

THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF DES MOINES

By Howard J. Nelson

Des Moines in 1950 is a city of functional diversity, occupying a four-leaf-clover shaped built-up area of some thirty square miles, located near the center of agriculturally rich Iowa. It is the retail, wholesale, financial, social, and transportation center of Iowa, the political capital and the second largest manufacturing city in the state. On the national scene, Des Moines has prominence in insurance and publishing. This variety of activities combines to provide a stable if unspectacular livelihood for the city's 175,000 people.

Site and Situation, 1843

Des Moines began as a temporary military post, established at this particular location to deal with a transitory local situation. The contemporary circumstances indicating a need for a fort in this area and the judgments affecting the selection of the site are items of importance in understanding the development of the modern city with its present economic activities and land use pattern on this particular spot.

The title to the land now Iowa was secured for the United States in 1803. It took the form of a treaty with Napoleon, commonly known as the Louisiana Purchase. However, the prior claim of the Indians remained a subject of negotiation. Agreements among the Indian tribes, together with treaties between the United States government and the Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi, Iowa, Winnebago, and Sioux Indians, opened all of the area now Iowa to settlement.¹ The Indians vacated these areas one by one as the treaty dates expired. White settlement followed close behind.

The establishment of Fort Des Moines was an outgrowth of this measured Indian withdrawal and complementary white settlement. In 1842 a large cession was made by the Sauk and Fox Indians. The area consisted of what is now central Iowa, including the site of the present city of Des Moines. The eastern half of the area was to be open to white settlement in

¹ "The Acquisition of Iowa Lands from the Indians," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 7:283-90 (January, 1906). Map.

1843, the western half in 1845.² As part of the agreement, the government was to prevent premature entry of whites into both parts of the territory as well as to protect the relatively peaceful Sauk and Fox Indians from the more warlike Sioux who lived farther north. A temporary military post at some strategically located point in the area seemed to be required. It was this combination of historical coincidences that led to the founding of a city in this area.

After the necessity for the establishment of a fort in the area had been recognized, the selection of a suitable site was assigned to Captain James Allen of the First Dragoons who were stationed lower down the river at Fort Sanford. He reconnoitered the area and by November, 1842, had chosen the point immediately above the junction of the Raccoon and the Des Moines rivers, where a company of United States Dragoons had camped as early as 1835.³ He explained the situation factors involved:

My reasons for selecting that point are these: The soil is rich; and wood, stone, water and grass are all at hand. It will be high enough up the river to protect these Indians against the Sioux, and is in the heart of the best part of their new country, where the greatest efforts will be made by the squatters to get in. It is about equidistant from the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and offers a good route to both. . . . It will be 25 miles within the new line, about the right distance from the settlements, and above all of the Indian villages and trading houses. . . . It will also be about the head of keel-boat navigation of the Des Moines. I think it better than any point farther up, because it will be harder to get supplies higher up. . . .⁴

Captain Allen's appraisal of the assets of the site was accurate and to a considerable degree forecast the advantages underlying the early development of Des Moines.

Military Post, 1843-1846

Des Moines existed for its first three years as a military post in an area from which all white settlers were excluded. Even in this brief time and

² *Ibid.*, 283-90.

³ Johnson Brigham, *History of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa* (2 vols., Chicago, 1911), 1:20, 26. For the 1835 occupation, see Albert M. Lea, *Notes on Wisconsin Territory* . . . (Philadelphia, 1836), 35.

⁴ Letter to War Department, dated Fort Sanford, Iowa, Dec. 30, 1842, reproduced in "Fort Des Moines, No. 2," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 4:164 (October, 1899).

under these unusual conditions actions were taken and attitudes formed that had an influence on the form and function of the future city. Major events of this era were the construction of buildings, the beginnings of roads leading toward the Fort, and the establishment of business organizations.

The beginning patterns of the city were visible in May of 1843. In that month Captain Allen and about 140 soldiers erected two rows of substantial one-story log structures. The officers' quarters were located near the Des Moines River and faced west on a street running generally north and south parallel to the river, now Second Street. A second line of barracks was extended in a line running along the Racoon River, called "Coon Row," at about the location of the present Elm Street.⁵ These buildings seem to have laid the framework for the early street pattern, a pattern that has by successive stages been retained in the area to the present day. Another event, the beginning of a military road to connect with Ottumwa, Keokuk, and the Mississippi, was later of major importance to the growth of the new city.⁶

Though the vast majority of the men in the Fort were military men, the nascent pattern of the present employment distribution may be discerned by the occupations of the few civilians present. Trade was represented by three merchants: two authorized Indian traders, and a third who supplied the soldiers of the Fort but could not trade with the Indians. In addition, a sawmill, which also soon was used for cracking corn and wheat, was founded by Captain Allen and J. D. Parmalee. An Indian agent and his interpreter might be representative of the civil governmental occupations. The forerunner of Des Moines' professional men existed in the person of Dr. Thomas K. Brooks, who came to practice medicine; the services, by a tailor and a blacksmith. The construction industry was represented by Thomas Mitchell and Peter Newcomer who had bridged Four Mile and Camp creeks respectively, in return for permission to settle. Four farmers contracted to furnish grain and other products for the garrison.⁷

After October, 1845, following an uneventful existence of two years, the

⁵ There is no agreement as to the exact position of the first two rows of barracks built at Fort Des Moines. See Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:47, and map facing 98. Also see "Fort Des Moines, No. 2," map facing 161.

⁶ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:48.

⁷ H. B. Turrill, *Historical Reminiscences of the City of Des Moines . . .* (Des Moines, 1857), 12; N. Sanford, *Early Sketches of Polk County* (Newton, 1874), 10; "Fort Des Moines, No. 2," 170.

raison d'être for the Fort no longer existed. At this time, in accord with previous treaty arrangements, the surrounding territory was vacated by the Indians and opened to settlement by the whites. Some of the soldiers left in the fall of that year, the rest by March 10, 1846.⁸

Frontier Town, 1846-1856

The period between the abandonment of Fort Des Moines by the soldiers in 1846 and the selection of the town as a site for the state capital were "years of decision" in the development of Des Moines. Events in this ten-year period largely determined whether a settlement would flourish or falter on this site. The existence of substantially built cabins, the road and river connections to eastern Iowa towns, and the prestige of a well-known name gave the site initial momentum. But without additional impetus other centers growing up elsewhere under different circumstances and with other attractions might well have assumed the functions that were eventually developed in Des Moines.

During this period further beginnings of the modern occupational structure were visible. Fort Des Moines became the seat of several governmental functions. Transportation routes focusing on Des Moines were improved and the city served a modest immigrant traffic, became the trading center for the surrounding area, and also developed some simple manufacturing industries. These activities combined to make Fort Des Moines at an early date the largest town in the middle Des Moines Valley. In addition, during this ten-year period, a pattern of land use was laid down that has done much to shape the modern city.

The early choice of Fort Des Moines as the county seat of Polk County, which was organized by the legislature on January 17, 1846, gave the town momentum at the very beginning of white settlement. Though Fort Des Moines had an advantage of some existent buildings, accessibility both by road and river, plus considerable prestige in the minds of the early settlers, its selection as a county seat was by no means certain. It seemed necessary, for example, through the instigation of interested individuals, to attach four townships to the southern border of Polk County from the territory that was afterwards Warren County, to give Fort Des Moines a more central location.⁹ Even with this legislative accomplishment, five other "towns" in

⁸ "Fort Des Moines, No. 2," 175-6.

