

The History of Prospect Hill

By Jim Jung
 Photograph courtesy
 G. R. Lindblade & Co



Prospect Hill as it appears today.

At the time it was platted in 1854 Sioux City was rapidly becoming a gateway to the west by way of river, rail and roads. It was a time of speculation, great economic development and for people to discover their passion for adventure. An early settlement immediately west of what we now consider downtown and a monument situated there represent these times.

Prospect Hill is located in the heart of Sioux City where early city development started. The hill is bounded by Kansas Street on the east, West 1st street on the south, Sioux Street on the west and West 3rd Street on the north. The hill had been taller but landslides in 1944, 1945 and 1951 lowered it and caused it to recede. Since the base of the hill is limestone it acted as a barrier to the city from floods of the Missouri River which meandered much more than the controlled river today.

Built on Prospect Hill were primarily homes of doctors, bankers, investors, lawyers, merchants and land agents. Over time many homes suffered from the ravages of time as the residents began to occupy northern newer sections of town. There are vacant lots where homes used to stand, although some interesting houses remain.

There exist two urban legends regarding the origin of the name Prospect Hill. One version recalls that Charles Collins, editor of the Sioux City Times, in 1880, walked up the hill and met a stranger who said, "I suggest you call this hill in the future Prospect Hill." The other account is that two men salted the hill with metal filings and then started a rumor that they had found gold. There was a minor stampede of prospectors and the two men hoped that it would increase business. After this incident it was known as Prospect Hill.

The hill was a very popular spot for strollers, was the center of 4th of July celebrations and boasted a beer garden at the crest. At one time, there was a limestone cave at the foot of the hill that provided good cold storage for beer.

On April 29, 1869, three Presbyterian ministers met in prayer at the top of Prospect Hill where they could view Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. The ministers were Sheldon Jackson, Thomas H. Cleland and John Elliot. They were there to plan their travel west with the word of God. Sheldon Jackson went on to accomplish many great deeds but little is known of the other two.

Sheldon Jackson was born May 18, 1834 in Minaville, New York and at the age of



Sheldon Jackson

18 he joined the Presbyterian church, becoming an Evangelist. He only spent a few months in Sioux City before heading west and did the majority of his work in Alaska. He was responsible for extending the church to 7 states, 3 territories, naming 27 Presbyters (elders), starting 570 churches and attracting 68,850 communicants.

In 1908 a group of Presbyterians met in prayer at the top of the hill and decided to erect a monument in memory of the 1869 meeting of ministers. In 1923 the Presbyterian Synod of Iowa erected a granite monument. It can be reached by going south on Bluff Street.

The original monument plaque was stolen and now there is an inscription in the stone, but the message is not original. The original message was "To commemorate the Prospect Hill prayer meeting held by Sheldon Jackson, Thomas C. Cleland and John Elliot ministers of the gospel on this hilltop April 39, 1869 which inaugurated the movement for the evangelization of the great northwest and the regions beyond. Erected by the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., Prayer availeth much.

In 1968 when erosion started to undermine the monument, it was dismantled and moved to where it stands today. The hilltop was regraded and 20 feet of were lost.

Rededicated in 1969, on the 100th anniversary of the original meeting and again in 1997 as Presbyterian Historical Marker #102 in the Presbyterian/Reformed Historical Site Inventory.

Take a walk or a ride to the top of Prospect Hill and view the monument and three states. Then close your eyes and imagine the excitement, passion and the challenge of the unknown that these men experienced on the same spot so long ago.

Information for this article obtained from the archives of the Sloux City Public Museum.

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