became 17 years old he was hired out to the saltworks which were in the north edge of Tennessee. When he was about to leave home for his new job his mother asked if he had any money? "Yes," said Henry, "I have a little." "How much?" said his mother. "Thirty-seven cents," said Henry. "Go past where your father is working (which was three miles); he may have some money he can give you." When Henry came to his father who was working in the field they visited for a little while and then he said he must go. His father asked if he had any money. "Yes," said Henry, "I have a little" and told him how much. "Well," said his father, that is enough for any smart man to start out on."

With this encouragement he left home and friends to go to the saltworks to be in the employ of a man by the name of Bell, who bore the name of being the hardest man in all Tennessee. Henry's job was to tend furnace at night, boiling salt water, thus making salt. Letting the fire go down was considered a crime worthy of punishment so all hands must keep awake. There were several men attending furnaces, among them a slave boy by the name of Ben. Often when the fire was good and everything favorable this Ben would lie down to rest and sometimes fall asleep. Henry also would lie down and rest. One night they both fell asleep and the fires burned low. Henry awoke in time to renew his fire and called Ben, who answered. He thought Ben was awake so got busy with his own furnace. About that time Mr. Bell, the overseer, appeared and found Ben's fire very low, although Ben was working at his fire when the overseer came, yet the kettle

was not boiling.

Mr. Bell had a cane in his hand and struck at Ben, who dodged the lick and caught the cane. Mr. Bell jerked at the cane two or three times, but Ben held on. The overseer dropped the cane and started away, very angry. Henry then knew there would be trouble so urged Ben to run off to the woods. The boy refused to run, saying he had done nothing to run away for. In a short time Mr. Bell returned with two other slaves. They caught Ben and tied him by the wrists to a cross-beam between two posts set in the ground. Ben's feet could only touch the ground. Then with a rawhide whip Ben lashed Ben on his naked back and legs. He would whip until he got tired, then rest awhile and talk, then whip again. This continued the rest of the day until the sun went down. Then he cut the ropes from his wrists and poor Ben fell to the ground entirely helpless.

Bell then ordered two other slaves to take Ben to the cabin, and as he lay exhausted they rubbed salt in the wounds made by the rawhide. The blood-covered man lay there on his bed of straw and Henry was ordered to watch after him. Henry did what he could for him, such as bring him water

Grinnell Herald May 20, 1856

and food Ben could not eat much. On the third day Mr. Bell came to the cabin where Ben lay and ordered him to get up and go to work. Sore and aching Ben arose and tried to walk, but only God knows the pain Ben had to bear.

When a boy, Henry, like other boys, was full of pranks. One day his master told him to go and catch a young mare they called Spot. She was a beautiful young animal and Colonel Preston's favorite. Young and lively she was hard to catch. The lot was large, and the fence was made of rails laid in a zig-zag shape called a worm fence. Henry tried to corner the mare but every

time she would run by in spite of him. One time he threw a heavy stick, hit Spot in the eye and put it out. About that time Old Master appeared on the scene. He always walked with a hickory cane and while Henry was a favorite boy, Old Master was angry. He hit Henry on the head with his cane. Henry fell, a little stunned but yet in his senses. His master picked him up and carried him to the house. Henry thought he was in for a good whipping and the next thought was to play dead, which he did.

His master laid him down and called Henry's mother and they worked over him, rubbing with camphor and water for quite a while. Finally he drew a deep breath. "He is coming to, Master," said the mother. "Thank the Lord" said his master; "rub him some more." they did and he came to. One whipping he missed.

In Virginia in those days they did not raise hogs as we do in Iowa now, but let the hogs run wild in the woods. In the spring the pigs were marked by cutting some part of the ear. Colonel Preston's mark was recorded in the court house so he could prosecute any one infringing on his property. His mark was a slit in the center of the right ear and an under bit and an over bit in the left ear. When they wished to kill their meat in the fall for winter use they would take a number of men with horses and dogs, go to the woods and catch the hogs.