⁹ Frank Harman Garver, "Boundary History of the Counties of Iowa," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 7:86-9 (January, 1909). After the location of the

Polk County were suggested and strongly supported by various individuals for the county seat: Polk City, Dudley, Brookline, Saylorville, and Churchville.¹⁰

An additional governmental function came with the establishment of a United States District Land Office in Des Moines. Though this came somewhat later, in January of 1853, and lasted for only three years, it was by its nature able to give a valuable boost to the new town. The rush for government land was just commencing, and the land embraced in this United States Land District was among the best in the state, including that in central, northern, and western Iowa. As a result, Des Moines became the center for the purchase and disposal of these lands, and many persons were attracted to the town by this activity. We are told that land agents and dealers in land warrants were thickly scattered along the business streets and that office room was in great demand. Extensive grants of lands were made in 1856 for the construction of railroads, and as this suspended to a great extent the further entry of these government lands, the great rush was over.¹¹

The early focus of transportation routes on Fort Des Moines was an added stimulant to the city's growth. The Des Moines River and the wagon roads eastward to Oskaloosa and Iowa City were the main elements in this focus. Although none of these routes provided first-class transportation, all, to a considerable extent, channeled the flow of supplies, settlers, and immigrants through the city.

The Des Moines River could be used by shallow draft steamboats during times of high water, but it never proved very satisfactory as a dependable artery of commerce. For example, though a steamboat brought up the first group of soldiers to the fort site, a few weeks later the river was so low it was only after many groundings and with some of its load transferred to keelboats that the rest of the supplies could be transported.¹² After con-

county seat at Fort Des Moines, the former townships were returned in 1853 to the county from which they had been taken.

¹⁰ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:60; also *History of Polk County, Iowa . . .* (Des Moines, 1880), 425-7.

¹¹ Will Porter, *Annals of Polk County, Iowa, and City of Des Moines* (Des Moines, 1898), 695-8.

¹² For an account of this trip by a member of the crew, see Tacitus Hussey, "History of Steamboating on the Des Moines River from 1837 to 1862," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 4:333-5 (April, 1900).

siderable agitation, Congress in 1846 granted to the state of Iowa, for the improvement of the Des Moines River, alternate sections of land in a strip ten miles wide extending along the river from the mouth to its source. It was proposed to install twenty-eight dams and nine additional locks, making the river navigable as far as the Raccoon Fork. However, by 1857, only three locks had been built; in all, only seven dams were completed and some work done on three more before the work was abandoned and the lands transferred to the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines and Minnesota Railroad Company (later renamed the Des Moines Valley Railroad Company) in 1858.¹³

Perhaps more important than the river in the growth of Des Moines were the wagon roads leading to the city. Captain Allen gave an initial impetus to road building by permitting two settlers to live in a restricted area, on the condition that they would bridge the two creeks east of the city. In the 1843-1844 session of the legislature, state support was given: a road was ordered to be built from Fairfield to Bennet's Point, Keokuk County, thence to Oskaloosa, from where it was to be extended "in the direction of . . . the Raccoon Fork of the Des Moines River." In 1845 the legislature also ordered the building of a road connecting Iowa City with Fort Des Moines.¹⁴

The latter road was useful not only in bringing supplies to the traders in the town, and in channeling settlers to the area, but also served to guide a considerable through traffic of immigrants through Fort Des Moines on their way west. By 1849, immigrants to California who traveled north of the Iowa River were advised to pass through Iowa City, Newton, and Fort Des Moines and from there to the Missouri. Before May 24, 1850, about 3,000 persons and 1,080 immigrant teams crossed the ferry at Des Moines. Many of the teams added to the demand for supplies at this "jumping off" place. The state road from Fort Des Moines to Council Bluffs "was one of the principal feeders for the wagon trail which began at the Bluffs."¹⁵ As early

¹³ Turrill, *Historical Reminiscences* . . . , 51; Jacob A. Swisher, "The Des Moines River Improvement Project," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 35:147-8, 167 (April, 1937).

¹⁴ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:48, 118, 668; also see map in Jacob Van der Zee, "The Roads and Highways of Territorial Iowa," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 3:183 (April, 1905); *Laws of Iowa, 1843*, Chap. 65; *1845*, Chap. 91.

¹⁵ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:95, 99.

as 1850 Fort Des Moines had scheduled stagecoach transportation. Frink, Walker and Company operated a line of stages through Fort Des Moines running from Keokuk to Council Bluffs.¹⁶ The territory surrounding Fort Des Moines was filling rapidly with settlers, and by 1850 the town seemed to have become something of a regional trading center. It was the nearest supply point for settlers living within eighty miles north and west of the city. There were no settlements between Fort Des Moines and Council Bluffs or Fort Dodge. Settlers typically came in the fall, to buy what groceries and dry goods they needed and "get trusted till spring and pay in hides, etc."¹⁷

In addition to trade and commerce, and the governmental activities mentioned above, some manufacturing was developing: the 1850 census listed forty-six hands employed in the city. The number of professional men was considerable. In writing of this year, Johnson Brigham quotes from an article in a local newspaper:

The Star of January 25 informs "all the world and the rest of mankind that Fort Des Moines is fast becoming metropolitan, having in 1850, nine dry-goods stores, with assortments of clothing, groceries, hardware, etc.; one hardware store, two drug stores, two provision stores, one tinware manufactory, one bakery, two printing offices, two weekly newspapers, one gunsmith, three or four blacksmith shops, six or eight builders, six or eight plasterers, one barrel factory, several shoe shops, cabinet makers, painters, tailor shops, etc., two hotels — the Demoine House and the Marvin — the former a large and commodious building mostly erected the past season, and the latter being enlarged by the addition of a spacious building to be finished early in the coming spring." Among the town's other available assets were "seventeen or eighteen lawyers, seven or eight physicians and half that number of patients;" also "two prospective saw-mills." The Star concludes with the assurance that "one year more will make this [by] far the largest town in the State off the Mississippi."¹⁸

The population of Fort Des Moines itself grew from 127 in 1847 through 502 in 1850 to about 3,800 in 1856.¹⁹ This rapid increase perhaps accu-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:84.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:58; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850. Compendium*, 234; *Census Returns . . . Iowa . . . 1856*, 322.

rately reflects the attractive force of the early town and forecasts Des Moines' growth in the future.

The original town was laid out on the terrace at the site of the old fort. The survey was completed by June 8, 1846, and extended from Locust to Elm and from Water to Eighth Street.²⁰ This laid down the street pattern that still dominates the business area. The streets, as the barracks, were laid out parallel and at right angles to the Des Moines River, instead of following the cardinal points of the compass. Some lots were then sold at public auction in the summer of 1846 and the rest disposed of to private bidders later. An indication as to the "center" of town can be found in the fact that the lot on the southwest corner of Second and Market streets brought the highest price — \$106.00.²¹

The first business district of Des Moines seems to have grown up among the barracks abandoned by the soldiers on Second Street south of Vine. Of the sixteen businessmen listed by Dixon as doing business in Fort Des Moines from 1846 to 1850, all are located there.²² Porter says that during the years before 1855 the main business houses continued on Second Street. The post office and nearly all the stores, groceries, and law offices were on Second Street south of Court Avenue.²³

In 1850 Court Avenue, surveyed to be the "main" street, seemed to be turning into a residential section. Three of the most prominent dwellings erected that year were at Court and Water, Third and Court, and on "the Avenue." At the same time, the hotels were the Marvin House on Third and Walnut and the Des Moines House at First and Walnut.²⁴ Thus during this period the residences do not seem to have been sharply separated from the business area.

Capital City, 1857-1866

The period 1857-1866 was one of continued growth. Important expan-

²⁰ This 160 acres of the government reservation, with all of the buildings of the fort, had been ceded to Polk County, January 17, 1846. Porter, *Annals of Polk County* . . . , 109.

²¹ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , map, 1:50; Turrill, *Historical Reminiscences* . . . , 22.

²² J. M. Dixon, *Centennial History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines, 1876), 24-31.

