

To the Land of Black Hawk

Fourteen cents an acre for six million acres of worthless land! Such, in the opinion of Black Hawk, was the substance of the treaty of September 21, 1832, whereby the first cession of land in what is now Iowa was secured from the Indians. Black Hawk had waged a bloody war largely because he thought the "difficulty of breaking the new prairie with hoes — and the small quantity of corn raised" would result in starvation. Had not the women of Keokuk's band given "bad accounts" about "raising corn at the new village"? Death at the hand of a foe was preferable to starvation. And yet the United States was willing to pay \$655,000 in cash alone for a "worthless" tract fifty miles wide extending along the Mississippi from the southern boundary of the Neutral Ground to the Missouri line.

Fortunately other men disagreed with Black Hawk. When Indian Agent Joseph M. Street examined the territory about the Wapsipinicon and Turkey rivers in the fall of 1833 he was delighted with the "beautiful and fertile" region. The country was so "full of game" that the hunter who accompanied him expressed astonishment at the

abundance of wild life of all kinds except buffalo. The men who surveyed the southern boundary of the Neutral Ground, however, killed many buffalo thirty or forty miles west of the Red Cedar River. During the summer of 1833 Keokuk and his men discovered a herd of three hundred of the shaggy beasts near the headwaters of the Iowa River and killed eighty of them. Elk and deer were abundant on the prairies and bear roamed in the woodlands. The signs of muskrat and otter could be seen on all the streams and ponds. Street actually saw a "beaver dam in progress" of construction on the "Wa-pee-sa-pee-nee-can".

The entire eastern border of Iowa abounded with fine mill streams. The soil was rich, springs were plentiful, and good stone and timber were close at hand. But the rugged nature of the northern half of the purchase was not likely to invite immediate conquest of the soil and probably served to deter those wishing to engage in agriculture. Lead was abundant in the vicinity of Dubuque's abandoned mines, however, and miners on the eastern bank were prepared to rush over and stake out permanent claims. While the mineral region served as a magnet, the country as far south as the Half-breed Tract offered fewer inducements than those afforded in the unsettled portions of Illinois and Missouri where settlement

was at least legal. The Lincoln country about Springfield in southern Illinois received approximately ten times as many settlers in 1833 as did the Black Hawk Purchase.

The last red man had departed before the first spray of immigration was allowed to enter the Black Hawk Purchase. The Indian villages of Keokuk, Wapello, and Poweshiek dotted the banks of the Iowa River on the Keokuk Reserve. No vestige of white occupation could be seen along the eastern border of the Black Hawk Purchase save the ruins of old Fort Madison, the charred cabins of the trespassers driven off by the troops at Dubuque, Flint Hills, and Fort Madison, and perhaps the dilapidated remains of a "house and barn" on the Giard tract.

The land adjoining the Black Hawk Purchase on the east and south was almost as sparsely settled. The population of Illinois in 1830 was 157,445, most of which clung to the rivers that formed its southern borders. With the exception of a small island of settlement in the mineral region, the northern half of Illinois was an unsettled area with less than two people per square mile. Galena was the county seat of Jo Daviess County, which sprawled eastward from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan and as far south as Rock Island.

The exaggerated descriptions of the rapid tide

of emigration was the fruit of an "over-heated brain" in the opinion of the editor of the *Chicago Democrat*. "Chicago, nay the very spot of ground where we are now writing", we are told naively in the first issue of that paper, "a few months since was the abode of the savage; and where are now seen a long line of habitations for white men, a short time ago was unoccupied save by the wigwam of the Indian. The change has been wrought by magic. More than eight hundred souls may now be found within the limits that within a few short months since included less than one-tenth of that number."

It was not until 1835 that the first land sales were recorded in the newly created land offices at Chicago and Galena. The frontier of 1830 barely impinged upon the Black Hawk Purchase opposite present-day Fort Madison.

North of Illinois lay Michigan Territory which included what is now the States of Michigan and Wisconsin. A total of 31,639 inhabitants occupied this vast region in 1830. Most of these were concentrated about Detroit, although a considerable number had settled about Niles and Saint Joseph. Small patches of settlement cropped out at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, while the lead miners in southwestern Wisconsin occupied a still larger area. Milwaukee had but one permanent

settler in 1833 while Racine and Kenosha were as yet unborn.

