

THE ROADS AND HIGHWAYS OF TERRITORIAL IOWA

“The history of America in the later part of the pioneer period, between 1810 and 1840, centers about the roads and canals which were to that day what our trunk railway lines are to us to-day. The ‘life of the road’ was the life of the nation, and a study of the traffic on those first highways of land and water, and of the customs and experiences of the early travelers over them brings back with freshening interest the story of our own ‘Middle Age.’”¹ And so the study of the roads and highways of Territorial Iowa as the avenues of the intercourse, trade, and traffic of our pioneer fathers suggests much of the history and romance of frontier life.

ROUTES LEADING TO IOWA

On the 17th day of May, 1673, Marquette and Joliet embarked upon the famous “first voyage” for the discovery of the Mississippi “fully resolved to do and suffer everything for so glorious an undertaking.” Crossing over from the Great Lakes by way of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers, they were borne out upon the broad Mississippi in their light canoes on the 17th of June. Eight days later they were conversing with the Illinois Indians near the mouth of the Iowa River. Theirs was the first route to Iowa.²

¹ Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. I, p. 12.

² *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. I, p. 6; and Thwaites' *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Vol. LIX, p. 107.

On the 14th day of May, 1804, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark with a force of picked men, some two score or more in number, departed from their encampment at the mouth of the Wood River near St. Louis to explore the regions recently bought from Napoleon. They followed the course of the Missouri, and on the 3rd of August they rowed their crafts, a keel-boat and two "perioques," to a place on the eastern bank. Here they held a council with the Indians. Speeches were made and presents distributed. The importance of this incident induced the explorers to give to the place the name of "Council-bluff."¹

It was a little more than a year after the departure of the Lewis and Clark expedition that Zebulon M. Pike started out from his encampment, near St. Louis, on the afternoon of August 9, 1805, in company with twenty soldiers. The party worked its way up the Mississippi in a large keel-boat, seventy feet long. On the 20th of August they were ascending the Des Moines Rapids when they were met by Mr. Wm. Ewing, who was understood to be "an agent appointed to reside with the Sacs to teach them the science of agriculture." Ewing, with a French interpreter, four chiefs, and fifteen men of the Sac nation, assisted the travelers up the rapids. At dusk they arrived at the house of Mr. Ewing, which was near the Indian Village on the west bank of the Mississippi.²

Previous to the explorations of Captains Lewis and Clark and of Zebulon M. Pike, very little was known of the regions of the Central West. The glowing accounts brought back by these explorers who, moreover, had examined only the

¹ Hosmer's *History of the Expedition of Captains Lewis and Clark*, Vol. I, pp. 3, 41. (Reprinted from the edition of 1814.)

² Coues' *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike*, Vol. I, p. 13.

country along the great water courses, awakened among thoughtful Americans a deep interest, especially in the land recently purchased from France. The only people who had previously penetrated this wilderness of woods and prairies were either zealous missionaries from France who sought to convert the savages to the Christian faith, or they were hunters, trappers, and fur-traders who cultivated the friendship of the Indian in the interest of their traffic.

By the year 1830 all the region east and some west of the Mississippi was open for settlement. But it remained for the Black Hawk treaty of September, 1832, definitely to extinguish the Indian title to the eastern portion of Iowa. The news of this important treaty was followed by such a rush to our fertile prairies that in a day, as it were, another Commonwealth was founded—a Commonwealth of the Pioneers. All the great avenues of travel were soon alive with emigrants.

At this early day the greatest thoroughfare leading to the Iowa country was the Ohio River. The old method of water transportation by the use of flat-boats or batteaus, propelled by poles or oars and aided by the current of the stream, was gradually giving way to the newly invented steamboat. The inauguration of steam navigation was, indeed, the dawning of an era of incalculable prosperity for the West. Emigrants from Virginia, Kentucky, and other States bordering on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers took passage on the numerous steamers busy on their waters. The fare from Pittsburg to St. Louis was from twenty to thirty dollars in the cabin; while on the deck the charge was from five to eight dollars. Deck passengers were placed

“in the midship where they are protected from the weather, and they are also entitled to a berth, but no bedding; the latter and provisions they furnish themselves.”¹ The fare from St. Louis to Dubuque and Prairie du Chien (Wisconsin) was, in the cabin, from ten to fifteen dollars, and on the deck, from three to four dollars. Hundreds of people came to Iowa in this way.² The entire distance from Pittsburg to the Gate City of Iowa (Keokuk) which was no less than fourteen hundred miles, was covered within a period of a few days, provided the journey was without accident. (See Map I on page 182.)

All of the early continental land routes focussed upon the Ohio River in western Pennsylvania. Soon after that well-known company of Virginia speculators³ received a grant of land from King George, one of the greatest wars of modern times commenced. Its first famous skirmishes need not be discussed, but the routes leading up to them are certainly deserving of some mention in this connection.

Upon being chosen to lead a regiment from Ft. Cumberland to construct a fort where Pittsburg now stands, Washington selected a path which had been named after a Delaware Indian (Nemacolin) who blazed its course for the Ohio Company.⁴ The path was hardly wide enough to admit the

¹ *Geographical, Geological, and Statistical Chart of Wisconsin and Iowa*, 1838, by Henry I. Abel.

² “It is astonishing to see how crowded the steamboats are with emigrants bound for Iowa Territory, every boat on which we traveled from Pittsburgh, on the Ohio to Bloomington on the Mississippi was crowded; accompanied with their farming utensils, furniture and every necessary article.”—*Iowa City Standard*, April 16, 1842.

³ The Ohio Company.

⁴ “To those who love to look back to small beginnings, and read great things in small, this Indian path, with its border of wounded trees, leading across the

passage of a pack horse; and so a company of men was sent ahead to widen the trail and bridge the streams. This twelve-foot road was soon made historic by the English general, Braddock, after whom it was named.

When shortly after the close of the Revolution the great flood of emigration swept westward the current, we are told, was divided into three streams near the Potomac. One went southward over the Virginia route through Cumberland Gap to Kentucky. This was Boone's Wilderness Road. The other two streams of emigration burst over Braddock's Road and Forbes' Road. Forbes' route, laid out from Philadelphia, was "the most important link between New England and the Ohio Valley in the days when New England was sending the bravest of her sons to become the pioneers of the rising empire in the West."¹

Since the old Washington-Braddock road was becoming worse with every year's travel, the location of a suitable permanent route was highly necessary. Owing to the rapid peopling of Ohio and the promise of parallel developments in Indiana and Illinois, Congress in 1811 authorized the building of the first and only great national highway—the famous Cumberland Road. This road has been styled "Ambitious America's Appian Way." If, as was intended, the whole distance from Ft. Cumberland to St. Louis had been macadamized, hills leveled, valleys filled, and streams and chasms spanned by covered bridges, the famous Roman road would indeed have been insignificant in comparison.

first great divide into the Central West, is worthy of contemplation. Each tree starred white by the Indian's ax spoke of Saxon conquest and commerce, one and inseparable."—Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. III, p. 96.

¹ Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. IV, p. 47.

But after nearly \$7,000,000 had been expended upon it,¹ the financial crisis of 1837 stopped the stupendous undertaking. The Iowa immigrants who followed this famous highway found the route "horrid in spring; but in the autumn, when the weather was dry, it was one grand pavement."²

Besides the river routes the Great Lakes, too, had become an important highway. Although steam navigation was, to be sure, little more than an experiment, it was the popular mode of travel to the West. Emigrants from the New England States and from Canada found it most advantageous to start from Buffalo and go by way of Lake Erie and Lake Michigan to Green Bay, Milwaukee, or Chicago. Teams and wagons were then secured for the short overland trip to Iowa. This route was the most pleasant, the quickest, and the cheapest, the fare being from six to twenty-five dollars. It is a fact that hundreds and thousands of very respectable families traveled as deck passengers, thus saving much of what they would otherwise have expended for cabin accommodations. The trip generally took from six to eight days; and a farmer was advised "under all circumstances, either by land or water, to take his teams and wagons along with him, as he would need them upon his arrival."³

It must be remembered that the States east of the Mississippi had already established a system of public road-ways, and that "overland" was the most popular as it was the most democratic mode of travel to the Great West. On

¹ Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. X, p. 202.

² Philips' *Mahaska County*, p. 35.

³ See Abel's *Geographical Chart*, 1838; Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, p. 250; and Plumbe's *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, 1839, p. 40.