²³ Porter, *Annals of Polk County* . . . , 173; also see Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:115.

²⁴ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:84, 89.

sions occurred in the city's economic activities: it became a military center, the railroads reached the city, and the previously established livelihoods such as commerce, light manufacturing, professional services, and government prospered. The population of the city increased from 3,500 to about 10,000, and the incorporated area was expanded from about one square mile to approximately eight square miles. After the first year, the city dropped "Fort" from its name and was known simply as Des Moines. However, perhaps the event that affected the town the most and that characterized the period was the location of the state capital there in 1857. This insured the permanent importance of a place that up to this time was a promising frontier town but whose future growth was somewhat speculative.

The extension of the western boundary of the state to the Missouri River,²⁵ plus the rapid settling of the Des Moines Valley, gave substance to the arguments of those who in the forties wanted to shift the state capital from Iowa City to some point in the Des Moines Valley.²⁶ If and when the shift was to be made and at what point the new capital should be located were subjects for lengthy and acrimonious debate for many years. Viewing the past from today's vantage-point, it seems reasonable that the capital would be located at about the position of Des Moines. Actually, the choice was far from inevitable: many factors were involved. It was a result of individual decisions made after considering numerous alternative possibilities.

After several false starts, including an abortive attempt to locate the capital at "Monroe City," where the commissioners appointed to select the site acquired large holdings, the legislature directed that a location within two miles of the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon be selected. The votes to relocate the capital at this point came from the representatives of counties in or near the Des Moines Valley or its tributaries in southeastern Iowa, and in the counties west of Polk. Brigham explains the vote this way: "The social, commercial and political relations early established between Fort Des Moines and the river towns as far to the southeast as Keokuk, these strengthened by stage lines and the common interest in the prospective

²⁵ It has been charged that the establishment of the present boundaries of the state was part of an effort to put the "Raccoon Forks" near the future center of population. The whole question of relocating the capital is discussed in John E. Briggs, "The Removal of the Capital from Iowa City to Des Moines," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 14:56-95 (January, 1916).

²⁶ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:134.

line of railroad from Keokuk to Fort Des Moines, had much to do with the success of the movement."²⁷

The locating commission visited both Fort Des Moines and East Des Moines in 1856. Groups representing both settlements offered land for the capitol site. Eventually a ten-acre plot on the east side of the river was selected. The site was described by Governor James W. Grimes as: "A gentle swell of land about three quarters of a mile east of Fort Des Moines, and on the east side of the river. It commands a good prospect and seems to be well adapted to the purpose for which it has been selected."²⁸ The west-siders were quite shocked, as the settlement on their side of the river was by far the larger, and the land offered by them more valuable. Will Porter attempts to explain the choice in this fashion:

They [the east-siders] were pushing and energetic men, had a large number of lots at their disposal, and they shrewdly sought to and were successful in making many influential politicians and business men of the state personally and pecuniarily interested in the East Side property. . . . They had this advantage: Theirs was virtually a new enterprise and they had everything to gain. They were, therefore, more united than were the residents of the original town, and worked better together and were more liberal in the offer of inducement.²⁹

On October 19, 1857, Governor Grimes issued a proclamation declaring that in his opinion a suitable building for the accommodation of the General Assembly had been provided and therefore declared the capital of the state of Iowa to be established at Des Moines.³⁰ From that time on, the city grew rapidly in both political and economic importance.

Des Moines assumed a military function in the later part of the Civil War period. It was the headquarters of the Fifth Congressional District for the enrollment and drafting of men and the taking of volunteers into military service. The district extended westward to the Missouri River and southwest to the state line. This brought a considerable number of people to Des Moines and gave the city further status as a regional center.³¹

Some significant changes in external transportation facilities occurred in

²⁷ Briggs, "Removal of the Capital . . .," 75-9; Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . ., 1:145-6.

²⁸ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . ., 1:142.

²⁹ Porter, *Annals of Polk County* . . ., 174-5.

³⁰ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . ., 1:142.

³¹ Porter, *Annals of Polk County* . . ., 208.

this period. As late as 1858 the river was still an important transportation artery during certain times of the year. For example, legislators living in the northeastern part of the state preferred to go by steamboat down the Des Moines River to Keokuk and up the Mississippi to their homes rather than travel across the state in a "mud wagon." Four years later, however, in 1862, navigation on the Des Moines River was virtually at a standstill. Two important factors in this situation were the approach of the railroads to within about forty-five miles, with stage connections to the city, and the demand for steamboats elsewhere during the Civil War.³²

Telegraph lines, which reached Des Moines by 1862, were a great boost to the Des Moines newspaper industry. Formerly newspapers brought from Keokuk could present the news as fast as the Des Moines papers, whose dispatches probably came in the same mail. It had taken three to five days to send a letter to Keokuk, one of the state's important economic centers.³³

Even in this early period, the distribution of persons in the various economic activities of Des Moines was beginning to assume the present form. This was true especially in the prospering commercial and manufacturing activities. In 1866 there were 149 retail dealers and 42 wholesale dealers licensed in the city. These groups included not only grocers, bakers, and druggists, but also 22 dry goods concerns, 6 furniture companies, 10 clothing establishments, 15 millinery and dressmaking stores, 8 hardware merchants, and 6 wagon dealers. These are, incidentally, the type of trading activities that are still important in Des Moines at the present time. Finance activities in this early period were represented by 3 banks, 4 insurance companies, 19 insurance agents, and 19 real estate brokers. For personal service and amusement there were 8 tailors, 10 hotels, 3 billiard parlors, 16 eating houses, and 20 saloons. Lawyers, doctors, dentists, architects, and surveyors were included among the professions.³⁴

The same two kinds of manufacturing that are important in the city today, food processing and printing and publishing, were the leading activities of that type in Des Moines in this period. One hundred and thirty-

³² Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:160. After 1866 the river was no longer recognized by law as a navigable stream, across which a dam or bridge could not be built which would tend to obstruct free navigation. The law was repealed and the river was legally open to bridging by railroads. *Ibid.*, 1:105.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1:185.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:244; and *Des Moines City Directory . . . 1866-7*, 149ff.

three "hands" earned their livelihood in manufacturing in 1860. The largest single group, 26, worked in newspaper and job printing establishments. Bookbinding, a related industry, employed 14 persons, including 6 women, the only women listed that year as employed in manufacturing plants.³⁵ Pork packing was stimulated by the Civil War, and for some years was important in Des Moines. In the season 1861-1862 some 10,000 hogs were packed. J. Tuttle and Son, a local grocer, erected a packing house in 1862. However, it was located in the business district and was considered a nuisance.³⁶

The land use patterns of Des Moines began to take shape rapidly during the period from 1857 to 1866. The city was incorporated in 1857, formed out of the two earlier towns of Fort Des Moines and East Des Moines. The area was thus increased from the approximately one square mile of the "Fort," to about eight square miles. The city now took on a rectangular shape, two miles north and south and four miles east and west. The year previously, 1856, the streets and alleys on the east side had been re-platted to correspond with the Capitol grounds. For the first time Walnut and Locust streets were carried across the river; Grand Avenue, however, was still called Keokuk on the east side. A substantial bridge was built across the river at Court Avenue in 1858 and two years later the toll was removed for "foot-passengers residing in this county." A bridge at Walnut Street was completed in 1866.³⁷

