

Carroll Yesteryears

27 November 2022

A Family's Journey: Following Along on the Road from Carroll County to Iowa in the 1850s

By Mary Ann Ashcraft

*Part One of the Switzer Family's migration to Iowa in 1857 appeared in the November 13, 2022, Carroll County Times. Here's the conclusion of the article, written by William Christopher for the Carroll News of January 21, 1893. It's reproduced here as it originally appeared.*

"Joshua" – said father as the morning began to dawn, "let us take one more look toward the west. We must find that boy." But the progress was slow. The track was lined with searchers, and many questions had to be answered as they passed slowly along. Yet they went on. Hours passed—fruitless, anxious hours. "That looks like a print of something" – said uncle Joshua. "Yes that is a track!" "And that, might have been blood stain." "Now let us look carefully for another." – Hush! – "Is it me you are hunting, father?" They looked up – and there like an apparition stood the veritable missing Jacob, right before them, with a curious smile and a little squatty Irish cap on his head. His father caught him round the neck and wept freely. "What on earth does this mean my boy – we have sought you with heavy hearts sorrowing – and – God has preserved you. And uncle Joshua and father clasped the boy and the big tears rolled down. "Are you hurt, my boy?" "No, father, my ear is a little scratched, that is all." A messenger was dispatched to give notice that he was found, and they proceeded slowly to the hotel to witness, not without some apprehension, the effect upon the family of great joy suddenly following profound grief.

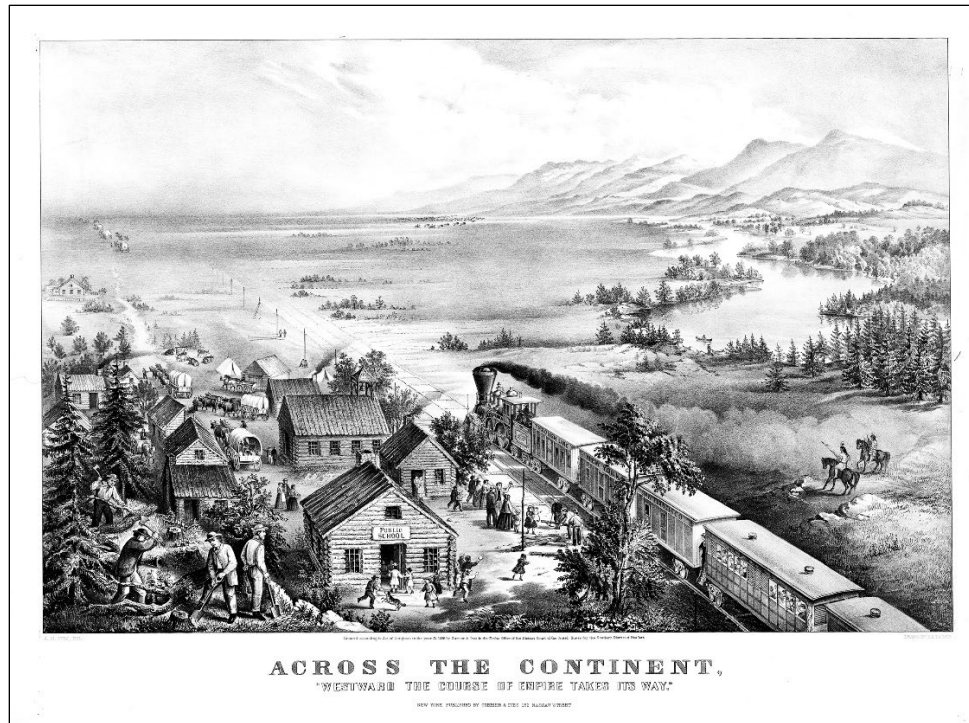
"Now Jacob" – said his mother, when the calmness of peaceful gratitude had quieted all their hearts – "tell us where you have been and how God preserved you from harm?" "I have been to Upper Sandusky," said he. "How did you get over the long bridge" – interposed the hotel keeper – It is fifteen hundred feet long, and a very high bridge?" [All the trestle part of this long bridge has since been filled up with earth, and the trestle removed. It is now only about 100 feet long.] "I walked over it before daylight this morning," said he. Just at this time a man came in, bringing his hat and one of his gloves, and said, "we have now found exactly where he fell from the train. It was at the embankment three miles west from Nevada – an embankment about fifteen feet high. He rolled down the embankment and rolled along as he rolled down to the bottom; there we found his hat and one of his gloves – here they are." "The only place" – said the hotel keeper – "that he could possibly have fallen off without being killed." "Yes sir" – said the man; "and it is evident from the marks upon the ground that he must have walked down the steps and stepped off, but let us hear him tell about it."

