

ISAAC GALLAND: BOTH SIDES OF THE RIVER

Susan Easton Black

If the mighty Mississippi could speak of saint and sinner, it would unravel the anomaly created by the life of Isaac Galland. In Keokuk, Iowa, tabloids, tossed nonchalantly inside grocery bags, herald Galland as a saint. Today, an elementary school in Iowa and even a city proudly bear his name.¹ However, less than a mile across the Mississippi, old-timers in Illinois weave an angry tale of Galland as a scoundrel, a man of unscrupulous character, a counterfeiter, and even a blackard. The life of Isaac Galland is a dichotomy of a man who lived on both sides of the river. Polarized views written in tabloid vignettes in Iowa and a villainess tale spun by storytellers in Illinois leave the question of saint or sinner unanswered.

As the Mississippi cuts through a continent, dividing asunder the east from the west, it appears the mighty river concealed the secret of the dual nature of Isaac Galland from reaching either bank before 1839. However, from 1839-42, Galland had an encounter with Mormonism; and, for a brief moment, his Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde character was revealed to both sides of the river.

GALLAND'S EARLY YEARS

Isaac Galland, son of Matthew Galland and Hannah Fenno, was born on 15 May 1791 in Somerset County, Pennsylvania.² At an early age, he moved with his parents from Pennsylvania to Marietta, Ohio, a frontier settlement on the Ohio River. In Marietta, he received a rudimentary education, although family tradition purports that at age thirteen the boy prodigy left his parental home to study theology at the prestigious William and Mary College.³ Historical documentation counters the notion of "boy prodigy," as it reports Galland's leaving Marietta in search of gold in New Mexico instead of educational pursuits. Gold fever, the first of his many fiascos, ended when he was seized by Mexican officials on suspicion of "evil design" and confined for a year in an

adobe prison in Santa Fe.⁴

Emerging from prison, Galland returned to Marietta—perhaps with a tale of his precocious studies at the William and Mary College. His renewal of familial ties was brief, as land out west in Indiana and Illinois



Isaac Galland

beckoned his adventurous spirit. Settling on the frontier of Illinois, Galland announced to unsuspecting contemporaries in Edgar County that he was an attorney. Because he lacked basis for the claim, his legal reputation was soon questioned and then refuted. At age 21, he was accused of stealing a horse and of counterfeiting and was driven from Edward County by local authorities.⁵ His antics led associates on the eastern bank of the Mississippi to call him a "scoundrel" and his three abandoned wives to label him even worse.⁶

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He fled from the harangue of name-calling across the wide river to the territory of Iowa. The watery deep that divided Illinois from Iowa did not divulge the tainted identity of Galland to squatters on its western banks. Galland was able to start anew—to carve out a respected life and reputation. By 1830, Isaac Galland had become almost revered by fellow Iowans. To the frontiersmen, he was the progressive-thinking benefactor who had built the first schoolhouse, fathered the second “white” child, and platted the city of Keokuk.⁷ He was the articulate editor who had printed the second newspaper in the Iowa wilderness, *The Western Adventurer and Herald of the Upper Mississippi*.⁸ He was the accomplished author of *Galland's Iowa Emigrant*.⁹ At his fur-trading post in Nashville, he was a benevolent friend to Indian, trapper, and new settler alike. He was also the negotiator and mediator who added the balm needed when problematic issues disturbed the tenuous peace existing between the new settlers and the American natives.

But to Iowans, first and foremost, Isaac Galland was Dr. Galland, noted medical practitioner. As a physician without educational attainment, he was applauded for paddling canoes up and down the dangerous waters of the Mississippi from Fort Madison to Nashville, bringing relief to the sufferer from ills inherent in the Mississippi Valley. In historical reflection of his medical contributions, Dr. C. F. Wahrer, president of the Iowa Medical Association, wrote:

It is said of him that he was a brilliant physician and was specially successful in the treatment of cholera, as well as the prevention of the epidemic. One of his contributions was a medicine chest or box about one foot cubic, on which was printed in red letters, “Dr. Isaac Galland's Family Medicines.” This box contained the usual and ordinary remedies used by the doctors in those days, and was placed in nearly every cabin in his wide field of practice.¹⁰

In 1832, at the outbreak of the Black Hawk Indian War, Galland moved across the river to Fort Edwards, Illinois.¹¹ At the fort, he enlisted in the 59th regiment of the Illinois Militia and was given the rank of colonel. The military rank had more to do with the selection of his fourth wife, Elizabeth Wilcox, the sister of the commander of Fort Edwards, than with his military prowess.¹² As

the threat of war abated, Isaac forsook his military commission but chose to remain in Illinois.

