

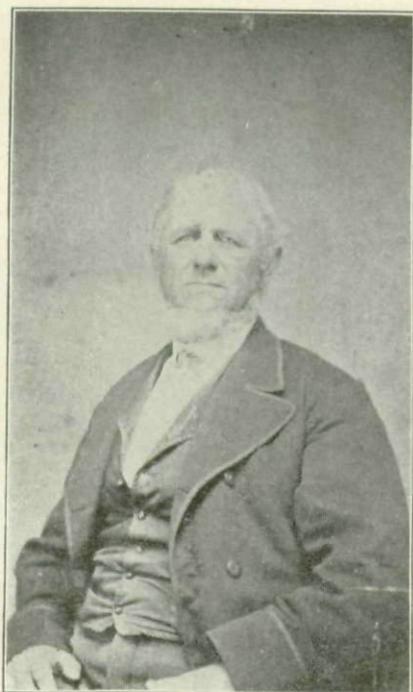
OPENING AN IOWA COUNTY.

BY HON. JOHN M. BRAINARD.

Forty years ago is not so very long in the past, but it was "the dawn of history" to many portions of Central Iowa. Scraps of records which throw light upon that penumbrous period and hold the mirror up to the "manners and customs" of those times, are of interest in this day. The musty files of the courts would not, at first thought, commend themselves as promising lodgment for unique historical information, yet from so unpromising a source have been unearthed the materials for the following pages.

In the summer of 1855 there came from Granby, Connecticut, to Boone county, Iowa, Arden B. Holcomb, spying out the land. He was fifty-one years of age, versatile in business, with knowledge of the law, and possessed of the native shrewdness, thrift, genius for adventure and finance characteristic of the sons of New England. He came to be well known for many years in Boone and adjoining counties as "Judge Holcomb," an inheritance from the presidency of some minor court in the land of steady habits. He died in the city of Boone, in the fall of the year 1879, in the seventy-sixth year of his age.

He brought with him from his eastern home some money for investment, and some belonging to one Edmund Holcomb, which was also invested, in his own name, the proceeds of the venture to be shared with the eastern namesake. In 1878 suit was brought in the Circuit Court of the United States, District of Iowa, between Judge Holcomb and the heirs of Edmund Holcomb, to determine their respective rights in this joint investment, the property involved having become a valuable part of the city of Boone. The defendants filed as their testimony, a printed



JUDGE A. B. HOLCOMB.

brief, a transcription of some thirty-six letters written by Judge Holcomb to the Granby partner between the years 1855 and 1866.

These are in the tone of utmost frankness as from an intimate acquaintance to his friend, by a man in the fullness of his powers; sagacious, daring yet cautious, visionary it may be, as became the times when the boundless prairies of Iowa were smiling for emigrants and its virgin groves beckoning the saw-mill. It is in this freedom of expression, the non-intent for publication, accurate description, faithful characterization, and the aroma of those early days therein preserved, that lie the chief charms of these epistles. With the hope that their perusal may be in some degree entertaining and instructive, and preservative of the spirit of those pioneer times, extracts from these quaint, old letters are herewith reproduced. Their flavor and truthfulness to the era will be readily recognized by "the old citizen," whose recollection can doubtless find many parallels to the pictures. The first letter is dated

BOONESBORO, IOWA, July 24, 1855.

Turned up at last at this place. It is the geographical center of Iowa, the county seat of Boone county, and one of the points of great interest to land operators. Everybody seems wild with the excitement of entering government lands. "Benton's mint drops"* fly freely and fortunes are made, sure and no mistake. Forty per cent interest is the lowest sale last week. I got a quarter section. As soon as lands are secured they are valued at \$3.50 per acre for prairie and \$5.00 for timber. So I made a good operation. I am in for three or four quarter sections at the sale this week. The lands are now all mostly taken within ten miles of this place. If any are found there is snatching for them. But I understand their games and can stand as good a chance as any one—a \$300 profit by securing a quarter section is as good for me as for anyone. A man must have his eye-teeth cut before it will do to venture. I supposed that all a man had to do was to select his land and make his entry whenever he pleased; but the case is very different. You obtain, for fifty cents, a plat at the land office, of any township you wish,

* Thomas H. Benton, by reason of his advocacy of metallic currency while a U. S. Senator, was called "Old Bullion," and the money he favored was denominated "Benton's mint drops." The quaint, double allusion can be readily interpreted by recalling the fondness, below Mason and Dixon's line, for "mint" in certain combinations.

which shows you the sections entered in it up to date. You make your selections of unentered lands and be ready for the sale, at which they call the townships in their order, naming the sections not heretofore entered, and you enter your name for the land. But, generally, there are many applicants for the same piece. Then comes the strife. They bid upon each other, and the highest bidder takes it. Consequently they have exciting times at the sale, and the timid and cautious choose to purchase at second-hand rather than run the gauntlet at these sales.