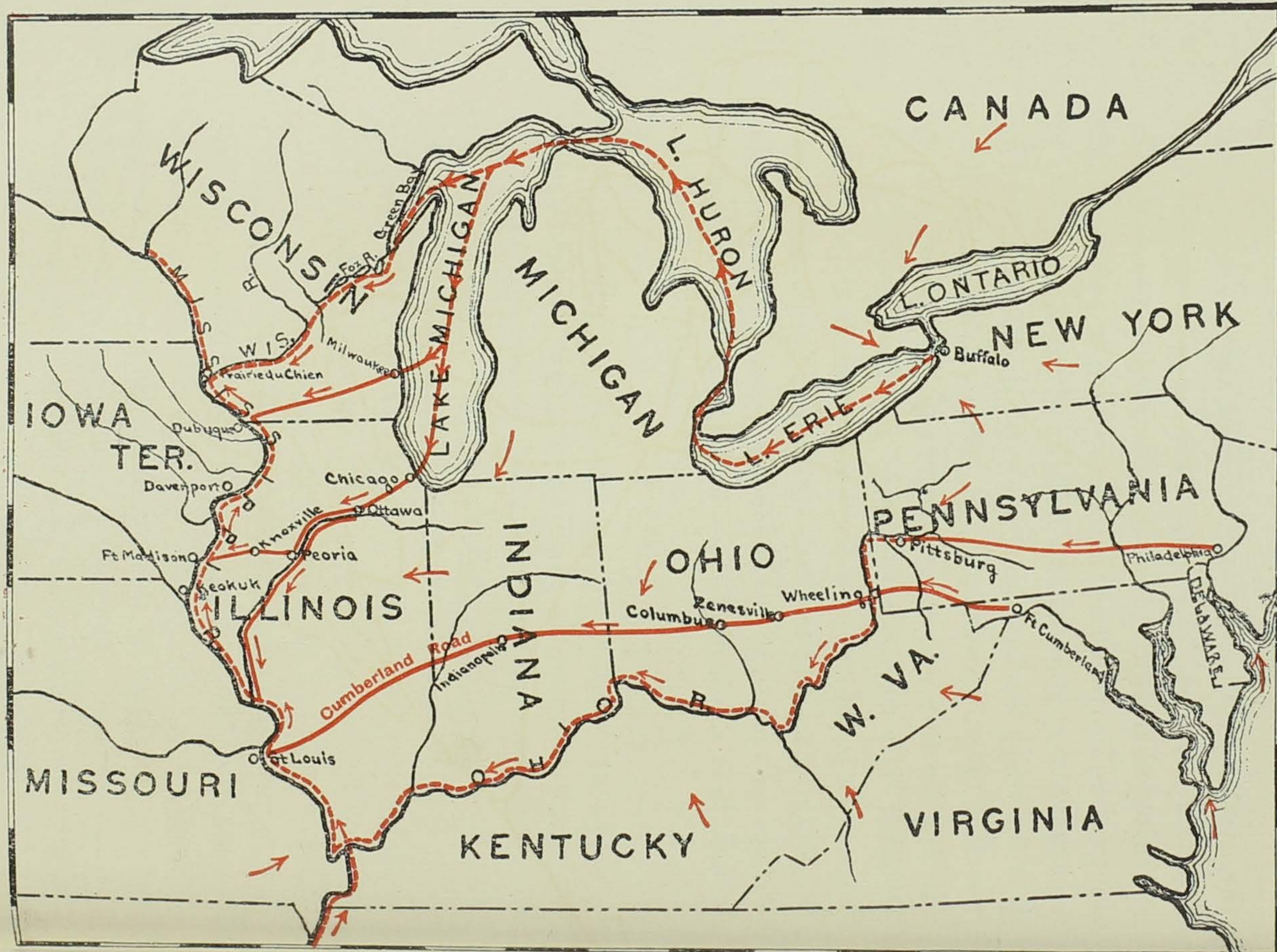
the overland routes the usefulness of the ordinary clumsy "prairie schooner," so suggestive of pioneer life and not altogether extinct to-day, was plainly demonstrated. Large families found the covered wagon most convenient; and that a very considerable number of people made use of it is shown by the fact that "the great thoroughfares of Illinois and Indiana, in the years of 1836-7, . . . would be literally lined with the long blue wagons of the emigrant slowly wending their way over the broad prairies—the cattle and hogs, men and dogs, and frequently women and children, forming the rear of the van—often ten, twenty, and thirty wagons in company. Ask them, when and where you would, their destination was the 'Black Hawk Purchase'."¹

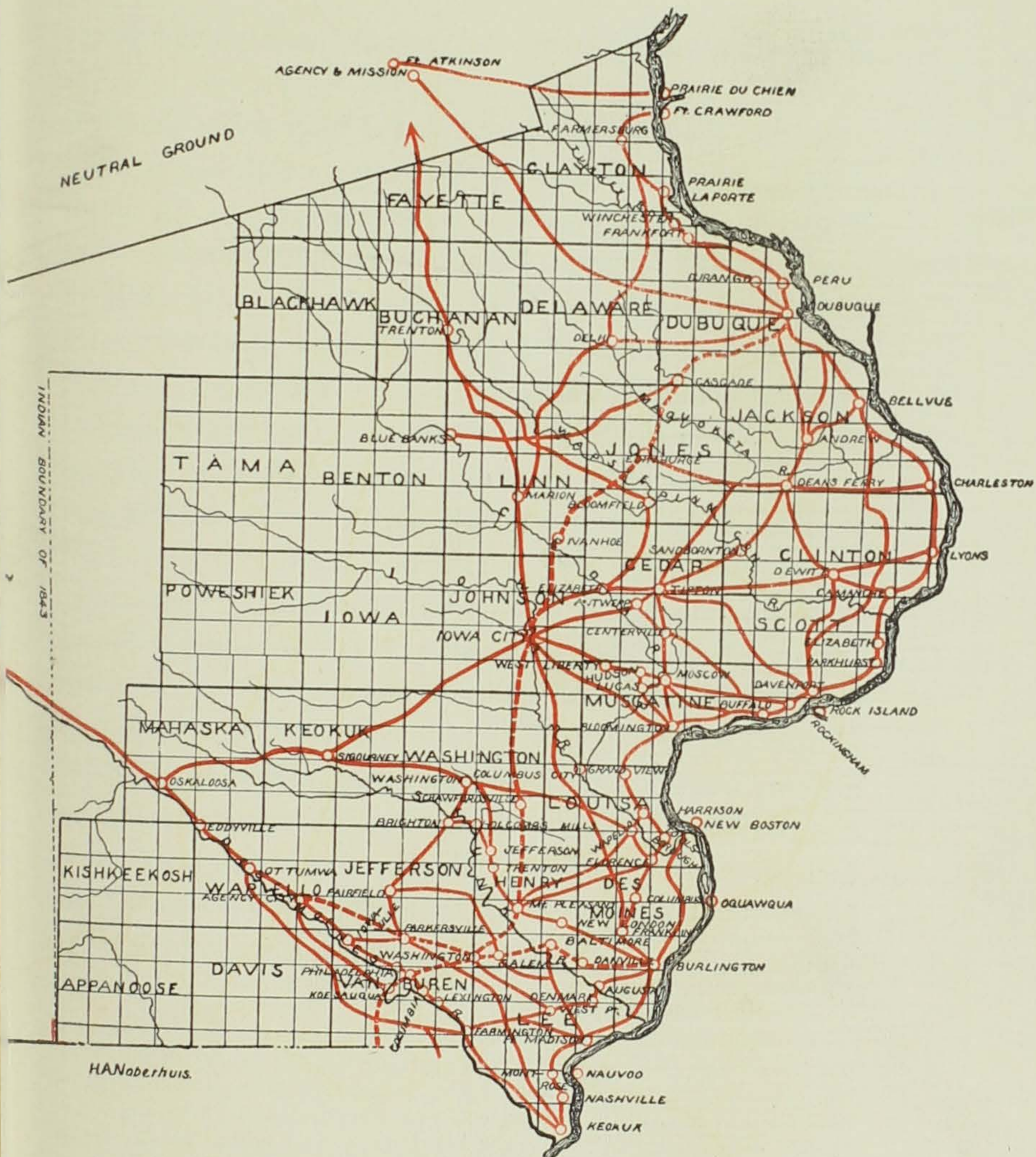
FERRIES

No sooner had the Red Man departed from the New Purchase in the memorable year 1833 than the sturdy pioneers took possession of the lands which he had loved so well. The flood gates of emigration were now opened. All the great avenues of travel were alive with people who wanted to find homes in the Black Hawk Purchase. The greater part of the immigrants who came by water routes settled in the towns along the Mississippi.

But what of the thousands who were impatiently waiting in their white-top wagons on the Illinois banks of the Mississippi? For those who came up this river by steamboat it was only necessary to step out upon the landings provided for that purpose. Those who came in canvas-covered wagons over the common roads of the States found but one way

¹ Newhall's *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*, p. 12.





MAP II

The More Important Roads of Territorial Iowa. The Broken Lines Indicate U. S. Military Roads

HANaberhuis.

of crossing the "Father of Waters," namely, the ferry. Bridges, there were none.

At first the usual means employed in crossing the river was a sort of flat-boat upon which a team and wagon could be driven and then propelled across the river by the use of several poles and oars. It was a crude method at best, but served well Iowa's pioneers.¹ These rude crafts, built of heavy forest timbers or from rough thick planks, afforded early home-seekers the only way of reaching the fertile prairies of the Black Hawk Purchase. Large encampments often gathered upon the eastern bank of the river opposite Burlington waiting to be ferried across. "The turn of each wagon for ferriage was claimed in the order of its arrival, and as a rule it was scrupulously conceded. Contentions for precedence rarely occurred, although even a few hours' delay often lost a good choice of a claim."²

In the years immediately following 1833, the ferry business was limited to perhaps three towns—Dubuque, Buffalo, and Burlington.³ If there were any other ferries in operation prior to December, 1836, they must have been unimportant enterprises of which no record seems to have been kept. It will be seen that the northern and southern parts

¹ Walton's *Pioneer Papers*, p. 210.

It may be observed in this connection that the means employed in 1846, or a few years before, were the result of evolution. In the *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VIII-IX, p. 261, we read that "the first ferrying across the Mississippi was in Indian canoes." These gave way, in time, to the more practical small flat-boats, which in turn were supplanted by the horse and steam ferry boats. Finally actual steamers did the work, furnishing the immigrant more safety and greater speed in transportation.

² See *Annals of Iowa*, 3d series, Vol. IV, p. 179. Also *The Iowa News*, Nov. 15, 1837.

³ Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 159.

of the newly acquired territory were well provided for. Dubuque was one of the great lead-exporting cities of the West. Burlington was the capital of Wisconsin Territory.