His new thrust as a citizen of Illinois was politics. Galland entered the political arena in 1834 with the same gusto that mirrored his former legal practice by announcing his candidacy as a state representative to the Illinois congress. Political opponents jeered at his announcement and took delight in disclosing his earlier fraudulent exploits. Governor Thomas Ford in the *History of Illinois* reported:

Dr. Galland had been a notorious horse thief and counterfeiter belonging to the “Massac Gang.” And that when running for representative to Congress from the congressional district comprising Hancock, Adams and Pike counties in 1834, Galland freely admitted the charge.¹³

“Yes, siree, I've been found guilty of most everything except hog stealing—and I never owned a hog,” quipped Galland.¹⁴ His bid for the legislature was unsuccessful.

GALLAND'S EXPERIENCES WITH THE MORMONS

Galland's next venture disclosed his dual personality to both sides of the river. The venture began when he accepted employment as an agent or trustee for the New York Land Company. As an agent, he touted such unlikely places as Commerce, a “paper town” bordering the eastern bank of the Mississippi, as a bargain to unsuspecting investors in the East. He imagined for himself a quick dollar in selling the swampland of Commerce as an investment windfall.¹⁵

Galland's excitement for shuffling real and pretended landholdings was stifled and then crushed by the national financial panics of 1837 and 1839. The panics and negative rumors of the unhealthy location of his landholdings left little basis for his optimistic projections. Adding to his woes was complicated litigation that would likely terminate in favor of the documented landholder instead of Galland's expansive, but zealous, claims. Galland's tenuous claim to extensive acreage in Commerce and his 119,000 “Half-breed Tract” acres in Iowa led him to search for an immediate buyer.¹⁶ Recklessly, he offered to sell Commerce in 1839 for almost no money down.

Where was a buyer for his investment gone sour? The answer to the query was Mormon exiles from Missouri. As exile Israel Barlow recounted the cruelties against the Mormons to those residing near the Des Moines River, tender sympathies were evoked; and letters of introduction to Dr. Isaac Galland of Commerce were forthcoming. When Barlow met Galland, Barlow discovered that Galland not only professed to be a land speculator but also claimed himself to be an avowed Methodist, who on several occasions had "filled pulpits in the absence of the preacher."¹⁷

With religious leanings added to his repertoire, Galland was able to listen intently as Barlow rehearsed the dire situation of the Mormons who were escaping to Illinois from the horrors of an extermination order in Missouri.¹⁸ Encouraged by Galland's interest, Barlow informed Mormon leaders in Quincy, Illinois, of land for sale in Commerce. On 26 February 1839, Galland wrote a letter to the Mormons of Quincy in which he invited them to rent farms and cabins in his locality.¹⁹ He offered to sell twenty thousand acres of the half-breed tract (between the Des Moines and Mississippi Rivers) for as little as \$2 per acre, to be paid in twenty annual payments without interest.

The generous offer of Isaac Galland was discussed at a Mormon conference in Quincy. Those attending the conference did not agree with the advisability of locating on his land. However, an epistle written by Joseph Smith from Liberty Jail on 25 March 1839 changed Mormon opinion:

It still seems to bear heavily on our minds that the Church would do well to secure to themselves the contract of the land which is proposed to them by Mr. Isaac Galland, and to cultivate the friendly feelings of that gentleman, inasmuch as he shall prove himself to be a man of honor and a friend to humanity.²⁰

Anxious for the Mormons of Quincy to settle on his swampland in Illinois and Iowa, Dr. Galland solicited a supportive letter from Governor Robert Lucas of Iowa Territory. On 12 April 1839, the governor's message was printed in the *Quincy Argus*: "[Mormons] are entitled to rights and legal protection that other citizens are entitled to."²¹ On 20 April 1839, a committee composed of Mormon founder Joseph Smith and two other Church

leaders purchased land from Galland for \$18,000. Of the transaction, Galland wrote, "Sold for 18 thousand dollars, to be paid likewise \$900 annually for 20 years, the above sales were made to the people called Mormons who were last winter expelled from the state of Missouri."²² The land was deeded to George W. Robinson because Sidney Rigdon insisted that "no committee should control any property which he had anything to do with."²³ It was understood that Robinson would deed the land to the Mormon Church after the indebtedness had been retired.