Much of northwestern Ohio as far east as Toledo was equally barren. The Cumberland Road was not fully completed to Columbus, Ohio, until 1833. With the exception of a cluster of settlers around South Bend, northern Indiana contained less than two people per square mile.

Northern Missouri was likewise destitute of settlers. The 140,455 people who had entered that State up to 1830 were settled along the Missouri River as far west as Kansas City. A thin film of settlement enveloped both banks of the Mississippi from Saint Louis to the Des Moines River, but no portion of it extended as far west as the Half-breed Tract. A significant factor in the settlement of the Black Hawk Purchase in 1833 was the unsettled nature of the adjacent country.

Probably less than two thousand immigrants came to Iowa in 1833. Of these, the overwhelming majority located in the mineral region about Dubuque. A sprinkling of squatters, soldiers, and fur traders formed the first spray in what is now Scott County. The settlements at Flint Hills and Fort Madison doubtless received most of their pioneers from Hancock County and the contiguous territory. Most of the pioneers of 1833 were apparently from the immediate vicinity.

Prior to the advent of the railroad no other single factor was as important in developing the Upper Mississippi Valley as the steamboat. The mightiest highway in the world formed the eastern border of the Black Hawk Purchase. It served as a link for the fastest, cheapest, and most convenient method of travel in the western wilderness. James Hall, the editor of the *Illinois Monthly Magazine*, urged emigrants to travel by steamboat, particularly if they contemplated coming west in the spring. "The streams are then swollen. The largest rivers rise from thirty to fifty feet above the low water mark; rocks, snags, sawyers, and sandbars, those formidable obstacles to navigation, are now all buried far below the surface; the steam-boat glides without interruption from port to port, ascends even the smallest rivers, and finds her way to places far distant from the ordinary channels of navigation. Business is now active; the number of boats are increased, to meet the demand for transportation; and the *traveller by water* meets with no delay; while the hapless wight, who bestrides an unlucky nag, is wading through ponds and quagmires, enjoying the delights of log bridges and wooden causeways, and vainly invoking the name of M'Adam, as he plunges deeper and deeper into mire and misfortune."

In 1833 steamboats ran from distant Pittsburgh and New Orleans to Saint Louis, the center of traffic on western waters. From Saint Louis other craft ascended the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Illinois. Of the two hundred and thirty-four steamboats afloat on western waters in 1833, ninety-nine docked at Saint Louis. Eighteen of these ninety-nine craft plied as far north as the lead mines, carrying their tribute of passengers and freight and returning with heavy cargoes of lead. During a single week in May the *Chieftain*, the *Don Juan*, the *Dove*, the *William Wallace*, the *Paragon*, the *Warrior*, and the *Winnebago* arrived at Saint Louis with a rich freight of lead. These boats, it must be remembered, were operating before miners were digging in the Black Hawk Purchase. Eleven other steamboats, the *O'Connel*, the *Express*, the *Utility*, the *Union*, the *Courier*, the *Reindeer*, the *Volant*, the *Albion*, the *Olive Branch*, the *Orion*, and the *Miner*, stemmed the swift current of the Mississippi to the mineral region that year. Only six steamboats are known to have visited the lead mines during the Black Hawk War in the previous summer.

Fares were governed largely by the number of passengers on hand, the number of boats in the trade, the stage of the water, and the season of the year. It cost \$55 to travel by stage and steamboat

from Philadelphia to Saint Louis. Deck passengers could reduce the fare from Pittsburgh to Galena to \$26. Cabin fare from New Orleans to Saint Louis was \$25 while freight cost about sixty-two and a half cents per hundred. Those who could not afford cabin passage in a steamboat were accommodated with deck passage. The deck, for the use of such passengers, was protected from the weather, but had no other conveniences. Passengers on deck furnished their own beds and provisions.

Late in the fall of 1833, Samuel W. Pond, a Sioux missionary, arrived at Galena from Pittsburgh by way of the Ohio and Upper Mississippi. Pond found the cabin fare from Pittsburgh to Saint Louis was \$24 and deck passage but \$8. Fare from Saint Louis to Galena amounted to \$15 in the cabin and only \$5 on the deck. On the way down the Ohio he had been seized with the cholera and accordingly warned his brother of his experiences. Since cabin passage cost three times as much as deck passage, Pond had borrowed a blanket from a fellow passenger. Mackinaw blankets cost as high as \$12 a pair. The table expense was cut by clubbing with other passengers of the same class, for food could be readily purchased at the towns along the way. Pond suggested bread as the chief diet to avoid cholera and

other sickness. Deck passengers were required to assist in taking on wood at the landings, and the youthful missionary found wood chopping was good exercise. Through tickets were not advisable, for a boat might lay over or run aground and the passenger be needlessly delayed.

