

La Crosse to Dubuque

VICTORY HOUSE

Victory, Wisconsin

September 14, 1881

It was proposed, on setting out in the morning, to make De Soto the evening destination, but a heavy thunder-storm, which had been gathering throughout the afternoon, burst at five o'clock and drove us ashore at Victory. This remnant of by-gone days might very appropriately be classed with the Alma, Minneiska, Trempealeau series, which, but for the circumstance that it stands upon the banks of the Father of Waters, would be a poor "Victory" indeed. One of the shining lights of this place, happening to overhear a conversation between Paine and myself, concerning the town of De Soto, situated on the river five miles below, ventured to inquire if in our opinion the "De Sota" after whom the town was called, was any relation of "Minnie Sota," the girl after whom he understood the adjoining State was named!

Nothing of an unusual character in the scenery or of especial interest as to incident was noted in the journey from La Crosse to Victory. A halt was made at one o'clock for dinner, which we had at a farm-house on the right bank, near the boundary line between Minnesota and Iowa. This was our last meal in the former State.

TREMONT HOUSE

*Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin**September 15, 1881*

On retiring to our rooms the previous evening, it was the intention to get into our canoes at seven o'clock in the morning, but we were detained at Victory by rain until after eight, when, taking advantage of a lull in the storm, we pushed off, finding a brisk current, wind down stream and everything favorable until we reached Lansing, when more rain fell, and continued to fall throughout the day. Stopped at a farm-house on the Iowa side for dinner, our first meal in the Prairie State [Hawkeye State]. Made short halts at De Soto, Lansing, and Harpers.

Wind, rain, a swollen stream and approaching darkness rendered our landing at Prairie du Chien both difficult and dangerous. We were cautioned by persons on the shore not to attempt to pass under the low pontoon-like railway bridge which crosses the river at this point, but the warning came too late, as the brisk current and suction of the bridge trellis-work had placed the canoe beyond our control, and we were unable to do more than guide it through the network of huge posts which constitute its foundation and support. We succeeded ultimately in getting out of the trap in which we temporarily found ourselves, much to our own relief and the apparent gratification of the anxious spectators on the shore.

On the seventeenth of June, 1673, Marquette and Joliet, the former a Jesuit missionary, reached the junction of the Wisconsin with the Mississippi, a little above which, Prairie du Chien stands to-day. Seven years later, in 1680, Father Hennepin and M. Dugay explored the Mississippi from the mouth of the Illinois northward, and on ascending and descending the river passed the site of the present town. Hennepin claimed at this time to have reached the head-waters of the Mississippi, and also to have explored it to its mouth, but his narrative bears evidence of great exaggeration, and procured for him, with the French, the title of "the great falsifier." Yet his achievement was a splendid one, with which he might well have been satisfied. He passed twice the entire distance between the Falls of Saint Anthony and the mouth of the Arkansas, in all nearly three thousand miles, which voyage having been accomplished in a canoe on an unknown and treacherous river, flowing through an unexplored wilderness, was truly something to be proud of. . . .

Prairie du Chien, the county-seat of Crawford County, is situated on the eastern bank of the Mississippi, on a level plain or prairie about nine miles long and between one and two miles wide. This prairie is bounded on the east by high, rocky bluffs, with scattered clumps of trees, while its western border is washed by the Mississippi. Its name was derived from that of an Indian chief who

once resided there, known as *Le Chien*, or *The Dog*; hence *Prairie du Chien*, or *The Dog Prairie*. It was one of the oldest of the French trading-posts, but the first permanent settlement was located there in 1783. Gautier de Vorville, Michael Brisbois, and Captain Fisher were among the traders late in the last and early in the present century, and all of them have left descendants. Fisher was of Scotch origin, and carried on an extensive trade with the Indians. In 1815 he emigrated to more remote regions on the Red River of the North, but died in *Prairie du Chien* in 1827.

