Hopeville

Hopeville is a name to conjure with. Every village hopes to be a town; every town desires to become a city; and every city aspires to become a metropolitan center. Every municipality hopes for a post office, a railroad, paved streets, sidewalks, a water system, churches, schools, and a multitude of other improvements. In a sense every town is Hopeville. But alas, hopes often vanish. The long-looked-for railroad never comes. The post office is abandoned. Business houses close, until perhaps only a single store remains. Like Goldsmith's Sweet Auburn, "loveliest village of the plain", the once thriving town becomes a deserted village.

Every State in the Union has had its Hopeville, though it may have been known by another name. But in Doyle Township, Clarke County, Iowa, there is a village which is actually named Hopeville. Its name is, perhaps, more fitting than its founders suspected.

The first white settlers in Clarke County were Mormon emigrants who started from Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846, with the hope of reaching Salt Lake City. When they came to the region that is

now Clarke County, they became separated from the larger group of emigrants, and tarried for a while. They erected cabins at a place which they called "Lost Camp", planted corn, and remained for a year or two before moving on westward.

In 1850 the first permanent settlement was made in the vicinity of Hopeville. Bernard Arnold, James J. Arnold, I. Ellis, Robert Jamison, A. Collier, and John Shearer were among the first settlers. They were followed by a group of emigrants from Van Buren County, which came to be known as the "Hopewell Colony". This lasted only a short time. According to one explanation "every man wanted to boss his own work and do as he pleased. It was but a waste of time to try to work together, so they soon scattered onto farms of their own."

In 1851, it is said, a post office was requested for "Hopewell". It happened, however, that there was already a Hopewell post office in Mahaska County, so the name Hopeville was adopted instead and a post office was established there on December 19, 1851 — the same day on which the post office was established at Osceola. David Newton was the first postmaster at Hopeville and he continued to hold that office the greater part of the time for twenty years.

Good land could be bought in the vicinity of

Hopeville in those days for $1.25 per acre, but the people who toiled to make their homes there sometimes "shook with chills" or "burned with fever." The winters were hard to endure, for the houses were small and poor — "the first ones all log cabins."

The town was laid out around a public square consisting of an entire block, which formed the center of the village. The first schoolhouse in Hopeville was a log cabin. In this building all public gatherings were held. Here, too, the Methodist Episcopal Church of the village was organized and held its first meeting. By 1850 more people had arrived and those of the Baptist faith erected a little log cabin for themselves. Meanwhile, people of the Christian Church organized and held meetings at the home of Dr. Jesse Emery. With the passing of time, small frame houses came to take the place of log cabins. About 1860 two frame churches — Methodist and Christian — were erected.

These two churches were south of the village square, facing north. Each had two front doors — one for the men and the other for the women and children. A family would come together to the platform along the front, then separate, the men going in at one door, the women and children at the other. If there were a large family of chil-

dren the father as well as the mother might accompany them and sit on the women's side to assist in maintaining quiet and reverence during the long services. On Sunday evenings young men might accompany their sweethearts and sit with them on the distaff side. When the church was crowded, the women might sit on the men's side while the men stood at the rear or outside, looking in at an open window.

When the Civil War broke out, Hopeville responded with its full quota of "Boys in Blue". Under the leadership of Sergeant Edwin F. Alden, twenty-one Hopeville boys joined Company B, Sixth Iowa Infantry. One of these, Orin S. Rarick, was cited for bravery and promoted to captain. Two of Hopeville's young men were killed in action.

When the war was over, the Grand Army post at Hopeville became one of the strongest in southwestern Iowa, and the Hopeville Grand Army Fife and Drum Corps served its own and neighboring communities for many years. Indeed, a remnant of that patriotic group was taken to Murray to help celebrate Armistice Day in 1918 at the close of World War I.

There was a time in the decade of the sixties when Concordia Lodge No. 215 at Hopeville was one of the strongest Masonic lodges in that sec-

tion of Iowa. Members came for miles around and frequently remained to an early hour to partake of refreshments. In 1869 when a new lodge was being established at Murray the ladies brushed past the tiler to serve refreshments to all present. It was a complete surprise to the lodge members and so the Murray Lodge was named Surprise Lodge No. 396. Thereafter membership in the Hopeville Lodge soon dwindled and Concordia Lodge No. 215 was moved to Thayer.