The town is now in the third year of its settlement. The public building is not yet built and courts are held in the log school house. The town has about forty houses and two hundred inhabitants. It lies in the bend of the Des Moines river, its valley covered with heavy timber; yet for want of saw-mills, all the lumber, up to this spring, had to be brought from thirty to forty miles. Now there is a steam saw-mill running, and two more in process of erection; also, two grain mills, which will be running in October. Other than this, there is no grain mill within one hundred miles. The heaviest timber land can be purchased for from \$5.00 to \$12.00 per acre. There are black and white walnut, basswood, different kinds of oak, elms, etc. Lumber is selling from the mills here, as fast as they turn it out, at \$2.00 per hundred.

Of the fertility of the soil—it can't be excelled. The prairie is rolling, a most magnificent sight. It reminds me of the handsomest Hartford meadows in June, fresh and green. Where it is broken up you pass corn fields of one hundred acres in extent, yielding from fifty to one hundred bushels per acre. The labor of one man with a pair of horses will easily produce ten thousand bushels of corn. I think it would make some of our Granby farmers' eyes blink to look at a farm here in wheat, oats, corn, etc., and all with comparatively no labor. Corn is planted by horse drill. It is never hoed and never fails. There are no railways yet completed beyond the Mississippi, but a number are in course of construction. In the course of three or four years this valley will be crossed by railroads in every direction. The Des Moines River and valley are to this region what the Connecticut is to New England.

The city of Des Moines, the new capital which is to be, contains 1,500 inhabitants. Yet speculation has gone ahead of me. Lots are run up there to \$1,500 to \$3,000. It is a low, dirty, stinking hole. I think the capitol buildings will be some two or three miles out. The matter is to come before the legislature again, since an injunction has stopped the commissioners from locating. It is thought by many that this place (Boonesboro), stands the best chance of any town in the State, if the whole matter were to be gone over again.

I have written a desultory letter. If it had been for the public eye, I would have been more methodical. I am bound to stay here awhile. Nothing is done on a small scale and a man with half an eye,

in this opening, magnificent country, cannot help building up a fortune in time.

I was bound for Fond du Lac and Lake Superior, until I reached Chicago. My route was to Niagara by rail, thence across Lake Ontario by steamboat to Toronto, thence by Lake Huron and Sinico railroad 94 miles to Collingwood at the southern extremity of Georgian Bay, thence through the straits of Mackinaw to Chicago. Tickets for the entire trip, \$9.50, which included board and stateroom on the steamers. At Collingwood I could not hear that there was any settlement at the west end of Lake Superior—so little is known in the east of what is going on in the west. New towns spring up in six months. On the steamer I was told that three new towns were started at the terminus of navigation in the Superior region, each about one mile from the other. Arriving at Chicago, I found that the steamer "Superior" was hourly expected from her first trip; that she was the first steamer through the entire lake, and the first arrival at the town of Superior, and would return there immediately. When she arrived I found the true condition of things there. A joint stock company of 120 members, formed in Washington, composed mostly of members of congress, among whom was Frank Pierce, had located and founded the town of Superior; had built a dock and were selling lots, 25x125 feet, at from \$200 to \$1,000, selling only alternate lots, and that the company had secured things so that they could make all for the next fourteen years. So I determined to push on in the direction from which I am now writing to you.

Evidently the transportation companies have improved in the art of collection of revenue from the traveling public since the day Judge Holcomb came from Connecticut to Iowa for \$9.50. His next letter gives evidence of the correct idea in the selection of colonists for a new country, with, perhaps, a little narrowness in its restrictions, and indicates the happy burdens laid upon the immigrants in satisfying the eager inquiries of friends left behind. Some of the statements must be taken in the light of later ascertained facts, but they were the opinions entertained at that time, and to be accepted as such only. He had revisited the east and on his return writes, under date of

May 18, 1856.

I shall take no trouble to look out a tavern stand for M——. We don't want any such taverners here. We have the "Maine Law" here that you have there. The supreme court this winter tried the constitutionality of it and sustained it—two judges to one.

