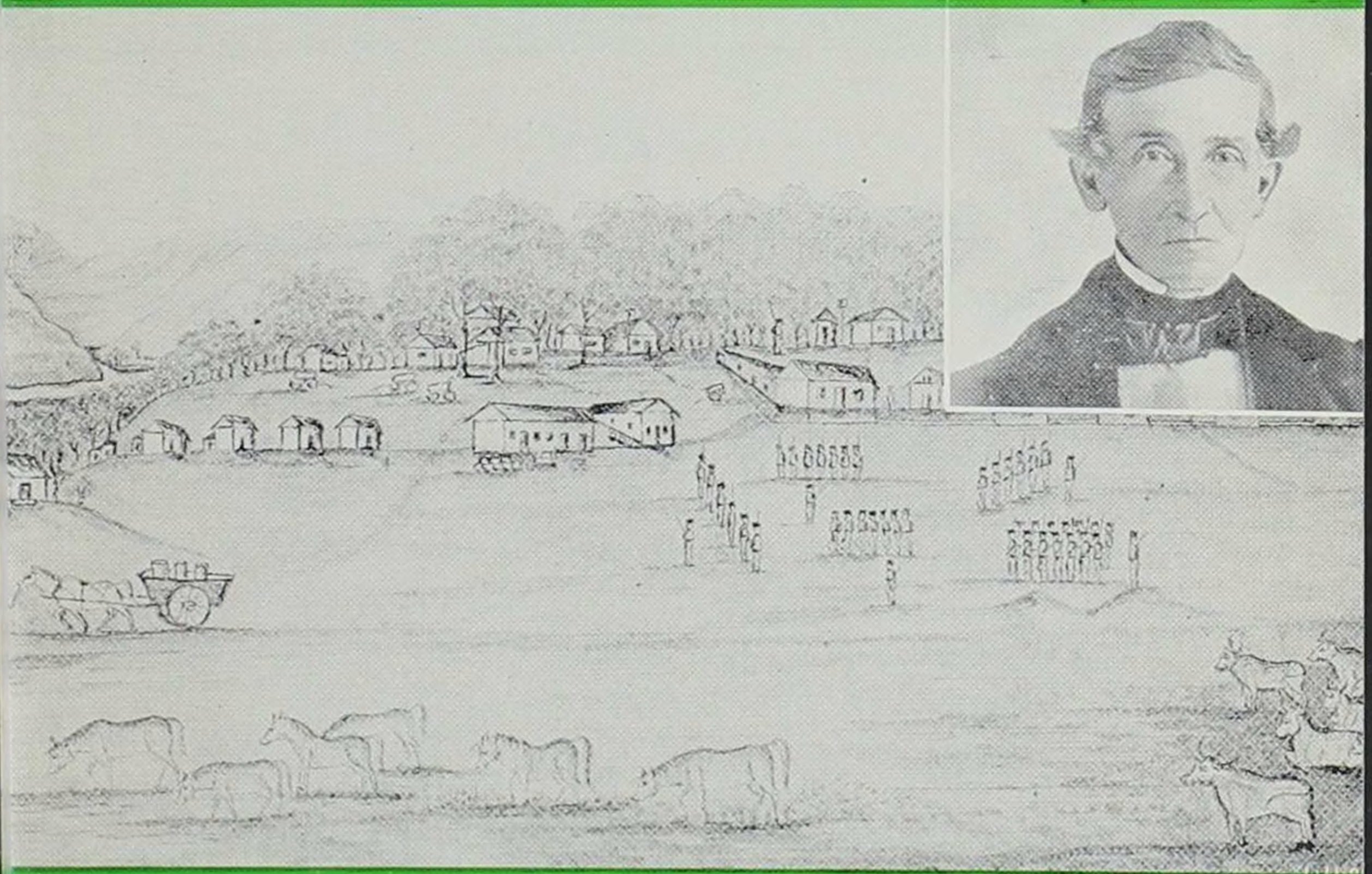


The PALIMPSEST



Drawn by Major William Williams

Pencil Sketch of Fort Dodge in 1852

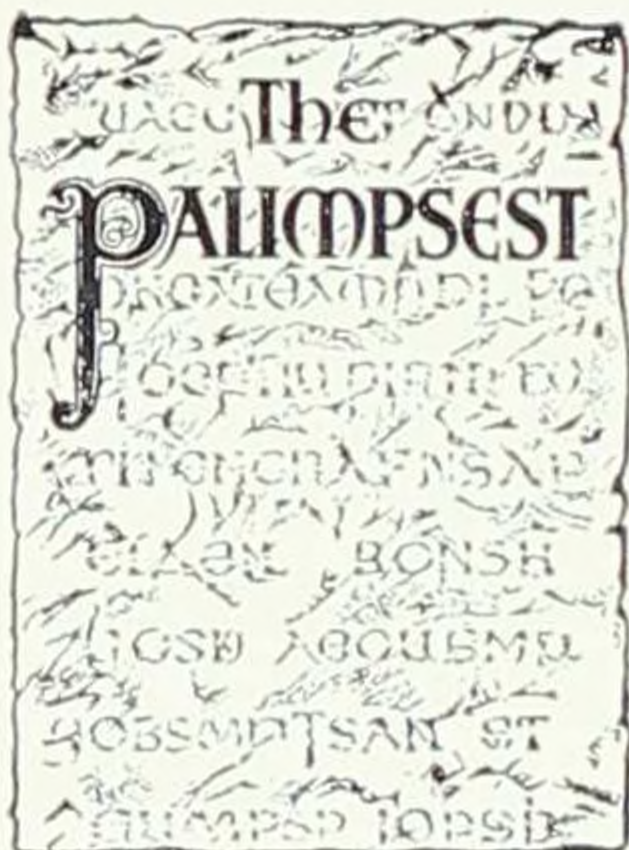
Glimpses of Iowa in the 1850's

Published Monthly by

The State Historical Society of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa

JULY 1972



The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

Contents

GLIMPSES OF IOWA IN THE 1850's

Roving Correspondents	289
WILLIAM J. PETERSEN	
Fort Dodge in 1857	291
HENRY C. KELLY	
Southwest Iowa	307
"S. J."	
Southeastern Iowa in 1853	314
"VIATOR"	

Illustrations

All illustrations are from *Illustrated Fort Dodge* published by the Historical Illustrative Co. of Des Moines in 1896.

Authors

The authors are discussed through editorial introductions at the head of each article by Dr. William J. Petersen.

THE PALIMPSEST is published monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City, William J. Petersen, Editor. It is printed in Iowa City and distributed free to Society members, depositories, and exchanges. This is the July, 1972, issue and is Number 7 of Volume 53. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

PRICE—Included in Membership. Regular issues, 50¢; Special—\$1.00

MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$5.00

ADDRESS — The State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. LIII

ISSUED IN JULY 1972

No. 7

Copyright 1972 by The State Historical Society of Iowa



Roving Correspondents

