

The Times in Review

When Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny led his dragoons up the Des Moines Valley in the spring of 1835 the region through which he passed was not yet identified by name. True, it was a part of the Territory of Michigan, but not until the appearance of Albert Miller Lea's *Notes on the Wisconsin Territory* in 1836 was the name Iowa definitely associated with the country north of Missouri. Lieutenant Lea published his book in order "to place within the reach of the public, correct information in regard to a very interesting portion of the Western country, especially of that part of it known as the '*Iowa District*' " or Black Hawk Purchase. The passing of a century has enhanced the historical value of this little book which gave to Iowa its name.

Attached to Lea's book was a "Map of Part of the Wisconsin Territory" west of the Mississippi. A red barrier hemmed in the Black Hawk Purchase leaving less than one-seventh of the present State open to settlement. Land-hungry squatters were excluded from the Keokuk Reserve, an oblong tract containing 400 square miles that cut diagonally across the Black Hawk Purchase from

its western boundary to within a few miles of the confluence of the Iowa River with the Mississippi. This land had been set aside for Keokuk as a reward for restraining his warriors from participating in the Black Hawk War.

All central Iowa from the Black Hawk Purchase to the Missouri watershed was claimed by the Sauks and Foxes in 1836. West of the confederated tribesmen Lea placed some 6000 Pottawattamie, Chippewa, and Ottawa but the vanguard of these tribes were just straggling westward from Lake Michigan into their new hunting grounds. On the north the Black Hawk Purchase was bounded by the Neutral Ground, a strip of land forty miles wide stretching from the Mississippi to the Des Moines River. By the treaty of September 15, 1832, the Winnebago had agreed to give up their homes in southwestern Wisconsin and move into the eastern section of this strip to form a barrier between the Sioux and the Sauks and Foxes. An Indian school on Yellow River had been established in 1835 but the *Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser* of April 2, 1836, complained bitterly of such a waste of money in educating "nine Winnebago scholars".

Roving bands of Indians made frequent incursions into the Black Hawk Purchase to hunt, to beg, and to steal. On March 1, 1836, a citizen of

Dubuque urged that a meeting be called to guard against a possible Indian uprising. Whether the danger was real or imaginary, rumors flew thick and fast on both banks of the Mississippi that spring. Happily no attacks were made upon the white settlers although the Indians wielded their tomahawks and scalping knives on each other. In December, 1836, ten Sauks crept into an unarmed Winnebago camp on the south fork of the Turkey River. A lad of seventeen and two children were murdered, and a squaw stabbed twice, scalped, and left to die. She recovered, however, and lived to relate the story to her fellow tribesmen.

Late in September, 1836, a thousand warriors of the Sauk and Fox nation assembled on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite Rock Island in response to a call from Governor Henry Dodge. The confederated tribesmen relinquished all claims to the land now constituting northwestern Missouri. On the following day, September 28th, they sold the Keokuk Reserve to the United States for money, goods, and annuities equal to \$198,588.87. The cession embraced 256,000 acres of land in present-day Johnson, Muscatine, Louisa, Washington, and Des Moines counties.

On June 1, 1836, Iowa was entering its fourth year of permanent settlement. To reveal these pioneers in their every-day life in the embryonic

squatter settlements is tantamount to telling the vital history of the Iowa District in 1836.

The thriving settlement of Dubuque was the metropolis of the District. It served as county seat and dreamed of becoming the capital of some future State. Nearly a third of the inhabitants of the populous Iowa mineral region lived in this busy town. It was not mere population that made Dubuque preëminent in the history of Iowa in 1836: Dubuque was the only town in the entire District that could boast of possessing a mirror of the times in the form of a newspaper.