Myself and wife have been overflowed with letters since my return here, asking for descriptions of the country; so much so that we

found it a great tax upon our time to reply to them individually. We have adopted the method of replying to them through the eastern papers, making one letter answer the inquiries of many. Our letters have been published in the papers of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont.

The winter held on to the middle of March. In the spring rains came, and the roads have been almost impassable since; the streams from melting snows of the North and from rains have been so high that crossing, otherwise than by swimming, was out of the question. We had only about six inches of snow this winter, which was blown into piles. The ground froze to the depth of four feet, and when the spring rains came the mud was of the tallest kind. Traveling with loads was out of the question. Mails have been, much of the time, carried on horseback, the carrier riding one and leading the other with the bagson.

Most of the deer skins here are bought up by steamers going to Keokuk, at $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents and sold for 18.

Was admitted to the bar last week. The lawyers from Fort Des Moines were here. This is a regular back-woods court; lawyers, judges and jury were good fellows. The court house is a log school house and the scene was ludicrous in the extreme to a man accustomed to the dignity of eastern court rooms. And such law as you might have heard laid down you don't find in Blackstone or any of the other writers! I brought twenty-seven suits last week at one time, and that is not the worst of it, either. I brought them all answerable before myself, I being a magistrate and that being the practice here. Every day long strings of emigrant teams and large droves of cattle are in sight, moving over the prairies, seeking homes.

In this same letter (May, 1856,) he tells of his purchase of the future site of Boone. A purchase not the result of happy chance, but inspired by a sagacious consideration of all the topographical and other circumstances surrounding the situation, and by a belief in the early construction of what is now the Chicago & Northwestern Railway.

In company with two other men—Cornelius Beal and Eli Keeler, a taverner—I have purchased a tract of land amounting to 300 acres at the sum of \$10.00 an acre. The prairie portion lies just one mile east of this burg, is elevated, and a beautiful site for a town and is at the point where this town must ultimately be. It is just due east of the John Pea's crossing of the Des Moines River, which is generally considered the place where the "Iowa Central Air Line" must cross the river. The railway up the Des Moines River to Minnesota can hardly fail of crossing this lot also. The main traveled road, east and west, also crosses it. Keeler was building a large hotel in town which was

nearly ready for the roof. He at once took it down and moved it to the land and it will be ready for business in four weeks. The stages from Fort Des Moines to Fort Dodge will stop there and send the mails in. The moment the deed was filed and Keeler commenced tearing down his frame for removal, there was a great commotion in town and men became alarmed. It seemed as if everybody in the county knew it in three days time. They beg us to stop—they scold—in short, they don't know what to do. It is conceded on all hands that the depot must be out there, that the town must go there, and in consequence of this belief everybody was wishing to buy property on that side of town. We will have our dish out ready for them. We, however, judge it best to sell no lots at less than \$100 a lot, and require the purchaser to improve it, and thus have a rather good class of citizens. We should like Yankees. We have a good many settlers from Indiana—regular log-cabin settlers whom we don't want.

There is not an acre of good timber land here but what is worth \$50 per acre, and the day is near when it will readily command that. There are four or five coal beds * * where the veins are five to fifteen feet thick, and so situated that you drive alongside and shovel the coal from the beds into the wagon. The indications are that there is enough on this land to supply the State of Iowa with fuel for one thousand years. The coal is overlaid with potter's clay of the best quality. Good limestone underlies the coal. A good water-power is on the lot, falling one hundred feet to the mile, running over coal and rock beds. The coal is worth 10 cents a bushel at the beds; the lime is worth, on the lot, 40 cents a bushel. Keeler has a splendid situation. The view extends ten miles north, south and east.

Under the decision of the supreme court the state capitol is located on the east side of the Des Moines River, on the highlands east of Fort Des Moines. The excitement was tremendous. The old town is ruined. Everything was said and done that could be to induce the commissioners to locate it on the west side of the river. Two hundred thousand dollars were offered; but the commissioners were firm, and placed the stakes out on the prairie. The town, of course, goes out there. The population is 2,700. A man having five hundred acres of prairie, upon which the stake was put, was immediately offered \$500 per acre for the whole tract. The effect was instantaneous on property on this side of the river. Here, by many, it was held at double its former value. It secures the great thoroughfare north and south, and also the railroad this side of the river is placed beyond a question.