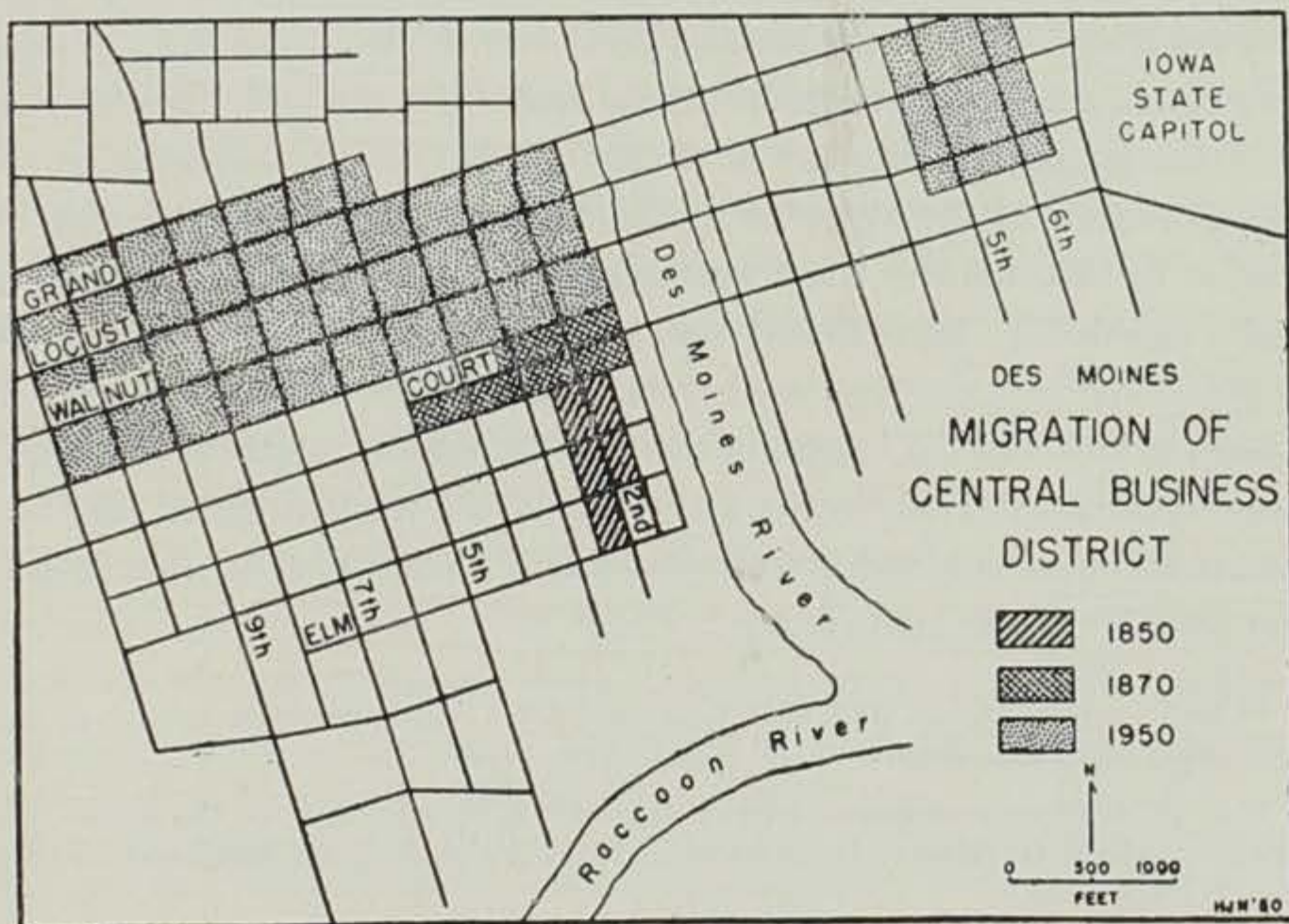
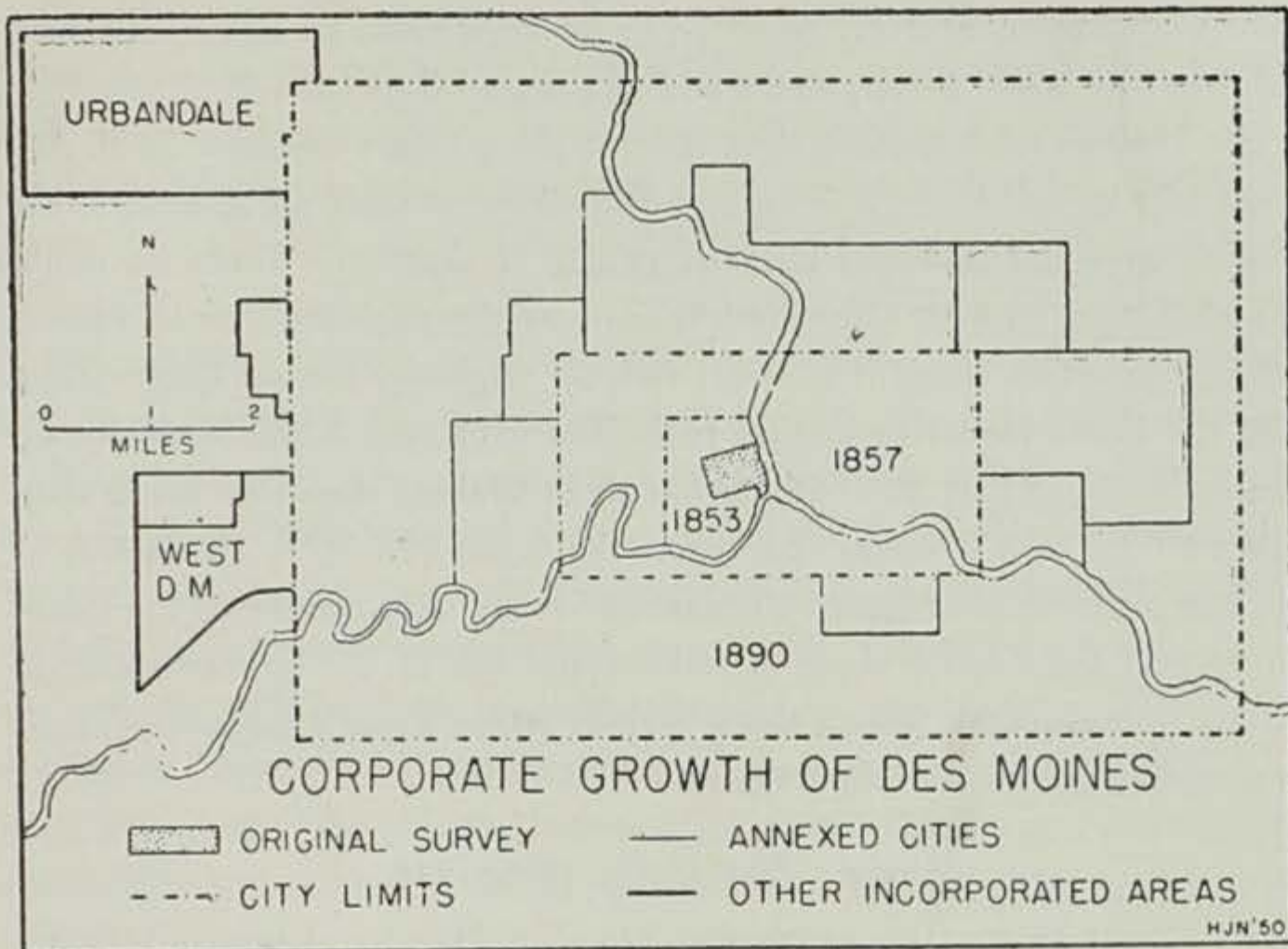
This "Capital" period saw some important shifts in the commercial center, as well as the beginning of a street railway system, an important reflection of location as well as a localizing factor in itself.

At the beginning of the period, though the largest portion of the business district was still on Second Street, a shift toward Court Avenue and especially Walnut Street seemed apparent. The Exchange Block, an office building at Third and Walnut (1855), the Savery Hotel at Walnut and Fourth (1856), and the Sherman Block at Court and Third were evidences of movement and in themselves attractions for further change. Of the seventy-one business and professional men who appear as sponsoring a map of "Des-moine" dated 1857 (at the beginning of this period) over one-half still had

³⁵ *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860. Manufactures*, 157.