The northward shift of population into Illinois was affected in no small degree by the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Emigrants from New England and New York, according to Robert M. Baird, approached Buffalo by stage or wagon on the road from Albany or by the Erie Canal. Six transportation lines were in operation on the canal besides a number of short-run lines and boats belonging to individuals. Emigrants could leave Albany for Buffalo almost hourly. The price of passage in a packet boat was about four cents per mile, and the common or "line" boats charged from two to two and one-half cents per mile. Emigrant families generally paid very much less.

At Buffalo the emigrant would set out by steamer for Detroit. Cabin passage cost eight dollars while a deck passenger paid but four dollars. A family of five or six with a wagon load of furniture and emigrant supplies could go on the deck in a comfortable manner during the summer for twenty dollars. In one week of June, 1833, seven steamboats arrived at Detroit from Buffalo

with 2610 passengers. Two hundred families in New York were reported to be on their way to Indiana and Illinois.

When Charles J. Latrobe arrived at Detroit in the fall of 1833 he learned that no steamers were likely to ascend the Great Lakes at that season of the year. Indeed, no steamer had arrived at Chicago until the year before. Latrobe therefore set out by land. Travel in "open and uneasy" conveyances around the southern tip of Lake Michigan involved many miles of "dreary road" without the "possibility of shelter." Once Latrobe walked fifteen miles through a pelting storm to the nearest cabin, where bread, whisky, and a few potatoes served to refresh him.

When he reached the "mush-room" village of Chicago he found five thousand Pottawattamie Indians assembled to sign a treaty giving up their land along Lake Michigan. Work of dredging a harbor had begun but vessels still anchored in the open lake. It was not until 1834 that the weekly arrival of steamers from Buffalo was advertised.

Another traveller over this route, Charles F. Hoffman, ferried the St. Joseph River at Niles in a "low sided scow" and drove in a four-horse wagon through the land of a "long-haired race" called "Hooshiers" whom he found "much more civilized" than he had been led to expect.

Stumps and fallen trees, bottomless mudholes and deep sand, impeded his progress. The course of the impressionable Hoffman was guided by stars that "stood out like points of light" while the "resplendent fires of the aurora borealis" which shot along the heavens to the north were "mocked by the livid glare of the Kankakee marshes, burning behind the sand hills" in the south.

There were no highways leading to the Black Hawk Purchase from Lake Michigan. An appropriation for the survey and location of a military road from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien was made in 1830 but it was not until 1835 that troops actually commenced building the road.

A rough trail connected Galena and Chicago. Surveyors had set out over it on May 1, 1833, driving stakes or posts in the open prairie at the end of each mile, and blazing the trees in the timbered land. They were expected to determine the probable amount of money and labor necessary to open such a road and "afford a safe and convenient passage" to travellers.

Two dim trails from Peoria to Galena crossed the Rock River at the Prophet's village and Dixon's Ferry but a regular State road was not established until January 18, 1833. In the fall of that year Latrobe described Peoria as a "wretched and ruinous collection" of huts. His route to

Galena led over "vast prairies" that were "rarely broken by cultivation". The accommodations throughout the journey were of the most "homely description" since some "beds in the corner, a table, a few stools or a bench, a chest or two containing the family clothing, and a shelf with a few papers and books" comprised the squatters' furniture. Bottles of "powerful medicine" hung from one nail and a skin pouch, powder horn, and "charger made of an alligator's tooth" dangled from another. Travellers were allowed to "stow themselves away enveloped in their clothes and blanket-coats on the low plank erections" that passed for bedsteads.

The roads leading to Galena were little more than faint ribbons on the prairie sod. The "survey and marking" did nothing to improve their usefulness as highways of immigration. Even a special act of the Illinois legislature dubbing them "State roads" brought little consolation to the emigrant deeply mired in one of the many holes en route.