Col. Harris of New York, the agent of the Des Moines River Navigation Company, spent a few days here and has gone to Minnesota to examine the country. The Company put the whole river under contract from Keokuk to Fort Des Moines last week. The expedition for the River Company encamped here last week on its way to Minnesota, to ascertain the true source of the Des Moines River, and to explore the country. The Chicago Air Line road was put to running to the Missis-

ssippi in December, to the town of Fulton, and Lyons in this state. From Lyons the road takes the name of Iowa Central Air Line. It is under contract from Lyons to Cedar Rapids, in Linn county, to be completed this fall.

My Sharpe's rifle is a great curiosity here. I have used it but little since I got back, the hunting season then being over. I don't care to sell it; it has the reputation of being a terrible weapon, and it's a very good idea for a man in this wild country to be known as prepared for any emergency. The name itself is a guarantee of safety. We have not seen a sick day since we came here. I never saw any country that compared with this for healthfulness. There are no prevailing diseases here. * * If I take part in politics, I will go in for J. C. Fremont.

Verily the earth was leaning toward "Taverner" Keeler's hotel at the source of Honey Creek and on the main highway between Fort Des Moines and the frozen North. But as though the list of good things recited in his last were not enough, the next letter declared new possibilities for this favored land. It is under date of June 30, 1856. The commerce of the region is indicated in the remark that "In the spring arks can be floated down the river, say for two or three months in the year." Navigation of the Des Moines by steamboats would seem to have been abandoned. There was a dearth of salt, and the prices quoted, if compared with present rates for this necessity, show that modern transportation has its advantages:

Salt is selling at \$2.00 per bushel, and is worth that in most parts of the interior of the state. There has never been any salt yet found in the state. I do not know that any one has bored for salt. I think it possible that by boring through the limestone, salt might be reached. If so, it would be worth more than the Mariposa grant of Col. Fremont. The stoneware manufacturers in town are working from a bed of potter's clay about five feet thick, clear from grit and makes a very good soap to wash with. They have made about 15,000 fire proof bricks from it and these are hard enough without burning to build a four story house, if kept from the rains. They say they can do a good business making these bricks at \$2 a thousand. Have specimens of black marble, beautifully variegated, which by rubbing together immediately take as fine a polish and finish as ever I saw. I never saw any Italian marble superior to it.

In this same letter, of June 30, 1856, a fresh discovery is mentioned which attracted attention for some time and served as the foundation upon which many air castles were builded.

Last Thursday we were in the bottom with a man from Boston who was looking with a view of removal of a number of families to this place. We discovered a vein of what we thought was Breckinridge coal. The vein is two feet thick, lying upon coal under slate; is the color of ivory black, feeling greasy, cutting like Bayberry tallow with a kaife, having a smooth surface. On examination we, as yet, don't find what it is. It will not burn in a candle, and under the blow pipe flies to pieces; is about as hard as chalk. Yesterday several blacked their boots with it, pulverizing it with a hammer, mixed with water and used as a paste blacking, giving a polish as fine and high as they ever saw. The Boston man took specimens of it and of the marble home to test them. Also, a beautiful agate which our boy found on the prairie, to cut and set in jewelry. He is a jeweler and pronounced it very fine.

Still pursuing this promising lead in future letters, we watch its development with an interest akin to that of the original discoverers.

I thought when I first found it that it was cannel coal, on account of its greasy feeling; but it cannot be burned. The State Geologist, (James Hall, '55 to '57.) examined it this fall while here, and at first thought, as I did, that it was cannel coal; but when it could not be burned under the blow pipe, he was unable to tell what it was. I have used it all summer as a boot blacking, it taking a polish and wearing well. I took some of it to a painter who ground it in oil and varnish and tried it on a carriage. His opinion is that it was the article they call "patent black," the highest priced black and the best they can get. I have no doubt it is a very valuable article. I think I could work off \$50,000 worth in a year, and almost the whole of it profit. * * * Charles Pomeroy has moved here from Meriden, Connecticut, and he is sanguine that a great amount of money can be made from it as a shoe blacking, stove blacking and paint.

By the following February, specimen packages had been sent to the friends in the east, and it had taken the local name of "mineral black." The eastern experimenters were non-professionals who tried it in the mechanic arts and returned most encouraging reports of its merits. Pomeroy's father advised him "by all means to secure the balance of the land containing it." The Judge writes: "We must keep dark here lest we have some Yankee opposition if found plenty elsewhere." In nearly every letter there continues to be found hopeful expressions of the value of "mineral black," with fond anticipations of a big

revenue therefrom, estimated even at \$100,000 a year. The advice is frequently given to "lie low and keep hushed" until the bonanza is ready for the market.