³⁶ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:194; H. H. McCarty and C. W. Thompson, "Meat Packing in Iowa," *Iowa Studies in Business*, No. 12 (June, 1933), 36-7.

³⁷ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:147, 153, 166, 181, 244.



addresses on Second Street, about a quarter on Walnut, an eighth on Court, and a few on Third Street, at the end of the period in 1866.³⁸

The 1860's saw increasing development along Court Avenue. L. F. Andrews tells us that Court Avenue and Second Street from the Avenue to the "Coon" were the principal business streets of that era. Trade no doubt was stimulated on both Court and Walnut by the establishment of a street railway system in 1866. The street railway originally ran on Court Street from the Court House to Capitol Hill. The next year it was extended up an alley between East Seventh and Eighth to Walnut, then west on Walnut to West Fifth to a terminal in front of the Court House.³⁹ The layout of this line seems to have been well planned. It not only connected the Court House with the Capitol along the widest and one of the busiest streets in the city, but also gave service along Walnut Street, a much longer thoroughfare, rapidly growing in importance.

Modern Metropolis, 1866-1949

The arrival of the railroads in Des Moines in 1866 and 1867 added the last major element necessary to facilitate the development of the city into a modern metropolis. The increased accessibility provided by these railroads greatly strengthened Des Moines' position as a trading and commercial center and made possible the development of manufacturing in the city on its present scale. Service activities also grew with the city. The early years of this period marked the migration of the business center to its present position, the localization of many of the present-day manufacturing areas, and the movement of the high-class residential homes off the terrace into the bluffs. In 1890 the city limits were expanded to their present location, and eight neighboring incorporated towns became part of Des Moines. The population of the city increased from about 10,000 to over 175,000. By 1880 the city was the largest in the state, a position which has not since been challenged. Thus, in the early part of the modern period, the economic activities and land use pattern of Des Moines took on substantially the same outline as exists today.

³⁸ *Map of Des Moines and Polk County, Iowa*. "Compiled from county records and other reliable documents . . .," Des Moines, 1857.

³⁹ L. F. Andrews, newspaper article, dated 1913, no publisher, on file under "Des Moines," at the Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Historical Building, Des Moines, Iowa.

Iowa lies astride the great middle or overland route across the United States between the East and the Far West. As numerous rail lines pushed their way westward through Iowa in the 1850's and 1860's, the absence of strong localizing forces gave the roads considerable choice as to their exact route. However, it seemed quite certain that the state capital and largest "interior" city would find itself on one or more of these east-west lines.

Nevertheless, it was not by means of an east-west line that Des Moines first made contact with the nation's railway net. The Des Moines Valley Railroad, the city's first, reached the capital in 1866. This road, following the river that had been an earlier transportation route, connected Des Moines with Keokuk — a city intimately associated with Des Moines since its founding through river and road connections. The rail line had been ten years in the building, with the railhead drawing slowly nearer Des Moines. It reached Ottumwa in 1859 and Eddyville, a few miles north of that town, two years later. This was the terminus for several Civil War years until, in 1864, Pella was reached and Des Moines two years following. Connections with the East could now be made via the Burlington at Ottumwa.⁴⁰

The route followed by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific, which reached Des Moines in the following year, was more in harmony with the present transportation pattern than the Des Moines Valley artery. This put Des Moines on a transcontinental route and, when completed to Council Bluffs two years later, gave Des Moines direct connections with Chicago and San Francisco. This road, then known as the Mississippi and Missouri, had been completed as far as Iowa City as early as 1856, and only reached Grinnell by 1863. During the Civil War construction slowed down and a stage route made the trip from the head of the railroad to Des Moines. In 1867 the road was still thirty miles from Des Moines, but arrived in the city the next year.⁴¹

Extensive railroad building was carried on during the next twenty years, connecting much of Iowa with Des Moines. By 1870 there were two railroads running trains in four directions out of the city. Nine years later five lines were in actual operation and two more practically built. In 1885 fourteen railroads entered the city. Soon afterwards an era of consolidation set

⁴⁰ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:243; Harrison L. Waterman, *History of Wapello County, Iowa* (2 vols., Chicago, 1914), 1:161-2.

⁴¹ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:251, 256; F. J. Nevins, "Seventy Years of Service," *Rock Island Magazine*, 17:23 (October, 1922).

in, and a quarter of a century later there were but eleven roads operating into the city.⁴²

Today, although nine railroads operate into the city, only the Rock Island, the first road of importance to reach Des Moines, can be considered a main line route giving first-class passenger service. The most important railroad in the state misses the state's most important city. The North Western-Union Pacific route, which has developed into the major east-west railroad link in the nation, passes about thirty miles north of Des Moines.

In addition to the coming of the railroads, one of the most important features of the period of the modern metropolis has been the growth in Des Moines of commercial activities: retail, wholesale, and financial. Steadily improving accessibility to all of Iowa, first by rail and later by highway, the gradual increase of the surrounding region in population and wealth, the lack of major near-by competing urban areas, together with the trend of modern life toward commercialism, go far to account for this growth.

Wholesaling, always important in Des Moines, assumed new importance early in this period. The "runner" type of wholesaling, rather than the "central mart" type, characterized this developing industry. Hardware, paper, drugs, and groceries, all employing "runners," that is, traveling salesmen, to visit retailers, and handling a standardized product, dominated the wholesale scene. Jobbers of goods where merchants visit a "central mart" and compare style and price have generally been unimportant in Des Moines.

The number of commercial travelers or "runners" operating out of Des Moines increased steadily from 416 in 1890 to a high of about 1,300 in 1920.⁴³ One hundred and three trains a day (including interurbans) enabled these salesmen and their samples to reach all parts of Iowa and still maintain homes in Des Moines.⁴⁴ The slight decline in the later part of the period can perhaps be understood in terms of the development of highways in Iowa affecting the relative importance of Des Moines' railroad supremacy and the growth of the city as a retail center.

By 1881 some of the names still famous among Des Moines' wholesalers

⁴² Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:265, 286, 605-610; *Resources and Industries of Des Moines and Polk County*, Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Trade (Des Moines, 1885).

⁴³ *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Population*, Vol. I, Part 2, p. 662, and following decennial census.

⁴⁴ *Des Moines, Iowa* (Des Moines, 1893), 17.

begin to appear: L. H. Kurtz, hardware; Rollin and Langdon, paper; Tone Brothers, spices; and Charles Hewett, groceries.⁴⁵ It is significant that all four of these are of the "runner" type. Two years later a manufacturers' and jobbers' association was organized and was active in attempting to extend the reputation and territory of the city as a trade center.⁴⁶

Today Des Moines is the wholesale center of Iowa. The city has numerous local outlets, good transportation facilities, and a location at a considerable distance from other large cities — prerequisites to a large wholesale trade. In 1947 Des Moines' wholesalers handled about 18.5 per cent of the wholesale business in the state. Compared to Des Moines' 7.2 per cent of the population, and an estimated 10.5 per cent of the total retail sales in the state, the importance of the city as a regional wholesale center is evident.⁴⁷ Handlers of such things as automobiles, groceries, machinery, and electrical goods were especially prominent.

The period of the modern metropolis witnessed the rise of Des Moines as a retail center as well as a wholesale town. Names familiar to the retail shopper of today, Younkers, the Utica, Frankels, and Plumbs, appeared as retail merchants within ten years of the opening of this period. A few years later, 1890, when Harris-Emery Company (now part of Younkers) moved to a Walnut Street location, it was said the retail life of the city entered a new era and that the best trade need no longer go to Chicago but had ample inducement at home.⁴⁸

Des Moines has remained a center for the purchase of high quality style goods to the present day. Stores selling "shoppers goods," merchandise usually bought only after style and price comparison, feature the city's retail activity. The numerous large stores, with extensive selections of goods possible only in a city of some size, give Des Moines a relative competitive advantage in this type of retailing. The most prominent example is Younkers, the largest department store in the city, and probably in the state of Iowa as well. In 1947 this store was the largest single employer of labor of any establishment in Des Moines.