The history of journalism in Iowa begins with the establishment of the first newspaper at Dubuque in 1836. Since June 1, 1833, the settlers on the west bank of the Mississippi had been dependent upon the Galena papers for their local news. Suddenly John King, having determined to make Dubuque his home, went to Ohio in the fall of 1835 and returned the following spring with a hand press and an experienced printer named William C. Jones. He next inveigled Andrew Keesecker to quit his job as typesetter for *The Galenian* and join in the venture. It was Keesecker who set the type and ran the press for the first issue of the "*Du Buque Visitor*" which appeared on May 11, 1836. The first number bore the motto "Truth Our Guide, The Public Good

Our Aim." Although the Iowa District was still a part of the Territory of Michigan when the first issue appeared, King had apparently heard that Congress had created the Territory of Wisconsin, for his folio read: "Du Buque, (Lead Mines,) Wisconsin Territory." The files of the *Dubuque Visitor* form the richest and most complete source of Iowa history during 1836.

Dubuque exhibited other evidences of cultural attainment. The Methodist Church had served the community as a schoolhouse since its erection in 1834, but in 1836 Mrs. Louisa King opened a school for young ladies which lasted until 1839. A welcome addition to the mineral region was Joseph T. Fales "late from Philadelphia", who conducted a singing school in the Methodist Church on the evening of May 25, 1836. Despite his name, Mr. Fales succeeded and in December the young singing master advertised a "School for instruction in sacred music".

A meeting of the citizens of Dubuque was held on June 10th for the purpose of forming a Library Association, an institution whose "influence on the moral and intellectual character of the inhabitants" was "universally acknowledged." Occasionally special lecturers appeared on the frontier and in June, 1836, both Dubuque and Peru were privileged to hear a lecture on "Temperance".

Among the pioneers were many devoutly religious persons. Any denomination was welcome to use the Methodist church at Dubuque. By 1836 it was the center of political and social as well as religious life in that community. In 1835 the cornerstone of a Catholic church was laid and by the fall of 1836 Father Samuel Mazzuchelli was able to conduct services in Saint Raphael's. In the first issue of the Dubuque *Visitor* the editor declared that another "Minister of the Gospel is needed among us — one who can reason, preach, and sing; and *enforce the fourth commandment.*" The *Visitor* was glad that some benevolent ladies established a Sabbath School and believed it would be of "much benefit to the 'young ideas' about town, who have heretofore employed their Sundays, literally, in learning 'how to shoot'."

Similar progress was apparent in Burlington and other settlements. Tireless preachers like Asa Turner and Barton Cartwright labored valiantly. Churches of several denominations were organized. And many circuit riders ministered to the spiritual needs of isolated settlers.

Dubuque led its rival cities in Des Moines County in many things, but the rough miners could hardly be expected to excel in personal deportment. It is only fair to say that the ten thousand people in the Iowa District compared favorably

with any equal cross-section of pioneers anywhere. Gambling, swearing, and drunken brawls were common; horse thieves and petty robbers, claim jumpers and land speculators were too numerous. But evidences of honesty were more prevalent. On August 31, 1836, Edward Langworthy inserted the following advertisement in the *Visitor*: "Found, In the Cooley, a very good new Boot, which is of no use to me without its fellow. Therefore whoever has its mate will please leave it at the printing office, as I have done with this, or take them both."

One incident of violence was particularly conspicuous. In the fall of 1835 John B. Smith and his son, William, shot Woodbury Massey in a quarrel over a claim. They were arraigned before the Circuit Court at Mineral Point but the case was dismissed for want of jurisdiction. Determined to avenge his elder brother's death, Henry L. Massey shot and killed the elder Smith in Galena. Thereupon William Smith swore vengeance and went to Dubuque in search of Massey.

At this juncture Louisa Massey, Henry's blue-eyed, fair-haired sister, determined on a "wild and daring adventure" to end the unhappy feud. Disguising herself, she went down town to find Smith. A boy pointed him out in a store with some other men. Louisa bravely approached him, ex-

claiming in a voice tremulous with emotion: "If you are Smith defend yourself." Smith rose and Louisa fired her pistol, "the ball entering his right side just above the third rib." As Smith staggered, Louisa turned and fled. Friends spirited her away to safety in Illinois. When the legislators met at Belmont that fall they commemorated this incident by naming Louisa County in honor of the heroine of the Dubuque lead mines.

