

Edenville - Rhodes As I Remember

by Plato Kreamer

In Edenville, the capitol of Eden Township, I grew up from before my earliest remembrance to my majority. During the time of childhood, which corresponds to the feudal age of the race, this Eden was my country and had the foreigners in Story County even attempted to invade it, with holy zeal I would have joined in, "Welcoming the invaders with bloody hands to hospital graves." Eden is still to me like a first love.

Edenville is on a level plateau between two streams which have their sources about six miles north of town. The rain falling just west of the peak of the roof of the church without a bishop, where I attended Sunday school, found it's way westwardly into Clear Creek, while that falling a quarter inch to the east drained eastwardly into Skunk Creek.

Only the southern third, or less, of Iowa was originally mostly covered with timber. The rest of the state generally was treeless prairie except for small round groves, of hard timber, of a few acres each, spaced five to twenty miles apart. About a mile and a half east of town was one of these round patches of native hard wood timber, on the brow of a high hill overlooking Skunk Creek. But a band of timber followed a larger stream northward from the wooded section, thence up Clear Creek west of Edenville to about four miles north of town.

The six sections of timber in Eden consisted of white, black, red, and burr oak; black and butternut, walnut; shell bark and pignut hickory; maple, elm, red elm, sycamore, iron wood, cottonwood, poplar, birch, ash, willow, wild cherries, wild plums, black haws, crab apples, thorn apples, and also hazel nuts, wild gooseberries, currants, raspberries, blackberries, strawberries, ground cherries, grapes, and many wildflowers.

Then pensive Indian Summer with the smoke of burning incense shrouded all the hills in a mellow haze; chastened with thick white hoar-frost in the morning and caressed with drowsy warmth of noon tide sun; clothed the trees in myriad colors and cast over all the Iowa panorama a tranquilizing peace conducive to poetic reverie.

An artesian well in the woods at the edge of town, the result of early exploration for coal, hurled a large volume of mineral water high into the air.

The upland prairie in Eden, even in my early days, was yet covered in many places with native grasses and flowers, a harmony, a symphony of colors, beautiful beyond description and in the wet places

grew sweet native slough grass. Along the creek banks were wax or rosin weeds, cousin of the sunflower, from which a boy on horseback could gather the gum near the tops. Horses greatly preferred these native grasses and hay, over the blue grass, timothy and clover that replaced them. The upland herbage was a mixture of glowing flowers and modest grasses that live in harmony together.

Edenville at the east line of the timber, half in and half out, sang with a sweet voice before her loom as she wove with a shuttle of gold the web of the happy days.

Edenville was settled in 1850 when the nearest town were three and were twenty miles away. It thus became the picturesque capital of a pretty domain. The surpassing loveliness and enthralling rapture of the woods, and the artistic skills in staging celebration that had been developed by the village, caused it early to become a fourth of July celebration mecca, even for people outside of its contributory territory, supremacy which it maintained after the coming of the railroads had reduced its trade area to a small part of what it was in its eminence.

It is impossible for these of this age of 1940 to realize what a Fourth day of July celebration meant to people of that era; when, the organ was the main musical instrument, organs outside of churches were few and churches with organs not plentiful; when there were no daily papers; few weekly papers or monthly periodicals; no phonographs, radios, movies, or shows; when neighbors and friends, for many were distant, roads were poor or nonexistent, and a lumber wagon often the only means of conveyance.

To the Eden of that time, the celebration of the Fourth had the same significance to the people, as their athletic contests and festivals to their Gods, had to the ancient Greeks, in the prime of their Hellenic integrity. It was a holy and patriotic rite, and a spiritual expression, a living dynamic force of utmost faith in America and her republican institutions and democratic freedom. Before this altar all were united there were no scoffers, none of little faith.

For our, my father's family, the Fourth had even more significance, not only because we were of the stock that had settled America and helped win her independence, but also because it was my mother's birthday. Thus with us it was the greatest festival, far surpassing the American Thanksgiving and the Christian Christmas.