Prior to the Civil War scores of writers wrote vivid and frequently detailed letters for the press regarding the rich State of Iowa—a land that was invariably described as “flowing with milk and honey.” Some of these writers were editors and journalists who published accounts in their own papers, accounts that were often reprinted in newspapers scattered throughout the country. Others were written by individuals already living in Iowa. These letters were published locally or sent to editors in their own home towns back East. Still others were by visitors to Iowa, or by roving correspondents writing for out-of-state newspapers. A sampling of these may be found in the following letters written during the 1850’s about various sections of Iowa.

The first and longest letter is one of a series by Henry C. Kelly and appeared in the *Weekly Express and Herald* (Dubuque) during the years 1857-1858. Kelly was a rival correspondent of Jesse Clement (see *Palimpsest* September, 1968)

who wrote a similar series of letters for the *Dubuque Times*. The present letter, which appeared on March 25, 1857, while dated two weeks after the Spirit Lake Massacre, very clearly was written some time before that bloody affair, as it would obviously have been mentioned, more particularly since the Relief Expedition headed by Major William Williams, was made up largely of Fort Dodge and Webster County men. The dangers of a Sioux Indian outbreak were not overlooked by Kelly, who must have been deeply stirred as news filtered into Dubuque about the dreadful holocaust on Lake Okoboji.