But the central portion of Iowa also had its gateway. The first public ferry across the Mississippi at a point about midway between the towns above mentioned was established by Benj. W. Clark at Buffalo.¹ This ferry was considered the most noted above St. Louis, being the gateway open to most of the original settlers of Scott, Muscatine, Cedar, Linn, and Johnson counties. Prior to 1840 Clark's ferry was well known in the central part of the Territory since it was the only reliable place in all that region for crossing "the grand and mighty river."²

It seems that the two counties of the Iowa District, Demoine and Du Buque, had authority to grant licenses through county courts to private parties for establishing ferries; for, in a newspaper published at Dubuque, we find a notice to the effect that certain men were going to "apply to the next county court for a license to establish a ferry

¹ The writer of the history of Scott County in the *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 43, claims that there is an error in this matter. "Capt. Clark," he declares, "might have established the first public ferry, but Col. Davenport had a flat boat and used it for ferry purposes as early as 1827, running between the Island (opposite Rock Island) and the main shore, carrying pack-horses, cattle and goods for the Indian trade."

² See *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 15; and Walton's *Scraps of Muscatine History* p. 2 of the "Old Settlers' Reunion, 1885."

Albert M. Lea in his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, p. 38, referring to Clark's ferry, says: "This is the most convenient place to cross the Mississippi that I have seen anywhere between the Balize and Prairie du Chien. Nature seems to have designed it for a great crossing place, by arranging good banks just opposite to an opening in the islands, and at a point where a good ferry would naturally be much wanted. All persons coming from the direction of the Illinois river to the great Mining Region of the Iowa District, or passing toward the Capital of the future State of Iowa, would naturally cross the Mississippi at this ferry."

across the Mississippi river, ten miles above the town of Dubuque, nearly opposite to the Snake Diggings."¹ No instances, however, of the granting of ferry licenses by these counties have been discovered.

The Legislative Assembly of Wisconsin Territory which met at Burlington in December, 1836, established the first ferry on the Mississippi² in an act which provided that "Matthias Hamm and Horace Smead, or their heirs, be authorized to establish and keep a ferry" some distance above Dubuque for the term of twenty-one years. Furthermore, the ferry was to be subject to the same regulations and restrictions as provided for other ferries in an act "fixing the rates of toll and prescribing the manner in which licensed ferries shall be kept and attended to."³

From the foregoing account it is evident that when the Iowa District of Wisconsin Territory was organized into the separate and independent Territory of Iowa there were few places for crossing the "Father of Waters." And so, im-

¹ *The Dubuque Visitor*, Sept. 14, 1836.

² The General Assembly of Illinois passed nineteen acts establishing ferries across the Mississippi into Iowa and Missouri. Ten of these acts related to ferries leading into Iowa. The first act was approved on March 1, 1833. It reads as follows:

"Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois represented in the General Assembly, That James White, of Hancock County, is hereby authorized to keep a ferry across the Mississippi river, at or near the head of the Des Moines rapids.

"Sec. 2. Said White shall receive such rates of ferriage for crossing at said ferry, as shall from time to time be allowed him by the county commissioners court of Hancock County, and he shall in all respects be governed by law, as though the said ferry had been established by the order and permission of said court."

This ferry, therefore, must be considered as the first to join Iowa and Illinois. It was authorized when the Black Hawk Purchase was not yet open for settlement.—See *Laws of Illinois*, 1833, p. 37.

³ *Laws of Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 86.

mediately after its organization the Legislative Assembly of the new Territory was confronted with the great and pressing demand for ferries. The fact that the Territory of Iowa could never hope to grow and develop unless its gates were thrown wide open to the sturdy people who were anxious to come and who alone could develop the timber lands and prairies was clearly seen and fully appreciated. And so, the First Legislative Assembly hastened to enter into competition with the States and Territories round about for the streams of immigration that were pouring westward. "Accommodate all" was the motto of the day.

The result of this attitude was that no less than fifty-four acts were passed between the years 1838 and 1846. Indeed, the whole eastern border of Iowa became lined with ferries. Beginning with Keokuk and going up the river to the mouth of the St. Peters (now Minnesota), ferries were established at all the chief towns and cities. Thus, at the very outset of our Territorial history, the ferry industry was fully launched upon the Mississippi.

The first law of the Territory of Iowa relative to ferries was approved by Governor Lucas on the 14th day of December, 1838. By its provisions Timothy Fanning was given permission to operate a ferry for twenty years at Dubuque "to depart from and land at any place on the public landing" which Congress had provided a little more than two years previous. No other person was to be allowed to establish a ferry within the limits of the town, if Fanning should procure within two years "a good and sufficient steam ferry boat for the transportation of all persons and their property across the river without delay." In the meantime there was

to be "a good and sufficient number of flat-boats with a sufficient number of hands to work the same." The penalty for violation of this grant made the whole charter void and the ferry was to be disposed of according to law.¹ This act is similar to the many that were passed soon afterward, except that some called for horse ferry boats.

Jurisdiction in the matter of ferries over the Mississippi River was at first exercised directly by the Legislative Assembly; but by the act of January 8, 1840, the several boards of county commissioners were empowered to grant licenses for ferries at such places as were not already provided for by charter. Ferries were not, however, to be established within two miles of each other.² This practically meant that every ferry was a monopoly for a certain region of country.

Besides the numerous special acts by which ferry privileges were conferred upon individuals, a general law regulating ferries on the waters of the Territory was approved by the Governor on December 20, 1838. The provisions of this interesting statute bring to light facts which cannot be found in the scattered accounts of the early days.

In the first place, it was provided that no person could "keep a ferry across any stream except the Mississippi, without having first obtained a license from the Court of County Commissioners." The applicant for a license had to give "notice, by advertisement, set up in at least three

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1838, p. 205.

It was in accordance with an act similar to this that a ferry was authorized at Burlington. When at the end of the two years no steam or horse ferry boat was established, the citizens took the matter into their own hands and soon compelled the owner to obey the law.—See *The Iowa Standard*, Jan. 8, 1841.

² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1840, p. 43.

places in the township or neighborhood where the ferry is proposed to be kept, twenty days prior to the sitting of the Court, of his intention to apply to such Court, for a license to keep a ferry." When the applicant had complied with these requirements the court was authorized to grant a license upon the payment of from two to fifty dollars annually by the proprietor of the ferry "for a term of time not exceeding five years." However, ferries could not be established within one mile of each other. Of course in all cases the consent of the owners of the land on both sides of the water way had to be secured by mutual agreement prior to the establishment of the ferry.

The duties of ferry keepers were expressly laid down by the statute. Every person who obtained a license must "provide and keep in complete repair, a good and sufficient boat for the safe conveyance of persons and property, and when the river or creek, over which the ferry is kept, is passable, shall, with a sufficient number of hands to work and manage the boat, give due attendance from daylight in the morning until dark in the evening, and shall moreover at any hour in the night or day (that the creek or river can be passed) when called upon for that purpose, convey the U. S. mail or other public express across said ferry." The penalty for non-performance of these duties was the payment of a fine which, however, was not to exceed twenty dollars for each offence.

Furthermore, it was provided that the County Court should fix the ferriage rates for every ferry. The ferry-keeper was required to "post up at the door of his ferry house or some conspicuous place convenient to the ferry" a

list of the rates of ferriage. In case a ferry was established without authority, a fine of not more than thirty dollars was imposed. For receiving higher rates than allowed by law a man was fined a sum not exceeding ten dollars.¹

Rates of ferriage might have been different in every county. At the same time it is true that the charges were more or less uniform throughout the Territory. It will be enough, therefore, to recall the bills of toll rates of ferries on two rivers—the Mississippi and the Iowa:—

ON THE MISSISSIPPI	ON THE IOWA
<i>Ferry at Bloomington</i>	<i>Ferry at Napoleon</i>
Wagon and two horses or oxen \$1.00	Team and Wagon \$.50, later \$.37½
Additional horse or ox12½	Additional horse or ox12½
Horse and wagon75	Horse and wagon .37½, later25
Man and horse37½	Horse and man .25, later12½
Horses and cattle, per head .12½	Horses and cattle, per head .12½, later . .06¼
Sheep and hogs, per head . .06¼	Sheep and hogs, per head .03
Freight, per cwt.12½	Footman, .12½, later . .06¼

By comparing these two bills it will be seen that the rate on the Mississippi in nearly every item is twice that on the Iowa. This difference is explained by the fact that the Mississippi River is more than double the width of the Iowa. The twelve and a half and the six and a fourth cent prices may be explained by the fact that the money in circulation during the early forties was mostly of Spanish and Mexican coinage. Nickels and dimes were unknown.²

¹ *Laws of the Territory of Iowa*, 1838, p. 208.

² See *The Iowa Standard*, Dec. 4, 1840; and *The History of Johnson County*, p. 233.

When it is remembered that in those early days there were but few bridges, some idea can be formed of the usefulness of the great number of ferries that plied the rivers of eastern Iowa. Ferries were, indeed, absolutely indispensable.¹ However crude and primitive they may seem to us, they were instrumental in effecting the rapid settlement of the new country and in affording all possible comfort and accommodation to the early settlers. These movable bridges, at all times accessible,² were the only means of communication between the different parts of the Territory; and early conditions, in this respect at least, were made as pleasant and favorable as could be expected. No wonder that the people prided themselves on their water crafts.³

TERRITORIAL WATERWAYS

As the Great Lakes and the Ohio and Mississippi rivers served the pioneers of the whole West as convenient routes for commerce and travel, so the large and small streams of eastern Iowa were to the early settlers the chief avenues of transportation. In the absence of railroads the rivers were

¹ As soon as the counties began to expend money for a system of roadways ferries on State rivers necessarily gave way, to a great extent, to the common bridge. As the country became more settled conditions of travel also changed. Ferries came to be too slow and too expensive.

² Of course during the winter ferries were of no use, as teams could cross on the ice; but when the rivers broke up and the water was high they were found most advantageous.

³ A comment of an early newspaper, illustrative of the thought of the time, serves to show what the ferry did for Iowa: "Its establishment opens for us a direct connection with the interior of Illinois—Knoxville, Peoria, Peru, and Chicago. Those wishing to go from here to Burlington will cross here and recross at New Boston, by which one-fourth the distance will be saved. The ferry swims like a swan and crosses in eight minutes with ease and safety."

indeed the most important factors in trade and travel—they were Iowa's first highways.

