

**SKETCHES OF HISTORY AND INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH
THE SETTLEMENT OF WAPELLO COUNTY, FROM 1843 TO
1859, INCLUSIVE.**

BY G. D. R. BOYD, OTTUMWA.

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AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY.

The Wapello County Agricultural Society was first organized on the 24th day of January, 1852. The following officers were elected: President, J. W. Hedrick; Vice President, G. D. Hackworth; Treasurer, Bela White; Secretary, James W. Norris; Managers, Uriah Biggs, William Runnell, Jesse Brookshine, James Hill, Franklin Newell, J. D. Benans, B. B. Stephens, Andrew Majors; Levi Jenkins, Wm. A. Nye, Edward Pedigo, Jos. Wood, D. H. Michael, W. C. McIntyre. At this meeting a constitution and by-laws were adopted and eighty-nine members enrolled. The first fair was held on the farm of Joseph Hayne, October 14, 1853. There was quite a large attendance and \$70.50 and a number of books distributed as premiums. In December following five acres of land was purchased, a mile north-east of Ottumwa, for a permanent fair ground. About this time the Society received \$110 from the State. The Society was now thoroughly organized and in a flourishing condition. The fairs of 1854, '55 and '56, were very well attended, and exhibitions creditable to the farmers of the county. In 1857 the old grounds were sold to advantage and ten acres purchased one and a half miles above Ottumwa. It was soon enclosed with a substantial board fence and otherwise made ready for the approaching annual Fair on the 24th, 25th and 26th of Sept. The county was canvassed by Mr. D. F. Gaylord, and 70 life memberships at \$10 each were soon subscribed and quite a number of yearly memberships at \$1 each. The fair of that year was successful beyond expectations. From an elaborate report of the fair published in the "Democratic Statesman" and prepared by the author, we extract as follows:

"The Wapello County Agricultural Fair which took place at

the fair ground above this city on the 24th, 25th and 26th ult., was, we suppose, by far the greatest gathering of the people that has ever taken place in this county, the best exhibition of her wealth, and probably not inferior in display and elegance to like exhibitions in any other county of the State. The number of persons present has been variously estimated at from 2000 to 4000.

“We think we may safely put down the number who were in attendance on Friday at 2500, while those present on Saturday will not fall much short of that number. Thursday was mostly occupied in receiving stock and articles for exhibition, adopting measures for good order during the fair, &c. * *

“Every person seemed well satisfied, and proud of the flattering prospects of our county and the very prosperous condition she at present enjoys.”

The receipts of the fair were \$1302.20; the amount of premiums awarded \$375.

A lively interest is still manifested in this organization and its usefulness and permanency is now unquestionable. Its success is a fair index to the great natural resources of the county, and the intelligence, enterprise and industry of its citizens. It exhibits a county peculiarly adapted to every variety of agriculture, horticulture and stock-raising; water, timber and stone convenient, and prairies of moderate size, the soil of which is of the most productive character. Nature certainly has been lavish of her bounty upon this locality, and it remains but for the industry of the farmer to make it a modern paradise. The variety and richness of its resources has scarcely commenced to be developed, and ten or fifteen years will present a picture of wealth and prosperity that the most sanguine dreamer and enthusiast would not imagine or give shape to at the present time.

At the general election in 1852 there were 1465 votes cast in the county.

RAILROAD ENTERPRISES.

The improvement of the navigation of the Des Moines had proved abortive, public confidence in its success had ceased,

the very name of the project and many of those connected with it had become extremely odious with the people, and slackwater navigation was only advocated by the visionary theorist, or the knavish political aspirant. The plank road, that had already spread—on paper—from Burlington to the “Big Muddy,” of course *via* Ottumwa, and whose arteries shot out in every direction from the main grand trunk, had likewise been passed upon and condemned, as impracticable by the sovereigns.” The stock books were closed, and the “institution” prematurely ceased to exist. And now commences the history of our railroad speculations. The “iron horse” was to be substituted for slack water and oak boards, and a sensible substitution it has proved to be.

The first Railroad meeting in this county, was held at Ottumwa on the 17th of January, 1852, at which meeting it was resolved to call a convention at Ottumwa, on the 13th of the following February, to advocate the construction of the Lafayette, Burlington and Council Bluffs Railroad.