The yearning for the arrival of the railroad was deep in the hearts of Fort Dodge citizens in 1857. It was not until 1858, however, that the Dubuque and Pacific reached Delaware County. The Iron Horse did not reach Waterloo-Cedar Falls until the eve of the Civil War. It was not until the close of the Civil War that construction was resumed and the Dubuque & Pacific finally reached Fort Dodge.

A keen observer, Kelly noted the rich soil, the great variety of trees, the coal beds, and the amazing gypsum stratum that was to prove one of Webster County's most valuable assets. The phenomenal growth of Fort Dodge, the favorable land values, and the healthful climate all combined to fix the eyes of many prospective settlers on Webster County.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Fort Dodge in 1857

Fort Dodge, county seat of Webster County, is delightfully situated on the east bank of the Des Moines River, and is distant from Dubuque in a due west line one hundred and eighty-six miles. It is on the line of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad, and as a beautiful, picturesque and healthy site for a large and important inland town, it stands pre-eminent among the many sister towns on that road, and no town in the west can excel it in its combined advantage of situation, healthfulness of climate, fertility of country around it, and great mineral resources.

Fort Dodge is situated on an elevated plateau or table of land about sixty feet above the level of the river. From the east it is approached by a long and extensive prairie; on the north and south it is enclosed by fine heavy groves of timber; on the west, in the deep valley below, flows the beautiful Des Moines, a large, clear, cold, pure stream of water, that flows over a pebbly and rocky bed, and drains some of the finest lands in the State. On the west side, the banks terminate in high bluffs or hills covered with heavy timber and filled with rich mineral treasures. These hills form a semi-circle around the town and add greatly to the bold pic-

turesque scenery. On the south side of the town a clear and handsome stream, heavily timbered, called Deer Creek, flows and empties into the Des Moines. On the north a larger stream which furnishes a good water power for light machinery, and is finely timbered, called Soldiers Creek, empties into the Des Moines. On the west side, the Lizzard River forms a junction with the Des Moines. This stream is also heavily timbered, and its valley is composed of the richest bottom lands. The Des Moines River at Fort Dodge is nearly as large as the Cedar River at Waterloo, and furnishes here an excellent, powerful, and unfailing water power. It is full of the finest fresh-water fish, and in the spring and summer seasons, when shaded by the beautiful groves, the disciples of old Izaak Walton could find no more lovely spot to pursue their favorite sport than on its banks.

Fort Dodge was first selected as a Military Post in 1849 by General Mason, then Colonel of the Sixth Regiment of United States Infantry. He was ordered at that time to select a post to keep in check the Sioux Indians, who were troublesome, and fixed on Fort Dodge, then known as the North-West corner of the Neutral Ground between the Sioux, Sac and Fox Indians. At that time two companies of infantry and one company of dragoons were engaged in removing the Sac and Fox Indians from a point on the Iowa River known then as Indian Town. Major Samuel Woods of the

same regiment was ordered to this point, and in the spring of 1850 established a military post which he called Fort Clarke, in honor of Colonel Newman S. Clarke of the United States Army. A portion of the same regiment, having been ordered to New Mexico, established a fort there and gave it the same name. As this created confusion in sending supplies, the name by order of the Secretary of War was changed to Fort Dodge in honor of Senator [s A. C. and Henry Dodge of Iowa and] Wisconsin. In July, 1853, the troops were ordered to Fort Ridgely [in Minnesota Territory]. On December 5th, 1856, a Land Office was opened at this point, by the order of the President, called the Fort Dodge Land District. The present town site with the Government buildings was purchased from the Government in 1854 by the Fort Dodge Company, of which the following gentlemen are the members: Hon. Barnhart Henn, Hon. George Gillespie, Col. Jesse Williams, Major William Williams.