Associated almost entirely with the period of the modern metropolis has been the growth of Des Moines to national prominence as an insurance

⁴⁵ J. P. Bushnell, *First Annual Report of the Board of Trade* (Des Moines, 1881).

⁴⁶ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:302.

⁴⁷ *Sales Management*, 60:10.

⁴⁸ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:317.

center. Though two companies were organized the year before the period began, all the rest have developed since 1866. By 1900 the number had risen to twenty-five and ten years later to forty-four. Today there are forty insurance companies: ten life, fifteen casualty, nine fire, and several miscellaneous types. In 1947 Des Moines ranked eleventh of all cities regardless of size in point of premiums received by insurance companies.⁴⁹

The two largest and best known insurance organizations are the Bankers Life Company and the Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa. Both these companies were products of Des Moines men and local money, and both have long and distinguished histories.

The Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa was founded in 1867 by Frederick Hubbell. He was an early Des Moines banker who disliked seeing the scarce money of the period going east for insurance premiums or any other reason. Today the company ranks thirty-fourth in size in the nation, employs approximately 500 persons, and has over \$900,000,000 of insurance in force.⁵⁰

The Bankers Life Company began in 1879 as a death benefit organization or an assessment life insurance company with membership limited exclusively to bankers. Though this idea came from E. A. Temple, a banker at Chariton, the company was organized and had its headquarters in Des Moines. With the rise to power of Henry S. Nollen in 1911, the organization was changed to a legal reserve life insurance company. In 1947 the company ranked twenty-fourth in the total of life insurance in force, about \$1,300,000,000, among the more than three hundred legal reserve life insurance companies operating in the United States.⁵¹ It is the largest insurance company in Iowa and in all the area west of the Mississippi. In 1947 it had an average of about 500 employees.

The men who founded and managed these companies contributed much to their initial success. In addition, in the early period of the companies' history, much of their money was invested in Iowa farm land. This period coincided with an era of rising land values, and hence these loans were very successful. The prosperity of the early companies may have attracted oth-

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:517; "Home Insurance Totals," *The National Underwriter*, 52:1 (1948). In a similar study in 1945, Des Moines was in thirteenth place.

⁵⁰ Personal interview with Mr. Francis Capper, Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa.

⁵¹ *Bankers Life Company* (Des Moines, 1940).

ers. Today insurance companies find many things about the city that are favorable. Des Moines' population is large enough to furnish an adequate number of workers, but land, buildings, maintenance, and wage costs are not so high as in a large city. Through the years the people have come to understand the advantages of working for insurance companies — many are children of "white collar" parents. Some executives can be attracted to the city because of its relatively small size. The location of the city, in the center of the country, makes it equally convenient to both coasts, so that branch offices are not necessary, yet it is close enough to New York to get next day mail service to that city.⁵²

In contrast to the moderate expansion of commercial activities in Des Moines, one of the striking trends of the modern metropolis era has been the slight relative decline of manufacturing employment. From 1890 on, when comparable data is available, a steady decline from about 28 per cent to about 17 per cent in 1940 is indicated. In 1948 it was estimated that 22 per cent of the employed persons were in manufacturing. In the decade of the sixties, however, at the beginning of this period, in response to increased demand during the Civil War, and the new accessibility with the coming of the railroads, the number of hands employed in manufacturing increased sixfold between 1860 and 1870. This is the largest percentage increase ever reported for a ten-year period, although after only a moderate advance in the next decade, the 1880-1890 period saw a 200 per cent increase in industrial employees.⁵³

Manufacturing in the modern metropolis may be meaningfully considered in four classes:

1. Local manufacturing, of the type widespread throughout American cities and towns, growing out of local services, usually to supply local needs.
2. Manufacturing of products finding a ready market among the surrounding Corn Belt farmers.
3. Manufacturing based on the processing of the agricultural raw materials produced in Iowa.

⁵² Many of these ideas came from an interview with Mr. Gerald S. Nollen, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Bankers Life Company.

⁵³ *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860. Manufactures*, 157; *Ninth Census of the United States: 1870. Industry and Wealth*, 516. (Eighth and Ninth census give only county statistics.) *Tenth Census of the United States: 1880. Statistics of Manufacturers*, 399; *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Manufacturing Industries*, Vol. VI, Part 2, pp. 190-97.

4. Light manufacturing, using raw materials brought in from other areas, and marketing the products on a nation-wide scale.

The dominant class of manufacturing in Des Moines throughout the modern period has grown out of local services. Printing and publishing, bakery products and beverage industries, and the manufacture of construction materials in brick works, planing mills, and cement plants are particularly important in the development of these "local" industries.

Printing and publishing has been a major industry all during the modern period. In 1870 printing, book and newspaper, was the second industry in terms of employment, with ninety-six men. However, in terms of wages it was by far the most important, paying its employees more than the next largest group of industries combined. The printing and publishing industry moved into first place by all measures in the next decade, and has been the largest single industry down to the present time. Printing and publishing, important in all stages of the city's development, was stimulated by the need for job work by the growing insurance companies and other commercial enterprises.

Even more important to the development of printing and publishing was the growth of locally published farm journals and daily newspapers, tailored to fit the needs of the state's growing agricultural population. The Des Moines publishing business, which today perhaps ranks first in national prominence among the industries of the city, received its start and owes much of its present prominence to the desire and ability of the people living on the surrounding farms and in the small towns to keep informed on agricultural happenings and world-wide affairs. The first journal on the scene was the *Iowa Homestead*, followed by *Wallaces' Farmer* in 1896 and *Successful Farming* in 1902.⁵⁴ In 1903 the direct predecessor of the Des Moines *Register and Tribune* was organized.

Starting at the turn of the century as a publisher of a farm magazine, the Meredith Publishing Company today publishes a nationally known magazine, *Better Homes and Gardens*, in addition to the expanded *Successful Farming*. *Better Homes and Gardens*, a home service magazine, has a current circulation of about 3,350,000, the seventh largest distribution of all the magazines in the United States.⁵⁵ The circulation of this magazine

⁵⁴ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:561. See also, *The Palimpsest*, 11:229-65 (June, 1930).

⁵⁵ The first six are: *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Saturday Eve-*

is nation-wide. Its density of distribution is generally in accord with the density of population, except for a somewhat larger circulation in California and a smaller circulation in the southeastern United States than the population of these areas would warrant.⁵⁶

Successful Farming, a farm publication keyed to the high income farmers of the Corn Belt, has a circulation of about 1,250,000 concentrated in the North Central States. The company also publishes such miscellaneous books as the *Better Homes and Gardens Cook Book*, and *Baby Book*. The *Cook Book* has sold over 3,750,000 copies and ranks among the best sellers of all time. Some feel of the scope of the operations of this concern can be gained by the fact that thirty boxcars a month are required to supply paper for the company, and that advertising revenues for 1947 were about \$14,500,000.⁵⁷ Over a thousand persons worked for this publishing concern in 1947.