The Dubuque *Visitor* was convinced that the root of much of the evil on the frontier lay in its wealth. "In a country where the facilities for making money are so great as they are here — where the labor of a week will support a man a month — where in many cases the labor of a month will render a man independent for life, it would indeed be surprising if every man should be found working every day, as he would be obliged to do in a less favored country." The Black Hawk Purchase must have been a land of milk and honey in 1836 — for Asa Turner wrote the following description to the Home Missionary officials in New York City. "It is so beautiful, there might be an unwillingness to exchange it for the Paradise above."

In such a Utopia the need of doctors, lawyers, and dentists must have been small. "We do not think it more strange that physicians should be

both scarce and lean in a healthy and salubrious clime, than that lawyers should be neither plenty nor fat, when a high state of moral purity and a great regard for the rights of our fellow men exist." The presence of only one lawyer in Dubuque in May was considered a "good omen" but before many months had elapsed, such men as Stephen Hempstead, John S. Horner, William W. Coriell, and Peter Engle hung up their shingles.

John Stoddard, R. Murray, and John Finley were practicing medicine in Dubuque in 1836. Dr. Stoddard quoted his prices in the *Visitor* in order to "prevent misunderstandings, and silence false reports". One dollar was charged for visits in town by day and double that amount for night calls. Simple "Medicines, Emetics and Cathartics" cost twenty-five cents, compound one dollar.

Dubuque also boasted a surgeon dentist, R. O. Shaw, who performed "all the various and necessary operations on the *teeth, gums, and mouth, viz: teeth and stumps neatly extracted on the most approved principles, so as not to cause one half the pain or force required by the usual mode of practice — teeth filed, cleaned and plugged, and loose teeth fastened — also the most difficult cases of scurvy and scorbutick affections of the gums successfully treated.*" In addition to all this Dr. Shaw advertised "*Porcelain incorruptible teeth in-*

served in stumps, or plates and springs, so as to completely resemble nature, and warranted not to decompose or alter their color."

The development of any region is mainly dependent upon the facilities for transportation and communication. Early in January, 1836, two enterprising young Galenians attempted to run a steam sleigh between Galena, Dubuque, and points north, hoping thereby to afford a means of transport during the winter months when river navigation was impossible. The plan failed because the engine lacked power but hope was expressed that the venture might be more successful the following year. On January 16, 1836, the Illinois legislature incorporated the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad Company. No construction was accomplished, but when the iron horse did arrive in 1855 it came over the route conceived in 1836.

In Dubuque there lived in 1836 a young dreamer, John Plumbe, Jr., who had visions of a transcontinental railroad. He was already unfolding his scheme to those who would listen. Less visionary, perhaps, was the action of the Belmont & Dubuque Railroad Company on December 21, 1836, in opening the books of the company for the sale of stock.

But the District depended mainly upon the

steamboat for the solution of its transportation problem. Navigation opened on April 1, 1836, with the arrival of the *Olive Branch* in command of R. M. Strothers at the Galena levee. On May 11, 1836, the *Dubuque Visitor* observed that a total of twenty-five trips had already been made by the steamboats *Galenian*, *Wisconsin*, *Du Buque*, *Olive Branch*, *Heroine*, *Banner*, *Cavalier*, *Missouri Fulton*, *Palmyra*, *Warrior*, *Far West*, *Envoy*, and *Frontier*. The *Missouri Fulton* arrived at Dubuque that spring with 225 passengers and 250 tons of freight. After discharging a part of her passengers and cargo she continued upstream to Saint Peters. "The tide of emigration is pouring in upon us an immense number of families this spring," the editor declared. "Every steamboat from below, is crowded with passengers." The steamboats *Bee*, *Gipsy*, *Emerald*, *St. Peters*, and *Science* made one or more trips to the mineral region before navigation closed in mid-December.

