

## THE DESTRUCTION OF THE NAUVOO TEMPLE.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Below is printed what is said to be the first authentic account of the burning of the Nauvoo Temple. It is written by Geo. H. Rudisill, formerly of Ft. Madison, Iowa. It appeared first in the *Evening Democrat*, of Ft. Madison. The date of its appearance we are unable to learn. Our readers must judge for themselves as to its truthfulness.

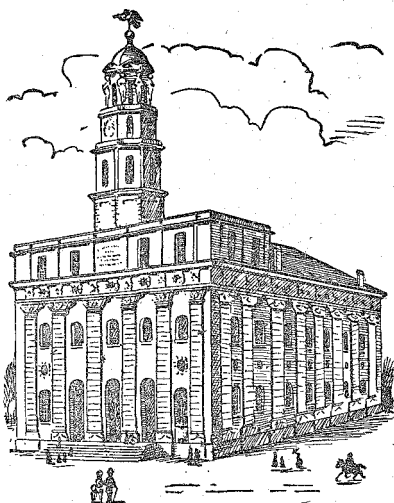
JUDGE SHARP, of Carthage, 'Squire McCauly, of Appanoose, and J. B. Agnew, of Pontoosuc, Illinois, were the men that planned and carried out the destruction of the temple. These parties were well and favorably known in Hancock County, Illinois, and also in Lee County, Iowa, but have all long since passed to that temple above [?] not made by hands but eternal in the heavens.

I will give it in Mr. J. B. Agnew's own words as near as I can recollect, which was just before his death in the fall of 1870. After telling me his story he asked me as a friend not to let it be known until after the death of all parties concerned, as they had pledged themselves to secrecy in the matter. This I told him I would do. And now that these parties are all dead it will do no harm to let it be known and it will satisfy many an old settler's curiosity.

Mr. Agnew was in failing health at the time he came to me. He told me that he was going to die soon, which I thought was true. I asked him if he had repented of his wrong-doings and he smiled and said: "Yes, all but one thing." I asked him what that one was, and he said it was the burning of the Nauvoo Temple. Says I, "Did you do that?" and he said, "Yes, I did it with my own hands. Sit down and I will tell you all about it";

which is as follows, as near as I can give it in his own words:

"The reason for our burning it was that there was continual reports in circulation that the Mormons were coming back to Nauvoo and we were afraid that they might take it into their heads to do so and as we had had all the trouble with them we wanted, Judge Sharp, of Carthage, Squire McCauly, of Appanoose, and myself, of Pontoosac, determined the destruction of their temple and by so doing they would not be able to ever again try to come back. So on the afternoon of the night it was burned. In order to make arrangements we three met on the prairie about five miles south of Fort Madison, in Illinois, the judge coming from Carthage, the squire from Appanoose, and I from Pontoosuc, and we met about where the Mormon church then stood, five miles south of Appanoose, and there we pledged ourselves to destroy the temple if it cost our lives.



NAUVOO TEMPLE.

So we journeyed towards Nauvoo on horse back and on the way tried to perfect some plan to work on. After awhile we decided to get the steward to show us through the temple and then watch our chance to get in our work. So we hid our horses in a secluded place a mile from town and walked in. We looked about town until four o'clock in the evening. I in the meantime had prepared a bundle of tinder by taking a corn sack and cutting arm holes in the top so I could put it on under my coat like a coat. I then stuck in as many tarred rags and sticks as I could carry without being noticed. I then put it on and secured some matches from a store to light my pipe, and we were ready.

"We had but little trouble finding the steward [steward] and after laboring with him for some time he at last consented to show us through, we claiming to be strangers in the country and were going away that night, and it would be our last chance, perhaps, of ever having an opportunity to visit the temple. So on these conditions he would oblige us, provided we would hurry, which we agreed to do as it was getting late and would be dark before we got through. So after a good deal of delay the key was at last inserted, it not seeming to fit, when the door swung open. We went in with a rush and kept a going, the man was left behind working with the door. He called out for us to stop, but we kept on and I noticed that he left the door with the key in it. I stepped in a side room and the other two kept on; the man ran on after them, and after he had passed me I went back to the door and unlocked it and put the key in my pocket and then ran after them.

