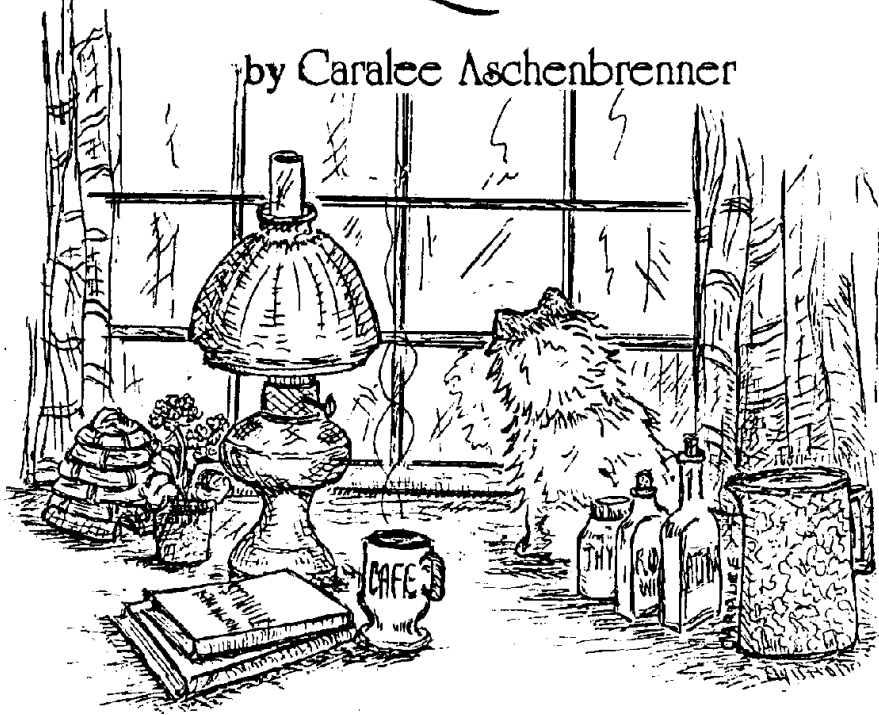


# Please Don't Quote Me ...

by Caralee Aschenbrenner



**T**oday's cities which are situated on the Mississippi owe their location to one or more quirk of nature. These were

criteria at the time of their settlement—a mooring place for keelboats, later steamboats, even to building a mill of some sort or other or where boats could take on wood to heat boilers to “steam” them along. the native American before that wanted an agreeable sloping shingle on which to land their swift canoes and, as often, a site deep enough to set up a cluster of tepees for weeks or months as a campsite with access to the natural resources of the region around them, their livelihood.

We should realize that at the time of the white man's coming the Mississippi here was much different in character than it is today—more narrow but with broad, irregular fingers edging it as sloughs, swamps, bogs or fen where grew a lush tangle of vegetation and trees. Around the open areas where scattered beaches were welcome openings were savannas of grasses which some cases were eight to ten feet tall in which a person on horseback could ride unseen or unseeing. These grasses were used as hay for livestock or for thatching-roofing, of crude log or slab dwellings or barns, a fact that is only mentioned here and there, a bit of otherwise unknown information.

Trees of many sorts reached prodigious sizes and numbers and types. They were **the** vital part of settlement at first... fuel to stoke lead smelters, then for cordwood for steamboats whose greedy maw were never slaked as civilization pushed relentlessly in. Stacks or cords of wood commonly lined the margins of the river and would sell for about \$3.50 per. Woodchopper's camps sprang up. Those with a convenient harbor or broad enough beach became permanent settlement such as Savanna.

Paths and trails had yet to be developed into any semblance of roads into the 1830s by which time lead was luring speculators and all sorts

of citizenry into a roughly triangular area... southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa and northwest Illinois. All was totally untamed except for a few tiny pockets which had to be hacked and sweat to get to. It was primitive wilderness back from the river's edge.

Settlement was slow to arise in the interior except at places where the intrepid decided to build an inn along a rutted path. Shore-line encampments took hold earlier and because of the transient nature of society might more less attract the undesirable. One could, because of the anonymity, be anything they desired, honest or treacherous. The landscape was amenable to the corrupt. There was little or no law enforcement. It was “mostly theoretical,” said one reference. The U.S. Militia stationed at Fort Crawford (Prairie du Chien) under General Zachary Taylor was the factual entity but which had thousands of acres to police when they



had to, as well as to collect the tax on the mineral rights of the lead region. A character of the new town was “dependent on the attitude of the community majority.”

Bellevue in Jackson County, Iowa, for instance became for a short while the familiar “den of iniquity” at its early day because of its most prominent populace and because of its sitting along the Mississippi which made for easy coming and going and a terrain in which to hideaway or be hidden. Protective bluffs, nice mooring and proximity just across the river on the Illinois side to the lead mines. John Bell vainly named an existing encampment for himself in 1835—Bellview.

Later misspelled, it was known as Belleview with an e. Ego never being admired in mid-America, its settlers took a dim view of Bell naming

it for himself but wished to keep the familiar label where by then was a reliable wood stop so they gave it a Frenchified title—“Bellevue,” keeping the feminine E (for beautiful) instead of the masculine, the merely be-l-l, then added the correct Gaelic—**vue**.