The activity of the pioneers is attested by the number of mushroom settlements that were springing up almost over night in the Iowa District. Dubuque dominated the mineral region. The *Visitor* of October 19, 1836, declared that the village then contained thirteen hundred inhabitants, three churches, fifty stores and groceries, and was supplied with "almost every article of necessity or

comfort". A number of boarding houses and workshops had been established but there were "not enough taverns and houses of entertainment for the accommodation of those who visit us." Fifty-five dwellings and one warehouse were built in 1836. The city boasted "four principal streets and seven cross streets." In addition to all this Dubuque offered "a pure atmosphere, a salubrious clime, good soil, large potatoes, big onions, fat beef, unctuous venison, milk and honey".

Was Dubuque above criticism in 1836? "We have one drawback upon the general convenience of our town", a newcomer lamented. "Either from the difficulty in digging wells, or the supineness of the inhabitants on the subject, there have been but three or four wells dug, so that most of the water used is taken from the Mississippi, and served round by Wm. Miller, a young Philadelphian, and a profitable business he makes of it." Peru and Bellevue were the closest rivals of Dubuque.

Leaving the squatter settlements in the mineral region, a traveler would come to any number of "paper towns" as he proceeded southward. The "Town of New York" on the present site of Clinton was said to have had "every prospect of being New York in reality". During 1836 a company composed of Major William Gordon, Antoine LeClaire, George Davenport, Thomas Smith,

Alexander W. McGregor, Levi S. Colton, Phillip G. Hambaugh, and James May boomed Davenport. The survey was made in the spring by Major Gordon, who is said to have performed the work in less than a day with his vision "very much obscured" by fire water.

Albert Miller Lea located Clark's Ferry, Throckmorton's Landing, and his own paper town of "Iowa" below Davenport. Prior to 1836 the present site of Muscatine had been known as "Sandstone Bluffs" or "Grindstone Bluffs" and was occupied by a two-roomed log trading post owned by George Davenport and operated by Russell Farnham. On February 20, 1836, Davenport sold his claim for \$200 to John Vanater and Captain Benjamin Clark who in turn employed Major William Gordon in May to survey and lay out a town.

Settlers were also trickling into what is now Louisa County although the Keokuk Reserve served as a deterring factor. The first permanent settler was probably Christopher Shuck who put in an appearance as early as 1835. The *Iowa News* of June 18, 1837, declared there were "not more than twelve voters in the county of Louisa" in April, 1836. A year later there were over 200.

Burlington was the metropolis as well as the county seat of Des Moines County. When James

W. Grimes arrived from New Hampshire in April, 1836, he found "six doctors, five lawyers, with myself, sixteen stores, five or six groceries, or, in New England, grogshops. No minister in town. We had one but he died a few days ago." Lots were selling for \$500 each in July. Wages were high and there was a great demand for skilled labor: carpenters, masons, and joiners received three dollars a day.

A tremendous activity was noticeable in what is now Lee County. "Speculation was running high in the spring of 1836, and everybody we met had a town plot," Hawkins Taylor recalled years later. "There were then more towns in what is now Lee County than there are now, if a paper plat constituted a town: and every man that had a town had a map of the county marked out to suit his town as a county seat."

In the fall of 1835 John H. Knapp and Nathaniel Knapp staked out a town on the present site of Fort Madison. Notwithstanding labor in Fort Madison was very high, the *Dubuque Visitor* of October 26, 1836, noted more than fifty buildings erected, some costing, when finished, from four to six thousand dollars. "It has nine stores and groceries, a good tavern house nearly completed. Two steam saw mills are under contract, one with one saw, the other with two, to be put into opera-

tion early in the opening of the next season." J. M. Salmon and wife alighted from a steamboat at Fort Madison on August 5, 1836, and presently he opened the Good Samaritan Drug Store.

Despite clouded titles settlers fairly swarmed into the Half-breed Tract. Keokuk was soon to dominate this section of Lee County but the original town plot was not laid out until 1837, when Dr. Isaac Galland bought Isaac R. Campbell's "potato patch" for the New York Land Company.