From its central position in the rich and fertile valley of the Des Moines, as a place of trade and as a seat of manufactures, Fort Dodge must necessarily become one of the largest and most flourishing towns on the line of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad. No point in the State of Iowa, or in the west, possesses more real and solid elements of wealth than Fort Dodge, in every way, both mercantile, manufacturing and agricultural; and when

our great system of internal improvements is brought to bear upon and develop the great farming and mineral wealth of the upper Des Moines valley, it must become the center of a trade sufficient to make it the leading city of western Iowa.

To Major William Williams, of Fort Dodge, really belongs the credit of being one of the first originators of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad. In a communication shown to me, published in the *Dubuque Express* some three years ago, he has clearly marked out, with but little variation, the present course of that company. He has been a close observer of the immense natural advantages of Iowa as a leading railroad State, and his valuable suggestions as to the best routes, made from time to time through the public journals, have been read with the deepest interest, and in many cases adopted, by the present railroad companies.

The growth of Fort Dodge, as a town, dates from the spring of 1856, and many permanent and handsome improvements have been made. The population of Fort Dodge, at the present time, numbers about six hundred and fifty inhabitants, and is rapidly increasing. A fine and spacious brick public school house has been erected this season, at a cost of \$3,500 and a prosperous school is now in operation. One handsome brick church edifice, by the Presbyterian denomination, has been erected and is now being completed. A handsome and spacious church building, one of the best west

of Dubuque, has been erected this last season by the Catholic denomination. The Episcopalian and Methodist denominations plan to build church edifices during the coming season. A Masonic and Odd Fellows' Hall will be erected next season. During the coming season, from estimates carefully made, over one hundred and fifty buildings will be erected, all of a good class, and mostly of brick.

The Fort Dodge Company propose to build, during the next season, a fine, large first-class hotel. Two other hotels by other citizens will also be erected. J. R. [?] Paine, a citizen of New York, contemplates building a large first-class flouring mill.

MINERAL RESOURCES.—Coal Strata—
On both sides of the Des Moines River, at Fort Dodge, an immense and inexhaustible stratum of superior coal of the cannel and bituminous qualities exists and is now being extensively mined. These veins are on an average five feet thick, jut out from the sides of the bluffs at quite a distance above the water level, and can be mined with the requisite labor as easily and cheaply as any coal banks in the Union. E. E. Colburn, Esq., has mined into his bank for a long distance, and the quality of coal increases in superiority as the banks are deepened. Eleazor H. Albee and F. Booth, Esqs., own other large tracts of coal lands in this vicinity. The Fort Dodge Company also owns extensive tracts of coal lands. These immense and in-

exhaustible beds of coal, on the completion of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad to Fort Dodge, must come immediately into market and supply to Dubuque and eastern Iowa this indispensable article.

The Dubuque and Pacific Railroad will come in at the southeast part of the town, cross to the west within a few rods of the mouth of the Lizzard, so as to embrace the coal region in this vicinity.

IRON ORE—Every indication of rich veins of iron ore abounds in and around Fort Dodge, and though as yet undeveloped, no doubt can exist in the mind of the geologist, that this is a rich iron region. Veins of great thickness, which will yield a rich percentage of iron, have been struck.

PLASTER OF PARIS, OR IOWA GYPSUM—The most extensive and valuable bed of plaster of Paris in the whole Union lies in the vicinity of Fort Dodge. For a future fertilizer of the soil, this bed must prove invaluable, and when brought into commercial demand, by facilities of internal improvements, it must add immensely to the revenue and wealth of Fort Dodge.

For the information of the readers of the *Dubuque Express & Herald*, I quote the following remarks on this stratum from the *Iowa Farmer and Horticulturist* of September 1st, 1855, thus showing what a great mine of solid wealth we shall grasp by the completion of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad to this point:

For thickness and extent this is by far the most important bed of plaster stone known west of the Appalachian Chain, if not in the United States. It is seen at intervals for three miles exposed on both sides of the Des Moines in mineral faces of from eighteen to twenty-five feet, always overlaying pink shales from beneath which copious springs of excellent water issue. There is every reason to believe that it occupies an area of from two to three miles square, retaining an average thickness of twenty feet. In mass the plaster stone is white with shades of a yellowish gray color running in horizontal streaks; in powder it is as white as flour. When ground or burned it sets well, becoming hard in the course of an hour.