In 1814, the British sent a party of Indians, composed of Sioux, Menomonies, and Winnebagos, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel William McKay, to capture *Prairie du Chien* from the Americans. After a four days' siege the fort surrendered, and the report of a great victory was carried by Captain Rolette to Mackinaw. Large numbers thronged the shores and inquired of the captain the news. "A great battle—a sanguinary contest," responded Rolette, with an air of great solemnity and importance. "How many were killed?" "None." "What a bloody contest!" vociferated the crowd, as they escorted the hero from the boat to the garrison. The following year, at the conclusion of peace, the post was evacuated.

Crawford County was established in 1818, while the country was still embraced in the territory of Michigan. At that early period it extended

from the Wisconsin River on the south to the Buffalo River on the north, comprising an area now divided into ten or more counties.

Like many of its neighbors up and down the river, Prairie du Chien had great expectations in its youth. It was confident of becoming the chief town of the Mississippi. It is situated five hundred and forty miles north of Saint Louis, in the midst of a productive agricultural and mineral region. But though one or more railroads touch it, the great through-lines of the continent passed it by; and for that, and other reasons, more or less difficult of explanation, but which act as a sort of Providence in shaping the ends of rough-hewn cities, it remains scarcely more than a town, having but about three thousand inhabitants. It is, however, an important local shipping-post, and has a number of manufactories. Saint John's College and Saint Mary's Female Institute are located here, under control of the Catholic Church.

Just above Prairie du Chien is the site of Fort Crawford, near the town of Saint Fiolle, which in 1846 was the larger of the two, but which has now altogether disappeared from the map. Prairie du Chien is a pretty town, being well built, with wide streets and an abundance of shade; and there is an air of thrift and enterprise about its inhabitants which impress the stranger. As in most other towns of the Upper Mississippi, its people are made up largely of New Englanders and New

Yorkers; and wherever they are found, prosperity is sure to follow in their track. Thus, though Prairie du Chien will probably never become a large city, it will hold its own among the neighboring towns and cities up and down the river, and obtain a due share of the influx of immigration into this section of the country.

JEFFERSON HOTEL

Guttenberg, Iowa

September 16, 1881

Lecture appointments at Davenport and other points below Dubuque made it imperative that we should launch our canoe at a seasonable hour in the morning, though much against inclination, for the storm which opened the day before was still in progress. Halted a few moments at McGregor, and took dinner at the Mississippi House, Clayton, both of which towns are in Iowa. A glance through their streets reminded us very forcibly of the "waning glory" of Minneiska, Trempealeau and Victory.

Finding the wind from the westward we kept close to the Iowa shore all day. Reached Guttenberg at five o'clock and housed our canoe in the *Diamond Jo* freight-house. Our clothing was again thoroughly soaked and no changes at hand.

Guttenberg, the county-seat of Clayton County, Iowa, is twenty-six miles [31] below Prairie du Chien, and two hundred and eighty-one [224] south of Saint Paul. It is the largest town in the

county and the river-landing for an extensive section of country. It has a population of about fifteen hundred—nearly all Germans.

The traveler who seeks to penetrate the region west of Guttenberg will first encounter nature in its rough and primitive majesty. He ascends a gigantic bluff, step by step, until he attains a mountain elevation. Then, at his feet, he beholds the Mississippi, dotted with lovely islands and sparkling in the sunlight as it rolls its flood of waters toward the sea. Before him spreads the forest as it appeared a hundred years ago, beautiful in its grandeur. He journeys through it, and his eyes are greeted by smiling farms as he looks westward from the hill-tops. The country grows less rugged as he advances, until, five miles from Guttenberg, he enters a rolling prairie, extending far and wide on either hand, to within three miles of Elkader. This prairie is one of the largest in the State, and is broken into every variety of hill and dale. It is covered with farms, most of them under the very highest state of cultivation.

PACIFIC HOUSE

*Dubuque, Iowa**September 17, 1881*

We paddled away from Guttenberg at eight o'clock in the morning. Weather still unsettled and in keeping with that which followed the launching of our canoes at Saint Paul, with the exception of two or three days. We learned from river-

men that these September rains are a well-known characteristic of the Upper Mississippi, and are looked for annually.

