

## THE FAMOUS SPANISH STIRRUPS

Found by George W. Prather near Riverton in 1874; Historical Society Expedition to the Site

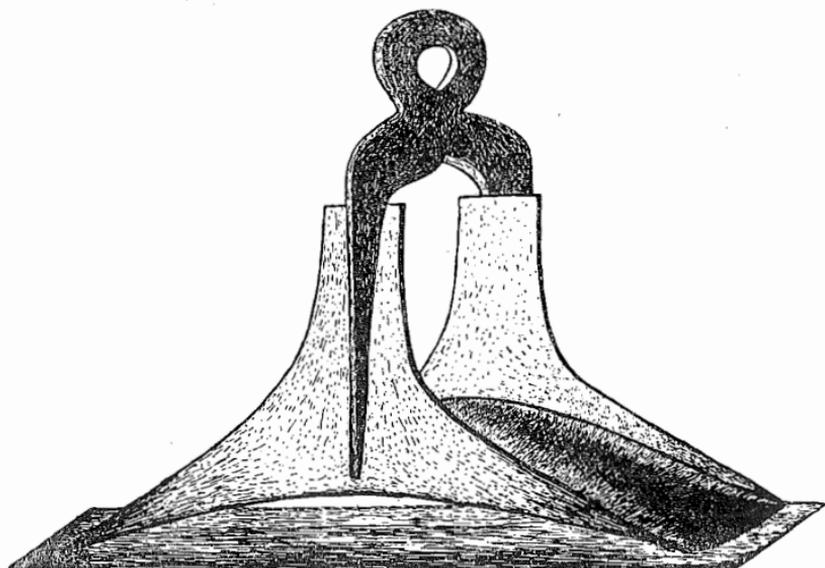
After some preliminary correspondence between Editor H. M. Crane of the *Bloomington Advocate-Tribune*, George W. Prather of Bloomington, and Supt. A. E. Sheldon of the State Historical Society it was resolved to visit Franklin county in order to secure for the Historical Society fullest possible information regarding certain Spanish stirrups found by Mr. Prather about 1874 and to secure legal authority for placing them in the State Historical Society Museum.

Through the kindness of Mr. A. T. Hill of Hastings, on Tuesday morning, December 2, 1924, Superintendent Sheldon and Mr. Hill left Hastings at 7:30 a. m. Our route was by the D. L. D. from Hastings to Minden, from Minden south to Franklin, thence west to Bloomington. At Bloomington Mr. Crane and Mr. Prather took passage with us. We drove east through Franklin to Riverton, from Riverton we followed the valley road up Thompson Creek beyond its forks to the homestead which Mr. Prather took in 1874, about 7 miles from Riverton. The site of the cabin where Mr. Prather lived 50 years before was found. After some study of the land, for Mr. Prather had not visited the place for more than 10 years, he walked across the section line road south of his cabin site to a point in a corn field about 100 feet from the fence and stopping said, "Here is the place where I found the stirrups. I marked the spot with an oak post. The land was in grass then. There was a pond in that little depression about thirty rods from where I found the stirrups, there were a few bushes between this point and the pond, otherwise this was grown over with heavy grass about two feet high."

Photographs and motionpicture films of the party and the site were taken by Superintendent Sheldon and exploration made of the adjacent region in search of evidence of a Spanish camp or ancient Indian village site. Nothing of importance in these respects was found by the party.

The present occupant of the Prather homestead, Mr. Elmer Cleman, has been there for about 30 years and stated that the land where the stirrups were found was broken up about twenty years ago and has been in cultivation since. He remembers the time when the pond mentioned by Mr. Prather stood in the field and has since filled up by cultivation and winds and no evidence of it remains. The region about is wild, rough and romantic. The West fork of Thompson creek heads within a mile of the site. There is much heavy timber now and a great deal more was there 50 years ago. The hills about are rugged and form a natural "pocket" in the prairie sheltering the place from heavy winds. Mr. Prather pointed out the place where about 400 Pawnees camped in 1875, in the timber and within 300 yards of the place where he found the stirrup. His story of the finding of the stirrup as given to Superintendent Sheldon is as follows:

"I took my cow with her lariat and picket pin from the stable near my house across the road south of the house to picket her out. It was



One of the Spanish Stirrups

about August or September as I remember. There was heavy grass there and a pond of water near by where she could drink. As I walked along through the grass my foot struck something hard. I looked down and saw what seemed to be an iron link of a log chain projecting from the ground in the midst of thick grass. I went back to the house, got my spade and dug around the iron. I dug out two metal stirrups. They were side by side. Each of them was about 6 inches wide and 9 inches long, as I remember. They were buried in the earth, except a small projection of the upper part of one stirrup. I dug all around and dug down several feet to find some other remains, but found none, except a little discolorization of the soil which I thought might have come from decayed wood. There was no track or trail where these stirrups were found, there was simply thick grass with a few bushes and a pond a short distance away."