Joseph Smith said of the purchase, "The place was literally a wilderness. The land was mostly covered with trees and bushes, and much of it was so wet that it was with the utmost difficulty that a footman could get through, and totally impossible for teams."²⁴ He further observed, "Commerce was unhealthy, very few could live there; but believing that it might become a healthy place by the blessing of heaven to the saints, and no more eligible place presenting itself, I considered it wisdom to make an attempt to build up a city."²⁵ On 24 April 1839, Joseph Smith "advised the brethren, who could do so, to go to Commerce and locate in Dr. Galland's neighborhood," which consisted of "one stone house, three frame houses, and two block houses, which constituted the whole city of Commerce."²⁶

As Galland became acquainted with Mormons in his neighborhood, his interest in Mormonism heightened. Before long, he discarded his Methodist leanings for the faith of the Mormons and was baptized on 3 July 1839 by Joseph Smith.²⁷ His conversion was deemed so significant that the First Presidency of the Mormon Church penned the following to the members of the "Church Abroad":

Dr. Isaac Galland . . . who is one of our benefactors . . . opened both his heart and his hands, and "when we were strangers, took us in," and bade us welcome to share with him in his abundance, leaving his dwelling house, the most splendid edifice in the vicinity, for our accommodation, and partook himself to a small, uncomfortable dwelling . . . He is the honored instrument the Lord has used to prepare a home for us . . . Being a man of extensive information, great talents, and high literary fame, he devoted all his powers and influence to give us



Isaac Galland
courtesy LDS Church Archives

a standing.²⁸

From all appearances, Isaac Galland, who had no small reputation on the Iowa side of the river, was now regarded as a benefactor also in Illinois. The Lord revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith on 19 January 1841: "Let my servant Isaac Galland put stock into that house; for I, the Lord, love him for the work he hath done, and will forgive all his sins; therefore, let him be remembered for an interest in that house from generation to generation" (D&C 124:78).

Whether he donated to the construction of the Nauvoo House is not known; however, his defense of his newfound religion is known. In July 1841, he wrote a seventeen-page pamphlet, "Doctor Galland's Reply to Various Falsehoods, Misstatements, and Misrepresentations Concerning the Latter Day Saints, Reproachfully Called Mormons."

His talents in land dealings were soon needed by the Mormon Prophet. In a letter written on 25 August 1841 to Horace R. Hotchkiss, Joseph Smith announced the appointment of Isaac Galland as a land agent for the Mormon Church. "I delegated my brother Hyrum and Dr. Isaac Galland to go east and negotiate for lands with our friends, and pay you [Hotchkiss] off for the whole purchase that we made of you."²⁹

Galland and Hyrum Smith arrived in Pennsylvania in March 1841; however, because of illness, Hyrum returned to Nauvoo after a few weeks. The unexpected illness and departure left the responsibility of Mormon land exchanges exclusively with Galland. Four months later, Joseph Smith recorded, "This day, January 18, 1842, I revoked my power of attorney given to Dr. Isaac Galland to transact business for the Church."³⁰ The reason for this action is hinted in a letter the Prophet wrote to Galland on 19 January 1842:

I have become embarrassed in my operations to a certain extent, and partly from a presentation of notes, which you, as my agent, had given for lands purchased in the eastern states, they having been sent to me. I have been obliged to cash them, and having no returns from you to meet those demands, or even the trifling expenses of your outfit, it has placed me in rather an unpleasant situation . . . And now, sir . . . I think we had better have a settlement, and if I am owing you, I will pay you as soon as I can, and if you owe me, I shall only expect the same in return, for it is an old and trite maxim, that short reckonings make long friends.³¹