Edenville was the first village established in Marshall County and one of the first few settlements in Marshall County was made in Eden Township.

Before Marshalltown, the county seat of Marshall County existed, and before a county government was established in Marshall County, the courts and sheriff of Jasper County had jurisdiction over Marshall County, which defacto was mainly Eden Township.

A railroad was built through Newton and Des Moines, the state capital and county seat of Polk County, just west of Jasper County. Until the Chicago Northwestern Railroad was built through Marshalltown and State Center six miles north and one mile east, Edenville, received its mail and merchandise through Newton.

There is no coal in Eden Township, but there is a few miles into Jasper County. In an early date coal for brick burning, industrial boilers, etc., was hauled by team from Jasper County. Even when I was in my teens, a great many farmers in Eden hauled their house heating and cooking coal from Jasper County, as the difference between the cost of coal purchased from a dealer in Edenville, and that at the mine mouth in Jasper County, paid them good wages when farm work was in its winter slack. On the coming of good roads and the automobile, hauling coal by trucks from Jasper County mines was cheaper than railroad freight from any mines available to Eden Township.

On important occasions as Fourth Day of July celebration, usually a baseball nine from Newton played the Edenville team, to insure a good game to the great number of people for whom it was a major attraction. During all my youth, Edenville had a baseball team, always the peer, and often the master of surrounding towns, including the much larger county seats.

Until the coming of the railroads to Marshall County, all conveyance was by horses and buggies or wagons. The wagon roads to Newton were with the drainage and mostly along a ridge, those to Marshalltown were across drainage, from one basin into another. The wagon road distances from Edenville to Newton and Marshalltown were each about twenty two miles and from some parts of Eden Township, fifteen and thirty miles respectively.

These conditions held unweakened even after one could drive seven miles to State Center and take the Northwestern Railroad to Marshalltown or take the Milwaukee Railroad from Edenville to Melbourne, about five miles to the east, and wait a long time for a train on the Great Western to Marshalltown.

Now in 1945, automobiles have obliterated differences of a few miles in distance and in conjunction with better roads differences in grades. An all weather concrete super highway direct from Marshalltown to Des Moines passes Edenville a mile and a half to the south east, and a branch highway of the same class extends into Edenville.

The highways between Edenville and Newton are good county roads, but not nearly so good as the super highway to Marshalltown. But a careful perusal of the newspaper, "The Tribune", published in Edenville in 1943, reveals and proves, that the old and original conditions have not been altered. Still the commercial, social and cultural outside connections of Edenville go with the drainage, through Baxter to Newton.

There never was a quarrel of any sort, or any bad feelings whatever, but Eden Township, never took part in the common community affairs and county life of Marshall County. Its only connections with Marshalltown were political and artificial and unavoidable, to pay taxes or perchance to go to court. During all my youth up to 1900 as before my time, all the commercial, social and cultural ties and outside connections of Eden Township were with Jasper County and Newton, though legal and political severance between Newton and Eden prevented full fraternization between them.

Thus it was that Eden had somewhat the aspect and outlook of a petty principality. Its Justice of the Peace Court had greater dignity than was usual elsewhere.

The first permanent settlers in Iowa came from the territory where Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina are adjacent to each other. In their migration they followed the rivers as highways and settled in the timber in the southern part of Iowa. But soon the southerners or their descendants in southern Iowa, following the streams and timber occupied the wooded land along Clear Creek.

But the first settlers in Eden Township were from north of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers, except upper class Virginians who had sojourned in Ohio for a generation or so; these settlers bore such names as Rhodes, Allen, Bartlett, Blink, Lacey, Woolston, Logan, Watts, McClusky, Brewer and Tuffree.

In 1865 there was only 12,000 population in all Marshall County. In 1858 the total population of Eden Township was 195. However, in 1856 a company of men drilled on the village green every Saturday and once a month went to Marshalltown to drill in larger formations, as a preparation for the Civil War.