By and by some of the new mineral was shown to Prof. Silliman in New Haven, who promptly pronounced it "plumbago, improperly called black lead, a very valuable mineral and this specimen a very superior article." Other samples were submitted to Prof. Hithcock of Amherst college. The prospectors themselves seem to have taken to the books, and we see references to Prof. Vine's Treatise on Mining, and his description of the mine in Borrowdale, England. The general markets were studied, discovering that plumbago was worth \$100 a ton, was imported into America, and that the manufacturers used 1,000 tons of it each year. This suggested the formation of stock companies and "shares on the New York market," pending which organization a quantity was shipped, at considerable cost, for a practical trial in the crucible works. This "bust the bubble," and it takes but two lines, Aug. '57, to record the ruin of the grand bonanza:

Pomeroy's brother-in-law has been here this summer. Said the "mineral black" did not answer for crucibles; that it burned through.

In May, 1858, a gold excitement broke out in the settlement, and another series of air castles was promptly erected to commemorate the event:

The gold fever has raged here for the last two weeks and bids fair to be of absorbing interest. Heretofore I felt very little interest in it, but now I have such evidence that I must pronounce it no humbug. It is found in several counties, and two weeks ago on our land, by an old California miner, in the same black sand and quartz as on the Pacific coast. It is in most of the ravines which run to the river. Yesterday there were forty men digging in the ravine west of town. They had the genuine dust—pieces about the size of a pin head and less. They say that with the proper appliances a man might realize from \$2 to \$10 a day.

We will not follow this golden fleece through all the hopes it engendered; but in February, 1859, the sequel is given:

Gold here is no humbug. It is diffused through the soil of this state, but not in sufficient quantities to pay wages. It raised quite a furore at the time, but was soon over, as it was found in many other places.

That there might be nothing in nature lacking in this happy land of promise, there was a "discovery of coal oil" about this time. Of this he writes:

I am assured by experienced oil men that there is beyond question oil here. They say they can see it in the water in the springs here. We have what is known as the stinking springs here. The water is so nauseating that no man can drink it. They advise me by all means to bore for-it. You know my caution and I'll wait awhile.

A similar "oil excitement" held sway for a time in after years in the neighborhood of Des Moines. Our pioneer "had his dish out" a little the earlier.

Yet another scheme characteristic of the times was entertained, described as follows:

Beal is a mail contractor, carrying the mail from Fort Dodge to Council Bluffs, once a week on horseback, for \$1,600 a year. A good job that. There is a very important point somewhere on the 42d parallel, where the mail routes from Fort Dodge to Council Bluffs, and from Fort Des Moines to Sioux City cross each other. If we can fix that point we can make a pretty thing of it. The Air Line railway will be likely to go through it.

He further remarks about this time, "It makes me ache to see the opportunities for money-making go by for want of means." Beal, the mail carrier mentioned above, was one of the early members of the legislature from Boone county, in which, tradition has it, he exploited his constituency in a speech favoring the Des Moines River Improvement bill, by the encouraging prediction that if the improvement were made, "High Boone alone would send more than six thousand pounds of maple sugar to market every year." In one of the Holcomb letters is given a personal description of this gentleman:

Beal is about thirty years of age; has a large, massive brain, is of exceedingly nervous temperament, his action fully up to his capacity which is immense. All that he has acquired he had to pick up in the backwoods. He says, talk to him of log houses, log-rolling and stump

clearing and he is at home; but talk to him of civilized society and he is not. He commenced practice with two month's preparation, yet he is a man of power in the courts here.

In this connection the advice given to a young eastern friend who wished to come on and open a law office, is to

Commence before Justice courts. Assume the half-horse half-alligator style—the rule in the new districts in the west. This will soon soften down, and the field is large here for a young man to push himself. But after the novelty and first excitement of western life had worn off he would sigh for the comforts and care of a mother's home.

The Granby friend was contemplating a visit to the west, and received the advice to "bring along a bottle of French brandy; also loaf sugar. The water here is all lime water and some of it slightly sulphuric." He was further informed of the character of the people he would find on arrival:

You'll find them rude, plain and blunt—they speak their minds right out. They will like you or not, and they'll let you know it, too. Independent, they regard a man for what he is, not for his connection, place or position. They must associate on equal terms or not at all. I would advise you not to say much about your eastern life and habits. If you enter their houses, no matter how rude the cabin, they'll invite you to eat. Don't decline, but draw your chair right up and take hold as though you loved it. Prepare a few stump speeches. Nothing brings a man forward better than a few good stump speeches; and if they like it they'll fight for you to the death.