The different boats or crafts which were used on the streams and rivers of Iowa during the thirties and forties were: (1) the canoe, (2) the pirogue, (3) the batteau or barge, (4) the keel-boat, and (5) the flat-boat.

The canoe was made from the bark of trees and was used mostly when the load was small and the time short. The pirogue, which resembled the canoe, was likewise quickly made. The canoe was paddled; the pirogue was pushed by oars or setting poles. The canoe easily glided up stream; the pirogue ran easily with the current, but could not ascend the stream without the expenditure of much labor.

The batteau or barge was a square box of no particular length, width, or depth. It was distinctly a down stream craft and in the early days rarely ascended with a load any river or stream of current. The canoe and pirogue were crafts of little burden; the barge served as the freight craft to be loaded with any burden which the stage of water permitted. The batteau was widest in the middle and tapered to a point at each end. Barges were the great, clumsy hulks that floated with the current and sailed with the aid of wind.

But the vessels most used upon Iowa rivers were the keel-boat and the flat-boat. The former was a long, narrow craft averaging perhaps twelve to fifteen by fifty feet and pointed at both prow and stern. On either side were provided what were known as running or walking boards, extending from end to end. The space between (i. e. the body of the boat) was enclosed and roofed over with boards or shingles. A keel-boat would carry from twenty to forty

tons of freight; and from six to ten men, in addition to the captain who was usually the steersman, were required to propel it up stream. Each man was provided with a pole to which was affixed a heavy socket. The crew, being equally divided on each side of the boat, "set" their poles at the head of the boat; then bringing the end of the pole to the shoulder, with bodies bent, they walked slowly along the running boards to the stern, returning quickly at the command of the captain to the head for a new "set."

The flat-boat was the most important craft of the era of immigration and has been fittingly called "the friend of the pioneer." Being solely a down stream craft, it was the boat that never came back. The flat-boat of average size was a roofed craft about forty feet long, twelve feet wide, and eight feet deep. It was square and flat-bottomed, and was managed by six oars; sails were used when the wind was favorable.¹

Such then were the crafts used upon the streams and rivers of Territorial Iowa. The smaller ones could pass in almost any depth of water; but the larger crafts could navigate only when the stream was at least four or five feet deep and free from snags and sandbars. Dams frequently obstructed free passage on streams where water-power was desired; but in the case of certain rivers legislative acts forbade all such obstructions.

It is said that the Turkey River in northern Iowa was susceptible of good steam navigation and that any boat of light draught navigating upon the upper Mississippi might

¹ See Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. IX, p. 102.

easily make its way as far as the forks, a distance of about thirty miles.¹ However, there is no evidence to show that the Turkey River was ever extensively used as an avenue of traffic; for settlers living in the vicinity of this river found it just as easy to transport their produce in wagons.²

How to facilitate transportation so that the produce of the pioneers could be taken to market as speedily as possible was one of the important problems which confronted the Territorial legislature. Under the circumstances there seemed but one solution to this problem—river improvement. One of the first streams to receive any serious attention was the Maquoketa River. On February 16, 1842, a law was passed declaring this stream "a public highway for all navigable purposes whatsoever, and if any person shall in any way impede or obstruct the navigation of said river, he shall be considered to have committed a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be fined or imprisoned at the discretion of the court; that in case of any obstructions in said river by mill dams or other dams prior to the passage of this act, it shall be the duty of the owner or owners of said dams to forthwith construct such schutes or locks as will admit flat boats or other crafts to pass with safety; that said schutes or locks shall be at least 20 feet wide, 120 feet

¹ Lea's *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 33.

² John B. Newhall, on page 17 of his *Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, says: "The steady and constant influx of population up to the present period, has prevented, to any extent, a surplus of agricultural produce; the order of things is, however, rapidly changing; so extensively are farms opening, and the raising of stock increased that Iowa must ere long avail herself of the great natural channels of navigation, with which she is bountifully supplied, and by which her surplus products can be exported abroad, either to the great southern 'depot,' New Orleans, and I doubt not, ere the lapse of many years, by internal communication across to the great emporiums of the Atlantic."

long and shall be completed so as to pass boats and other crafts within two years from the passage of this act."¹

The Wapsipinicon River was not so good for navigation as might be supposed because of its rather crooked channel and very rapid current. However, it was "believed to be susceptible of steam navigation for boats of light draught."² It seems strange, but it is nevertheless a fact, that nothing whatever was done to improve this great river. Indeed, there is little to show that it ever afforded facilities for navigation.

Another stream that proved of great advantage to the pioneers in those days before the possibilities of railroads were dreamed of was the Red Cedar River. From the time Colonel George Davenport³ moved up its waters in his small canoe in 1830 to trade with the Indians until the advent of the "iron horse" this river supplied the settlers on its banks with means of transportation. Besides being "navigable for keel-boats, at certain seasons of the year, about 100 miles from its mouth,"⁴ it permitted a steamer to ascend in

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1842, p. 67.

Albert M. Lea, in his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 33, gives the following account of the Little Mequoquetois:—"This stream has been a favorite among the enterprising people who have settled on the west side of the Mississippi. Its stream is clear and rapid, affording several good sites for machinery, throughout the greater part of its course. It affords a depth of fifteen feet for two and a half miles above the mouth, and is wide enough to admit that far the largest boats that navigate the Upper Mississippi. The fertile lands on its borders are said to be extensive; and it affords large forests, also, composed chiefly of oak, walnut, ash, and cherry."

The Iowa Capitol Reporter of November 18, 1843, contains this statement: "We see by the *Dubuque Transcript* that a keel boat ascended the Makoqueta last month, and was freighted with wheat near the forks."

² Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, p. 41.

³ See Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 154.

⁴ Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, p. 40.

1844 as far as the rapids (i. e. Cedar Rapids). The captain of the boat is reported to have said that "he had no more trouble navigating the Cedar than the Mississippi"—a remark that was highly pleasing as it inspired the hope of better markets for produce and cheaper and easier transportation for supplies.¹

In connection with the Cedar River we must not forget to mention an enterprise of peculiar interest to Iowans of today. In 1839 Congress passed an act which empowered the Secretary of War "to cause a survey of Red Cedar river. . . . and an estimate to be made, with a view to the improvement of the navigation thereof above the town of Moscow, and the connexion of the said navigation with the river Mississippi by a canal extending from the vicinity of said town to some suitable point in or near the town of Bloomington (Muscatine); and to defray the expense of said survey and estimate, the sum of fifteen hundred dollars, be, and the same is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated."² This appropriation was probably made in answer to a petition from the Bloomington and Cedar River Canal Company which had been incorporated a short time before and which had been authorized to begin work at once. The great enterprise, however, was

¹ Carroll's *Pioneer Life in and around Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1839 to 1849*, p. 215.

"The Cedar River, being navigable for steamboats of the smaller class, for several months in the year, and affording facilities of shipping by keel and flat-boats, to and from the rapids, will render this point one of great interest to the producers not only of Linn County, but to a district of country considerably beyond their vicinity."—*Iowa Capitol Reporter*, Oct. 22, 1842.

² *U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 352.

never carried out, although its advisability was afterward much agitated by citizens of Muscatine.¹

Perhaps a much greater historic interest is aroused when mention is made of the Iowa, the "Beautiful River." We know that as far back as 1830 when the whites were not yet permitted to make settlements a trading post was established at a place just south of Iowa City and later called Napoleon. Near by stood the wigwams of Poweshiek's village. The traders brought in their keel-boats fine things to exchange for the skins and furs of the Red Men. Finally, after the Territory of Iowa had been established, a steamer, "The Ripple," churning the waters of the peaceful Iowa ascended as far as Iowa City, the seat of government of the Territory. Here the captain and crew were given a popular welcome and ovation.² Such an event meant much for a people without railroads. It proved beyond a doubt that the Iowa River was navigable for seven months at least every year. Iowa City's relation to the outer world was, it was thought, effectually changed by this arrival. It was the farthest point directly connected with the Mississippi.³ Although the navigation of the river for steamers of the smaller class

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1838, p. 245; also Walton's *Pioneer Papers*, p. 348.

² Shambaugh's *Iowa City, a Contribution to the Early History of Iowa*, p. 45.

³ *Iowa City Standard*, June 24, 1841.

J. B. Newhall says in 1841, that the Iowa affords steam navigation "the principal part of the year, to the forks of the Red Cedar. From thence to Iowa City, about 25 miles, it is susceptible of keel-boat navigation, and it is supposed a light draught steamboat can ply to the above point without material obstruction. The principal difficulties in the navigation of the Iowa will be found in the frequent changes of the channel—the bed of the river being composed of quicksand, and the current rapid, renders these changes frequent. There will seldom be a deficiency of water to float the average class of boats that navigate the upper Mississippi."
—*Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, p. 39.

was thus demonstrated, and although there was no reason why the people should not have had steam navigation at least three or four months every year,¹ steamboats came only at long intervals. And so in the forties and early fifties merchants were in the habit of building flat and keel boats in the winter and sending out in them on the flood tide in the spring to St. Louis their pork and wheat.²

As to the Skunk, or Chacagua River as it was once called, Iowa's first historian wrote as follows: "To what extent this river may be navigated, it is difficult to say. A small keel-boat has frequently ascended it, even at low water, a distance of 60 miles; and it is probable that it may be navigable much further. Steamboats have not yet been upon it, but there appears to be no reason that they should not perform upon it to advantage."³ A small steamer did ply upon this river later on,⁴ but it seems that steam navigation was so unsuccessful that the Legislative Assembly soon passed several laws similar to those relative to the Maquoketa whereby several locks and schutes were authorized.

Navigation on Iowa's largest river, the Des Moines, received attention not only from the Territorial Assembly but also from Congress. In 1839 an act was passed by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory providing for the construction of a dam not more than three feet above the common low water mark. The dam was to contain a "convenient lock, not less than 130 feet in length, and 35 feet in width, for the passing of steam, keel, and flat boats,

¹ See *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, March 9, 1844.