Its composition is:

Sulphate of Lime	70:8
Lime comb'd with Silica as Sil. of Lime	2:2
Carbonate of Lime	2:0
Phosphate of Lime	1:1
Insoluble matter	2:0
Magnesia	0:7
Water	20:0
Carbonate and Sulphate of Alkali	:3
	———
	99:1

Water lime or cement is also found in inexhaustible quantities.

The best qualities of building stones, such as a fine quality of sandstone and conglomerate of lime are abundant and easily quarried. A species of gray marble is also found in abundance and is capable of a high polish. Brick clay of an excellent quality also abounds.—Two brick yards have been in operation during the last season. A species of

clay resembling red ochre, and which, when mixed with oil makes an excellent paint, is also found in great quantities.

A very superior sandstone, suitable for grindstones, is also abundant. The timber that abounds around Fort Dodge, on the Des Moines and tributaries, is composed of red and white oak, groves of sugar maple, black and white walnut, linwood, elm, hickory and honey locust. In and around the town are from twenty to thirty large springs of water, sufficient to supply a large town. Water can be reached in wells at a distance of fifteen to twenty-five feet.

STATISTICS—One large sawmill, water power, by E. Hinton, Esq. This gentleman proposes erecting early next season a large flouring mill to be propelled by water power.

One large steam sawmill, owned and carried on by the Fort Dodge Company.

One very large steam sawmill, forty horse power, owned by Messrs. W. & S. Todd. These gentlemen plan on adding large machinery, for other branches, to this mill.

Mr. E. Templeton will build a large flouring mill next season.

COUNTY OFFICERS—

Hon. W. M. Meservey, County Judge.

Dr. S. S. Pease, Treasurer and Recorder.

S. B. Rozencrantz, County Clerk.

C. B. Richards, Prosecuting Attorney.

E. H. West, Sheriff.

John Talman, School Fund Commissioner.

ATTORNEYS—John F. Duncombe, John Garaghty, C. P. Richards, James S. Shaw, Beecher & Gower, Esqs.

UNITED STATES LAND OFFICE.—This Land Office will be opened on the 4th of May, 1857, for the sale of public lands.

Hon. H. P. V[er Planck] Van Antwerp,
U.S. Receiver.

William H. Merritt, Esq., U.S. Register.

BANKERS AND REAL ESTATE AGENTS—Williams, Henn & Co., Wilson, McBane & Co., Hoyt Sherman & Co., Greene, Weare & Co.

LAND AGENTS—BROKERS IN REAL ESTATE—Williams, Henn & Co., Wilson, McBane & Co., Meservey, Gregory & Co., Stoddard & Merritt, John Garaghty, Bruce & Son, Jas. D. Lynch, Carpenter and Morrison, Daniel Okeson, L. L. Pease, Sargent & Co., W. P. Pollock, H. W. Ringland & Co., B. Grayson & Co., Beecher and Gower, W. A. Beer, Strow Brothers, Hodge and McCauley, B. F. Gray & Co., Robbins, Safford & Co., C. C. Carpenter, Andrew Hood, Lucas and Stockdale, F. A. Stratton, Charles B. Richards.

HOTEL—Wahkonsa House, by John Schaffner, Esq.

BOARDING HOUSES—Mr. Plum, Mr. Allcutt, and Mr. Patterson.

PHYSICIANS—Dr. S. B. Olney and Dr. Nicholson.

MERCANTILE—J. B. Williams, general variety; S. & S. C. Hinton do [ditto]; Woodbury & Dawley do; Howes and Noble do; Morrison & Swain do; White and Brother do; Butterworth, Snell & Co. do; Stephens and Phinney do; N. M. Hare do; S. C. Hinton and Son do; Dr. S. B. Olney, drug store; Prusia and Klinedob, stove and tin shop; A. J. Humphreys, stoves and hardware; Stephens and Phinney, groceries.