Town names underwent several transformations in their history as you will see. Bellevue's early reputation was notorious for being a center of counterfeiting, horsethieving, robbery even murder and other creative aspects of crime. Those who particularly were involved were miners or woodchoppers with a lot of time on their hands, boozing as well, and a leader whose organizational skills rivaled any CEO today. It was a dangerous place, and lawless around Bellevue with

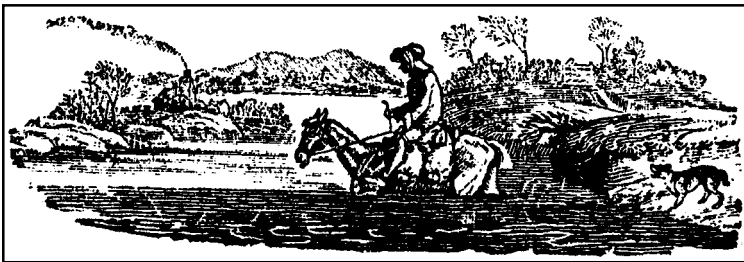
the “Bellevue War” taking place there in 1840, the culmination of good vs. evil. Its' fifteen minutes of fame were never as well known as the OK Corral forty years later not as public a character as Doc Holliday and the Earp brothers. **That** latter shoot out only lasted sixty seconds!!!

In the earlier Eastern version, four members of the posse were killed while only three of the outlaws bit the dust but thirteen were captured. The day following the shoot-out a “jury” was to decide their fate with the verdict taken in beans—white for hanging and red for whipping. Calming oratory from the able sheriff prevented the occasion from being a mass hanging. After a sound lashing for each of the miscreants, undoubtedly a few murderers among them, they were put aboard a couple of skiffs with three days supply of food with the warning never to return to Bellevue. This they promised to do with groveling thanks for the magnanimity of the verdict. However, three of these were later implicated in the heartless murder on the 4th of July, 1845 for killing

Colonel George Davenport, pioneer originator of Davenport, Iowa. Facts concerning these types of highwaymen have gradually been exposed over the years which relate that the William Brown gang at Bellevue was associated with a vast network of criminals which ranged throughout the Midwest—the Driscoll's of Ogle County being the most known here. Local histories give little notice of the nature of such crimes in our past although we all know by now that past, present and future should not be viewed in the same perspective. Communities, society evolves. Neighborhoods are highly different in character, not to be painted with the same brush.

Lawlessness was some time and infrequent but the very nature of our terrain made it easy for illegals to flourish. But most of our forefathers chose to be upright and square dealing even when the marshal was sixty-hundred miles distant.

Carrollport was a river town which chose the latter direction. They had their own fish to fry, so to speak. Only one of its citizens volunteered when call went out to bring frontier



justice to Jackson County.

Carrollport was one of those settlements which owed its origins to an opening in the slough-edged Mississippi, too, where a sand beach gave way to the wilderness beyond over the tops of the bluffs behind the shingle.

Long before it had its name, Carrollport, there was an Indian village there of long duration. Vast numbers of artifacts of their society-life and deaths, have been found in its environs. Children, picnickers of all ages from the Plum River Settlement, day trippers and transients from everywhere landed there and found carnelians in great numbers... a dark blood red-brown stone which when polished makes a mysterious, attractive jewel. Reminiscence relates that the native American lingered there after white settlement, the young attending school and some of the elder still practicing some of their craft such as basket weaving whose art was sold to locals.

Carrollport was a pleasant place but which also had another label even before its “modern” history. It was called “Prairie la Pierre,” another French appellation like

Bellevue; perhaps influenced by the nearby French settlement along the Tete des Morts Creek to the north.

In its “modern” history, however, it was called for awhile Carrollport, a destination for its first permanent white settler, Isaac Dorman, who drew onto its beach in 1835. It was said he reached there by straddling a log and paddling over the Father of Waters.

It was that very year that the once famous military personage, Lt. Colonel Stephen Watt Kearny, with three companies of U.S. dragoons set out through Iowa to explore and examine its considerable assets. It was an arduous but successful tour of eleven hundred miles with result from it being an excellent little book describing the then new frontier, “Notes on the Wisconsin Territory with Particular Reference to the Iowa District” by Lt. Albert Lea. In succeeding years Kearny would go on to dashing exploits in the West (and in 1940s cowboy movies). And it may well have been that it was during this early expedition (but PDQ me) that Bob Upton was introduced to that dash because reference states that

Bob's eventual disappearance from the scenes of the Plum River Settlement in which he so largely played a part was to go off and become a scout for the Lt.

Colonel. Bob, you know, was one of the near victims of the Indian attack on the tiny clutch of cabins, now Savanna, in 1832 during the BlackHawk War. Bob Upton, one of the colorful characters of the early day gave his name to a once popular landmark, “Upton's Cave,” a declivity in the bluff now part of Palisades Park in which he hid during the raid. It is no more because of time's erosive qualities. We don't know what ultimately happened with Bob Upton though we'd like to. He, like so many, faded from the foundations of our history who deserves to be mentioned.

Isaac Dorman, though, paddled his way to immortality. And we do know something of his contribution to area history plus his ultimate demise and burial because Carrollport grew from the determination of him and others pursuits there on a sandbar on the Mississippi, a community which persists despite the ravages of periodic flood and severe decline in economic potential.

*Next Week— More about Carrollport, etc. nee Prairie la Pierre.*