The first Iowa regiment took part in the battle and victory of Wilson Creek in Missouri in August of 1861. This was the first engagement of Iowa troops. Iowa soldiers took part in the campaigns and battles of Blue Mills, Belmont, Fort Henry, Kentucky, and Ft. Donelson, Kentucky, Shiloh, Pea Ridge, Arkansas, and Prairie Grove, Arkansas. The battle of Prairie Grove occurred in December of 1862. Iowa had thirty regiments at Vicksburg and Iowans were the only troop to get inside the breast works in the assault. Iowans were in the Chattanooga Campaign and the Red River Expedition, fifteen regiments were at the siege of Atlanta, seventeen regiments were in Sherman's march to the sea, three were in the Shenandoah Valley in 1864 and twelve Iowa regiments

were at Mobile in 1865. This is a very abbreviated and condensed account. Iowa had 76,242 soldiers in the Civil War, of which 12,000 were killed, 9,000 wounded and 10,000 invalidated. About one out of every three Iowa soldiers in the Civil War, were the sons or grandsons of southern immigrants into Iowa.

As a boy I often listened eagerly to old soldiers tales of how they fought down the Mississippi to the siege and capture of Vicksburg, the taking and burning of Atlanta, thence to the devastating march to the sea.

When the draft came, Eden Township had to furnish eight soldiers. Stewart Baker told me that the week before the draft, eight men met together in the school house, of whom I can remember the names of only Conway Rhodes, Anthony Rhodes, John Rhodes, the inn keeper Lacy, and Stewart Baker, himself, where each contributed \$100 in gold, which \$800 was turned over to the school master, without a receipt, for him to distribute \$100 apiece to the families of the men who were drafted. Stewart Baker was one of the drafted and got his own \$100 back.

Previous to this, a citizen of Eden, whose name I do not remember, though Stewart Baker told me his name, red hot for war cried, "We will fight the rebels till hell freezes over and then we will fight them on the ice." He tried to impart his zeal to Stewart Baker and upon failure said, "Why don't you believe in preserving the Union?" To which Stewart replied, "Yes, and if necessary, to fight for it, but I see no need to go now when so many like you are anxious to go to the war."

Afterwards, just before the battle of Chattanooga, when they were in the same regiment, composed of two former ones, this man was sick and Baker walked the sentinel for both of them for which Baker said, "If an officer has seen and elected to notice it officially, they both could have been shot." Baker as he passed the other asked him, "What do you think of fighting on the ice now?" to which he received no reply.

When the Iowa soldiers reached Georgia, on their way to the sea, a mulatto, Frank Harris, came into their camp with tales of cruelty and mayhem perpetrated by his father and master on his slaves for insubordination at the close approach of the Yankees.

Frank was past age, had never had shoes on his feet, and could not write or read. His mother, a slave had been shamefully mistreated by his father-master whose religion taught him, that he was a potter and had mastery over the clay, with the power and the right to mold one for honor and another for dishonor.

This Iowa regiment hanged the father of this Frank Harris, whether under the articles of war, or just holding a party, I do not know. But I heard Bill Girton say in Frank's presence that he helped hang Frank's father. Frank said nothing, but from his countenance he evidently counted him a comrade indeed, who had helped to hang his Georgia cracker father.

Frank Harris joined the Iowa regiment that hanged his father and coming to Iowa with the Union soldiers after the war, settled in the timber in Eden and resided

there until his death.

When I was first allowed to go alone to the Post Office for the mail, I frequently met an old union soldier by the name of Waggerman. He always passed without speaking, a quiet subdued little old man, with his eyes cast down to the ground near his feet.

But, one day he approached with his head held high and throwing his feet out before him like a pacer. He was in his cups and stopped me and told of how when the boys collected in a crowd the next day after arriving back to Edenville from the Civil War, he had stepped forward and said to Captain Chapman, "I'm going to whip you!" At this point in the narrative he was so overflowed with joy that he could tell no more.