One time Colonel Preston took Henry on his horse behind him. The men and dogs caught a fine big hog and after worrying it until it was exhausted they left Henry to hold the hog until they could bring the wagon to load it in and take it home. Henry sat on the hog and held its feet for a while. The hog got rested enough to make a struggle before the men came back. Henry did his best to hold him but the hog was too strong for the boy. In the tussle the hog struck Henry in the left temple, cut a deep gash with his tusks and got away, leaving a mark which Henry carried throughout his life.

Col. John M. Preston had twelve children, boys and girls. One of his boys, John M., Jr., was a lawyer. In 1831 he left Virginia and went south, taking Henry with him as body servant. They landed at Helena, Ark. Young Preston had a law office. He and Henry boarded at the hotel. There was not enough work at the office nor his rooms to keep Henry busy so he made arrangements with the hotel to work as helper in the kitchen, thus paying his own and his master's board. At law young Preston won an important case and received as compensation some money and a large tract of land.

In 1834 young Preston returned to Virginia to visit his father and told him of his success as a lawyer. His father was very much delighted. Col. Preston owned over 100 slaves, so he told his son to take his choice of 20 slaves and mules and wagons, and many other necessities to open up his new acquired possessions in Arkansas. Among these slaves were Henry's mother and one of his brothers, and a young girl about 13 years old whose grandmother was stolen from Africa when a girl 12 years old. This new plantation was about thirteen miles from Helena, Ark., near a lake called Blue Lake.

Henry still worked at the hotel and learned to be a chef. He was very thrifty and often received tips from customers at the hotel. He also worked at night cleaning other offices, sawing wood by the light of a home made lantern, and other odd jobs after hotel hours,

for which his master allowed him to keep the money earned. Henry saved as much of the money as he could and when he had saved \$10 he would give it to his master who would give him credit for every cent. Thus he toiled on, sometimes making visits to the plantation with his master. These visits became numerous as the farm was more and more improved.

Henry fell in love with the young girl whom his master had brought from Virginia, whose name was Lottie. She had one uncle and one cousin among the twenty who came from Virginia. Lottie was a handsome mulatto girl and was made dining room and house maid of her master's house on the plantation. After a few years Young Preston allowed Henry to marry Lottie and she made her home in the quarters in a log cabin with his mother.

Henry's master had a brother who was weakly. His name was Walter Preston. His father thought it best to let Walter go south with John M., Jr., that it might benefit his health, so John took Walter into partnership with him. Walter acted as overseer and manager of the plantation. From time to time other slaves were bought and it became necessary to hire another overseer, a man by the name of Reece. Before long they thought

they should have a foreman or driver as they were then called, so Henry was appointed as foreman. Things went along all right until one of the slaves did something that the overseer thought deserved a whipping. He ordered Henry to whip the man. This Henry refused to do. He would not whip a fellow servant. This of course was cause for trouble between Henry and Reece. They had some words. Reece then decided to whip Henry. He must have help to do this as Henry would not submit. Henry saw there was going to be trouble and he went to his cabin, barred the door, got his ax and put it beside him, and declared the first man who came in that door after him he would kill with that ax.

this caused quite a bit of talk among the white folks on the plantation. Henry would not come out of his cabin and they were afraid to go in. Henry was personal servant of John M., Jr. and the rest of them dared not go too far with him. Lottie of course must attend to her duties as housemaid so she was asked where Henry was and what he was doing. She told Mr. Reece that he was in the cabin mending her shoe. He wore a little and about that time Young Master John Jr. came. When he found out what it was all about he said "I will settle this right now. Lottie, go and tell Henry I say come to me." Lottie went and told Henry what Mars' John had said. Henry came at once and told his master all about it. "Well," said he, "Henry, get your things ready to go back to town with me." So that was the last of that.

Lottie and Henry's mother still remained on the plantation. Henry was again in the hotel and stayed there until the war between the United States and Mexico was declared. Mr. Preston took an active part in the war. He left his law office, raised a company of 100 men, was appointed captain and was known thereafter as Capt. John M. Preston. He took Henry with him as body servant to the front. When the company was in action Henry stayed in camp and took care of his master's belongings.

