

## "John Brown in Iowa - An Exciting Journey to the Front" Letter to the Editor, May 3, 1883

### *Just Before the War*

#### *John Brown in Iowa – An Exciting Journey to the Front.*

To the Editor of the National Tribune:

Some of the boys who once wore the blue, and who are acquainted with incidents connected with my enlistment in a Kansas regiment, while I was a citizen of Iowa, have urged me to write something in relation thereto for your columns . . .

I am at this time a resident of Franklin county, Kansas within the borders of which John Brown once lived, and from whence he departed on the long journey through Kansas and Nebraska, and then across the State of Iowa . . .

In 1858, however, I resided in Iowa, directly on the line of his march and saw him and his party while en route. My home was at West Liberty, fifteen miles east of Iowa City, on the railroad leading to Davenport and Chicago . . .

Sometime in the winter of 1858-'59 - probably after January 1, '59 - it came to the knowledge of the writer and two other men and their families, that John Brown was on his way through Iowa with a party of fugitives from bondage, en route to Canada. They first stopped at Springdale, a Quaker settlement a few miles distant, and when it became generally known that they were actually in the country, and had, furthermore, announced their intention of making a long visit for the purpose of obtaining a much-needed rest, it occasioned a great deal of excitement throughout all that section of the State.

Friends and foes alike were much exercised as to what would be the result of their presence. Rumors of the most sensational character were circulated. Among other reports was one that officers from Missouri, with assistance from Iowa City, would attempt to capture the party at Springdale. However, although they were there several weeks, the old man did not seem to be in the least disturbed by the exciting rumors or the fears of his friends. He remained impassive and silent, his plans known only to himself and a trusted few. The men with him were all of that devoted number that met their death at Harper's Ferry, and it is certainly safe to say that any attempt to capture them would have been met with the same determination that they afterwards displayed. At last, when his preparations had been completed, John Brown made his appearance suddenly one night, with scarcely an hour's warning at the homes of the three families residing at West Liberty, with all his men and the colored fugitives, and a number of volunteers from the Quaker settlement . . .

Early the next morning a train from the West left a box-car near the mill, ready for use. Before the arrival of the train that was to take them forward, however, it became known throughout the village that something unusual was going on at the mill, and a large crowd soon gathered, but it proved friendly, and many a helping hand was extended to the fugitives by persons who forgot, for the time being at least, the existence of that infamous law that sought to make bloodhounds of Northern freemen. A few days after their departure came the news of their safe arrival on Canadian soil . . .

E.H. Gregg

Late First Serg't, Co C, 10th Kan. Inf. Ottawa, Kan.