Several attempts were made to arrange for dinner between twelve and one o'clock at farm-houses on the Iowa side, but the stupid foreigners whom we encountered declined to accommodate, seeming to regard us with suspicion. Our perseverance was ultimately rewarded with an excellent dinner at Specht's Ferry, thirty miles [22.7] below Guttenberg.

The afternoon was the finest we had chronicled in many days and afforded us a splendid opportunity to study scenery and other objects of interest in our "line of march."

The geologist, mineralogist or artist will find in the tour from Prairie du Chien to Dubuque a most productive field for research, and one possessing more beauty of scenery and grandeur than any other section of the Mississippi below Winona. His attention will be arrested by the peculiar outline of hills that limit the vision on either side of the river, and the perpendicular walls of rock that rise from the grassy slope or green copsewood in massive cliffs, which terrace the heights as with continuous natural battlements. This scenery not only characterizes the banks of the Mississippi, but many of its Iowa and Wisconsin tributaries. At the base of the cliffs we often noted cool, clear, and copious springs, which not unfrequently give

rise to small streams containing an abundance of delicious trout. The sportsman will find the rivers of this region well stocked with pike, carp, bass, cat-fish, pickerel and sun-fish, while the prairies abound in grouse, partridges and pheasants.

Along the banks of the Mississippi the surface is broken and too uneven for farming purposes, but affords excellent pasturage, while from the valleys and bottoms are gathered hay and grain for winter fodder, leaving little to be desired by the shepherd and stock-raiser. Further back from the river on the Iowa side are found undulating prairies, interspersed with open groves of timber, watered with pebbly or rock-bedded streams, pure and transparent; hills of moderate elevation and gentle slope, with here and there small lakes and ponds, some skirted with timber, and others surrounded by the greensward of the open prairie.

Less than forty years have elapsed since this section was in full possession of the Winnebago Indians. How changed the scene! Their villages, their hunting-grounds and the unbroken forests have disappeared. The palefaces came among them, and the axe of the woodman broke the solitude of ages and warned them of an impending fate. No longer shall these groves and plains be the hunting-ground of the red man; no longer the deep ravines serve as lurking-places for the wily foe, nor the bluff-side as a battle-field between contending tribes.

Our journey was uninterrupted until about four o'clock, when we ran into the log-boom of a saw-mill just above Dubuque. A long "pocket" had been constructed for the reception of logs, and into this we slipped before realizing that, like all well-ordered pockets, there was but one way out of it. We had, in brief, after discovering our dilemma, indulged the hope that as, in a few parallel cases still preserved in memory, there might be a hole in this rather unwelcome Mississippi saw-mill-log-boom pocket, and so we glided down towards the mill. We recalled our Winona adventure, but that was a squall, while this affair was certainly a *boom*, and if there is anything in a name, our present unfavorable outlook was likely to result to our advantage. Proximity to the inevitable saw-mill finally brought our musings to an end, and our canoe to a standstill, for we had run into a nest of two or three thousand logs, and must either retreat by the route we had entered or lift the canoe over the boom, by no means an easy matter, considering that there was nothing but a narrow pole to stand on while we were making the transfer, and that floating on the surface of the water. Running the canoe alongside the boom, Paine stepped out upon the latter, and balancing himself with his double paddle, gave me a hand, and in a moment more I was beside him. We then hoisted the canoe over and launched it; resolved to give saw-mills and *booms* a wide berth in future. . . .

Up to the year 1803, the French owned an immense region west of the Mississippi, which in that year became part of the public domain of the United States by purchase. This region had previously belonged to Spain, and during the tenure of the Spaniards, namely in 1788, a young Canadian trader, named Julien Dubuque, obtained the privilege of working the lead mines which are situated within the limits of the present city. This privilege was obtained from the Indians, and in 1806, Dubuque and his companions applied to the United States Government to have their claim established as a Spanish grant, on the ground that the governor of Louisiana had confirmed, in 1796, the Indian permission given eight years before. In 1810, Dubuque died; but his heirs-at-law continued to press their claim, and the "Dubuque claim case" was legislated upon in Congress and litigated in the courts for nearly fifty years, until, in 1853, it was finally settled adversely to the claimants. . . .