A sprinkling of emigrants may have followed the old Sauk Indian trail that connected Saukenuk with Detroit. Two roads paralleled the Mississippi from Saint Louis to the Half-breed Tract. The eastern road left Missouri and entered Illinois in southern Calhoun County from whence it

followed the general course of the Mississippi northward through Atlas and Quincy to Fort Edwards. The road along the west bank passed through Saint Charles, Troy, New London, Palmyra, and Wyaconda, striking the Des Moines River a few miles west of Keokuk. A dim trail also hugged the bank of the Mississippi between Galena and Fort Armstrong. During 1833, provision was made for the survey and locating of a road from Beard's Ferry to the head of the Des Moines Rapids and another from Pekin into Mercer County, probably to New Boston. These enabled the sturdy pioneers to span a wilderness in order to gain the coveted Black Hawk Purchase.

Ferries were established in anticipation of those who crawled westward over the unmarked trails. Since the laws of Illinois required ferrymen to advertise their intention to petition their local county commissioners for the privilege of operating a ferry at certain specified points, the Galena newspaper contained many such notices. No less than six ferries were to be established between the Turkey and Fever rivers. Another, Jordan's Ferry, was in actual operation opposite the settlement of Dubuque.

Captain Benjamin W. Clark's ferry ran from Andalusia to Buffalo. Jonah H. Case declared

that he wanted to establish a ferry across the Mississippi at General Gaines's encampment "below Rock River", while Archibald Allen signified his intention to operate a similar craft "near the head of the Rock Island Rapids". By an act of the Illinois legislature dated December 3, 1832, James White of Hancock County secured permission to operate a ferry near the head of the Des Moines Rapids in Lee County. White was to receive such rates of ferriage as the Hancock County commissioners might allow and be governed by the same laws as though established by them. Morton McCarver and Simpson S. White operated a ferry at Flint Hills in 1833. Wilcox's Ferry at Warsaw, Illinois, probably transported the handful of emigrants destined for the Half-breed Tract.

The concentration of settlement in southern Illinois together with the increasing immigration to that region made it natural that most of the roads, ferries, and bridges should be established there. "Emigrants are coming by thousands into Illinois, and from all quarters of the Union", declared the Springfield *Sangamo Journal*. "On Friday last fifteen large wagons, from St. Lawrence County, N. York, loaded with emigrants, arrived in our village, and drove up in front of the market house, in grand style. These emigrants

had been about ten weeks on the journey, and enjoyed good health during the time. They design to settle in Sangamo County to which we bid them welcome. A few days previous a company of emigrants from Vermont for Green County, passed thro' this place. Our northern counties are daily receiving inhabitants from New York, Ohio, and the Eastern States. Kentucky is pouring out her population upon us — which generally passes over to the military tract [between the Illinois and Mississippi rivers]. Tennessee also contributes largely to the current emigration; and even some of the wandering sons of Illinois, who were driven off to the Paradise of Arkansaw by a certain cold winter, are bending their weary steps back to the sucker land. We calculate that Illinois will increase her number of inhabitants the present season by emigration between 20 and 30,000."

A Kentucky paper declared that the "number of persons that daily pass thro' this place [Hopkinsville], on their way to the State of Illinois, is immense. Many of these people seem to be much more wealthy and respectable, than those we have observed moving to that State in former years. A company passed, in which were five large well built and heavily laden wagons, and six neat two horse carriages, filled with females. The fertile lands of Illinois must invite men of enterprize and

capital; and e'er long we expect that this young State will take a conspicuous rank among her sisters of the Union." While these waves of emigrants were destined for Illinois and no mention is made of the Black Hawk Purchase their importance can not be overestimated. Their presence increased the need for roads, bridges, and ferries, to the land west of the Mississippi. The extension of the frontier northward led many of the settlers to cross over to the Iowa country west of the Mississippi.

According to the first census of Iowa, 10,531 people lived west of the Mississippi in 1836. Ten counties now form the eastern border of Iowa. An average of one immigrant per day for each county for three years reveals the slow progress of settlement in the Black Hawk Purchase. The census of 1840 shows Iowa with but 43,112 inhabitants. Illinois, on the other hand, gained 318,738 new settlers during the thirties, Indiana 342,835, Missouri 243,247, and Michigan 180,628. The Territory of Wisconsin showed a total population of 30,945 in 1840. When measured by the accretions of other States, it becomes clear that a mere trickle of squatters filtered into the Black Hawk Purchase in 1833.

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