A committee of invitation was appointed, consisting of W. H. Brunfield, H. B. Hendershott, J. C. Ramsey, W. B. Street, C. Vanchune, H. P. Graves and Geo. Gillaspv, who published an address, and extended invitations to prominent citizens in all the counties interested. In their published address the committee set forth the advantages of this route in glowing terms. The result was, the convention on the 13th of February was very largely attended. Des Moines county sent twenty-nine delegates, and Henry, Monroe, Lucas, Jefferson, Van Buren, Davis, Mills, Louisa, Keokuk, Mahaska, Marion, Polk and Wapello, were well represented. The new court house, at that time, was not built and the largest public building in Ottumwa was the congregational church, in which the convention assembled. Col. William H. Wallace (now a prominent citizen of Washington Territory,) presided. The convention was addressed by Col. Wallace, H. W. Starr, Hon. William Thompson, E. W. Eastman, R. R. Harbor, J. J. Childs, C. Negus, J. W. Norris, D. Anderson, Henry Allen, Mr. Allender and L. D. Winchester. Letters were read from Judge

Mason, J. W. Woods and W. G. Clark. The feasibility of the route was fully demonstrated, and a string of resolutions, all expressing reasons why the road should be built, were unanimously adopted. After this time the subject was constantly agitated.

On the 23d of August, 1853, a public meeting was held in Ottumwa, (in accordance with the wishes of this Railroad Co., which had now become thoroughly organized as the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co.) to take into consideration the propriety of the county taking stock in the road to the amount of \$100,000. This meeting resolved that the county should become a stockholder, and accordingly the County Judge submitted the question to the people, the main proposition being as follows:

“Said stock to be paid for by the issue of bonds of the county, redeemable in 20 years, bearing an interest not exceeding 8 per cent. per annum, to be issued upon the call of the company, after the work in said county shall be put under contract, in installments not exceeding five per cent. per month, and to be taken at par.” The vote was taken on the 24th of September, 1853, and resulted in favor of the county taking \$100,000 stock by 651 majority. The county was thoroughly canvassed by gentlemen favorable to the proposition. Subsequently the company demanded that citizens of Wapello county should subscribe \$40,000 in private stock. Accordingly books were opened, and at a meeting in Ottumwa on the 15th of December, 1853, it was ascertained that \$40,600 had been subscribed to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Company. This meeting appointed H. B. Hendershott, J. H. D. Street, C. C. Warden, J. C. Ramsey and C. Dudley to present these stock books to the company at Burlington which duty these gentleman fulfilled.

The assessed value of property, for the year 1853, in the county was \$1,313,100.

On the 5th of January, 1854, a public meeting was held at Agency City, the object, as stated, being “for the purpose of taking action on the Keokuk, Ft. Des Moines and Minnesota

Railroad." This meeting was addressed by Messrs. Farner and Hornish, of Keokuk, who elaborated on the feasibility of the route, and the beneficial results that would accrue to the people of this section by the construction of the road. After this, resolutions were submitted and passed favorable to the proposed road, and the County Judge was petitioned to submit to a vote of the people of the county, a proposition for the county to take \$100,000 stock in the road; a committee was also appointed to procure private stock. A meeting was then called at Ottumwa on the 19th of January, to further discuss and consider the same proposition; but the people of the county, being already committed to aid to the extent of their ability the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, the proposition of Keokuk, at that time, was not seconded by any substantial demonstration on the part of our citizens. They seemed to feel that they, for the time being, were sufficiently pledged towards the advancement of railroad enterprise, and therefore plead their inability to contribute further. The meeting of the 19th assembled, and Messrs. Farner and Hornish were present, but almost immediately withdrew after discovering that those present were almost unanimously averse to the county taking stock in the proposed road. The meeting then proceeded to organize, and passed resolutions opposing the proposition. The County Judge refused to call an election, and so the matter dropped. The people of the county, however, were then, and are yet, favorable to that road, and will, at a proper time, give it a substantial token of their good will. It is now finished within thirty-five miles of our county, and located along the bank of the Des Moines River to Des Moines City.

It was about this time that the extension of the North Missouri Railroad into Iowa was first spoken of, and a very sensible article appeared in the Ottumwa Courier of January 26 upon this subject. On February 16, 1854, a convention was called at Bloomfield to take this subject into consideration. Wapello sent a large delegation. The convention was largely attended by the counties and localities most interested, and a