Iowa became a Territory in 1838, Dubuque having been incorporated as a village in the previous year. In 1840 the population of the village was less than one thousand. The first newspaper published in the Territory was started in 1836, under the title of *The Dubuque Visitor*. In 1840 a movement was made to incorporate Dubuque as a city, and in the spring of 1841 this was effected by the election of a mayor and aldermen. . . .

The lead-mining operations were prosperous,

and the foundation of a flourishing city had been laid by this industry. In December, 1847[6], Iowa became a State, and the population of Dubuque had now increased to over three thousand. The city had become an important receiving point, but Galena was still its successful rival for the up-river commerce. It required another decade to secure the success achieved by Dubuque.

The emigration from the Eastern States to Iowa in 1850, and for several years afterward, largely added to the population of this city. Improvement of the streets and business blocks followed, with large school-buildings for the accommodation of six hundred pupils each; and, during the five years preceding 1856, Dubuque made more progress than it had done in the previous fifteen years. During this latter year the population had grown to nearly sixteen thousand. In 1857 and 1858 the city met with some reverses owing to the general financial revulsion; but in 1859 business revived, immigration from the East was resumed, and the business men of Dubuque commenced earnest work for the welfare of their promising city. Fine blocks of buildings and commodious public halls were erected, and the General Government began the construction of the Custom House and Post-Office. From 1860 to 1870, the whole country was convulsed by the Civil War and its results. Although far removed from the scenes of military conflicts, Dubuque City and County sent three

companies of volunteers to battle against rebellion, besides many who enlisted in the regular army. Within a year after the close of the war, the city grew more rapidly; trade, manufactures and public improvements increased, and more houses, schools and churches were built.

In 1870 the population of Dubuque had increased to over eighteen thousand. A street railway was added to the facilities for passenger transit; and steady progress made it all that pertains to a healthy municipal growth. Among the manufactures of this thriving city are those of steam-engines, boilers, threshing-machines, casting and the work of iron-foundries and machine-shops, coppersmith work, tobacco, window-shades, churns, fanning-mills, trunks, soap, flour, wagons and carriages, furniture, planing-mill work, cooperage, brick, vinegar and many others. The trade in lumber affords a striking contrast. In 1834 a small raft of pine boards, the first that ever descended the Upper Mississippi, furnished the material for a frame building used as a boarding-house in Dubuque. In 1870 fifty million feet of pine lumber were sold from fifteen Dubuque lumber-yards, and the trade has very considerably increased since that date.

The first school in Iowa was opened in Dubuque in 1833. At present there are in the city a dozen fine buildings, with about eighty well-qualified teachers and over three thousand pupils to mark

the educational progress of its citizens. The lead mines of Julien Dubuque within the corporation limits and surrounding them, have been, and are still, an important element of prosperity. The lead district of Dubuque County comprises over a hundred square miles, but the larger number of the mines are worked within the city, or within a mile or two of it. Many of the valuable lodes near Dubuque have been worked beneath gardens, streets, roads and cultivated fields. The product of the mines has averaged in value about three hundred thousand dollars annually, and they are still as productive as they were fifty years ago.

The Methodists, in 1834, were the first religious denomination established in Dubuque. The Catholics were the next, in 1835; and by the year 1840, the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Baptists had organized churches.

No city of the Union of equal population has in our opinion more reason to be proud of its position, character and reputation, than Dubuque in developing all the elements of progress placed by nature at its disposal. From its fortunate geographical position, nearly midway between Saint Louis and Saint Paul, it bids fair to justify its claim to be the "Metropolis [Key City] of Iowa."