The subscription list of *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, a bi-weekly farm magazine, reflects the high income of the Iowa farmer. Of its current circulation of over 300,000 weekly, about two-thirds is in Iowa. Most of the rest is in adjoining states.⁵⁸

Rapid delivery of a high quality metropolitan newspaper to a relatively prosperous, reading farm and small town population has formed the basis of success of the *Register* and *Tribune*. The nucleus of the present organization was formed in 1903 when Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr., took over the old *Register and Leader*. At that time the paper was in debt and had a circulation of about 14,000. In three years the circulation was about doubled, in 1908 the *Des Moines Tribune* was added to the combine, and still later the *Iowa Capital*.⁵⁹ Despite the fact that it operates out of a relatively small city (fifty-four cities were larger in 1940), only five Sunday and twenty-three daily papers in the United States have today a larger circulation than the *Des Moines Register*, a morning paper, the *Des Moines Evening Post*, *Woman's Home Companion*, and *McCall's*. See *World Almanac* . . . 1949, 403.

⁵⁶ Map in possession of Mr. John Robling, General Promotion Department, Meredith Publishing Company.

⁵⁷ *Investors Reader*, 10:17.

⁵⁸ Letter from Mr. Donald R. Murphy, Editor, *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, July 7, 1949.

⁵⁹ George Mills, "The *Des Moines Register*," *The Palimpsest*, 30:292-4 (September, 1949).

Tribune, an evening paper, and the Des Moines *Sunday Register*.⁶⁰ These are the only daily papers published in Des Moines. The combined average circulation of the daily papers is about 370,000, about 70 per cent of which is delivered to customers outside of Des Moines; the Sunday paper circulates slightly over half a million copies, about 90 per cent outside of the city. Based on the occupied dwellings in Iowa in 1940, this circulation reached 46 per cent of the Iowa families daily and 70 per cent of them on Sunday.⁶¹

Two other industries that have grown out of local services, the bakery products and bottling industries, are relatively new in their importance. Both have arrived at their modern status with the coming of motor truck delivery of their product from Des Moines to the surrounding territory.

The building and rebuilding of the large number of dwelling houses, business blocks, factories, streets, and utilities that go to make up a modern city have made an additional contribution to the local manufacturing activities of Des Moines. With the rapid growth of the modern metropolis, such things as planing mills and brick factories, present in the earlier period, took on new life. More recently cement plants have become important.

The most significant industry producing materials used in building the physical plant of Des Moines has been the clay products industry. The deep valleys of both the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers have exposed within the city formations of shale suitable for the making of brick, tile, and hollow block. These resources have been utilized throughout the period. The city directory for 1866 listed ten brickmakers; by 1880 eleven firms were turning out nearly twelve million bricks annually. With the shift from wood blocks to brick for street paving in the 1890's, the Des Moines plants produced nearly forty million bricks annually.⁶² In terms of employment, brickmaking was second only to printing and publishing from 1899 to 1914.⁶³

Planing mills, too, had some importance in the employment picture of the

⁶⁰ *World Almanac* . . . 1949, 403. From Audit Bureau of Circulation Reports.

⁶¹ Audit Bureau of Circulation one-day count as of March 31, 1948. *Iowa Grocery Directory* (Des Moines, 1948), 66. Des Moines is one of the ten cities in the United States having a Sunday newspaper circulation of over a half-million. Mills, "The Des Moines Register," 294.

⁶² *Des Moines City Directory, 1866-7*, 150-51; Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:290, 352.

⁶³ *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Manufacturing Industries*, Vol. VI, Part 2, pp. 190-97; and following decennial census of manufacturing.

modern period. Gilcrest Brothers Planing Mill and Sash and Door Factory, still on the scene, was already a going concern and, in "an event of the year," opened a large planing mill in 1869.⁶⁴

With the shift toward concrete as a material of construction and the utilization of low-grade raw materials in the production of Portland cement, two cement factories, using locally exposed shales, have been established within the functional city. Employment in these plants, in 1947, eclipsed the combined total employment of brickyards and planing mills.

A second major type of manufacturing, the production of goods finding a ready market among the surrounding Corn Belt farmers, has grown significantly in recent years. In Des Moines this type takes the form of agricultural machinery and accessories of the kind particularly useful to mechanized modern Corn Belt agriculture. A small machinery industry, beginning with the production of carriages, wagons, and agricultural implements, has its counterpart in the modern city in the Wood Brothers Thresher Company and the John Deere Tractor Works, both in their present form post-war establishments.

The Wood Brothers Thresher Company has long utilized Des Moines' position in the heart of an oat growing region for the production of threshing machines. Since the war the company has produced cornpickers and combines for the Ford Motor Company. Early in 1948 the John Deere Company took over a wartime ordnance plant, located north of the city limits. Here, in the center of the leading corn producing state, they too have begun the manufacture of cornpickers.

Complementing the production of agricultural machinery, the production of rubber tires, particularly for this type of machinery, is also important in Des Moines. The Lakeshore Tire and Rubber Company, an old established Des Moines firm, produces tires for a part of the national market, but its sales are concentrated in the Middle West. A Firestone plant, specializing in tires for agricultural machinery, began operations in 1945. Tires are sold to near-by agricultural implement factories and also enter the retail replacement market.

The processing of agricultural raw materials, though of significance all through the modern period, has never dominated the manufacturing life of Des Moines as it has in other smaller Iowa cities such as Sioux City, Cedar

⁶⁴ Brigham, *History of Des Moines . . .*, 1:256.

Rapids, and Ottumwa. For example, in 1870, meat packing was the city's leading industry, employing 102 men.⁶⁵ However, from that time to 1925, the packing business was strictly an "on again, off again" enterprise, sometimes a large employer of labor, selling in the world market, at other times completely shut down. In 1925 Swift and Company bought the largest plant in the city at a receiver's sale, and since that date the plant has been in continuous operation.⁶⁶

Though a number of other manufacturers using agricultural raw materials have existed during various parts of this period, at present the majority of them have ceased to operate. A corn syrup factory, starch factories, breweries, and an alcohol works have all been important employers of labor at various times.⁶⁷ A small oatmeal mill, several modest creameries, a woolen mill, and a leather working establishment are all that remain. The processing of agricultural raw materials in Des Moines employed only about 15 per cent of the total labor force working in manufacturing in 1940.⁶⁸

Manufacturing of the type carried on in recognized centers, using raw materials shipped in from outside the region and marketing the finished product on a nation-wide scale, has not been of general importance in the livelihood of Des Moines. However, some successful enterprises of this type have been in operation in the past few decades. The failure of the Tibbets Sewing Machine Works to open in 1889 after much fanfare was symbolic of the lack of this type of operations in the early part of the period, and perhaps made the people of the city wary in encouraging factories of this kind.⁶⁹ The Ford Motor Company opened an assembly plant in Des Moines in 1919, but with the passing of the Model T in 1927 it ceased operations.⁷⁰ Light manufacturing, where the value of the product is high per unit of value, has had some rather recent representatives. The F. W. Fitch Company, manufacturing perfumers; Armand Company, producers of cosmetics; and the Rollins Hosiery Mills are representatives of this group. The Solar Aircraft Plant, housed in the old Ford building, a remnant of wartime manufacturing, is an important addition to this group.

⁶⁵ *Ninth Census of the United States: 1870. Industry and Wealth*, 516.

⁶⁶ McCarty and Thompson, "Meat Packing in Iowa," 40-41.

⁶⁷ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:288, 292, 294.

⁶⁸ *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Manufacturers, 1939*, 326.

⁶⁹ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:313.

⁷⁰ Letter from Mr. John D. Adams, General Secretary, Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, July 9, 1949.

The service activities of Des Moines have furnished a livelihood for a generally constant proportion of persons in the "Modern Metropolis." This is in contrast to a relative increase in commerce, and a relative decline in manufacturing. Within this category there has been a slight increase in professional service and a slight decrease in domestic and personal service.