long string of resolutions, advocating the extension of the North Missouri Railroad to the Des Moines Valley in Iowa, were passed. A mass convention was called at Ottumwa on the 15th day of the following month (March), to effect a more permanent organization. On the 15th, the delegates assembled in the congregational church, and articles of incorporation were adopted, article 2d of which states that "the name and style of this incorporation shall be the North Missouri and Iowa Extension Railroad Company." A board of directors were elected, consisting of Geo. Gillašpy, C. C. Warden, Joseph Hayne, J. W. Hedrick, and E. Washburn of Wapello county, and J. W. Ellis, H. W. Briggs, H. H. Trimble and Josiah Earheart, of Davis. Since that time the route has been surveyed to Ottumwa, and its construction from the Missouri line to the same place is only a question of time. The direct communication that this road will give the people of Wapello county with St. Louis and the lower Mississippi is not lightly valued, and its construction is constantly being agitated. The road is now built to within a short distance of the State line, which brings it to within 40 miles of our county. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad was located permanently to Ottumwa on the 29th day of March, 1854, and in May following contracts were entered into for grading and bridging to that point. The work was commenced in the county in the fall of 1854, but soon after relinquished and the road was not constructed within the limits of the county until the winter of 1858-9. In the spring of 1859, the cars commenced running to Agency City, and on the 14th day of August, 1859, the first passenger train left the depot ground at Ottumwa. This company have encountered many embarrassments, yet they have pushed their road along with much vigor and energy. Their progress has been more expeditious than any other railroad in the State.

The assessed value of property in 1855, was \$2,148,030, in 1856, \$2,684,649, and in 1857, \$3,983,211. In 1859 the number of inhabitants were 15,060, and 3000 voters; No. of persons between the ages of 5 and 21, 6,000; No. of schools, 90. Ow-

ing to the failure of crops, and the derangement of the financial condition of the country, (which bore heavily upon the West,) property for the past few years has been assessed at a very low figure in this county. The real increase in value, however, has been gradual and steady, and a full and correct statement of the wealth of the county, at this time, would not fall short of \$6,000,000.

But we are reminded that it is time that we were drawing this short sketch of our county history to a close. Circumstances made it necessary to condense it into the smallest practicable compass; consequently only the more important events and incidents are referred to, and many of them only generally stated, as details and particulars would have extended the work to an indefinite length.

In 1856, a Court House, costing the county some \$13,000, was finished by John J. Adams. The jail, costing some 9,000, was finished in 1857.

We have thus taken a cursory view of the operations of sixteen years. We have seen our county at its first settlement; in its earliest infancy; the red man taking up his gun and his tomahawk, his squaws and *papooses*, and wending his way farther west; and we have seen the first infant colony of "pale faces," covered with dust and travel-worn, eagerly seizing upon the prairie homes and the hunting grounds of the now almost forgotten Indian. Hastily we have sketched the contentions of the first "squatter sovereigns," and from numerous incidents have selected two or three of the most important illustrative of the spirit of the times. Incidentally we have touched upon that magnificent swindle, the "Des Moines River Improvement," that fruitful theme of agitation and public discord. Referring to plank-road speculations, we have seen that character of public gull-traps condemned and abandoned. Briefly we have given a history of our Agricultural Society, from its first organization down to the present time. Touching upon our railroad enterprises, we have seen their first organization and gradual construction. We have in that time seen our county emerge from an uninhabited region to a com-

paratively high state of cultivation, dotted over with large fields and cottages, churches and school-houses; with here and there a village, and some few *cities*, each enjoying "a local habitation and a name," commercial advantages, and a prosperous trade. We have seen year after year our county increase in population and wealth, and those shining substantial virtues that dictate respect for law and order and good government. Connected with all of the foregoing subjects that we have hastily passed over, there are many incidents that have fallen under our observation that may engage some of our leisure hours in the future. If so, the public shall have the benefit of them.

For the present, "we rest."

HISTORY OF JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA.

BY CAPT. F. M. IRISH, IOWA CITY.

(Continued.)

To the Editor of The Annals:

DEAR SIR: Mr. Walker will hand you my article for the July number. I fear it will not be found as interesting to the readers of THE ANNALS as I could have wished; so much of it being taken up with dates and facts connected with dry history. I indulge a hope that the next number, being the last, will possess more interest.

Respectfully yours,

F. M. IRISH.

ROSE HILL, June 23d, 1868.

July 4th, 1841, was celebrated by the citizens of this county by the following appropriate proceedings. The Mechanics' Association formed in procession, carrying their banner of "Mutual Aid," each member wearing the appropriate badge of the association. The procession presented a splendid appearance. Next came a large company of ladies dressed in white. These were followed by a large number of citizens.

This procession marched through the principle streets to Capitol Square. John Hawkins, Esq., presided over the meeting, Charles S. Foster read the Declaration of Independence, and Horace Smith, Esq., delivered the oration of the day, which was listened to with deep and marked interest. At 3 o'clock, the audience numbering about three hundred sat down to a sumptuous dinner prepared by Jonathan Lawrence,

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