The early Iowa settler, either by inheritance of original sin or eastern importation, understood the energy concealed in a commercial corner; for we are informed that in the milling business

The way they grind is this: The law regulates the toll here as well as in Connecticut. A man goes to mill with a load of wheat and finds that they don't grind for customers, but will buy his wheat and pay him in flour, twenty pounds of flour for a bushel of wheat. He can do no better—there is no other mill within twenty-five miles—and they keep the price of flour up, to from \$5.50 to \$7.50 per hundred.

The rates of interest in those early days were simply "terrific," forty per cent being the usual tariff. Even that was sometimes exceeded, for the Judge writes, in 1856:

I put out \$200 for thirty days for \$15. A good man came to me the other day and offered me \$20 for \$15 twenty days—\$5 is pretty good interest. Of course I let him have it.

At this rate per cent it was possible to indulge in an occasional can of oysters, the price for which was \$1.25, or to use molasses at \$1.50 per gallon. In the midst of this rush for lands and railways and big interest, it is refreshing to find a touch of sentiment in the Judge's sorrow for the loss of his horse.

My horse is dead; my elegant, splendid Charlie. He was sick about three weeks, during which I gave up my time to care for him, day and night, but I couldn't save him. He struggled hard to live. We shed many tears over him. He was so kind and affectionate. Let him rest. You see it disconcerts me every way.

And so the story runs along, touching almost every phase of human interest, and being an epitome of the social, political and financial history of the early years. The founding of the first local newspaper in this frontier community is mentioned, the making of "sorghum molasses," and consequent danger to Southern sugar plantation values, the first appearance of quail, those companions in man's advancing work of civilization, the rise and fall of real estate, growth of the town's population, the independence of "help," passage of the state banking act, advent of "hard times" with the panic of 1857 and resort to tilling the soil as a means of existence, the killing of wolves with strychnine to still further add to the family till. Inkipadutah's raid calls for this note:

The Indian excitement has gone by. One woman came in here from Spirit Lake at the time of the massacre. She had the mark of a rifle ball on one cheek and another on a thigh. She was out two days and one night in March, with nothing on but the clothes she wore about the house and a single crust of bread to eat, and a child two months old in her arms. She knew nothing of the fate of her husband until she got here, nor he of her.

The Women's Temperance Crusade was practiced out on the frontier before it aroused the attention of the nation in the larger cities years after. Under date of October 24, 1858, our historian writes:

Our women took the law into their own hands with the liquor dealers a few weeks ago and made summary work of it. The rummeries

got word of it and hid their liquors; some in wells, some under the floors of their houses and some out in the fields. But the women found it and, knocking in the heads, spilled it. One fellow invited them to search his house; but when they found it, he sprang upon the two women who were taking up the floor, seizing them each by the throat. One of the women was a large, stout woman, such as they grow in New Hampshire and Vermont. She took the fellow instantler, and laid him on his back on the bed, and held him by his arms, pinioned, just as easy. The crowd of men, some one hundred and fifty, rushed in, called for ropes and would have hung him if the women had not interceded. They made a clean sweep and now no one dares to sell openly.

Beautiful and promising as was this new Land of Canaan beyond the great river, it needed transportation facilities before anything more than hopes could be realized. What were the "mineral blacks," the coal, potter's clays, gold, and corn by the hundred bushels per acre to a people without ready and reasonable transportation to the markets? It was not uncommon in those days to hear the settlers say, "We had better give half our lands to secure railways than stay here to decay in the midst of plenty; the other half will be worth more to us then than the whole now is." It was this sentiment which promoted the liberal land grants of those years. The story of the weary waiting, the high hopes of one year, the depression of the next, as the railway prospect waxed and waned, are, at this distance of time, pathetic. The war came, and again the cup of railway promise was stricken from their lips. But they were brave, these early settlers. They sent their sons by ox team to the recruiting stations on the river and down into Dixie to fight the battles of our country, and when "the cruel war was over," received them home again, drawn to the prairie by the iron horse. Let the Judge's letters tell the story of this season of working and watching for more than a decade.

Within the first year of his residence, between July 1855 and May 1856, he had determined in his mind the location of the future town when the railway should have arrived, and had sagaciously endorsed this judgment by

purchasing the land. There were two different railway lines in prospect, and he and his friends "had their dish out" to secure the benefits from both of them. These were the Keokuk and Des Moines, now in the Rock Island system, and the Air Line, now the main line of the Chicago and Northwestern. The former was eventually lost to this locality, perhaps by the attempt to use a "railway dish" in trying to catch a state capital.

