

Prospects from Prospect Hill, Part 1: Saved by a Mulberry Bush

It wasn't upkept--I'll say that much. The grass could have used a trim, but the City is keeping it up adequately, as well they should. It stands at the very top of Prospect Hill, where once some obscure Sioux City history was created. The Prospect Hill Monument, as it's called, attempts to remember an event 152 years ago that today wouldn't snag a *Journal* headline.

If you stand beside it, then take a few steps southward to the edge of the bluff, the view is extraordinary—Sioux City bustling away in three states, each state visible beyond the winding river and its interstate sidekick. The South Sioux bridge is right beneath you, and a couple hundred cars and trucks. Prospect Hill offers one busy cityscape.

But nothing out there is the same as it was in 1869, when the “monumental” event occurred. Not even Old Muddy. The river was more braided, far less drawn-and-quartered by upstream dams. It could be placid enough mid-summer; but the longest river in America, rain-swollen, was often a dirty rascal.

A few hundred souls lived here, Sioux City a barely established frontier village, home to a French-Canadian named Theophile Brugeiur. His two wives were daughters of War Eagle—yes, that War Eagle. He and those two spouses reared thirteen kids.

Another French-Canadian, Joseph Leonais, a trapper who'd run the river for so often he knew every inlet, fell in love with the good land at the mouth of the Floyd.

Leonais knocked on the door of the only log cabin in the neighborhood one night and was delighted to find an old buddy Brugeiur, who'd put down roots

of his own nearby. Leonais wanted a chunk of that good land and made an offer--\$100 for 160 acres. Done, Theophile said. That land is downtown Sioux City.

The Sioux City Museum says what's to come may be legend, but let's just pretend not--the story is too much fun. Once the deal was set, a party followed at which Leonias tipped some considerable brew so when he trotted off, his Brugieur wondered if his new neighbor would find his way back. He sent out one of his thirteen kids to bring the dinged Leonais back safely.

As you can guess, I wouldn't be telling the tale if it didn't bring us to Prospect Hill, First Street and Bluff, right here in town. Leonais, plastered, saw the kid coming and figured he wanted to race, so he kicked his trusty mount into high gear and took off—ON PROSPECT HILL.

Not smart.

Off the cliff he went, arse over tea kettle, as Theophile might have said—or the French equivalent.

Leonais fell into a mulberry bush that saved his life, but his horse tumbled down the bluff and drowned in the shivery river below.

Now, that big white monument up on our Prospect Hill has absolutely nothing to do with Joseph Leonais or Theophile Brugeiur, who sound like biblical characters, but weren't, to be sure.

That old alabaster monument has wholly different origins, as we shall see in a some upcoming "Small Wonder(s)."

Sioux City's great forgotten monument is dedicated not to a potted pioneer saved by mulberries, but three Presbyterians who didn't get smashed, but gathered there on Prospect Hill to pray—that's right, to pray.

Seriously. That's what the monument says. Climb up there sometime, have a look, read the print, wander over to the side of the bluff, take a few seconds to honor an imaginary mulberry bush full of Joe Leonais.

That monument over there on First and Bluff, that's holy ground.

More to come. Stay tuned.