"Cap" never took anything of value on his person when he left camp but left everything in Henry's care. While in camp Henry made some money by doing small favors for other officers, such as washing their socks or underwear, shining their shoes, brushing their clothes, sewing on buttons, or anything else he saw needed or was asked to do. These men would pay him or often give him a piece of money, all of which he saved. Often while the soldiers were at the front or in an engagement Henry could have taken all his master's money, watch and other valuables, and within a mile's travel been within the Mexican hills and been a free man. But true to his trust he stayed loyal to his master and the United States.

When his master came back to camp Henry always had something nourishing for him to eat, water to bathe in, or any other comfort he could think of was always ready for Mars John. When the battle of Buena Vista was fought Henry was forced into the ranks. Being a slave at that time he was never given credit by the United States for his service.

When the war was ended Capt. Preston and Henry returned to Arkansas. Preston again took up law. Henry was still a slave. All slaves have a desire to be free, and this was Henry's great desire. One day he approached his master and asked him to sell him his liberty. Preston took the matter under advisement and after due consideration decided to sell Henry his own time. Walter Preston did not like the idea. Henry was then working on the farm. Walter argued that Henry was the best hand they had and the effect would not be good with the other slaves. Walter being a brother to Capt. Preston and also manager of the plantation and a partner, had quite a bit to say. Finally a price was fixed at \$700. Henry had saved up the money and paid his master the price. The papers were made out in legal form and Henry Lucas or Preston became a free man, but his wife and three children were yet slaves.

One day at the dinner table Walter Preston brought up the subject of the sale of Henry. Capt. John Preston pushed his chair back from the table a little and said: "Now, Walter, I have had that in my dish often enough, and I am getting damned tired of it. When I was in the war I was among my enemies and Henry was among his friends. If he had chosen he could have taken everything I had and in a half hour have been free. When I was sick Henry nursed me, when I had been out on a skirmish and came back tired and worn out Henry always was there to comfort and cheer me, and did his best and even went into battle and proved himself a man. And, if I had done as I ought I would have set him free. Now don't let me hear

you mention that again."

When the papers were signed and money paid Henry left the plantation, went to Helena, bought a horse and dray, and went into the draying business. This venture took all his savings. He now had another great desire. His wife and three children were Preston's slaves. He wanted them free also so worked with new energy and great determination to bring that about.

He had not been draying very long when gold was discovered in California. There was a great rush to the western gold fields. A company was organized in Helena of 100 men equipped with provision wagons and teams, and other accessories, to go overland to the goldfields. They wanted Henry to go with them. "Well," said he, "I would like to go but I have just spent all my money for my dray and horse so I can't go." Now the committee said to him: "You are a good cook, if you will drive one of our teams of four mules and cook for one mess of ten men, that will pay your way." Henry talked the matter over with his wife and Capt. Preston, and decided to take the offer. He sold his dray and horse, took his carpetbag and left for the goldfields of California.

The trip was a long and hard one. They lost their way, followed the wrong trail and were attacked by Indians. The Indian attack was a great setback to the company. Their scout and interpreter discovered the approaching Indians in time to get the company in fighting form. They drew their wagons into a hollow square, staked out

their mules and every man got his gun and was ready for the attack. On came the Indians, the chief at their front with his strong bow and arrows, and the warriors on their ponies, with paint on, ready for the fray.

The scout cautioned the men not to shoot unless the Indians made an attack. Up came the Indian chief and sprung his bow. The Indians outnumbered the men more than two to one. The men held their fire, and there was great suspense. The Indians halted a few rods from the men and the scout spoke to the chief telling him that the company was peaceful and wished to go on to the coast. The Indian bucks began to ride around in circles and then among the company mules and succeeded in making 20 of the mules break loose and drove them off. The company then had to leave some of their wagons and supplies.

The road was bad, no bridges, streams had to be forded, mountains to climb, and deserts of sand to cross. Thus for six months they journeyed, short of provisions and no place to buy anything. They killed what game they could. They were so short of meat they ate anything they could kill. In the woods at one time they killed a panther. When it was cooked they could not eat because it tasted just like a

cat smells.