But even after the war, until one of them died about 1900, on the anniversary of the return from the war, Captain Chapman kept indoors and Private Waggerman ruled the sidewalks. On the other days of the year Waggerman treated Chapman with respect and deference, Eden thought well of its Captain despite this incident.

In Eden we lived in a large brown house in a setting of majestic trees. During the summer time we lived mainly on a long porch from which could be seen a panoramic Iowa landscape extending as far as the eye could see. In the winter, agreeable to Pennsylvania Dutch traditions, the two front rooms were not occupied much, especially by the children, except when we had company. Steel lithograph copies of the four allegorical paintings, the Voyage of Life, depicting childhood, youth, manhood, and age by Thomas Cole hung in the parlor; near my father's desk in the sitting room hung a lithograph of Shakespeare and his friends and one of Neal Dow with the original Maine prohibition law printed thereon. Even before I could read I acquired a love for poetry through my next elder sister, Bessie, reading to me from an old school reader.

Eden according to its light and resources, took great pride in its school. Probably, it had the first consolidated school in America. One school district never built a school house, preferring to send its children to the town school. Others with a school house did not use it, but sent the children to town school instead.

One Simon Patten, who had a brother farming in Story County, west of Eden, and who had just returned from Germany where he had been either studying or teaching made application for the principalship of the Edenville school, because he desired a relative rest on account of poor eyes. Dr. Thomas, President of the school board, desiring to secure such an able man for such a small school, negotiated a bargain with Patten, wherein Patten agreed to take the school for two years instead of the one year he desired. At the end of the second year the report was that Patten had accepted the chair of Political Economy in an eastern university.

When I entered school I became very friendly with John Miller another Pennsylvania Dutch boy, actually Pennsylvania German, but dubbed Dutch by the English. I remember going home from school one

evening with John Miller, by a new way, which was out of the way for both of us. We passed what had once been a cellar for a large store. With the coming of the railroad the business section of the town had been moved. The original vertical sides of this cellar had crumbled into slopes. The sides and bottom of the excavation were covered by a thick sod. As we passed we stopped at this cellar to step carefully and slowly over the top till finally gravity would overpower us and we would have to run rapidly to fall in a little heap at the base of the slope. Then we walked along a rickety sidewalk not used since the store building had been moved, arms entwined and a little scared at our venture. At Nirk's corner we parted to go different ways.

I ran into Melt Wilson who had been away for the summer and shortly one of us suggested that we go fishing the next day (Saturday). It was more than a legend that there was carp in the Reservoir, because our township Darcy had caught them. The only bites Melt and I got were from swarms of large black mosquitos and soon we became discouraged. On our way home when we got in front of the section house, instead of continuing down the track the way we had come, we both began to climb the sides of a cut, which were so steep we often had to grab a tuft of the grass to keep from falling back.

When we reached the top of the cut we saw, far enough away that the balls did not get into the cut, and in front of Miller's house, boys were playing ball. When we passed this ball game we stopped to watch it. They had no umpire. Dell Miller was the best catcher I ever knew, he picked balls from in front of the bat. John Miller was not so good at anyone thing, but he had greater versatility. He was an excellent pitcher, short stop, first baseman and batter. John played hard and claimed hard and seemed to get more pleasure out of gaining a point, he did not deserve, by over claiming, than by actually winning it. However, he understood the game, and all the rules to influence an umpire, and as an umpire he was as incorruptible as he was tricky as a player. I always got fair decisions from him. So though I never claimed anything I did not believe deserved; I drew no moral line on John, thinking the best part of any game was to bamboozle the umpire and the other side.