In harmony with this trend, Des Moines seems to have served Iowa as a convention city throughout this period. As early as 1873, twenty-three conventions were held in the city. The major hotels now functioning, aided by this convention business, came into existence during this period. The new Savery was built in 1888, the new Kirkwood opened in 1891, the Chamberlain in 1903, and the Fort Des Moines somewhat later. The "Coliseum," a public auditorium, provided a meeting place for groups of up to 10,000 persons after its completion in 1909 until destroyed by fire 40 years later.⁷¹ In 1950 Des Moines voted funds for a new Coliseum, which will seat 20,000 people.

Professional services, especially educational and medical, have made important developments in this period. Des Moines University, Drake University, Highland Park College, and Grand View College were organized during the first thirty years of the "Modern Metropolis." Of these, only Drake and Grand View remain. However, with the expansion of Drake in the peak years to over 4,000 students and 220 faculty members, it is probable that educational services are rendered to more people at present than ever before.⁷² Increased medical service is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon. For example, only one of Des Moines' five major hospitals was established before 1900.

The modern commercial center is on Walnut Street. The period has been characterized by an increasing concentration on this street and a westward movement along it. The rapid demise of Court Avenue and Second Street in commercial importance is also notable. As early as 1871 the majority of the establishments commonly associated with the commercial center were on Walnut Street.⁷³ However, Court Avenue, a relatively short

⁷¹ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:272, 311, 322, 382, 411.

⁷² Ilda M. Hammer, *Book of Des Moines* (Des Moines, 1947), 279, map, 88; *World Almanac* . . . 1949, 386.

⁷³ From business directories of the city for the dates indicated. The establishments of the sort that today are commonly found in the commercial center of a city were plotted on maps with the aid of street numbers, and the percentages computed from this distribution. The classes of establishments mapped included: Boots and Shoes

thoroughfare, was probably at the peak of its prominence, with about half the number of establishments on Walnut, and there were still some business houses on Second Street. On Walnut the clustering was between Third and Fourth streets, and on Court it was between Second and Fourth. A decade later the trend was almost complete: over three-fourths of the establishments sampled were on Walnut, only about one-tenth on Court Avenue; while Second Street, the main shopping street of early Des Moines, had almost none. A beginning of the shift west on Walnut is observable, the main clustering now occurs in the blocks from Third to Sixth with some locations west of Seventh.

By 1891, 80 per cent of the sample business establishments were located along Walnut all the way from Third to beyond Seventh. A concentration is noticed in the block between Fourth and Fifth. Sixth Avenue is now the second ranking street of retail importance, with some establishments along it, both north and south of Walnut. By this date Court, like Second in an earlier period, seems to have been completely abandoned by retail establishments.

The pattern of retail establishments has changed only slightly in the past fifty-eight years. There has been apparently a small movement of the center a block or so farther west: today the most valuable business property is on Walnut between Fifth and Sixth, with the neighboring blocks along Walnut of nearly the same value.⁷⁴ The cross streets in these blocks, as well as in the area on Locust between these streets, are also desirable retail areas. The stability of Walnut Street as the retail center over this long a time is one of the striking characteristics of the modern period. Another may be the development of business on Locust and Grand. The recent building of several specialized office buildings north of these streets is also of significance.

Manufacturing in the early part of this period (1880) appears to have been concentrated in the area from which the business center had recently moved. Of forty manufacturing establishments whose addresses are avail-

(retail), Clothing, Gent's Furnishings, Dry Goods, Notions and Fancy Goods, Furniture Dealers (retail), Hats, Caps and Furs, Jewelers and Watch Makers, Millinery (retail), Toys and Notions. When duplicates were excluded, the number of establishments mapped for any year ranged from 48 to 72. The following several paragraphs are from these maps. After 1891 the directories no longer classified establishments in similar categories.

⁷⁴ Personal interview with Mr. Hugh Harter, Polk County Assessor.

able, two-thirds were on the west side of the river, mainly concentrated in the area bounded by First Street, Fourth Street, Court Avenue, and Elm Street; a few establishments were as far west as Seventh Street, and some were even on Walnut. On the east side of the river the locations were more scattered but generally were found on the lowlands near the river, from Vine to Sycamore.⁷⁵

In 1870 and 1871 two new packing houses were built east of the river at what is now SE 18th Street and Maury, establishing permanently the site of the packing house district. Subsidiary and associated industries have also moved into this area. In 1888 several firms located between Dean Avenue and the Rock Island tracks, an event which marked the beginning of manufacturing there.⁷⁶

The movement of the better class of residences off the relatively low terrace into the surrounding bluffs, especially to the west, coincides with the beginning of this period. Symbolic of this movement, B. F. Allen, "Des Moines' foremost capitalist," sold his home at Court and Fourth in 1871 and moved to a quarter million dollar house on "Terrace Hill," a twenty-nine acre landscaped plot "between the Adel Road and the 'Coon River'" (the area between the present Grand Avenue, the Racoon River, and from about Twenty-First to Twenty-Eighth Street).⁷⁷

As Des Moines grew in population and livelihood activities, in another and final expansion in 1890, the boundaries were extended to include the 53.4 square miles of the present city. This addition took in eight incorporated towns as well as a considerable amount of unincorporated area.⁷⁸ Greenwood Park, a suburb to the west taken in by this expansion, was said to contain some of the most elegant residences in the county. Greenwood Avenue, "the finest drive in the city, extends through it from east to west" (now Woodlawn Avenue from Twenty-Eighth Street to Forty-Second Street). "It was a popular place of residence for business men — not so crowded as in Des Moines." Other towns included were Sevastopol, located south of the river and the site of four coal mines, and University Place, seat of Drake University. It had fine homes and was said to attract

⁷⁵ *History of Polk County, Iowa* (Des Moines, 1880), 709-716.

⁷⁶ McCarty and Thompson, "Meat Packing in Iowa," 37-8; Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:311.

⁷⁷ Brigham, *History of Des Moines* . . . , 1:244; Porter, *Annals of Polk County* . . . , 378-9.

⁷⁸ Hammer, *Book of Des Moines*, Map, 88.

the "better class" citizen. The street railroad was being extended in that direction. Chesterfield, to the east, had several "heavy" manufacturing establishments. North Des Moines, Capital Park, and Eaton Place to the north, and Grant Park to the west, were the other suburbs incorporated.⁷⁹

In the past, Des Moines has reflected the characteristics of the people and of the economy of the state of Iowa to a greater extent, perhaps, than do most state capitals. Many factors combine to produce this result. Numerous transportation routes tie all parts of Iowa to Des Moines. There are no mountainous sections or areas of hill country within the state, no deeply cut canyons or large bodies of water to hamper the development of transportation routes. Corn Belt agriculture on Iowa's fertile, well-watered soil has been relatively profitable, and the farmers of the state, as well as the small town dwellers they support, are generally economically in the class that is presumed to travel to make purchases. Iowa farmers have the equipment and freedom to use their highways. The state ranks first in percentage of farmers owning automobiles, with about as many farmers reporting automobiles as reporting buildings.⁸⁰ In addition, farmers are free to plan the use of their own time and are free to travel any day of the week.

Though Iowa has been settled almost entirely within the past one hundred years by migrants from previously settled states to the east, as well as by people coming directly from Europe, no significant cultural islands remain. Further, very few of the groups that elsewhere have resisted or have been denied integration are present in the state. These facts, together with physical uniformity and similar economic conditions, make for an unusual degree of cultural similarity and a lack of sectionalism within Iowa.

As a result, Des Moines has developed into an effective focal point providing organizational unity to a relatively homogeneous agricultural state. The future evolution of Des Moines seems to lie in a continuation of this role. Upon the prosperity and good will of the people of Iowa, operating within the framework of the national economy and world order, lies the future of the city of Des Moines.

⁷⁹ Bushnell, *Resources and Industries of Des Moines* . . ., 99-102; Hammer, *Book of Des Moines*, 88.

⁸⁰ 192,456 farms reporting automobiles; 219,140 farms reporting buildings. *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Census of Agriculture.*