² *Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. XIII, p. 46.

³ *Lea's Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 27.

⁴ "The Maid of Iowa."—See *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, Oct. 22, 1842.

rafts, and other water crafts" of two or more tons burden. This lock was to be kept in repair and boats were to be passed without delay. The penalty for destroying or injuring the structure was a fine of treble the amount of damage sustained.¹ Subsequently the Legislative Assembly authorized the construction of additional locks and dams.

Steam navigation on the Des Moines was possible for 100 miles in a good stage of water. Keel boats, however, were used at all seasons and for greater distances.² The first steamer appeared in 1837, and many others soon followed. The river channel, however, was not good enough for extensive traffic. The products of the valley had become sufficient to require a permanent improvement of the river. Flat-boats afforded the only mode of transit to market; yet these slow-moving hulks could not keep pace with the increase in the products of the fertile country.³ And so, in accordance with the universal demand within the Territory for better commercial advantages the Council and House of Representatives passed a joint resolution relative to Des Moines River improvement.⁴

The culmination of this movement for the improvement

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1838-39, p. 339.

² Jesse Williams' *A Description of the U. S. Lands in Iowa*, 1840, p. 171; also Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, p. 38.

"I presume I am the earliest pork packer and shipper in the State. I supplied the post at 'Raccoon Forks' with commissaries and transported them from St. Louis by steamboat in 1840. I built and run the first flat-boat of pork out of the Des Moines River. In all my flat-boating I can remember of sinking but three laden with pork and grain."—Hon. Edw. Manning, in the *Report of the Second Reunion Tri-State Old Settlers' Association*, 1885, p. 49.

³ *A Record of the Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Iowa, held at Burlington, June 1, 1883*, p. 54.

⁴ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1839, p. 148.

of the Des Moines River was the passage of an act by Congress which was approved August 8, 1846. This was perhaps one of the most important steps ever taken by that body to develop Iowa's resources, although the results were not far-reaching. All the alternate sections of land in a strip five miles wide on each side of the river from its mouth to its source were granted as an appropriation to provide for a system of slack-water navigation.¹ Thus the United States government, "without serious thought of the future, approved the act, little dreaming that it had ceded for 'chips and whetstones,' lands, which, if sold fifty-three years later, would have paid the national debt, and built a war ship or two." Nevertheless, the Des Moines River played a great part in transportation from the time the first settler found a home upon its banks until the year 1862 when the rapid development of the railroad system made steamboating unprofitable.²

All of Iowa's waterways were but the tributaries of the mightiest stream of the continent—all mingled their waters with the "Eternal River." The Mississippi was for the Central West, and indeed for the entire Union, a powerful agent in the early development of the country's vast resources. It was the main avenue of trade; and it alone placed the pioneers of Iowa in direct touch with the markets of the world. The quantities of produce that annually swept down its current in crafts of all descriptions prove to us the inestimable value of such a waterway to the north

¹ *U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. IX, p. 77.

² For an excellent account of steamboating on the Des Moines River, see Tacitus Hussey's article in the *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. IV.

central States. Before the appearance of the steamer, French voyagers, trappers, traders, and American rivermen had introduced upon the Mississippi the pirogue, barge, keel-boat, and flat-boat. Then, when steamboats in the early twenties¹ had begun to ply northward as far as the mouth of the St. Peters, there sprang into life an industry which prospered wonderfully until the arrival of the railroad, the enemy of all water transportation.

During the Territorial period the Mississippi River and the common roads were the only thoroughfares by which merchandise could be received and produce exported. Moreover, available markets were so distant and wagon transportation so inadequate that overland routes were comparatively little used except for inland trade. The Mississippi River was, therefore, the only adequately available route for exports. But navigation on its waters was closed by ice three months of the year. The products of the northern States were stored up during the fall and winter, awaiting shipment when the water was high in spring.² The principal markets to which products could be shipped and from which grocery

¹ Sabin's *The Making of Iowa*, p. 221.

² Albert M. Lea says in 1836, on page 16 of his *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, that "the trade of this district is confined almost entirely to the grand thoroughfare of the Mississippi. By it, the produce of the mines is carried away, and all the wants of a new population are supplied. Saint Louis is the port through which all the exchanges are at present effected. . . . The only important article of export, as yet, is lead. . . ."

"All kinds of agricultural products have heretofore found ready consumers in the increasing population of every neighborhood; and this cause will continue to afford a market at every man's door for years to come. After the emigration shall have abated, the mines will afford always a ready market for whatever can be produced within reach of them. But should this market fail, there are numerous navigable rivers intersecting the District, and leading into the broad Mississippi, an ample highway to any part of the world."

supplies, farm implements, and mill machinery could be conveniently obtained were St. Louis and New Orleans. Purchases of dry goods and hardware were largely made in New York City and shipped by sea to New Orleans and thence up the Mississippi¹ to the Iowa country.

The other transportation routes were: (1) New York via Philadelphia, Pittsburg, and the Ohio and Mississippi rivers; (2) New York via Buffalo, the Great Lakes, and the Wisconsin, Fox, and Mississippi rivers. By either of these routes goods could be transported from New York to Bloomington (Muscatine) in about twenty-four or thirty days and at about the same cost, that is, at from \$3.25 to \$5.25 per hundred weight.² (See above Map I.)

Out upon the Mississippi floated barges and flat-boats laden with grain and pork. These boats came from Wisconsin and Illinois, they came from all the streams of the Iowa country. Upon arriving at his destination the proprietor sold his stock and boat, invested his money in the goods he wanted, and embarked with his freight on a

¹ *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. IV, p. 191.

² By a writer in *The Madison Express* quoted in *The Iowa Standard* (January 29, 1841) the following estimates were given:

	MILES	PER CWT
From New York to Green Bay via Buffalo,	1,320	\$ 1.62
From Green Bay to the Portage,	120	1.00
Across the Portage, and storage,13
From Portage to Prairie du Chien,	120	.50
<i>Whole distance and cost,</i>	<u>1,560</u>	<u>3.25</u>
From New York to Philadelphia,	100	.50
From Philadelphia to Pittsburg,	300	1.75
From Pittsburg to St. Louis,	1,300	2.00
From St. Louis to Prairie du Chien,	600	1.00
<i>Whole Distance and cost,</i>	<u>2,300</u>	<u>\$ 5.25</u>
<i>Lake Route,</i>	<u>1,560</u>	<u>3.25</u>
Difference in Routes,	740	\$ 2.00

steamer for home. These primitive crafts afforded perhaps the cheapest mode of transportation, but the steamboat was the safest and quickest. As early as 1839 there was a "continuous line of steamboats running from Dubuque, via New Orleans and New York, to Liverpool and Bristol, England; besides, another from Dubuque to Pittsburg, where it connects with the great chain of railroads and canals across that State to the sea-board."¹ The steamboat register of Bloomington (Muscatine, one of the gate ways of the Iowa country) shows that from March 14, 1841, to April 15, 1841, thirty-three boats arrived. Of this number one boat plied between St. Louis and St. Peters, one between Cincinnati and Dubuque, one between New Orleans and Prairie du Chien, one boat between Nauvoo and St. Louis, two boats plied between Pittsburg and Dubuque, two between St. Louis and Prairie du Chien, and twenty-five steamboats between St. Louis and Dubuque. In fact this traffic grew so rapidly that in 1844 four hundred and fifty steamboats were employed in navigating the Mississippi and its tributaries.²

Communication with the outer world, therefore, was chiefly by river. There were, moreover, several causes which rendered navigation impossible at times—ice in winter and rocks in summer at low water. It is a noteworthy fact that the only obstructions in the Mississippi River from New Orleans to the Falls of St. Anthony in Minnesota were rapids just above Keokuk and Davenport.³ The mean depth

¹ Plumbe's *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, 1839, p. 77.

² Hulbert's *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. IX, p. 142.

³ In Zebulon M. Pike's journal of the expedition to the sources of the Mississippi, we find the following entry for August 20, 1805: "Arrived at the rapids

of water at these places being about two and four-tenths feet, it was impossible for steamers to pass without first unloading their cargoes on keel-boats.¹ The annual cost for lighterage and reshipment varied from \$200,000 to \$600,000. Although such men as Lieutenants Robert E. Lee and G. K. Warren had made surveys, it was not until 1866 that the long-looked for passage of the river was effected.²

In 1844, an appropriation of \$7,500 was made by Congress for a harbor at the city of Dubuque, Iowa's famous center for the lead industry, "provided, upon due examina-

De Moyon at 7 o'clock; and although no soul on board had passed them, we commenced ascending them immediately. Our boat, being large and moderately loaded, we found great difficulty. The river all the way through is from three-fourths to a mile wide. The rapids are eleven miles long, with successive ridges and shoals extending from shore to shore. The first has the greatest fall, and is the more difficult to ascend. The channel (a bad one) is on the east side in passing the two first bars, then passes under the edge of the third; crosses to the west, and ascends on that side, all the way to the Sac Village. The shoals continue the whole distance."

On the 28th of August, he came to the Rock Island Rapids: "Commenced ascending the rapids. . . . Carried away our rudder in the first; but after getting it repaired, the wind raised, and we hoisted sail; and, although entire strangers, we sailed through them with a perfect gale blowing all the time; when, had we struck a rock in all probability we would have bilged and sunk. . . . Those shoals are a continued chain of rocks, extending in some places from shore to shore, about eighteen miles in length. They afford more water than those of De Moyon, but are much more rapid."

¹ "When the water becomes very low, it is the practice to unload the steam-boats, pass them lightly over the Rapids, and take the freight over in keel-boats of less draught. These keel-boats, when ascending, are towed up along the west shore, by horses moving along the natural beach. This rapid is a source of great annoyance, expenditure and delay; and yet it is susceptible of being so easily improved, as to be a matter of surprise that it has not already been done."—Lea's *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 22.

