

## An Invitation to Eden

Uppermost in the minds of most Iowans, from Governor Samuel Merrill to the humblest citizen, was the dire need of attracting more settlers, both native-born Americans and foreigners. Iowa newspapers were filled with the advantages of choosing the Hawkeye State as the logical place to settle and commence farming. On January 29, 1869, the *Iowa Age* of Clinton carried the following letter from Josiah B. Grinnell, a letter originally appearing in the *Iowa Homestead*:

The States of the West and Southwest seek immigration by the high colored pictures of each. Iowa never took precedence more truthfully than this year. Oats by their plentifulness will be a drug in the interior at a Yankee shilling a bushel. The corn is of a most luxuriant growth, and grasses, cultivated and native, are far in excess of the wants of the stock, the increase and value of which animals give our State the peculiar occasion for boasting.

The value of live stock in Iowa in 1860 was \$21,000,000; in 1866 it was \$61,600,000. Three hundred and fifty per cent in six years, during the four years of which one-fourth of our agriculturists had gone to war. Comparison will illustrate. The New England States justly boasting of their blooded stock of Devons, Morgans, Merinoes, and Downs, have had an advance of fifty per cent in the same period, and the total value of animals in five of these old States but little surpasses the stock of Iowa.

New York, with five times our population, has not half our proportioned value of stock to the population.—Indiana, the paradise of swine, only leads us a few millions in value of live stock; Illinois, so successful in obtaining the credit for the beeves of the Northwest, to be the equal of Iowa should have the valuation of \$150,000,000, but falls short of it \$35,000,000. Wisconsin and Michigan, each surpassing us in population by 100,000, fell behind Iowa in the value of live stock, the former \$24,000,000 and the latter \$19,000,000. Taking wealth as a basis, our pre-eminence among the States is still more apparent.

The legitimate deduction from these facts are: First—we are enriching and not impoverishing our soil as is done by grain raising for exportation. Second—our people, in the care of domestic animals, find more time for recreation and improvement than those engaged in any other agricultural pursuits. Then the marvellous advance is at once an argument in behalf of the sagacity and care of our breeders, and for the richness of our crops and cereal products, and the adoption of our predominating domestic animal races.

The landless and the enterprising will not overlook these attractions of a State where five-sixths of the acres bear luxuriant grass, unclipped by a brute and left for the autumnal fires, as rich as the one-sixth whose occupants, in healthful cheer, have an invitation and a welcome to the millions who can here find a home with the promise of health, near schools, churches, and railways.

One might forgive the enthusiasm of an Iowan for presenting a laudatory opinion of his adopted state. However, when even more flattering opinions were expressed by visitors from Eastern states the impact on both Iowans and prospective

Iowans must have been tremendous. Thus, on February 12, 1869, the *Iowa Age* of Clinton quoted a letter from a Cleveland visitor who had traveled from the Mississippi to the Missouri in the fall of 1868 and, upon his return to Ohio, had penned the following words of praise to the *Cleveland Herald*:

We might dismiss the ride across Iowa by saying that from the Missouri to the Mississippi the country presented not a foot of land incapable of the highest cultivation, and that Nature has made the entire State, on the route traveled by the party, as perfect a garden as lies out of doors. Back a score of miles from Omaha, after making slow progress over the hills that make the prairie a rolling one, we came in view of the Boyer Valley; and seeing the beauty of that landscape, all felt to exclaim,

'Twas a lovely sight to see  
What Heaven had done for this goodly land.

Save that there was no body of water in view—a very essential requisite to perfection of landscape—the eye cannot rest upon a richer, more lovely valley than the Boyer Valley of Western Iowa. Miles upon miles: without a house or a fence, the land as it came from the hand of its maker, the view was over a landscape as refined, as if science and labor and money had been exhausted in perfecting the scene, and one could imagine the coach passing the well-kept reserves of a landed nobility, rather than through a valley that is yet in its wild virginity. And here, too, the eye found relief resting upon groves scattered here and there, as if planted for the ornamentation of the sweet valley. If the whole of Iowa is like that portion through which this railroad runs, from river to river, it has not a waste foot that is not superlatively rich. It is

diversified by rolling prairies, by abundant streams, and what is particularly attractive—by groves of timber. What may be found beneath the soil we know not, but as it stands to-day, its mere surface view proclaims it the husbandman's Eden, of course with the great penalty attached, "by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread."