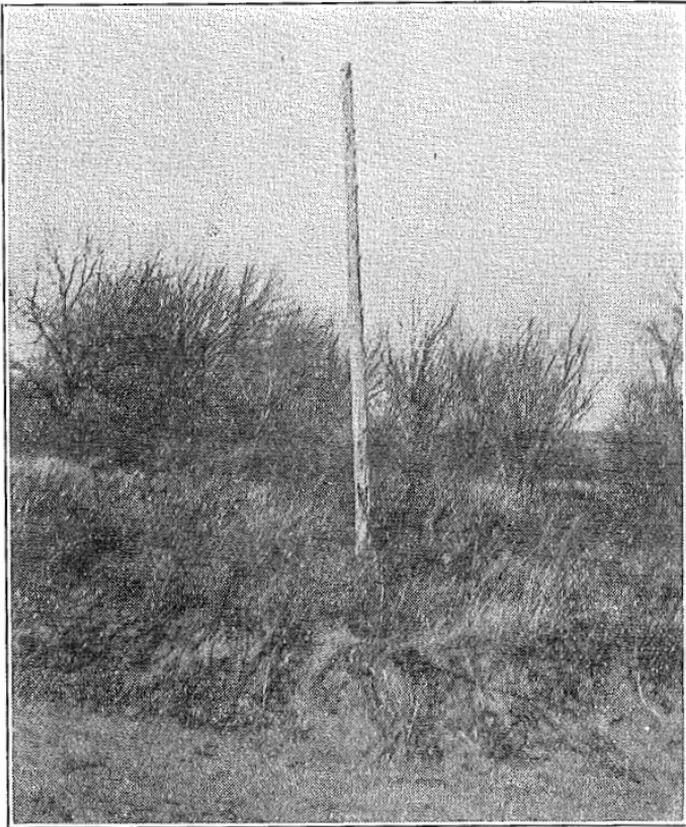
"I took the stirrups over to my cabin. Some of the neighbor settlers told me they were "Indian Spurs". I had never seen anything like them and wondered at the peculiar sharp appearance of them at the bottom where the foot would rest in them. I did not attach any special value to them, but simply wondered how they came there."

"About a year or two later (I think in 1875 or 1876) a man named Dinenny came to my place. He was agent for a school furniture company. He saw these stirrups and asked about them. I told him their history. He proposed that I send them to Prof. Samuel Aughey, at the State University, at Lincoln, who was state geologist at that time. He said Prof. Aughey could tell more about them. I let Mr. Dinenny take them to carry to Prof. Aughey for examination. I made it clear that I did not give up the ownership of them, but merely sent them to be studied so that we would know more about them.



George W. Prather Standing on the Site Where He Found the Stirrups, Dec. 2, 1924.

"It was a good many years after that when Mr. Joseph Lamaster of Tecumseh came to my house. That was after I had moved to Bloomington had been elected county judge. Mr. Lamaster brought with him one of these stirrups for me to identify. I immediately identified it as one of those which I had dug up in 1874. He then told me some of the things that had happened to the stirrups. One of them he said had been loaned to Judge James W. Savage of Omaha. Judge Savage had made a study of the Coronado Spanish expedition and given some addresses on the coming of Coronado to Nebraska. That was the reason why he wanted one of the stirrups to examine. The other stirrup had been sent to the Smithsonian Institute at Washington, D. C. They had examined it and having reported that it was of medieval Spanish make, they held on to it and would not give it up. Mr. Lamaster secured the help of U. S. Senator A. S. Paddock of Beatrice. Senator Paddock went to the Smithsonian museum and asked to see the stirrup. When they showed it to him he promptly took it and carried it away, telling them that it belonged in Nebraska and that they had no right to keep it. Mr. Lamaster then got the stirrup from Senator Paddock and brought it to me at Bloomington so that it might be identified as the one I had found."