Finally they reached the Golden West. The company had entered an agreement to stick together for one year, open up mines and divide their findings equally among them. This worked well only for a little while. Some of the men were rich already and had slaves working for them back in the states. Some of the men spent most of their time gambling, others were not used to work and did not know how and did not care to learn. When the year was up the men all disbanded. Some went home, others went to another locality, while some stayed and made good.

Mining was a very dangerous business. It was a new territory, far from the city and had no law enforcement. Every man was a law unto himself. Murder was common. Men were slain for their gold and their claims jumped. No one was safe at any time. Wild animals, bears, lions, wildcats, panthers, and numerous other dangers so that one could do nothing alone.

There was a white man from Illinois who was seeking a fortune in the mines. Henry Lucas met this man whose name was Robert Morrison. He was unmarried, young, strong and honest. They

formed a partnership known as Morrison & Lucas. As Henry was a cook they agreed that he should look after that part of the work while Morrison looked after the tools. They also agreed that if one of the firm should want to go home the other would go with him. Henry readily agreed to this as he had a wife and three children and Morrison had neither. They both worked hard and their mine yielded fairly well and they made good.

For more than a year they worked on. One morning Henry was a little late getting things ready for dinner. When he came down to the mine he found Morrison had done very little and was standing with both hands on the end of a shovel handle and his chin resting on the back of his hands, seemingly in a deep study. Henry said nothing but jumped into the pit and began to

shovel out gravel. After some time Morrison spoke and said: "Henry, I want to go home." Henry remonstrated. "Why, Mr. Morrison, we are just getting where the gravel is yielding good and we are making money now. Let's work on a while longer. Everything looks good here now." Morrison did not reply for a while when finally he threw down his shovel and said: "Henry, I'll be damned if I will ever

(Continued on Page 7).

Farm Column

(Continued from Page 2)

pick up that shovel again." Nor did he. He would not even help wash out the gold they had thrown out of the pit that morning but went to the shack and began to get ready to go.

They sold their claim and tools for what they could get which was not very much because when it was known they were going to leave miners would not bid very much. They divided their gold equally and took a stage for San Francisco. Then by boat to Panama, crossed the isthmus, and then by boat across the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans. The trouble with Morrison was that he had a sweetheart in Illinois and it took six months to get a letter from home.

While crossing the gulf, Henry took sick with Chagres fever. Morrison took charge of his money and other valuable, for Henry had bought three gold watches, one for each of his children, a large gold breast pin for his wife. The pin is now in possession of John E. Lucas here in Grinnell. Henry was unconscious for most of the time and Morrison took care of him. When they got to New Or-

leans the boat was quarantined but Morrison succeeded in getting Henry off the boat and into a hospital in New Orleans, and stayed with him until he was able to travel. They took a boat at New Orleans for Helena, Ark. Morrison was still in possession of Henry's belongings and when they arrived at Helena Morrison returned everything that belonged to him, not charging him one cent for his time and trouble, and went on to his own home in Illinois.

Henry then wanted his wife and family. He proposed to buy them from Capt. Preston. After considering the matter for some time, Preston decided to sell to Henry his wife and three children. Cain was 10 years old, Ola Phoebe 8, and Walter 6 years old. The price for Lottie, his wife, was \$1,000, and \$300 each for the children. Nineteen hundred dollars in gold Henry paid for his family.

The English language has not words enough to express the happiness of that family. Free! Free! Great happiness does not last long and this family was no exception. Only two short weeks when cholera visited that home and sorrow filled their hearts. Phoebe was stricken and died just two weeks from the date her father had bought her.

Henry then went into the restaurant business in Helena and again made good. But trouble again crossed his path. In the spring of 1859 the legislature of Arkansas passed a law that all free Negroes should leave the state or be sold back into bondage. A great dilemma indeed. A free man in a free country and nowhere to go. During all this time Henry and Morrison had kept up correspondence. Henry wrote to Morrison and told him the condition of things. Morrison answered very definitely. He had married and had moved to Iowa, near Montezuma. His letter read: "Henry, come to me at Montezuma, Iowa, and I will see you through."