It should be noted that the Cleveland visitor emphasized that the "Eden" of which he spoke required *work*—"by the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread." When the New York *Tribune* presented its widely copied story of the success of two brothers—[Ambrose A. Call and Asa C. Call] who had settled at what is now Algona in 1854—the story was repudiated by a number of Iowa papers. The editor of the Knoxville *Iowa Voter* of November 11, 1869, declared Horace Greeley's *Tribune* was guilty of "False Logic" when it implied that everyone coming to Iowa would succeed as did the Call brothers:

Two brothers named Call went into Kossuth County, Iowa, 15 years ago, when it had hardly an inhabitant. They took with them less than five dollars each, but they went there to work. They have kept at work ever since; and they have earned and made a quarter of a million dollars. There are many thousand as good chances to-day as they had; the difference is in the *men*. He who tells you he can't hew a farm out of the wild West because he has no money, is not the man to do it with ever so good a start. If you were to offer to keep him in provisions while he made his farm, he would want some one to chew his victuals for him. What would suit him best

is an office, in which there is much to gain and little to do.

Now, the facts about the Call brothers may perhaps be as above stated—though those large Eastern papers have a loose way of stating things about Iowa, that makes us rather distrustful. Admit, however, that the Call brothers did make \$250,000 in fifteen years—and is not that a most rare and remarkable case? How many others have done as well, or anywhere near as well? But on the other hand hundreds and thousands of men have come to Iowa, settled in new Counties, lived there as long, worked as hard and been as prudent as the Call brothers could have done, and yet, though undoubtedly prospering well, have not made the twentieth part so much money—in just the same way that hundreds of men have been as smart, been educated as well, studied and worked as faithfully, and everyway done their duty as well as Gen. Grant has, and yet never were or will be either Generals or Presidents. The point is that *circumstances*—outside circumstances—have much if not most to do with such exceptional cases.

A thousand readers of the *Tribune* may come to Iowa, and, with reasonable efforts, may each in fair time secure a competence; but not more than one or two out of the thousand, working ever so hard, could possibly do anywhere near so well at making money as the Call brothers. Indeed, if the *Tribune's* logic were true, and everybody could do as well as they, what a world of rich men this would soon be!

Iowa editors had plenty to boast about as Federal Census figures of all kinds confirmed the phenomenal growth of the Hawkeye State. The *Iowa Age* of March 5, 1869, took no little pride in comparing the productivity of the Hawkeye State with some of the "Big States" back East:

**Iowa vs. Big States**

The Department of Agriculture has put out some estimate of last year's corn crop. The crop of the country runs close to a thousand millions of bushels—an increase over the preceding year of 137,000 bushels. Proud young Iowa is fourth on the list of honor—the four great corn states being, Illinois, 134,363,000; Indiana, 90,832,000; Ohio, 74,040,000; Iowa, 65,332,000. The good folks who live in the big broad states of Pennsylvania and New York are wondrous full of state pride. If you proposed to compare this newly born state with their great commonwealths, they would crush you with the question, where is this Iowa you talk about? For the information of such, we will merely say, it is a fair little sister of the Union, whose territory was an untrodden wilderness when New York and Pennsylvania were already gray with age, but which in the year 1868 had a corn field which compared with theirs as follows:

New York	20,910,000 bushels
Pennsylvania	31,979,000 "
Iowa	65,332,000 "

How's that for a recommendation for Iowa? The figures are official. We are vain enough to think that the showing grandly honors our blessed Iowa. This year we will add several millions to that exhibit, and in ten years will link arms alongside with Illinois.

The same Clinton editor, on February 12, 1869, after noting the enthusiasm of Easterners for Iowa, reminded his readers that not all new additions from the East would be farmers:

Both the east and the west are rivaling each other in extolling the advantages and prospects of Iowa. It looks as though the whole country had its eye on Iowa, and if

any man left any state it would be to come to Iowa. The newspapers of New England are enthusiastic over our State, many of them describing it as an agricultural Eden.