With his financial transactions in question, Galland returned to Nauvoo to substantiate his altruistic motives. He counseled with Joseph Smith on 2 February 1842, and "the unusual thing concerning Dr. Galland's agency for the Church is that no formal action was taken against him for any wrongdoing."³² However, his direct association with Mormons apparently was over. The last-known interaction between Galland and the Mormon prophet was a letter dated 11 March 1843 in which Galland reported his outrage at John C. Bennett's lectures against Mormonism and at the arrest of Porter Rockwell in Missouri.³³

GALLAND'S FINAL YEARS

Galland crossed the river to the Iowa side after his disaffection from Mormonism and apparently never returned to Illinois as a resident. He lived in Keokuk from 1842-53. During these years, he must have known of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and the rumored extermination of Mormons in Nauvoo. He must have read newspaper accounts of the injustices perpetrated against the Mormons and of their exodus from Nauvoo in midwinter of 1846. From his vantage point at Keokuk, he must have seen flatboats, old lighters, and a number of skiffs, as Mormons formed a makeshift fleet carrying exiles across the river. Yet no historical recording can be found on either side of the river of his reaching out to help former coreligionists.

What took the place of Galland's abandoned religious leanings? By 1851, he had entered the political arena again, running on the "Possum" ticket for the Iowa legislature. Surprised by his unsuccessful political bid, he concluded that the forces of darkness must have caused his loss. He turned to spiritualism for solace and became "a firm and zealous believer in Spiritualism, and was heard to say that Joe Smith was the dupe of his own impostures; that Smith was simply a so-called spiritual medium."³⁴

Comfort in spiritualism waned by April 1853 as his life tilted toward an earlier escapade—gold fever. The call of "gold in them thar hills" led him from the banks of the Mississippi to Sacramento, California, with only a brief stop in Salt Lake City, where he was kindly entertained by Brigham Young.³⁵ Three years later, an impoverished Galland returned to Iowa. Fortune smiled when he learned that a lawsuit brought against his former employer, the New York Land Company, had netted him \$11,000.³⁶ The unexpected windfall softened his craving for wealth, fame, and notoriety.³⁷ The last two years of his life were quiet while he resided among longtime friends at Fort Madison, Iowa. However, to "his dying breath, Galland felt the Mormons cheated him by non-payment of money owed for the land he purportedly sold them."³⁸ Galland died on Monday, 27 September 1858, in Fort Madison at the age of sixty-seven and was buried in the city cemetery near the fort. His son, Washington Galland, a member of the Iowa legislature, was instrumental in placing a beautiful marble monument over his remains.³⁹ The manuscript he had been writing on Indian life, manners, and customs was published posthumously

in 1869 in *Annals of Iowa* and is entitled, "The Indian Tribes of the West: Their Language, Religion and Traditions."

CONCLUSION

The mighty Mississippi divided a man from himself. Iowans revere Galland for his generosity to those living on the western side of the river. Yet, for those living near the river in Illinois, he is abhorred and is portrayed in blackest terms. The man who lived on both sides of the river may have hoped the watery deep would keep his dual identity from crossing the expanse. If such hopes existed, they have been in vain.

Where historical recounting has lapsed, folklore, tradition, and even fiction have filled in the cracks. The story of Isaac Galland, woven by fact and fiction, is a tale of odd proportions. Was he a saint or a sinner? Do fiction or facts cloud the issues? Perhaps the reader of this odd tale will unravel his true identity and solve the dichotomy his life presents. Whether Galland was a Dr. Jekyll or a Mr. Hyde is difficult to confirm, but no doubt exists that he was a deceiver.

NOTES

1. Galland first settled at Ah-wip-e-tuck, the head of the rapids, later named by him Nashville, Iowa. The town is located three miles below Montrose and was founded in 1829. It was renamed Galland, Iowa, in honor of Isaac Galland. Galland Hill on the Montrose-Keokuk river road is also named for him. A portrait of Isaac Galland hangs in the Iowa Historical Society building at Iowa City, Iowa. The painting was done by Charles Caleb Bingham and was donated to the museum by a relative. The original is 28" x 32" and was painted in 1830 at a cost of \$100.

2. Sources vary as to his exact birthdate. According to the 1850 census of Keokuk, Lee County, Iowa, he was born in 1791 in Pennsylvania. The Iowa Historical Society lists his birth as 1792 near Chilicothe, Ohio. *Annals of Iowa* records his birth as 5 May 1790 near Marietta, Washington, Ohio.