When Hopeville was in its heyday there was an array of hitching posts surrounding the four sides of the village square where farmers might "hitch" their teams while they did the shopping, and many were the occasions when all the hitching posts were in use. In 1869 Hopeville was the second largest town in Clarke County — being surpassed only by Osceola. At that time the town boasted "three general variety stores, two grocery stores, one drug store, one school, one tin shop, one harness shop, one shoe shop, one wagon shop, two blacksmith shops, two lawyers, and three physicians".

How many people lived in Hopeville? There have been both hopeful estimates and census figures on the population. The Iowa census for 1875 reported 332. That was the high point. By 1890 the population was not quite half as large as it had

been in 1875. It had become evident by that time
that no railroad would reach Hopeville in the near
future. During the next fifty years the population
varied but it never justified the name of the town.
In 1900 there were 145 residents in Hopeville; in
1940 there were 92.

In 1870 the citizens of Hopeville celebrated the
Fourth of July "under their own vine and fig
tree". Ample arrangements were made to accom-
modate the audience, "a large and commodious
bower having been previously erected adjoining
the Christian Church. A procession was formed
in the morning, headed by the Hopeville Martial
Band, which marched to the grounds. The meet-
ing was called to order by Chief Marshal Harlan,
and James Bates, Esq., was elected President.
The Declaration of Independence was read by
O. G. Brown, who did credit to himself as a read-
er." The oration was delivered by M. B. Reese.
At the afternoon session a speech was made by
P. O. Goss. Joseph Howard, a resident of Hope-
ville and a veteran of the war of 1812, volunteered
a toast to the "Sons of Iowa", which was re-
sponded to by M. B. Reese. "Upon the adjourn-
ment of the meeting the Calathumpeans, in fan-
tastic garbs made their appearance and enter-
tained the audience; their performance was quite
laughable". The Glee Club, "which discoursed

such fine music," the Osceola *Republican* de-
clared, deserved much praise. "It is but just to say
that the best musical talent in Clarke County is to
be found at Hopeville, and the best that Hopeville
had was furnished on that occasion."

In 1871 "Lively Times" were reported at Hope-
ville. A prominent citizen, locally known as "Ur"
Fitch, wanted to become postmaster, but did not
receive the appointment. By way of protest he
moved to Murray and began the operation of a
"Star Line" carrying freight, express, and other
packages that might be sent between Murray and
Hopeville. Later Mr. Fitch moved back to Hope-
ville to continue his operations. The Osceola *Re-
publican* in reporting this news item said: "Ur.
Fitch wanted the Post Office at Hopeville a year
ago. The incumbent Mr. Newton demurred and
'Ur' didn't get it. Not to be foiled, Ur went up
to Murray and bought one. He has moved back
to Hopeville and proposes to take the property
with him. The old postmaster is said to be mad
about it, he says that two Post Offices at Hopeville
won't pay. We advise consolidation."

In December, 1871, the *Republican* reported
that "Dr. Newton, the old and reliable postmaster
of Hopeville retires and Ur. C. Fitch succeeds
him. Ur. will have to watch his 'P's and Q's' if he
comes up to Mr. Newton's standard."

In 1883 Hopeville was dependent upon the town of Osceola for banking facilities, and the nearest railroad shipping point was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy at Murray. There was stagecoach service to Murray and also southward to Decatur in Decatur County. Hopeville received mail daily and it was hoping still for the day when a railroad would come and bring to it a greater and lasting prosperity. The railroad had not come by 1890, but stagecoach facilities remained. The population had changed but little, and the post office was maintained in connection with Sam Lockwood's hardware store.

In 1906 hopes of obtaining adequate transportation facilities were revived. In January of that year the Osceola *Sentinel* said:

"Hopeville is wonderfully excited over the prospect of getting two railroads, one from Sioux City via Winterset, Thayer and Hopeville on to St. Louis. This is to be a standard gauge double track State R. R. The route has been viewed and pronounced practicable, the papers of incorporation will soon be filed and as soon as the company gets their franchise the route will be surveyed and the work on the grade will begin as soon as spring opens up. The other road is to be a motor from Creston to Arispe on to Osceola via of Hopeville and Lacelle. Those who want to buy Hopeville

property had better do so at once as property has already advanced 25 per cent and the boom has just begun. For thirty years we have been living between hope and fear, hoping for a railroad and fearing it would not come. And how gratifying even in our old age and declining years to think that our fond hopes are about to be realized. Already we fancy we see a fine depot standing on some nearby spot where we may be able to catch the morning train to Osceola without having to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, drive 10 miles over rough roads or thru mud and rain, but in a palace car we shall reach the city, transact business, shake hands with our old friends, return home in the evening and wonder how we got along so many years without a railroad."