Now while our State will, the coming season, receive an emigration wholly unprecedented even for Iowa, we of the cities must remember that the new population will not be entirely tillers of the soil. Capital is turning this way. Trade and commerce are finding their natural channels. We no longer send wheat to New York to be ground into flour and then returned. We don't send our wool to Ohio and Pennsylvania as formerly. Iowa has woolen mills which consume every pound of wool raised. But we still take the hides off of Iowa cattle and ship them to New York or Massachusetts, to be returned in boots and shoes, leather belting, &c. We go to Ohio for threshers, reapers, mowers and cultivators, to Illinois for wagons and ploughs, to Wisconsin for furniture, when we could make them all in Iowa, and be able to sell them at much lower figures than they are now furnished.

An Estherville editor was overwhelmed by the "ceaseless tide" of immigration rolling by his door. Writing in the *Northern Vindicator* of June 11, 1870, he declared:

A ceaseless tide of emigration is flowing into the Northwest. Every road leading from the east, south-east and north-east is daily lined with prairie schooners freighted with human beings and household goods, seeking for homes and shrines in northwestern Iowa.

Come from forests of Maine  
Through the mist and shower—  
O'er prairie and plain,  
From the South's sunny bower—  
From the high northern hill  
And the green eastern hollow,  
With stout hearts and good will,  
Come follow! come follow!

and secure a home in one of the fairest, most productive and health promoting portions of God's green earth; where the wicked cease from troubling and you can raise more produce to the acre and with less labor, than in any other part of the world. You bet.

The Estherville editor declared in the same issue of the *Vindicator*:

"Westward the star of empire takes its way," is an expression the technical signification of which is but feebly comprehended by a large number of the post-deluvian dwellers on this orbicular planet. We might say in the outset that the said star referred to is not at all to blame for it; "Westward" couldn't help it either—"Empire" don't know how to, and "way" don't want to—Still on comes the star, rising across the ocean, among the many-tongued nations of the old world or in the crowded lanes or scant, barren grounds of New England, it leads its people, their penates in their moving dwelling places, on, on, over hill, prairie and through wood, towards the golden sunset.

Where now is vast uninhabited plains, far stretching prairies, and unknown but fertile valleys, in imagination we picture in the near future mansions of elegance and wealth, pastures of teemful herds, fields of golden grain and homes of happy families. This can occur in no other country than ours and would not under any other than such a generous and republican government.

The passage of the *Homestead Act* of 1862 had been a powerful factor in steering settlers into Iowa. The Sioux City Land Office did a thriving business both through Pre-emption and Homestead claims. Actually, only 902,000 acres of land were

homesteaded in Iowa whereas 14,099,825 had been granted for military services, 11,916,276 sold for cash, and 4,360,046 granted to railroads. Much of the land in Northwestern Iowa, particularly in Kossuth County, had already been taken up by 1870. On February 3, 1870, the *Iowa State Register* declared:

Of the chances for securing homesteads in Kossuth county, the *Algona Upper Des Moines* says: "We receive numerous letters asking what is the chance for Homesteads in Kossuth county. To save the time and trouble of writing separate replies, we will give a general answer to all. Two years ago this county had about five hundred homesteads open to entry. To-day there is not an unclaimed Homestead of any value in the county. There are quite a number of abandoned homesteads, some of which are not very far from town, and all of which are valuable. But for every such abandoned Homestead there stands some one watching, and only waiting for the six months of abandonment, to file a new claim. A stranger coming here now, would stand a poor chance of securing one of that class. People locating here in the future must depend upon buying second-hand lands." There are several counties in Northwestern Iowa where homesteads can be secured without trouble. Over one million acres of land in that region are still open, and free to any one who will come and take them.

While much of the rich farm land was taken up between 1870 and 1880, editors emphasized the need of laborers of all kinds. Under the heading "Homes for Poor Men," the *Grand Junction Head-Light* of January 1, 1870, declared:

. . . Lands in this section are offered at prices reasonable and just, while lots in the city are sold to actual settlers on terms that will suit every man's purse in the land, and a steady application to the labor that awaits mechanics and laborers will insure a revenue sufficient to support them and in good time enable them to pay for their homes. Lumber and all other material necessary for the speedy erection of houses is found in the city, and at prices that are low. With the advantage of a good, deep soil in the county, always prolific in its yield; with our new and busy city opening wide the avenues for all kinds of trade and businesses, we offer inducements to immigrants of all classes to settle among us. We want men of all trades—