I don't know how I got off but I found myself climbing up the embankment, without my hat, and only one glove upon my hand. I had the impression that some one had thrown me off of the train. When I reached the top of the bank and found I was on the railroad track, in a great forest and alone in the night, it made me shudder. I looked back through the opening and saw the moon was rising, and then I knew the track ran nearly east and west; and so I determined to walk along the track toward the west; but I imagined there might be wild animals in the woods, and scarcely knew what to do. I had not gone far till a train came, meeting me on the track. It was going backward and two men were holding lights low down on the rear platform. I got off, away

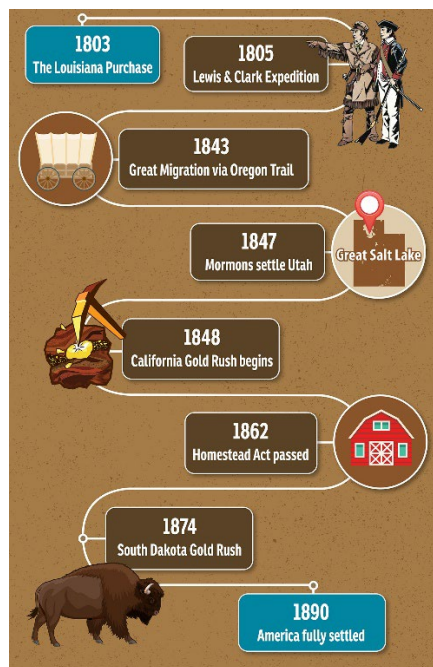
out to one side, to let it pass, then went on. After awhile another train came up behind me, and that train was running like the wind. I hardly got out of the way in time. I went on till I began to get cold, and came to where I could see a large strawstack, by moonlight, a little way from the track, and I determined to go there and stay till morning; so crawled into the straw and went to sleep. I dreamed – I dreamed of war. There were tremendous shouts, and the sound of drums beating, and the roar of guns, and a terrible charge. Then there came a wagon to gather up the wounded, and they were just going to pick me up when I awoke. I think it must have been a train passing along that made me dream of so much noise. The moon had risen higher, and I again went over to the track and walked along. After awhile I come to the long bridge and wondered how I should get over it; but I saw a board laid across wide enough to walk on, and I got on the board and went on. It was the longest bridge I ever saw. I was afraid I would meet a train on it, and I could hardly see the bottom under it. After I got over the bridge, I found myself in Upper Sandusky, and saw a light burning in a hotel. I went in there and warmed a little by the stove, when a man, who was sleeping on a lounge, awoke, and bringing, his lantern, he eyed me all over from head to foot. He asked me where I came from. I said Union Bridge, Maryland, and father was moving to Iowa. He asked me when I got off of the train; and I said I didn't know how I got off. He said – “Are you the boy that fell off of the train last night?” I said; I was on the train but I don't know how I got off. Then he looked at my ear that was bloody, and my clothes were dusty, and he said – “Where's your hat?” I told him I had lost it. Then he laughed, and said – “Old fellow you had a pretty narrow escape that time. You just stay here till morning. Your folks are all back at Nevada hunting for you; I will send you back in the morning.” So he gave me my breakfast, and a cap to wear, and then the watchman brought me back on his hand car, and I got off and walked to where I met father and uncle Joshua.

The family got aboard the train again that afternoon, and the next day reached their destination in safety. His mother, who became a widow soon after, kept all these things in her heart; and when, in after years, she heard her boy had passed through the roar, and confusion, and carnage at Winchester, and the “wagons” had gathered up her wounded boy, among others on the battlefield, she said, “The hand of the Lord is not shortened. He is still able to save my boy.” And he did; though the wounded soldier left his right foot buried at Winchester. But he reached home again to comfort his mother, and enjoy the fruits of victory; and for many years has been highly respected as one of the prominent business men of Iowa. But in all his subsequent experience he has never never had another spell of somnambulism.

*Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image 1: Courtesy Library of Congress – Caption: This Currier and Ives lithograph entitled: Across the Continent: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way.” It depicts a train paused at a pioneer settlement on the edge of a prairie and could easily represent the arrival of the Switzers in eastern Iowa in 1857.*



*Image 2: Courtesy of YourDictionary - Caption: Beginning with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pioneers like the Switzers filled the country to the Pacific Ocean.*