² See *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VIII, p. 149. The will of the people of the whole Mississippi Valley concerning these rapids had been repeatedly expressed by their representatives in commercial conventions and elsewhere, and by the press.

On this matter, see Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 6, 15, 256, 267; also *Iowa Capitol Reporter*, January 29, 1842; and the *Iowa News*, May 5, 1838, which contains a short report on Lee's surveys.

tion and survey, under the direction of the Secretary of War, it shall appear that a permanent improvement can be accomplished and completed for this amount so as to admit the landing of steamers of the largest class navigating the river at the town of Dubuque at all seasons of the year."¹

In concluding the subject of rivers it may be observed that in the days before railroads, the "Iowa idea" seems to have been the desire for navigable rivers. This is shown by the fact that the people and their representatives kept up a constant clamor for natural river boundaries for Iowa. "The Lucas boundaries were based upon the topography of the country as determined by rivers."² The fact that the people wanted the St. Peters on the north, the Mississippi on the east, and the Missouri on the west, shows the immense value of waterways as avenues of travel in those early days. In the legislative resolutions of 1845, the year before Iowa Territory became a State, Iowa's Delegate in Congress was "in no case to accept or proffer to accept anything short of the St. Peters on the north and the Missouri on the west as the northern and western limits of the future State of Iowa."³

THE FIRST ROADS

When the Iowa country was first opened to settlement in June, 1833, there were no roads in the modern sense. And

¹ *U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 670.

² Shambaugh's *History of the Constitution of Iowa*, p. 236.

³ See Joint Resolution of June 10, 1845, in the *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 110.

The Missouri has not been discussed in this article, because prior to 1846 western Iowa was still a wilderness and the home of the Indian. Later on, of course, the Missouri became a highway of commerce and travel for that portion of the State. See Chittenden's *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River*.

yet the first comers were not wholly without some guiding routes; for the Indians and large game animals had left here and there trails across the prairies and paths through the forests. These, we may be assured, were sought out and followed by explorers, traders, and early settlers.

When Marquette and Joliet first set foot upon Iowa soil they "saw upon the water's edge, human footprints and a well beaten path leading to a beautiful prairie. We stopped to examine it," writes Marquette, "and concluding that it was a road which conducted to some native village, we resolved to go and reconnoitre. . . . M. Joliet and myself undertook this discovery, rather hazardous for only two men, who thus put themselves at the mercy of a barbarous and unknown people. In silence we followed this foot-path and after having made about two leagues, we discovered a village upon the bank of a river, and two others upon a slope distant half a league from the first." Thus, an Indian path on the banks of the Iowa River was the white man's first road in the Iowa country.¹

One of the old settlers has left us an unique account of Indian trails. "These trails," he writes, "were all roads or paths traveled by the Indians. They were generally located on the best ground for a road; keeping as near the river as was convenient. As a rule, an Indian will travel in the timber or along a river considerably farther in preference to venturing out in open grounds. There was one main trail that passed through our town. . . . Indian trails were about twelve inches wide, worn about an inch below the surface of the surrounding ground and thickly matted

¹ *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Vol. I, p. 6.

with a short, fine, wiry trail grass not more than three or four inches high. This grass was probably indigenous with the Indian, occurring nowhere else but in these trails. It lived long after the Indians left. I could follow this trail in places where the civilization had not disturbed it for years after the last Indian had stopped traveling over them."¹

It is a well-known fact that it was the habit of the Indians to travel in single file; and so where a company of several hundred passes over a region of country, even for the first time, a well beaten trail is left behind. But there are not many people in Iowa to-day who have witnessed the strange sight of the long drawn out caravans of Indians moving along, mounted on their ponies—the old chief riding in advance, followed by his warriors; the squaws sitting on the right instead of the left side of the pony; papposes stowed away in the baskets or bags that were swung over the backs of the ponies; and the tents and rush mattings covering up some of these little pack horses so that one could scarcely see them—all following on, one after another in a string that would seem almost interminable.² But these narrow Indian foot-paths were the best means of directing white settlers on their way through forest and “ford.”

Mr. Hulbert in a readable account of Indian paths says that “the trails of the Indian, though often blocked by fallen trees and tangles of vine, ever offered a course through the heart of the continent. Like the buffalo trails, they

¹ Walton's *Scraps of Muscatine History*, p. 1. This was a paper read on February 16, 1887, at the Old Settlers' Society of Muscatine County.

² Carroll's *Pioneer Life in and around Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from 1839 to 1849*, p. 202.

clung to high ground, mounting the hills on the long ascending ridges. Here, as was true of the routes of the earlier Indians and buffaloes, the paths found the driest courses, for from the ridges the water was most quickly shed; the hilltops, too, were wind-swept of snow in winter and of brush and leaves in summer, and suffered least from the annual forest fires; for the Indian, the hill-tops were coigns of vantage for outlook and signaling."¹

That Indian trails became, at least in some cases, regular roads for the White Man is the testimony of our pioneers. We are told that the road between Marion and Cedar Rapids was once the Red Man's path.² Again, in the vicinity of Davenport, once the home of the Sacs and Foxes, there were two trails, one of which afterwards became a public road.³ A few trading houses had been established on a trail most frequently traversed by the Indians between Des Moines and Hard Fish (an Indian town located where Eddyville now stands) and Agency.⁴

And so the roads prior to those laid out by public authority were either old Indian trails or "the hap-hazard ox-

¹ *Historic Highways of America*, Vol. II, p. 15.

² Carroll's *Pioneer Life in and around Cedar Rapids*, etc., p. 203.

³ *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 51.

⁴ *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VII, p. 242.

"Late in November, 1841, we located on the boundless prairie near Mt. Pleasant. Our first home was on the Burlington trail, along which parties of Indians were continually passing to and from Flint Hills (Burlington) either for their government annuities, food supplies, ammunition, or fire water."—*Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. I, p. 567.

"I remember distinctly the hundreds and hundreds of Indians, squaws, pap-pooes, ponies and dogs that for days prior to that of the treaty (1836) swarmed past our cabin. The main trail from the Indian villages on the Iowa River to the Agency on Rock Island passed within twenty or thirty rods of our cabin and right across our land."—*Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. IV, p. 528.

wagon tracks wherever they could find a dry and level passage on the prairies."¹ As the country became more settled, roads were laid out and established. However, during the first years of settlement (1833-1838) the almost total absence of public roads and bridges made travel by ox-team and wagon very difficult. "In dry weather common sloughs and creeks offered no impediment to the teamster, but during floods and the breaking up of winter, they proved exceedingly troublesome and dangerous. To get stuck in some mucky slough and thus be delayed for an hour or more was no uncommon occurrence. Often a raging stream would blockade the way, seeming to threaten swift destruction to whoever would attempt to cross it."²

Such were the disadvantages with which people had to contend. Suffering from the great inconvenience for want of roads and bridges and mail facilities, the first white settlers of Johnson County, then (1838) the westernmost part

¹ *History of Johnson County*, p. 234.

² *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VIII, p. 34. See also Lea's *Notes on Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 9.

In Plumbe's *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, 1839, p. 19, we find the following optimistic account of roads, presumably for advertisement purposes: "The natural surface of the ground is the only road to be found in Iowa District [Territory]; and such is the nature of the soil, that in dry weather we need no other. The country being so very open and free from mountains, artificial roads are little required. A few trees taken out of the way, where the routes much traveled traverse the narrow woods, and a few bridges thrown over the deeper creeks, is all the work necessary to give good roads in any direction."

Mr. Plumbe's view may be contrasted with the following: "In these days of railroads and comparatively well-kept roads, we can hardly realize the trials and hardships of law-practice years ago..... Think of the forded Iowa, the overflowing Cedar, the muddy Turkey, the deceitful English, the quagmire Fox Run, the Skunk and Coon, the Wapsiepinicon, and even for the most part the beautiful and placid and gentle Des Moines, and think of them as I have known them, without bridges, without boats, out of their banks, and without bottom. Think of the muddy roads and bottomless sloughs of the mere blind paths from one village or settlement to another!"—*Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. XII, p. 405.

of the Territory, drafted a petition to the legislature at Burlington for the establishment of roads to different points on the Mississippi.¹ This particular resolution was one of the great number which probably passed in different parts of the Iowa country.

As early as the year 1836 the Assembly of the Territory of Wisconsin felt the need of facilitating as much as possible the means of communication between the different towns. And so six commissioners were appointed "to make and lay out a territorial road west of the Mississippi, commencing at Farmington, on the Des Moines river, thence to Moffit's Mill, thence on the nearest and best route to Burlington, in Des Moines county, thence to Wapello, thence by the nearest and best route to Du Buque, and thence . . . to the ferry opposite Prairie du Chien." Among other duties, these men were commanded to mark the great highway "by stakes in the prairie a reasonable distance apart, and by blazing trees in the timber."² This statute had for its objective purpose facility of travel and intercourse over a route that would place distant towns in direct communication with Burlington, the capital of the Territory. The immense value of such a wagon road cannot be doubted for a moment.

But it was not until the separate Territory of Iowa was organized that the matter of roads received adequate attention. Thereafter, legislation relative to roads was so extensive that when Iowa became a State in 1846 the area then settled was covered with a network of highways run-

¹ *Iowa City Republican Leaflets*, p. 52.

² *Laws of Wisconsin Territory*, 1836, p. 57.

ning in every direction and connecting all the principal towns and cities. From the statute books of the Territory of Iowa we learn that nearly two hundred acts were passed authorizing the location of roads. (See Map II). These acts are as a rule very much alike. With the exception of the names of towns and commissioners, the legal phraseology is practically the same. One act, therefore, will be sufficient to illustrate the characteristics of all. The following act is selected at random:—

An act to locate and establish a Territorial road from Keokuck, on the Mississippi river, to Iowa City [Iowaville], on the Des Moines river.