Fort Des Moines still occupied the present site of Montrose, but a number of inland towns had sprung into existence. Early in the spring of 1836 the present town of West Point consisted of four small log cabins and the place was known as "Cotton Town" after John L. Cotton, the proprietor of a small store. Cotton's stock, like many another pioneer merchant's, consisted of one barrel of "red-eye", about a dozen pieces of calico, some fancy articles, sugar, tea, coffee, and tobacco, all amounting to perhaps \$200 in value.

The cost of living in the Iowa District was best revealed by the wholesale prices current at Dubuque in 1836. Pickled beef brought \$15 a barrel while fresh beef was quoted at eight and ten cents per pound with none available. To relieve this shortage William Hale went to Shawneetown, Illinois, and returned with a large drove of cattle.

Most of the herd consisted of milch cows which sold within a few days at an average of \$27.50 per head. Late in June, 260 cattle were driven up from Missouri and commanded a good price on the Dubuque market. Wild game was plentiful throughout the Iowa District. Late in November a newcomer reported a "great abundance" of game including "deer, wild geese, and ducks, pheasants and prairie fowl".

Butter was scarce and sold for between 25 and 31 cents a pound. Eggs ranged in price from 12 to 25 cents and chickens sold at \$3.00 to \$4.00 a dozen. Lard and bacon were worth 15 cents a pound, mess pork commanded \$25 a barrel, while prime pork and army pork were slightly cheaper. A barrel of flour cost up to nine dollars; corn ranged from 75 cents to a dollar a bushel. Potatoes sold at from 50 cents to 75 cents and beans for \$2.00 and \$2.50 a bushel. Dried peaches wholesaled at \$4 and dried apples at \$2.00 and \$2.50 per bushel. A universal shout went up when a Dubuquer raised a parsnip measuring seventeen inches in circumference and nineteen inches in length. "Let our neighbors of Milwaukee beat that", cried the *Visitor* with pardonable pride!

Rent was high in Dubuque. Few frame houses had been erected in the Iowa District by 1836. To make up for this deficiency, a very comfortable

log cabin could be put up for \$150. Furniture ranged in value according to the quality. Low-post bedsteads and walnut breakfast tables could be purchased for \$10, while a half dozen "Windsor" chairs sold at \$9.00.

The first brick dwelling at Burlington was constructed by David Rorer in July, 1836. Shortly afterward Isaac Leffler built a one-story brick house. John Johnson built a two-story brick house in Dubuque in 1836. Bricks cost \$10 per 1000 in Dubuque and bricklayers were paid at the rate of \$3 per 1000. It was not until 1837 that Davenport could boast a brick house.

The dearth of building material hampered the growth of many a frontier Iowa community. "Our town is getting full of life and business as the season advances," declared the *Dubuque Visitor* of June 1, 1836. "The scarcity of lumber has hitherto retarded its progress. A large number of buildings, which would otherwise have been erected, have necessarily been delayed on that account; and many emigrants have been obliged to return down the river for want of houses."

The observance of Independence Day was a great occasion at the lead mines. Exactly sixty years had passed since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. But July 4, 1836, had a double significance for it marked the "Birthday of

Wisconsin Territory". At eleven o'clock in the morning a procession formed at the Tontine House and marched to the Catholic church where Father Samuel Mazzuchelli officiated as chaplain. Milo H. Prentice read the Declaration of Independence and William W. Coriell delivered the oration. "After the oration, the procession was again formed, and marched to the green in front of town, where an excellent dinner was prepared, to which the company did ample honor." Thirteen regular toasts were followed by over two score volunteer toasts in honor of the occasion. George Washington, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution were not forgotten, but the miners might be forgiven if lips and hearts responded with greatest enthusiasm at the mention of Wisconsin Territory, Henry Dodge, and George Wallace Jones. As the celebration came to a close, John King proposed a toast which probably well expressed the temper of the Iowa frontier in 1836: "*Woman* — Were it not for *Woman*, our infancy would be without *succor*, our age without *relief*, our manhood without *enjoyment*, and Du Buque without an inhabitant."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN