

Comment by the Editor

LOST CITIES

If some patriotic society should erect monuments to indicate the location of all the deserted villages in Iowa, the State would be strewn with the emblems of false hopes and the vagaries of fortune. In every county there are places which were once thriving communities, even incorporated towns, that are now devoted exclusively to agriculture. Their names exist only in old records. A list compiled by David C. Mott in the *Annals of Iowa* fills many pages.

During the first century of occupation by white men, hundreds of villages sprang up, flourished for a while, and then withered in the drought of commercial opportunity. The pioneers, full of great expectations, settled at potentially favorable spots and bided the time when Pleasant Hill, Hickory Grove, or Maryville would become a metropolis. But steamboat navigation of the inland river failed; the day of the local sawmill and grist mill passed; factories were located in a rival town; the coal mine was worked out; the county seat was removed; the hoped-for railroad never came or, being built, it passed by on the

other side, and motor cars made larger towns accessible to country trade. For a multitude of reasons, promising villages were gradually abandoned.

In the swift transition from prairie wilderness to cultivated fields and complex industry, fortuitous circumstance was often the decisive factor. Changes in transportation, markets, crops, population, and types of opportunity occurred so rapidly that the best of plans were obsolete before they could be realized. Precedent was a treacherous guide for men who staked their lives on such a vacillating future.

Lytle City, like many another prospective metropolis, was well conceived: yet it has vanished completely. Only the image of that typical country town lingers in the memory of a few people. There may be some comfort, however, in the paradox that "the sweetest memories in life are the recollections of things forgotten."

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