Sec. 1. *Be it enacted by the Council and House of Representatives of the Territory of Iowa,* That James Sutton, Joseph Robb, and James McMurry, be and they are hereby appointed commissioners to locate and mark a Territorial Road, commencing at Keokuck, in Lee county, on the Mississippi river, thence to the horse tail reach, on the Des Moines river, thence up said river as near as practicable to Iowa City [Iowaville], on said river, passing through Farmington, New Lexington, Bentonsport, Columbus, and Philadelphia, in the county of Van Buren.

Sec. 2. *And be it further enacted,* That the commissioners aforesaid, or any two of them, shall meet at Keokuck, on the first day of June next, for the purpose of proceeding to the discharge of their duties as commissioners aforesaid, and that they be and are hereby authorized to adjourn from time to time, and from place to place, as they may agree and determine; and that in case said commissioners, from any cause, shall fail to meet at the time and place aforesaid, or any other time or place to which the said commissioners may have adjourned, that then the sheriff of the county be authorized, and he is hereby required, on the application of any of said commissioners, either written or verbal, to notify in writing said commissioners of some other day, to be by him appointed, and request their attend-

ance on such day at the place aforesaid. Approved, December 14, 1838.¹

Besides the special acts like the one just given, there were acts of a general nature passed by the Legislative Assembly. The first of these, entitled "An Act to provide for laying out and opening Territorial Roads," and approved December 29, 1838, is unusually suggestive. It provided that all Territorial roads should be viewed, surveyed, and established, and returns made within one year from the passage of the act establishing the same. Commissioners appointed to lay out and survey a route were directed to "blaze trees in the timber, and set stakes in the prairie at a distance of 300 yards." Mile posts must be marked with a marking iron and at every angle in the road, posts were to be placed showing the bearing from the true meridian. The surveyors were required to make a certified return and plat of the road, specifying the width, depth and course of all streams, the position of all swamps and marshes, and the face of the country generally, noting when timber and when prairie. The returns and plats were to be sent to and recorded by the Secretary of the Territory within sixty days after the making thereof. Expenses in every case were to be borne by the counties through which the road passed. The established width of all roads was seventy feet; and a road once laid out was to be a public highway forever, to be opened and worked by the counties in the same way as county roads.²

Second. In "An Act to provide for the organization of townships," approved January 10, 1840, several sections

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory, 1838-39, p. 427.*

² *Laws of Iowa Territory, 1838-39, p. 428.*

are devoted to township roads. They provide that at least six freeholders must sign a petition for such a road, after notices of taking such action have been posted at three public places in the township. The board of trustees of the township are to appoint the viewers and a surveyor, and in case a land-owner complains of damages to his land, the petitioner shall be compelled to pay the damages before the road or cart way can be established. Clerks of general election were to be exempt from one day's labor on the roads as compensation for their services.¹

Third. In "An act defining the duties of supervisors of roads and highways," approved January 17, 1840, all male persons between twenty-one and fifty years of age were made liable to three days work on the public roads. For neglect of this duty the delinquent must pay \$1.50 for every day. The supervisor was empowered to order any person, who owned them, to furnish a team of horses or oxen, wagon, cart, scraper, or plough, for which he should receive some compensation. Furthermore the county and township were to be divided not more than once a year into road districts. Fines and forfeitures were collected by the supervisor. The duties of the supervisor were to open and repair roads and to erect at the forks of every Territorial or county road a post and guide board twelve feet high with an inscription in legible letters directing the way and distance to the next town or towns. For injuring guide posts there was fixed a penalty of not less than ten nor more than fifty dollars, or imprisonment. Bridges must not be less than sixteen feet in width.²

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1839, p. 51.

² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1839, p. 115.

Fourth. The provisions of "An act for opening and regulating roads and highways," approved January 17, 1840, are practically the same as the first general act above mentioned, except that the former concerns county and Territorial roads instead of township roads. The specified width of a county road was sixty feet, and it took twelve householders of the county to secure the opening of a new road or to have an old one altered. A county road must be worked by the road supervisors of the townships through which it passes.¹

Fifth. "An act amending an act defining the duties of Supervisors of roads and highways," approved February 2, 1842, contains the provision that in an action for the recovery of a penalty or fine for refusal or neglect to labor on the roads, the supervisor shall be a competent witness to prove that he gave the notice or warning to the person bringing the action.²

Sixth. By "An act to amend an act entitled 'An act for opening and regulating roads and highways,'" approved February 2, 1842, it was provided that twenty legal voters shall petition for a county road, and the county commissioners shall have the option to grant or not. Besides where a greater number of people remonstrate against the re-location or establishment of a road, the prayer of the petitioners shall not be granted. Where "a bridge shall be necessary over any creek, river, pond, lake, slough, or place," when district supervisors cannot conveniently do so, the county commissioners shall be empowered to let the contracts.³

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1839, p. 133.

² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1841, p. 26.

³ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1841, p. 27.

Seventh. By "An act to punish the obstructing of Public Roads, etc.," the person who obstructs or injures any public road or highway was required upon conviction to pay a fine of not more than one hundred dollars.¹

Eighth. On February 16, 1842, an act was approved, "to provide for levying a tax on real and personal property for road purposes." The county boards of commissioners were empowered to levy a per centum tax of not less than five nor more than twenty-five cents on the hundred dollars valuation on all property made taxable by the revenue laws of the Territory. This tax must be paid or worked out on the roads. The township supervisor was directed to make a complete list of the individuals liable to pay county taxes, and tax collectors were authorized to proceed against delinquents. All road taxes were to be applied to the making and repairing of bridges. Instead of three a man was now required to work only two days.² This act, moreover, was amended by an act approved February 14, 1844; and by it the per centum tax was fixed at not less than five cents nor more than fifteen cents on the hundred dollars valuation.³ This same act was again amended by an act approved June 10, 1845, which authorized county treasurers to sell at public auction the property of those who were delinquent in road taxes. Money thus raised was to be used to pay the taxes and the expenses of the sale. The purchaser received a deed for the property. The owner of this real estate could redeem it by paying to the purchaser the sum bid for the land with fifty per cent per annum at

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1843, p. 24.

² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1842, p. 69.

³ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1844, p. 25.

any time within two years after the sale. The money collected by the sale must be appropriated for the improvement of roads and erection of bridges.¹

Ninth. On June 11, 1845, there was approved "An act to prevent and punish the obstruction of Public Roads and Highways." A fine of not less than ten dollars or imprisonment should be the penalty. The county sheriff was to order the person committing the injury to repair the road within six days. If this order was not complied with, the sheriff himself should repair the road at the cost of the guilty person, which of course varied with the extent of the injury.²

Tenth. In "An act relative to relocations of Territorial and county roads," approved January 19, 1846, the county commissioners were empowered to appoint reviewers when the proposed alteration was less than three miles.³ By an act approved January 1, 1846, the penalty for obstructing roads was a fine of not less than ten nor more than one hundred dollars, or imprisonment. On January 2, 1846, the Governor approved "An act to legalize Territorial and County Roads," whereby the returns of reviewers and the surveyors' plats of roads and alterations when once accepted by the county commissioners were to be declared legal as fully as if they had been recorded. Henceforth, the boards of all the counties were required to procure books for their clerks, in which all the returns and plats of roads were to be recorded and kept on file.⁴

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 47.

² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 48.

³ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 33.

⁴ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 42.

The only "turnpike" which seems to be mentioned in Iowa history is recorded in "An Act incorporating the Burlington and Iowa River Turnpike Company," approved January 24, 1839. Section five reads as follows:—

RATES OF TOLL FOR EACH AND EVERY TEN MILES

For every four-wheeled carriage, wagon, or other vehicle, drawn by two horses or oxen, twenty-five cents and for each horse or ox in addition, six cents.

For every two-wheeled carriage, wagon, or other vehicle, drawn by two horses or oxen, twenty cents, and for each horse or ox in addition, six cents.

For every horse and rider, six and a fourth cents.

For every horse, mule, or ox, led or driven, three cents.

For every head of neat cattle, two cents.

For every head of sheep or hogs, one cent.

For every four-wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by two horses, forty cents.

For every two-wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by one horse, twenty-five cents.

For every four-wheeled pleasure carriage drawn by one horse, twenty-five cents.

For every chaise, riding chair, gig, sulky, or cart, or other two-wheeled carriage of any kind, drawn by one horse, twelve and a half cents.

A turnpike, therefore, is a road on which toll gates are established in order to collect from travelers tolls to defray the cost of building and repairing.

It is quite evident from all the legislation upon the subject, that the Assembly was not backward or negligent in the matter of establishing roads. Indeed, it was only natural that the legislature should grant petitions for roadways because favorable action in this respect was sure to

confer great benefits upon the people at large. The establishment of common roads shows how essential such improvements were considered for the speedy settlement of the Territory and the future welfare of the people.

However, it seems that in time the power to establish such roads by order of the legislature was in some instances abused. This phase of the matter is set forth in the *Annals of Iowa* in a short article on *Territorial and State Roads*, which reads as follows:—

These inchoate highways would seem legitimately to have had but one purpose—that of facilitating travel and intercourse between different portions of the Territory or State. But in time their establishment became an abuse which the makers of our constitution did well to suppress. Candidates for the legislature were ready and even eager to promise to secure the establishment of these roads, in order to obtain support in securing nominations, as well as votes at the election. The carrying out of pledges was generally easy, for as a rule these projects met with very little opposition in the legislature. Then, these laws provided not a little patronage in the appointment of commissioners to locate the roads, who were also generally authorized to appoint one or more practical engineers and surveyors. A team, a tent, and other camp equipage, one or more common laborers, and subsistence for the party, were also required. The location of some roads required several weeks, and as the work was for the most part undertaken as early in the season as animals could subsist on prairie grass, they were real junketing, “picnicing” excursions. Nothing could be pleasanter than going out to perform such official duties. The pay was sufficient in those “days of small things” to make the position of commissioner a very welcome appointment. The appointments seldom went a-begging. The prairies were most beautiful with their carpets of green grass, interspersed with myriads of flowers, and fairly alive with feathered game. Deer and elk were occasionally killed, and as soon as the spring floods

subsidized fish were plenty and of the choicest quality. Enterprising frontiersmen who had gone out beyond the settlements to make themselves homes always gave them the heartiest welcome. Such settlers were hospitable to all comers, but especially so to these parties whose work promised to open up roads and place them in communication with populous places.