Blacksmiths and butchers,  
 Farmers and laborers,  
 Carpenters and coal dealers,  
 Merchants and milliners,  
 Grocers and pump makers,  
 Painters, plasterers and preachers,  
 Shoe makers and school teachers,  
 Men of wealth and poor men,  
 Young men, and only those who are industrious,  
 Men with families and men without them,  
 Young women who want to be husbanded,  
 And young women who don't—

we want every man, woman and child, white or black; American, Dutch, German, Dane, Irish, English, African, Chinese, or any other nationality, only so they bring an honest face and hands that fear not work—to come and join our enterprising, bustling, prosperous community. Homes are here for the thousands who only half live the life God gives them to live, in crowded, pestilential cities, and to such we open wide our doors and welcome them to all the joys and pleasures that attend a life spent in this good and best portion of all States.

Farming was made up of a lot of hard work and those who came to the broad prairies of Iowa and shirked were destined to fail dismally. "Our farmers," declared the *Sioux City Times* of June 22, 1872, "are fighting the potato bug, chinch bug, cut worm, grub worm, army worm, gophers, ground squirrels, mice, rats, meadow mice, caterpillars, curculio, black-bird, mischievous neighbors and rambling stock." Despite such an array of problems the same editor noted that a Mr. Divine of Sioux City had presented him with a peck of new potatoes he had raised that spring.

The *Spirit Lake Beacon* of July 31, 1872, waxed enthusiastic over the prospects of farming in 1872:

The Prospect.—It is certain that never before in the history of this county was the prospect more bright and encouraging than now. Our farmers have commenced to harvest the heaviest crop, by far, that Dickinson county ever produced. With a fair price for their grain, they will be able to meet their liabilities and have some surplus capital to invest in improvements. As a natural consequence of this prosperity, all branches of business will receive fresh impetus. The merchant will sell more goods; the manufacturer find a more ready market for his productions, and the mechanic obtain more work and better pay. Never were we more in love with this beautiful country than now, when its fertile fields are burdened with their load of golden grain. The poetry, of a beautiful landscape is rivaled by that of a bountiful harvest; and the harmonious strains of the grand orchestra of Nature are flat and discordant in comparison with the music of the sickle.

Let sailors sing of the rolling deep;  
Let soldiers praise their armor;  
But in my heart this toast I'll keep—  
The Independent Farmer.

With agriculture passing through a fairly good period and prospects likewise good, editors in Northwestern Iowa assumed a jovial mood in 1872. The *Spirit Lake Beacon* of January 26, 1872, quoted the following from the *Cherokee Times*:

Farming—"Old Kirk" tells a tough story on Judge Ford on what the latter "knows about farming." He hints that the judge, in giving advice to an old farmer on sheep raising, advised him to grow Devons, Herefords, Chester Whites and Berkshires, the two former for wool and the two latter for mutton.

The Judge retaliates by saying, that "Old Kirk" two years ago, planted an acre of *pigs feet* and then blamed the dry summer because his hog crop proved a failure.

Not all of Western Iowa was enjoying such great success with its crops. Evil days had befallen the farmers in the Big Sioux Valley. The *Sioux City Weekly Times* of August 10, 1872, declared:

The grasshoppers are represented as stripping the fields between Yankton and Canton of everything green. Dakota is somewhat unfortunate. The grasshoppers are reported as being on the Iowa side of the Big Sioux river, in the western portion of Plymouth County. They are reported as having done great damage in the Valley of the Sioux. Caterpillars are likewise on the rampage. With a circus, caterpillars and grasshoppers, all coming along the same time, our people will have a Variety of evils to contend with.

The following year, in 1873, the grasshopper plague struck the greater portion of Western Iowa, bringing ruin to many a hard pressed Iowa farmer. His situation was not made easier by the Panic of 1873, which laid its blighting hand on Iowa and the Nation. Little wonder that Iowa farmers, with such misfortunes repaying them for their hard toil, should become one of the most active followers of the National Grange. By the end of the decade the movement toward cheap money had led discontented Greenbackers everywhere to nominate an Iowan—James B. Weaver—for their presidential candidate.

Truly, this land flowing with milk and honey, this haven for the weary and oppressed called "Eden," this favored land above all others called Iowa, was not without its economic problems a century ago.

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