A young sixteen year old daughter of a neighbor family which were in extremely distressed circumstances, had recently failed to pass a county teachers examination. When the county superintendent of schools, Mr. Fogg inspected the Edenville School, my father invited him to our house for dinner. He had not an inkling of what was in store for him, but I did, as I had a part to play, which was not to be seen too much and heard not at all except when spoken to and then just enough to be respectfully friendly. We all had our parts appropriate for the occasion and purpose at hand. My mother's contribution was the preparation of a Pennsylvania Dutch dinner. After dinner my eldest sister, a beautiful

young woman with an excellent voice, played the organ and sang one song, that could not fail to please unless he disliked music and could not harm much if he did.

Then at the most appropriate time my father told Fogg of the conditions of this family and the daughter's recent failure in the examination; and how he had obtained the promise of a director of the county school, where all the children were in the primary grade, to hire this girl as teacher if she could obtain a permit to teach. Though Fogg had no legal authority to do so, he issued the permit.

This was in 1888, the year of the many and great blizzards in Iowa. The highways were often blocked with snow so that it covered the osage orange hedges that is ten to twenty feet deep. Fence wires were let down and the traffic followed along the foot of the drifts often a quarter of a mile inside a farm. A solid high board fence of ours was completely drifted over, and our neighbors, farther out, walked over this fence on the drift and past our porch to go to town.

I remember, when a lad of nine, seeing this sixteen year old girl, Alice Daugherty, leave her home to walk three miles to her school, her face twice wreathed in smiles, because opportunity had knocked at her door and because she had been alert enough to open the door. She taught this school, walking six miles each school day, for thirty dollars per month. Later her father recovered his health and her family arose out of their destitution.

Often, I must smile, when I hear present day whiners complain of no opportunity and seek dollars from the government.

Alice Daugherty's father had been a volunteer cavalry man during the four years of the Civil War. When a small boy I used to question him a great deal about the war. He would neither admit nor deny that he had killed a man. He said in the Virginia campaign often he would cut and pile branches until the top of the pile would not sink under his weight below the surface of the swamp water, then throw his blanket on the pile for his bed. He thought the cavalry was the hardest branch of the army, because in part, while an infantry man had only himself to care for at nightfall, a cavalry man must first find food for his horse, and after that he was often so tired he went to sleep without any food. A cavalry man, he declared always comes in at the tail end of everything. He is always covering the sides and front or rear of the infantry and artillery. After being in the saddle with little rest for four days he arrived at Gettysburg the afternoon of the third day.

All the old union soldier Democrats in Eden had volunteered, and were inclined to be a little caste conscious over the Republicans, many of whom had been drafted.

These democrats claimed that the only way Grant won battles was to order the boys in and then get so drunk he was incapacitated from countermanding or changing his orders, in consequence of which the

boys in blue either had to win or die.

Even Republican Daugherty thought McClellan a better general than Grant, and claimed that McClellan would have ended the war in less than two years, if he had been left alone by the politicians in Washington.

During the 1892 to 1896 inclusive, I saw in Edenville, corn cribs totaling more than a mile in length, filled with corn at eight and ten cents a bushel. I saw a continuous procession of men pass through the village, out of work and on the tramp. They lived by stealing corn and potatoes from the farmers fields and per chance sometimes, "A chicken that weren't roosting comfortably." One year due to the drought there was a complete crop failure in that farmers raised just enough to carry their stock through the winter, though the market remained glutted with carry over crops.

I was keenly interested to find the reason why there was all this misery in the midst of all the visible plenty.

I listened attentively to whatever my elders had to say on the matter, and to the political campaign speakers and read everything I could find on the subject.

Some claimed the hard times was due to over production, some lack of confidence and others the shortage of money. Though the economic collapse was just another one of those that have periodically occurred.

What sense I had, told me that starvation could not be caused by production of more than could be consumed. At worst, what was needed could be eaten and the rest could waste or rot without causing suffering.

It was then at the suggestion of the principal of the Edenville School, Grant Flora, I chose money as the subject to discuss upon my graduation from Rhodes High School in the spring of 1895.



1920's - James Gray bogged down in the mud near his home.