In July, 1856, he writes:

I learn that the men of the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines & Minnesota railroad are on their way looking out the route and getting the right of way. Day before yesterday they were at Saylorville, seven miles this side of Fort Des Moines, on their way up. They will probably be here the last of this week. We shall look for the surveyors from the east also in about two weeks. Many heavy business men here say it is very evident this town is not in the right spot and that we have the exact spot. Our movement in "East Boonsboro" is playing the deuce with the old town. I am anathematized as being the author of it. I am a Yankee; they give me full credit for that, and many govern themselves by my operations. Sometimes I amuse myself in the way you did in pacing Dr. L's lot across the street from your house.

A month later, August 13, he writes:

The company which surveyed from Cedar Rapids reached here one week ago. It is now settled that Boonsboro is to be the great central point in the state. My view is that the road will take the Honey Creek route, as much the most favorable. The road bed west of here must be furnished with ties from the Des Moines River timber. One of the engineers told me they would continue the survey west of the Missouri, one hundred miles into Nebraska.

December 20, 1856:

Everything in the matter of railroads is going on fully up to our most sanguine expectations. The road is under contract from Clinton to Cedar Rapids; is to be completed for running by next fall. I think the cars will reach this place by a year from next fall. I am confirmed in my belief that the cars will reach here before any other point on the Des Moines River. It requires very little foresight to see what the effect will be on this place. Already strangers are beginning to appear here with copies of the railway map in their pockets, shy and private in their movements. I am at a loss to determine where the depot will be, but have a pretty strong faith that the day is not distant when our lots will be in the center of this town. The town now has a population of 1,000 inhabitants. I have no doubt that before the railway leaves here it will have run up to 15,000 or 20,000, and if so, the town will extend two miles east and west.

Then followed the "cold winter of 1856-7," long to be remembered in the annals of this state, and railway references were subordinate to the "plumbago scheme." March 30, 1857, note is made of the return of the railway surveyors, who, starting from the Des Moines River, ran a line to the Maple River. The Judge also explains what he knows about railway organizations:

Ten men organize into a railway company to build a road from the Mississippi to the Missouri river. They apply to Congress and obtain a grant of land to aid them. Then they subscribe up the stock to the amount of \$1,000,000 among themselves, organize, choose officers, make a contract with a company to build the road and put it in running order, and when completed, take the lands in full payment for the building. Haven't the railway company financiered pretty handsomely? Is that not doing business with a big auger? Have a railroad with \$8,000,000 of stock in which every dollar is a dollar, and at a cost of nothing comparatively!

In July, an agent of the company passed over the line, getting the mortgage of the company to secure \$12,000,000 bonds recorded in every county along the line, thus taking up another link in the chain of hope for an early construction. The settlement begun by "the Yankees" east of Boonsboro was sometimes called "New England," but dubbed by the irreverent "Holcombville." Notwithstanding the courage with which the field was held, in reply to an inquiry from the eastern friend, if there was not a re-action in western speculation, he says:

The re-action has commenced, and many are losing largely, especially in Fort Des Moines. The capital question raised a great excitement; anything like a fair business lot commanded from \$4,000 to \$8,000. Now business there is at a standstill and speculative prices are tumbling down. But I have no fears of a re-action in this place. A man from the east bought a lot on the street a few days ago, paying \$900 in gold for the naked lot, the holder's profit on the lot was \$850.

In August, 1857:

Allen & West, bankers at Fort Des Moines, have bought 636 acres adjoining ours on the south, for thirteen dollars per acre, cash down. Without a doubt the purchase is with reference to the Keokuk, Des Moines & Minnesota railway company, which is purchasing its depot grounds all along the line this side of Des Moines, and, I am told, say

they will have their road here first. The struggle is between St. Louis and New Orleans to control the trade of the Des Moines valley from being drawn off to Chicago.

An English agent was here a week ago, passing over the route of the Air Line road, and from his view he selects the bonds of this road to purchase.

By September he writes that the company has the iron and will lay the track to Cedar Rapids that season. In December he returned from a visit to the east, walking home twenty-five miles from Nevada, the ground covered with snow and the weather cold. He had met the locating engineers at Marietta and reports:

They had high times at Marietta that night. The citizens gave a ball and supper. The question was settled between Marietta, Marshalltown and Lafayette, three rival towns all sure of the road. I left them eight miles west of Marietta steering for Boonsboro.

By the latter part of February, 1858, he rather despondingly records that "the engineers spent six weeks here surveying the river to find the best crossing. So that now railroad matters are just as undecided as before."