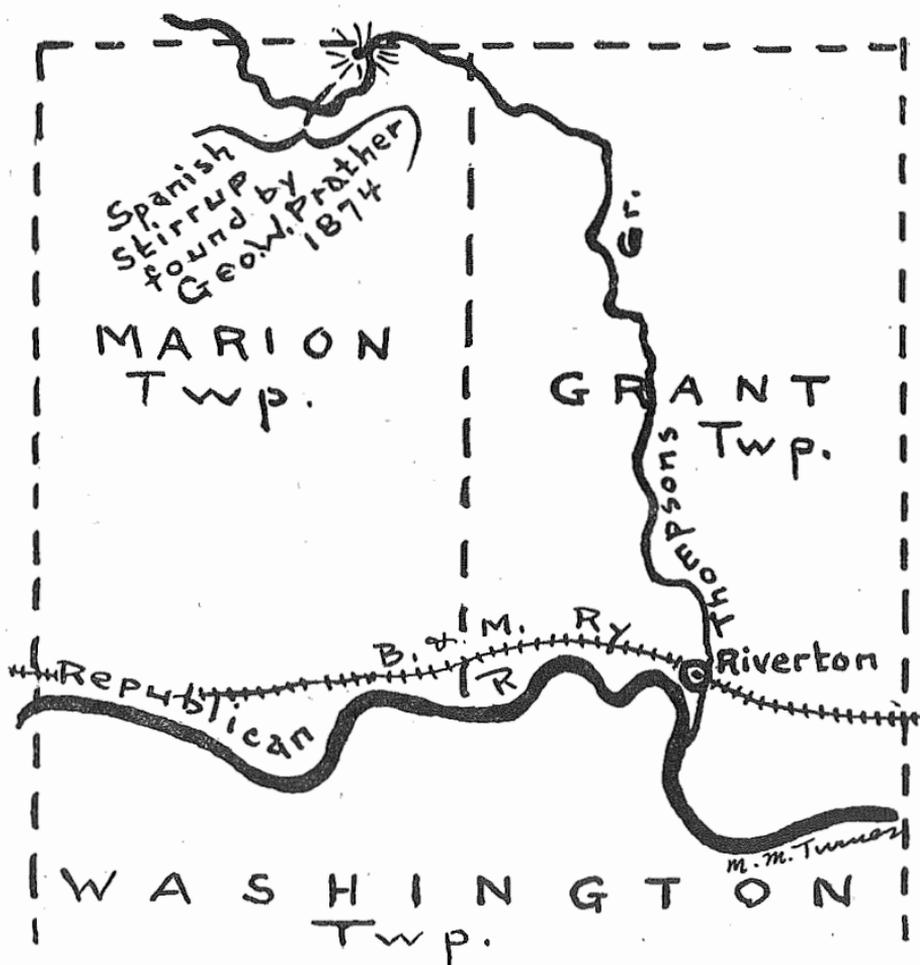


Present Appearance of Site of Mr. Prather's Homestead House  
Across the Road from Stirrup Site

"I wrote out for Mr. Lamaster the history of the stirrups as I knew it, all the circumstances of how I found them and how I had sent them to Prof. Aughey for examination and report. I also told him that they were mine and that I had never given up the ownership. I let Mr. Lamaster have the history which I wrote and the stirrup with the distinct agreement that both the stirrup and the history should be placed together in the museum of the Nebraska State Historical Society at Lincoln. He agreed that this was done and I let him take the stirrup and the history upon that agreement."

"During these years I read the story of Coronado and his journey across the plains. I got the history of Coronado's expedition and studied it carefully. I concluded that these stirrups belonged to the Coronado party and that he camped on Thompson Creek in the region where I found the stirrups. I had cleaned the stirrups while I had them and noticed that as the rust was rubbed off they appeared to be inlaid with silver and of very fine workmanship."

"Coronado in his story says he reached Quivira in the 40th degree of latitude and then went further. The 40th degree of latitude is about 12 miles south of where I found these stirrups. I found evidences of an old camp, which I believe was the Spanish camp, within a quarter of



Map of Eastern Part of Franklin County, Showing Location Where Spanish Stirrups Were Found

a mile of where I found these stirrups. The land where I found them was near the corner of the Northwest quarter of the northwest quarter of section 5, township 2, range 13 west of the sixth p. m., in Franklin county, Nebraska. I firmly believe that Coronado camped there and that these stirrups were lost by some of his party and during the long years and centuries they were covered with earth and grown over with grass."

"I am now 80 years of age. I enlisted as a soldier in the 4th regiment of Iowa infantry, commanded by General G. M. Dodge, and served through the civil war. I moved to Nebraska about 1872, and lived for a while near Beatrice. I then came to Franklin county and took a soldier's homestead where I lived when I found the stirrups. I have lived in Nebraska more than 50 years and I want to help preserve the history of the pioneer days. So it is my last wish, knowing that I have not many years to live, that both these stirrups may be secured and kept and owned by the Nebraska Historical Society and that the history of how they were found by me may be kept along with the stirrups."