3. "Historical account of Dr. Isaac Galland," written in the bible of Washington Galland, in the possession of Ralph Smith. The bible account of his life is reported in *The Gate City and Constitution—Democrat* (Keokuk,

Iowa), 29 April 1941.

4. "Miscellaneous," *History of Lee County, Iowa*. (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1879), 548, in author's possession.

5. "Keokuk's First Citizen Was a Doctor!" *Shoppers Free Press* (Keokuk, Iowa), 10 January 1979, 2.

6. Isaac Galland was married to Nancy Harris on 22 March 1811 in Madison County, Ohio. He married Margaret Knight by 1816. He married Hannah Kinney on 5 October 1826 in Fulton County, Illinois.

7. A boulder marking the site of the first school-house was unveiled on 18 October 1924 by the Keokuk Chapter of the DAR. The site of the old school, built in October 1830, is now covered with water backed up by the Keokuk Dam. A log replica of the school was built on the bluff by the Lee County Schoolmasters Association.

8. His first paper was printed on 28 June 1837 in Montrose, Iowa. The paper was discontinued in 1838, and only a few issues have been preserved. Galland sold the paper to James G. Edwards, who changed the name of the paper to *Fort Madison Patriot*.

9. *Galland's Iowa Emigrant—Containing a Map and General Description of Iowa Territory* (Chillicothe, Missouri: William C. Jones, 1840). (Reprinted in 1849 by the State Historical Society of Iowa.)

10. *Ibid.*

11. Fort Edwards is now the site of Warsaw, Hancock, Illinois. From the reminiscences of his daughter, Eleanor McPherson Thornborg, "The friendship of Black Hawk for Dr. Galland was shown by the fact that he warned the family and they took refuge in a nearby fort." In author's possession.

12. Elizabeth Wilcox became his fourth wife on 25 April 1833. She is the sister of Major John R. Wilcox, a graduate of West Point.

13. Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co., 1854), 406.

14. "A Man of Conflicting Aspects—That Was the Famous Dr. Galland," *The Daily Gate City* (Keokuk, Iowa), 13 April 1960.

15. Known first as Quashaquema to the Sac and Fox Indian tribes, then as Venus in 1834, and by 1839 as the "paper town" of Commerce.

16. Galland was indicted in 1850 by D. W. Ilbourn in his twenty-four-page booklet, "Strictures on Dr. I. Galland's Pamphlet, Entitled, 'Villany Exposed,' with Some Account of His Transactions in Lands of the Sac and Fox Reservations, Etc. in Iowa."

17. "Miscellaneous."

18. John M. Madsen, "Study of Dr. Isaac Galland," n.p., 18 August 1964, 10.

19. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 2:5-6.

20. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 3:298 (hereafter cited as HC).

21. HC 3:318.

22. Letter of Isaac Galland to Samuel B. Swasey, 22 July 1839, as cited in Lyndon W. Cook, "Isaac Galland—Mormon Benefactor," *BYU Studies*, 19 (Spring 1979) 276.

23. HC 3:342.

24. HC 3:375.

25. HC 2:9.

26. HC 3:375.

27. Edward Stevenson, *Selections from the Autobiography of Edward Stevenson, 1820-1897 (1820-1846)*, Joseph Grant Stevenson, ed. (Provo, Utah: Stevenson's Genealogical Center, 1986), 59.

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28. HC 4:270-71.
29. HC 4:406.
30. HC 4:495.
31. HC 4:499-500.
32. Cook 281.
33. Letter of Isaac Galland to Joseph Smith, 11 March 1843, LDS Church Archives.
34. Madsen 10.
35. He resided during the winter of 1853 with his sister, Mary Galland Casto, in Salt Lake City.
36. His friend, Dan F. Miller, of Keokuk had succeeded in settling his case against the New York Land Company.
37. One biographer noted that Galland was still "quick-tempered and quarrelsome, never hesitating to attack an enemy with a sword cane, which he always carried with him," as cited in "Dr. Isaac Galland," n.p., n.d., in author's possession; "A Man of Conflicting Aspects—that was the famous Dr. Galland," *The Daily Gate City*, (Keokuk, Iowa), 13 April 1960.