But it not only became apparent that this work had too often degenerated into mere schemes of politicians....but that railroads would largely obviate their necessity. So the convention of 1857, in Article III, Section 30, of the present constitution, prohibited the general assembly from "laying out, opening, and working roads or highways."¹

It seems to have been the practice of Congress whenever new Territories were organized to appropriate sums of money for what were called "Military Roads." The government undertook to open up such roads "professedly for military purposes, so that troops in case of war with the Indians or when needed for other purposes could be quickly moved from one portion of the Territory to another."² In the year 1839 Congress passed "An Act to authorize the construction of a road from Dubuque, in the Territory of Iowa, to the northern boundary of the State of Missouri, and for other purposes."³

¹ *Annals of Iowa*, 3d Series, Vol. IV, p. 72.

² *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VIII, p. 101.

³ Sec. 1. *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled*, That the sum of \$20,000 be appropriated out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, to the opening and construction of a road in Iowa Territory, from Dubuque on Mississippi River to such point on the northern boundary of the State of Missouri as may be best suited for its future extension by that State to the cities of Jefferson and St. Louis; that the Secretary of War be empowered and directed to cause such road to be constructed by contract or otherwise; Provided, that said road shall be opened throughout and so far completed as to be capable of use without exceeding in cost the sum hereby appropriated; and in laying down the route

On January 25, 1839, an act had been approved by the Governor whereby a road was authorized from Du Buque to Keosauqua, in Van Buren County, and thence southward to the Missouri boundary line. This act provided that one set of commissioners should finish constructing the road to the southern boundary of Johnson County, blazing trees in the woods and setting stakes in the prairie, and another set should continue from there on to the Missouri line. The counties which were thus traversed should pay the expenses "in their respective proportions to the amount of road laid out in each."¹ But this legislation was unnecessary, for the general government was generous enough to take this great enterprise into its own hands.

With regard to this important highway there is in Gue's *History of Iowa* this interesting account:—

In the autumn of 1839, a sale of lots took place in Iowa City, the seat of government. There were no roads leading into the town, and travelers from the east and north who were attracted to this region often became lost on the large prairies and wandered far out of their way. In order to guide strangers to the new capital from the Mississippi River, the enterprising first settlers employed Lyman Dillon to plough a furrow across the prairie and through the groves. "Dillon started from Iowa City with his huge breaking

thereof, respect to be paid so far as the same may be practicable without greatly increasing the length thereof to the accommodation of seats of justice of the several counties of Iowa through which it may pass and to the best sites for bridges and ferries over the several rivers which said road must cross.

Sec. 3. For opening and constructing a road from Burlington through the counties of Des Moines, Henry and Van Buren towards the seat of Indian Agency on the river Des Moines, \$5,000. Approved March 3, 1839.—*U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 352.

¹ *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1838, p. 71.

plow, drawn by five yoke of oxen, a two-horse emigrant wagon carrying provisions, cooking utensils, and bedding for the journey. All day the patient ox-team drew the plow, turning over the tough prairie sod, mile after mile, to mark the way for travelers. At noon and night the oxen were turned out to graze on the rich prairie grass, while the men cooked their food and slept in the wagon. For nearly one hundred miles the longest furrow on record marked the way and soon a well-beaten road was made beside it by the white-top wagons of the coming settlers."¹

But this interesting tradition does not seem to tally with the facts, for it is stated by one of the three original contractors, Mr. Edward Langworthy, that a United States engineer made a thorough survey of the whole route and let the contracts. Then Lyman Dillon, of Cascade, was directed to plow a furrow the whole length of the road. This he did under the personal superintendence of the engineer as a guide to the contractors.²

As has been stated above, for many years after the first settling of the country the thoroughfares from place to place were but little more than what nature and travel made them. The two military roads, however, were worked and graded and most of the streams were bridged. The bridges were built in a good substantial manner and greatly benefited the people in the first occupation of the country. The facilities of travel, therefore, were much improved, and it

¹ Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 197. This account is taken by Mr. Gue from the *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. VI, p. 107 and Vol. VIII, p. 106.

² This explanation, writes Mr. Langworthy, is made "at the risk of taking something from the romance of the late publications." — *History of Johnson County*, Edward Langworthy's letter, p. 235.

was only natural that these two roads were, in comparison with others in the Territory, extensively used. Travelers who wished "to view the country pretty generally before locating" were urged to follow the military road from Dubuque to Iowa City. The road was an excellent one passing through a fertile region.¹

That the United States government desired good roads in Iowa was plainly shown when an act was passed by Congress appropriating \$5,000 "for the construction and keeping in repair bridges on the 'Agency' Road (so called), laid out by the United States in the year 1839;" and \$10,000 for similar improvements on the Military road from Dubuque to the northern boundary of the State of Missouri.²

But it is also a fact that the general government was far from committing itself to a policy of unlimited expenditure of funds for all such improvements in the States and Territories. And so, several bills introduced by Iowa's Delegate to Congress "failed for want of time to enquire into their merits." The most important bill provided for a grant of land to the Territory of Iowa "for a McAdamized road from Burlington City commencing at the Western end of High Street, by Mount Pleasant and Fairfield and progressing Westward as the Indian title shall become extinguished until said road shall reach the Racoon fork of the Des-

¹ Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa*, 1841, p. 251.

² *U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 670.

In accordance with the passage of this act there was published in several newspapers a notice to bridge builders and stone masons asking for sealed proposals for the masonry and woodwork. The plans contemplated the construction of fourteen bridges on the Military Road, lengths varying from twenty to a hundred and forty feet, and seven bridges on the Agency Road with spans of from twenty to sixty feet.—See *Iowa Capital Reporter*, Dec. 28, 1844; and *Iowa City Standard*, Dec. 26, 1844.

moines river." This road was to be constructed "agreeably to the plan and construction of the United States road through the States of Indiana and Illinois." It should remain "a Public Highway except so far as tolls and regulations continuing it in repair may be necessary and no farther."¹

The second bill which failed provided for appropriations of money as follows:—

1. For making a road from Keokuck through the towns of Farmington, New Lexington, Bentonsport, Philadelphia, by Portland to Iowaville, ten thousand dollars. (This bill was the result of a resolution of the Legislative Assembly, since the improvement of this road was deemed of too much magnitude to be undertaken in the ordinary way of improving such roads).²
2. For a road from Keokuck by West Point to Mount Pleasant (including the survey of Skunk River) five thousand dollars.
3. For a road from the Mississippi River opposite Ft. Crawford to Iowa City in the direction of the proposed fort on the Des Moines River, ten thousand dollars.
4. For a road from the county seat of Scott County, to Marion the county seat of Linn County, two thousand dollars.
5. For a road from Drumes Mills by Bloomington to the seat of government, ten thousand dollars.
6. For a road from Iowa City through Louisa County to the Mississippi, five thousand dollars.
7. For a survey of the steam boat landing at the city of Dubuque, one thousand dollars.³

The third bill was supposed to be an addition to the act that provided for the two military roads as will be seen from the following:—

¹ *The Iowa Standard*, Dec. 4, 1840.
² *Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1839, p. 154.
³ *The Iowa Standard*, Dec. 4, 1840.

1. For continuing the opening and construction of the road from Dubuque to Missouri, \$24,000.
2. For similar improvements on the road from Burlington to Agency City, \$6,407.
3. For completing the road from Burlington to De Hague's, Ill., \$10,000.¹

In glancing through the journals of Congress for the years 1833 to 1846, one is astonished at the numerous petitions which were received from people of Iowa Territory alone. During this period there was one continual clamor for internal improvements. Petitions came from private individuals, from groups of citizens, from towns and cities, and from the Legislative Assembly. These petitions vary in importance. Some called for improvements of great concern, while others were of no practical value whatever. However, all go to show the peculiar needs of the first settlers.

Thus we have seen how great were the inconveniences of our pioneer fathers and how active were the first Assemblies of Iowa in supplying the numerous demands for roads and bridges. We have seen, also, that the United States made some large appropriations to Iowa, not only for the government's advantage in dealing with the Indians, but also for the improvement of facilities of travel for the people

¹ For this road \$2500 had been granted in aid of a like sum contributed by the town of Burlington.—*U. S. Statutes at Large*, Vol. V, p. 352.

For the three bills above quoted, see *The Iowa Standard*, Dec. 4, 1840.

Later on a resolution was sent to A. C. Dodge, the Delegate at Washington, requesting him to use his best endeavors to obtain an appropriation sufficient to complete the bridging and embanking of the Agency Road, which was still in an unfinished state.—*Laws of Iowa Territory*, 1845, p. 125.

Five thousand dollars was asked of Congress to improve the Territorial road across the Mississippi bottom between the town of Toolsboro and the Mississippi River.—*Ibid*, p. 128.

themselves. Although the Legislative Assembly requested further grants of money to carry out its "good-roads policy," Congress did not feel that it could afford to become too generous at a time when the country still felt the dire effects of the panic of 1837. However, in spite of all difficulties, the Territory of Iowa grew rapidly in wealth and population, and on the 28th day of December, 1846, the Union received a new member in the Commonwealth of Iowa—a land of fertile fields and enterprising Americans.

JACOB VAN DER ZEE

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA CITY