There is no mention of railroad building again until the next year, and then only to remark, "times do not improve any here yet owing to failure of crops and scarcity of money. It is impossible to collect anything. But we can sell when the railway comes." Then there is a long skip in these letters. But in November, 1863, railway news revives:

Enclosed I send you a slip from our town paper containing a notice of the location of the Cedar Rapids & Missouri River Railway as finally laid here. There are now but twenty-one miles to be graded to this place. The location of the depot is now only in doubt.

The "Air Line" had taken the name used above, and this later gave way to the present name of the road. The patience which had endured eight years was yet to be tried for two years longer, and it was not until the summer of 1865 that regular train service was put on the road to Boone, then called "Montana."

Then the Granby recipient of these many confidences received a letter with the shout of victory, the proud note of triumph and the joy of things hoped for now seen. Persistence and patient endeavor was a justification for these glad notes.

BOONE, September 8, 1865.

Dear Sir: Yours from the senate chamber came to hand and found me well. In railroad matters I have been successful beyond my most sanguine expectations. All that I have told you heretofore in relation to this point I am realizing now to the fullest extent. But I have had a hard fought battle. Single-handed and alone I had to combat a town of 1,500 inhabitants. I sent you in March the Chicago Journal containing the advertisement of the sale of lots in the new town of Boone on the 29th of March. At that time there was not a spadefull of earth broken nearer than one mile, to which point the track was laid and construction trains running. On the day of the sale came two full car loads of buyers from the east of here, and even from Chicago. The first two lots sold were each warehouse lots, and struck down at \$300 each. The sales ranged through the day at prices from \$75 to \$300, the highest sold. Building commenced immediately, and on the 17th day of July the passenger trains commenced to run regularly. Now we have over six hundred inhabitants in the town and the rush increases every day. There are seventy-five dwelling houses erected and in process of erection. Some ten or twelve heavy stores are now building, designed for wholesaling and retailing—in short we are having all the concomitants of a large town—foundries, machine shops, saloons, restaurants, etc. We have regular transportation lines running to Council Bluffs, Omaha, Denver, Sioux City, Dakota Territory—in short it is the outseting point for all the great west. There is a rush here; lots rising—in some points they have already trebled in value. Already two other railways have arranged to come here as soon as they can be built. We have two lines of telegraph here, both running to California, and one to the east. I have heard of cities built in a day; I am seeing it here now.

There is nothing of the Keokuk line in these days. Alas! it was lost in the shuffle of railway land resumptions, capital locations, and other of men's ambitions. But the cup of Judge Holcomb's ambition was full to running over even without it. A few months later, is the glad shout of triumph repeated, in the last letter of this interesting collection.

As you may judge, we are living in excitement here. Business is increasing very fast. One year ago to-day nothing here; now a town

so large as to attract the traveling circus, with music wagon with ten white horses, playing through the streets. * * * * * I've unbosomed myself somewhat; no matter. I know you can sympathize with me and can readily feel how I feel about these days. I've accomplished everthing I have undertaken. I'm in the complete tide of success. I've gone through hell to do it. I've fought a town of 1,000 inhabitants, single-handed and alone. I've triumphed. I am regarded now as a far-seeing, long-headed man, and "pretty well off" in the world, and as never failing in my undertakings. Direct your letters to "Boone Station," we have a new post office here of that name.

This closes the record, so far as made by the letters filed in the case. Judge Holcomb lived to see the city which he dreamed of in 1855, and so graphically described in 1865, grow into a healthy, western town; but an unfortunate investment in the Republic Insurance Company of Chicago which suffered so severely in the great fire in that city, and the adverse result of the suit in which these letters appeared, stripped him of much of his wealth in his old age. Fortune is ever fickle with her favors, and the founding of Boone merely gave the jade another opportunity to exercise her caprices.

BOONE, IOWA, December, 1895.

THE THIRD IOWA INFANTRY went into the battle of Shiloh six hundred strong, with twenty-six commissioned officers. Near the close of the first day Colonel G. W. Crosley, then a first lieutenant, was the ranking officer and commanded the regiment until the close of the battle on the second day. Only seven commissioned officers escaped being killed or wounded, and they were first and second lieutenants. The total loss was two hundred and six killed, wounded and captured. * * * After the Atlanta campaign the one hundred men to which this gallant command was reduced were consolidated with the Second Iowa Infantry, losing its identity as a regiment—absolutely fighting itself out of existence on the field of battle! —Condensed from *The Webster City Freeman*, Nov. 8, 1895.

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