Plato (Bert) E. Kreamer

Plato (Bert) E. Kreamer

P.E. Kreamer was born in 1879 in Jesup, Buchanan County, Iowa. He was named Plato, but he was always called Bert, and used the initials, P.E. for business. His parents were the Rev. Frederick and Susan Kreamer. The family moved to Edenville in about 1883, where his father served as pastor of the Methodist Protestant Church. He graduated from high school there in 1895, and shortly after that the family moved to Kansas City, Kansas.

He studied civil engineering, and pursued that profession all of his life, working in various places including Texas, Illinois and Canada. By 1927 he had moved to Washington, D.C. and served as a civil engineer in the government service until his retirement. He died there in 1959. He never married.

Living in Washington for so many years, he availed himself of the facilities of the Library of Congress to do extensive historical research. He was deeply concerned because he felt the country had strayed from the intentions of the founding fathers, and had lost its original purpose as set forth in the constitution. This led him to write a lengthy book, never published, which he entitled, "The Decline and Fall of the Republic." The story of the Fourth of July celebration and the history of Edenville was a part of that manuscript.

*Submitted by
Florence Logan*



One hatchet - 50¢; Eggs - 10¢ a dozen, overalls - 90¢ a pair; rice - 10¢ a lb.; raisins - 10¢ a lb.; socks, two pair - 25¢.

Old Edenville, I Love Thee Still

July 23, 1896

The editor (Collins) visited Rhodes, Monday evening, which is considered a highly respectable town where people don't laugh or talk too loud. You can hear them if you have good ears. We fancied Rhodes people are high cultured. The ethical side seemingly being largely developed to the exclusion, to some extent, of the bustling, breezy business get up and dust atmosphere of such rushing, rollicking, real live towns as Collins, for instance. That cleanliness is next to godliness the Rhodes people firmly believe. The only language that reminds us of Collins business men was when Bro. Harmon of the Review ask us if we would wish to ride out to the "dam". We did not wish to admit we needed washing but could not help admiring the religious instinct that hinted, "Wash you - make you clean". When we did not enter into the cleansing project, Bro. Harmon gave us complimentary tickets to the concert at the Opera House. The concert was good but we firmly believed his main object was that we might feast our eyes on that great work of art - the drop scene. Those that seen the art gallery at the World's Fair can appreciate the bold effects of the drop scene. Tall and majestic, the mighty snow clad peaks rise in terrific splendor, while the green fixings at the foot of the mountains include shrubbery that measured by surroundings that must be a thousand feet in height. Surrounding this work of high art, the business houses of Rhodes declared to the world their importance and demand respect. Among those honored names, the ethical predominates, for we are told that the manager of the bank of Rhodes is a good man and a Saint (Latter Day Saints), but as might be pre-expected, a "frost" hangs over the drug store. Yet there is heat in Rhodes. After the Opera was over, Bro. Harmon took us to his father's brick works. If some regular fellow in Rhodes needs a lesson he is taken to the top of the burning kiln and allowed to look into the fiery pit below. It is no wonder the people of Rhodes are ethical, we looked down into that burning kiln and thought of Hades, that is the new name for it, and there on resolved to live a better life. We are sure the readers see an improvement in this issue. If they would only go to Rhodes on Sunday where even the national name of Poker is influenced by the prevailing stillness, they would come back thoroughly rested and ready for the brisk competition of like in Collins. In conclusion, we will say that Colonel Kintz, the host of the Rhodes House, smiles on the traveler with a beam of perfect peace and contentment and the weary one is made to feel like is not all turmoil, that there are peaceful nooks and quiet retreats where the soul of man can be undisturbed in the contemplation of divine mystery of repose, accompanied by a darn good square meal.



Residence scene looking north from Main Street.



Men about town, from the left; unknown, Herb Buck, Walt Burgoyne, Henry Buck, Joe Ethington and Ross Wendel.



Residence scene, looking west from the school belfry.