By this time the man had discovered that I was missing, but when I came up to them I explained to them that I had stopped to look at the crucifixion, but he looked suspicious at me and from that time on he kept right by my side and would not allow us to stop but walked us right around and out. It was getting dusk and we had had no chance for me to light my fire and I saw that it was telling on my companions, that they were bitterly disappointed and we were compelled to walk out. I told them to come on in haste that we were late and would miss our boat that we were going away on, so they came along and we stopped behind a house where I told them what I had done, which made them two of the happiest fellows I ever saw. We had to watch but a few minutes until we saw the steward start away on a run, and we knew that he was going for a key or some one and that this was our chance. So leaving the judge and the squire on guard I ran back to the temple. I started for the top which I soon gained and found a good place to start my fire where it would get a good start before it would shed any light to be seen from the outside. After seeing it start to a success I began to retrace my steps with joy and a light heart for I was sure that the temple was as good as burned but I now saw that there was a good chance for me to burn with it, for I had lost my way and did not know which way to turn to get out, although I had been through the temple a number of times before. I thought if I would succeed at last in getting out that I would be sure to be caught by the steward for he would soon be back and in all probability would have help with him, for I was certain that he would lay the missing

key to us. You can imagine my feelings, being lost in a burning temple and in case that I did escape the fire I was sure of an arrest and if arrested some Mormon would be sure to kill me, so I became desperate. I ran first one way and then another in hopes of gaining some passage that I would know so as to find my way out but all to no purpose. I was getting worse lost all the time and I couldn't tell one direction from another and it was as dark as an Egyptian night. At last I came to a stairway going up and I took it with the hope that it would lead me back to whence I had started the fire and could then take a new start. After going up two pairs of stairs and through many halls I came to a square turn and a light shone away down a passage in the opposite direction from what I wanted to go, but I thought best to go and see what it was or who it was, and I soon discovered that it was my fire, which was burning at a fearful rate, sending its fiery tongues clear across the hall.

"I drew near as I could and I happened to see 'Squire McCauley's bandana handkerchief lying on the floor a short distance from the fire on the opposite side from me. So I knew that my way led through the fire as that room was the end of our trip. Now what was I to do? I knew no other way out but through that fire. I became horror stricken. Was I to be burned up by my own hands? Oh, God! what shall I do? Not knowing as it were what I did I threw my coat over my head and made a dive through that hell of fire, striking my full length on the floor and I rolled over and over until I got out of reach of the fire. When I got to my feet I took off my coat and extinguished the fire that had caught in the lining, after which I put it on again with difficulty as I tried to run for I had seriously hurt my arm and one of my legs from my fall on the floor, but I was so excited at the time I did not realize the pain until afterwards. With the assistance of a few matches I had, that I now thought of, I kept striking them along my way and at last I reached the door that I had gone in and found it standing open. The 'squire had come and thrown it open in hopes I might be able to see a star from without. They were satisfied something had happened on account of my delay. You can imagine our feelings when I stepped through the door. I pulled the door to and locked it and ran away in an easterly direction, the judge and 'squire following. I was sore, lame and burned and almost choked, not being able to speak, and when I came to a well about one hundred yards away I drank and threw the key in the well. I then told the boys to scatter and go to the horses which they did. They got there long before I did for I was almost beyond going at all.

"After reaching the horses I told them the job was done and for them to go in different directions and get home as soon as possible and avoid meeting anyone. They objected to leaving me as they were afraid that I was hurt internally, which I was fearful was the case. I had inhaled the fire and thought my time had come. I told them to go; that I would pull through. So the 'squire took the river route up the Mississippi to Appanoose, 10 miles; the judge going in a southerly direction to Carthage, which was about 16 miles, and I going the prairie route in the direction of Pontoosuc, 12 miles distance. After going about one-half mile I looked toward Nauvoo and

I saw a flickering light and the next minute the flames bursted through the roof and lit up all the country around for miles as light as day. I put my horse into a dead run in the direction of the Mississippi timber which I gained in time without being seen, as the people on the road were all in bed, but I had no sooner jumped my horse over a fence into a field and secreted myself behind some bushes when along came seven horsemen on their way to the fire which had by this time been discovered for twenty miles around. After they had passed I again tried to mount my horse, but found it was impossible, and that my leg had swollen so that I could not walk. I was in a fix sure enough. What to do I did not know, but I had to do something, so I got down on my hands and knees and began to crawl towards a clump of trees, leading my horse. When I arrived at the timber I fortunately found a large tree which had been cut down leaving a high stump. I got up on the tree; then on the stump, and from there onto my horse. I then went back, jumped my horse over the fence. I was suffering so internally that I could but just hold to my saddle. I turned my horse in the direction of 'Squire McCauly's cabin, where I arrived just before day. I found that the 'squire had got home nearly two hours before. He was surprised to be called out by me, but after giving him to understand my condition he cried like a child. He took me in and hid me away for a week, where he and his wife cared for me as they would for one of their own until I was able to go about without suspicion. The judge got home the next night following the night the temple was burned, having to ride in the woods on Rock Creek all day, which was in the south side of Rock Creek township."

So after nearly fifty years the true history of the burning of the great Mormon temple is made known. The narrator of this story, as told by Mr. Agnew, was a small boy at the time of the burning of the temple, living with his mother just west of Fort Madison, Iowa, and he recollects seeing the light from the burning building on that memorable night. Over twenty years after the destruction of the temple I became intimately acquainted with all the parties connected with this narrative. They were all men of good standing and wide and favorably known, and they have many relatives and friends in Hancock county that will read this with surprise.

GEO. H. RUDISILL.

BOWLING GREEN, Florida.