In May of that year a Hopeville news item reported that "The two strangers who are stopping at the Dewey house are here in the interest of the new railroad. They are pricing the lots and looking the city over." At least in the thought of the news reporter, Hopeville had become a city, and there was hope that it might flourish, with the coming of the railroad.

But alas, hopes vanish! By August, 1906, it was apparent that the railroad would not come. Moreover, it appeared that Hopeville might even lose its post office. There remained only the hope

that an interurban might come. A news commentator referring to this situation said:

"The town of Hopeville, historic spot of Clarke county and at one time one of the most prosperous towns in this part of the state, is apt to lose its post office. The new arrangement of the rural routes will probably provide for the distribution of the mails in this place by carriers on one of the Murray routes. The people of the town are very much disappointed at the news and efforts will be made to maintain the office. While it will be only an added convenience to the people to have their mail distributed at the same time it seems hard to allow the name of a town with the historic career of Hopeville, founded in the earliest days of this section of the country, to be taken from the directory of the postal department. But the Hopevillians can wait until we get that interurban out that way and then it will be a city of no small importance."

Such incurable optimism convinces one that Alexander Pope was right when he said:

> Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
> Man never is, but always to be, blest.

In September, 1906, the postmaster at Hopeville, still firm in his belief that the report relative to discontinuing the post office was mere rumor, inserted in the weekly newspaper this item:

"Notice — It has been reported that the post office at Hopeville is to be discontinued and I am asked that question very nearly every day so I thought best to answer thru the *Sentinel* that it is a mistake. The Star Route [the stage and express service] will stop on the 15 of Oct., 1906."

Meanwhile the town of Hopeville maintained its local interests. Now and again a store would close, and the population decreased somewhat. But the churches, the school, the lodges, the remaining stores, and the village park continued to be the centers of interest. Indeed, the village park for many years played an important rôle in community life. It was the scene of many Fourth of July celebrations, G. A. R. reunions, church and lodge picnics, strawberry festivals, ice cream socials, band concerts, and ball games.

It is reported that on one occasion during the days of the Civil War a copperhead came to town and was "giving free voice to his opinions" when the commanding officer of the militia ordered him placed under arrest. He was sullen and impudent and refused to salute the flag. Whereupon he was compelled to carry the flag around the village square while a few members of the militia prodded him with their bayonets. "He was then ordered to kiss the flag three times and give three cheers for Lincoln".

Upon at least one occasion in later years the village square was used for a funeral. On October 4, 1906, a newspaper reported the following item:

"Our town was all excitement last week over the sudden death of Uncle Abe Coon. He was out in the orchard helping his wife gather peaches when he fell stricken with apoplexy and lived but a few hours. The funeral was held in the park Thursday because no church in town was large enough to accommodate the people in attendance."

Today the Hopeville village square presents a forlorn aspect. Its once gaily decorated band stand is weathered and worn. The hitching posts for the most part have been removed. Only a few scattered trees remain, and weeds have crept in to the once well-kept park lawn. To the north of the square is an almost deserted lodge hall, to the east a little store where farm products may still be exchanged for necessary groceries, and to the south a little school where children still may work and play, as did their great grandsires in pre-Civil War days. But everywhere there is evidence that for the most part the glories of Hopeville lie in its historic past.

Had a gifted poet visited Hopeville a half century ago he might have written:

Sweet Hopeville! "loveliest village of the plain,

Where health and plenty cheer'd the laboring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delay'd."

As one visits Hopeville today, he is moved to write:

"Sweet, smiling village, loveliest of the lawn"
Thy hopes are fled, and many charms withdrawn.

Hopeville is, indeed, almost a deserted village. Yet not wholly so. It still has a church, a school, a few dwellings, and a store, although the post office was discontinued on September 15, 1919. But most of all it has a history — a memory of the past, a record that may well be preserved. Moreover, Hopeville is not an isolated example of an Iowa town that has come, and served, and receded. There have been hundreds of Iowa towns that are now abandoned. Hopeville is perhaps on its way to become a typical deserted village. Meanwhile it presents a fascinating story in justification of the name Hopeville.

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