When it became known in Helena that Henry Lucas and family were going to leave there was real regret among the boarders. Among them was Judge Mark Alexander, circuit judge. He advised Henry not to leave Helena. Henry said to him: "Why, Judge, how can I stay when the law says I must go or be sold back into bondage?" The judge answered: "Henry, the law says they shall be brought before the circuit judge, and if they arrest you I will declare the law unconstitutional and turn you loose." Lawyer Tappen, another of the boarders, said: "Henry, if you will leave your signature in my office I will have every man in the county sign a petition in your behalf and send it to the governor of the state of Arkansas and he will grant you liberty." Mr. Tappen was

county attorney of Phillips county, Arkansas.

Other leading men of the city offered assistance for the safety of himself and family. All these offers were made at the evening meal in Henry's restaurant. He made a short speech, thanked the gentlemen for their patronage and their kind offers in his behalf, but told them that he could not stay in a state where the law was against him; that he was going to Montezuma, Iowa, where he expected to meet his old friend, Robert Morrison, with whom he had been associated in California. He had written for him to come and he would see him through.

Henry sold his restaurant and closed up all other business. Received all the money in cash except about \$1,300 in bonds of swamp land, which he sold to a firm by the name of Johnston & Co. at a discount of \$400. As this Mr. Johnston was in Europe at the time Henry was not paid the cash but was given a certificate of deposit as this was a banking institution, and Johnston was president. So Henry and his family and what cash he could gather up took boat to Davenport, Iowa.

Henry had at that time \$1,000 belted around his waist and his tickets for his family and enough money for his traveling expenses and also letters of recommendation in his pockets. His wife had \$1,000 quilted in her petticoat which she wore continually until they had landed in Iowa and had bought a farm one-half mile north of Montezuma.

Mr. Morrison, true to his word, met them at Oskaloosa, came with them to Montezuma, and saw them housed for the winter as it was late in October, 1859.

They lived on the farm seven years where two more children were born, John Brown and Charles Theodore. John Brown Lucas was named in honor of Capt. John Brown who was hung at Harper's Ferry because of his efforts to liberate the slaves. John Brown Lucas was born June 1, 1861. He claims to be the first colored child born in the state of Iowa.

When the Civil war broke out, Cain Lucas enlisted in the federal army and was in service one year and six months, when he was given an honorable discharge. He came

back to the home of his father at Montezuma in November, 1865.

Henry Lucas lost his barn and harness and much of his grain by fire. He also received a letter from his attorney in Helena stating that on account of the Civil war the firm of Johnston & Co. had failed and had gone into bankruptcy and was over \$100,000 worse off than nothing. Henry then sold his farm north of Montezuma and in the fall of 1866 moved to Pleasant township to a farm he had bought from a man by the name of McCready. This farm contained 160 acres. In 1868 he bought another farm of 80 acres. In 1870 he bought 80 acres more. The family lived and worked together on the farm until in 1879, when Cain Lucas died, leaving a wife but no children. In 1883 Walter Lucas died, leaving a wife and one daughter.

In 1885, after a long and eventful life, Henry Lucas died at the age of 75 years, leaving to mourn his loss his faithful wife, Lottie Lucas, and two sons, John Brown Lucas and Charles Theodore Lucas.

When Henry Lucas died he owned 320 acres of land, 21 head of horses, 60 head of hogs, and 30 head of cattle. His estate was divided among the heirs.

Mrs. Lottie Lucas moved to Grinnell with her son John, and lived with him in his home at 1517 West street in north Grinnell until God called her to her reward in March, 1906. She was 85 years old and had lived a widow for 15 years. She left one son, John B. Lucas. He and his wife now live at 511 Second avenue, Grinnell. They have raised a family of eight children, three of whom have passed on.

John Brown Lucas has some of the letters written to his father by his old master, Captain Preston, and also some of the recommendations written by Judge Alexander and others by Lawyer Tappen. Also the printed statement of the bankruptcy of Johnston & Co. wherein Henry Lucas lost his \$1,300 deposit.

Henry Lucas was a staunch and loyal Christian from his young manhood when they came to Montezuma. He and his wife joined the Protestant church in Montezuma and he remained a member of that church until he died.