

JOHN BROWN

There is another incident of early Grinnell in War days which merits a place in this chronicle. It is the visit of John Brown in March of 1859, Brown was headed east from the guerilla warfare in Kansas for his unsuccessful attempt on Harper's Ferry.

Brown came alone to the Grinnell home, rang the bell and introduced himself to Mr. Grinnell as "the awful Brown." He reported that there were 16 in his party with horses and that they badly needed rest over the week end. They had come from Missouri, where they had killed a slave owner, stolen some horses and taken some slaves. Grinnell had just been reading in the New York Tribune that Brown was leading a party of fugitives through Iowa to Canada, that a reward had been offered and that U. S. Marshals were expected to capture the party.

Grinnell extended a welcome, and Brown accepted an invitation to tea. Grinnell writes: "His attention to the little girl, our prattling Mary, soon brought her playfully to his knees."

When Brown explained his needs, saying that he traveled on Sunday only when necessary, Grinnell opened the door of his parlor, later known as "the Liberty Room" and placed it at his disposal and also offered the stalls in the barn which were not taken. The rest of the party, he said, could stay at the hotel.

Grinnell describes his unusual visitor as follows: "He stood very erect for a man nearing sixty years, and wore a long, full beard, almost white, with hair parted and standing up, suggesting Andrew Jackson as pictured. The chin was broad, lips compressed, the eye was a keen, light gray, deep set and mild, only flashing in moments of excited action or when crossed in debate. . . . There were

no spurs on his boots, and he was only clad in a plain, well worn suit, with nothing to suggest border warfare save a wide rimmed hat and half-concealed pistol."

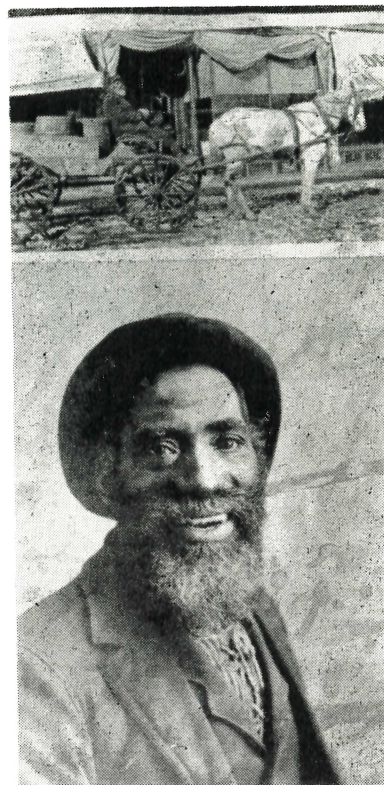
By this time the news had spread and the citizens turned out in force to see the unusual visitors. Mr. Grinnell reports: "There were canvas covered wagons followed by horsemen, altogether a novel affair before the civil war era. Sentinels were placed by strict military precaution and my parlor in the corner was a depository for small arms, ammunition, swords and rifles, some having been brought from concealment under the canvas."

An informal reception was held that evening in the large audience room used for the church, at which Brown spoke, defending his policies in the Kansas border war. A talk was also made by J. H. Kagy, soon to be killed at Harper's Ferry. Brown spoke again at the Sunday evening meeting in the church. Grinnell describes it as "an educational meeting of high order."

In the intervals, Grinnell and Brown, both professional wool growers, had interesting conversations on their mutual interest.

After the Sunday evening meeting Mr. Grinnell found the stage driver waiting with a message from Mr. Workman, U. S. Marshal in Iowa City and a personal friend, warning Grinnell to "get the old Devil away to save trouble, for he will be taken, dead or alive."

Grinnell passed the word along to Brown, who refused to leave that night. That night six of Brown's men slept on their arms on Grinnell's parlor floor. Brown waited through Monday for the marshal to appear, then loaded his wagons and headed for the Quaker settlement of Springdale which he reached



Old Mumf

One of the picturesque figures of early Grinnell was Mumford, or "Old Mumf" as he was familiarly called. A tall and gangling Negro with a beaming, flashing smile, "Old Mumf" had been a slave and was brought to Grinnell by G. M. Christian to work in his hotel. Everybody in Grinnell knew "Old Mumf" and he was a friend to all. He was by way of being a town institution. The picture above shows "Mumf" in the old one horse wagon which he used to drive around Grinnell collecting garbage. The town was never quite the same after "Mumf" died. He was generally believed to have been over 2 hundred years old when death took him.



safely, remaining until March 10.

Meantime Grinnell had gone to Chicago and, as a wool shipper, arranged that a car should be dropped off at West Liberty. The railroad agents were hoodwinked and the slaves were loaded on the car and taken to Chicago and here Allen Pinkerton, the detective, arranged their transportation to Detroit where Brown saw them turned over to the Canadian authorities.

Brown was greatly moved by his cordial reception in Grinnell, and in a letter to friends in Tabor summarized his visit as including the whole party and teams kept two days without cost, sundry articles of clothing given to captives, bread, meat, cake and pies prepared for the journey, full houses two nights in succession, contributions in cash amounting to \$26.50 and "public thanksgiving to All-mighty God offered up by Mr. Grinnell in the behalf of the whole company for His great mercy and protecting care, with prayer for a continuance of those blessings."

Brown's visit aroused also much hostile comment in anti-abolitionist circles over the state and some of the Democratic press denounced Grinnell as "John Brown Grinnell".

This prejudice was found even in Grinnell itself as evidenced by the fact that determined opposition developed when an attempt was made to admit Negroes to the public school. When L. F. Parker, as head of the school, admitted four Negroes to the primary grade the town became bitterly divided. At a school meeting Parker was sustained by a majority of only eight votes. The next morning two citizens appeared at the school to expel the Negroes but Parker, armed with a club, informed them that he would defend every student permitted by the directors to attend.

The Negroes, however, had not yet reached the school and were intercepted on their way. One of the Negroes, it is reported, mounted a woodpile and shouted: "Gentlemen, we uns come up North to be free; if we can't be free here we'd just as soon die here as anywhere."

For a time bloodshed was imminent but finally the Negroes were persuaded to withdraw and school was closed a few days before the term expired.

It might be added that for many years the room in the Grinnell home in which Brown slept was known as "The John Brown room."

This is another of the largely unsung annals of Grinnell.



The spanking team harnessed to a buggy, a Spaulding of course, stands in front of the business block at the corner of Fourth avenue and Broad street. The corner is now occupied by the Poweshiek County National bank building. The sign on the old First National bank may be seen in the background.



This is the cabin built by the founders when they first came to the Grinnell locality. It was located in Lattimer's grove, west of Grinnell and served as a shelter until the Long Home was built.