

The Lay of the Land

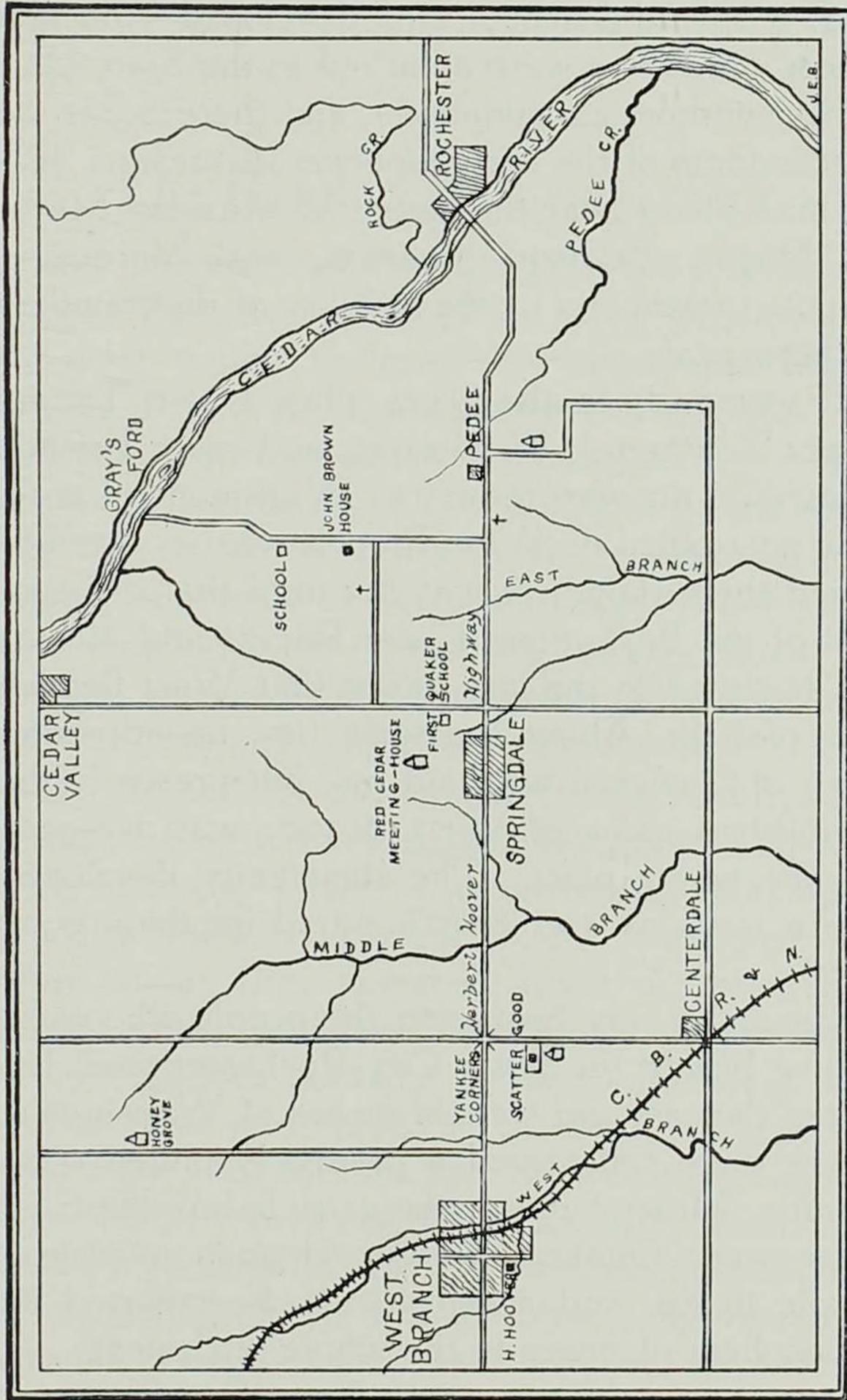
When the capital of the Territory of Iowa was located at Iowa City in 1839 a land rush took place in that direction. From Muscatine and Davenport the settlers moved westward to the Cedar River and beyond into the very heart of the rich prairie. It was natural that they should follow the most direct routes. Taverns were built at convenient places and settlements developed along the way. The old stage road from Davenport to Iowa City crossed the Cedar River near the mouth of Rock Creek about five miles north of the Cedar County line and thence ran directly west to the capital. Along this road (Highway 1), named for Herbert Hoover, the pioneers established their homesteads.

As early as 1836 Stephen Toney and George McCoy settled near the mouth of Rock Creek on the Cedar River, established a ferry, and laid out a town which they named Rochester. During the next three or four years others came to live in that vicinity, a mill was built, a tavern erected to accommodate travellers on the stage route to the new Territorial capital, a post-office called Rock Creek was located there, and Rochester became the principal village in Cedar County, serving as

the county seat until 1840 when Tipton was officially designated. Being strategically located, Rochester prospered for a time, but even before the Civil War the decline began. By 1870 the population was only one hundred and seventy-four, and in 1903 the post-office was discontinued. Today a vague legend persists that Rochester was the childhood home of Sarah Bernhardt.

During the two decades preceding the Civil War other settlements developed along the old road west of the Cedar River — Pedee, Springdale, and West Branch. Pedee, locally known as Stringtown because the cabins of the settlers bordered the road for nearly a mile, was the first to develop and for many years lent its name to the countryside for miles around. By 1845 the community had risen to the importance of having a post-office, located about two and one-half miles west of Rochester, and in December, 1849, a Presbyterian church was organized.

While Pedee seems to have been chiefly Presbyterian, most of the settlers who arrived during the fifties were of the Quaker faith. Gradually the village of Springdale, almost wholly composed of Quaker families, took form and a post-office of that name was established in 1851, though it was originally located two miles farther west near Yankee Corners. This peaceful village has always been regarded as the center of the Quaker community. There the first meeting was organ-



Past and Present Map of the Springdale Community on a Scale of One-Half Inch to a Mile

ized, a splendid school was developed (the first whose graduates were admitted to the State University without examination), and thereabouts the descendants of the early pioneers still reside. Rural mail-boxes bear the names of Maxson, Mather, Negus, Branson, Pearson, and Varney — eloquent testimony of the stability of the founders of Springdale.

It was early in the fifties when David Tatum, James Townsend, Eli Hoover, and other Friends located on the west branch of Wapsinonoc Creek. The post-office of West Branch was soon established there though it was not until the construction of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad in the late sixties that West Branch was platted. About the same time an adjoining town of Cameron was laid out, but presently the established name of West Branch was accepted for the whole place. The community developed into a town of over four hundred inhabitants by 1880.

From the very beginning the people who came to live beside the Iowa City-Rochester road between the east and west branches of Wapsinonoc Creek have constituted a peculiarly united community. Most of those who came before the Civil War were Quakers whose religious tolerance, simple living, and moral standards imparted an atmosphere of peace to the whole settlement.

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