One fine nursery in operation, W. B. Plumbe.

NEWSPAPER—*Fort Dodge Sentinel*, edited by A. S. White, Esq., an ably conducted journal, devoted to the interests of Fort Dodge and western Iowa.

RELIGIOUS—One Presbyterian organization, Reverend Mr. Dodder, pastor. One Methodist do, Rev. Mr. Parker, pastor. One Episcopal do, will have a pastor shortly. One Congregationalist, stated supplies. One Catholic do, Rev. John B. Veahy, pastor. Wahkonsa Literary Association of Fort Dodge, numbering about sixty, and carried on with much ability and energy, W. G. Mitchell, Pres., H. W. Ringland, V. Pres., W. Burkholder, Secretary. This society can boast of much real talent.

SECRET SOCIETIES—An Odd Fellow Lodge and Lodge of Masons are now in course of organization.

POST OFFICE STATISTICS—This office is under the control of Major William Williams, Esq., and his son, J. B. Williams, and is one of the best arranged offices in the western country, and the statistics show a very large business for the age of the place.

For the fiscal year of 1856, the net proceeds of the Fort Dodge Post Office are \$907.27 and the net revenues to the United States for the same length of time are \$434.76. Mail routes from Fort Dodge to Dubuque, tri-weekly. Do to Fort Des Moines, tri-weekly. Do to Algona, Kossuth County, weekly. Do to Sioux City, weekly. Do to Council Bluffs, weekly. Do to Cedar Rapids, weekly. Do to Fort Ridgely, Minnesota Territory, weekly. Do to Marengo, weekly. Do to Newton, weekly. There are two hundred and twenty-seven newspapers and magazines taken at the office at Fort Dodge, and that number will be considerably increased by an increased circulation of the *Express and Herald* before I leave for the east.

As soon as the roads are practically open from the Mississippi to Fort Dodge, an immense travel will pour in from all sections to attend the land sales in May at this point.

The population of Fort Dodge is composed of the choice population of Eastern States, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York and New England States, and in business capacity, enterprise, education,

and refinement, will compare with any Eastern society. Although yet comparatively on the frontier, the traveler will find here all the refinements of older society, and a people whose energies are devoted to the improvement and prosperity of the beautiful country Providence has allotted to them.

WANTS—A large amount of building will go up during the next season, and there will be a great demand for mechanics. A number of carpenters, masons and brick makers will be wanted at good wages. Also more blacksmiths and wagon makers. A good cooery could do well. A saddle and harness maker would do well. A large number of laboring men would find constant employment at good wages. One or two more brick yards are needed.

PRICE OF TOWN PROPERTY—Extensive additions are being made to the original town plot, among the largest and finest of which is the addition made by Carpenter, Morrison & Vincent on the upper table of ground situated in the eastern part of Fort Dodge.

Town lots range from one hundred to eight hundred dollars, according to location.

FARMING LANDS—Improved farming lands within three, six and ten miles, range from twelve to twenty dollars per acre. Prairie lands, same distance, from four to eight dollars per acre. Timbered lands from ten to twenty-five dollars per acre.

The future prospects of Fort Dodge are certainly brilliant, and its natural and geographical position at once marks it out as an important railroad center. Already the cities of Dubuque, Chicago and St. Louis are extending the iron bands of commerce to the Des Moines, and it must be a source of gratification to our own citizens that we in all probability will first reach it. The citizens of Fort Dodge feel that their interests are identified with the interests of Dubuque, as the leading city of Iowa, and are looking forward to the extension of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad as the great link which will bind them together and be the means of developing the great agricultural and mineral resources of the upper Des Moines valley.

Webster County, Iowa, is the eighth county due west of Dubuque, or, as it may more properly be termed as yet, the seventh. By recent action of the Legislature, the county has been divided, and the east half has been declared a new county, to be called Hamilton County—with Webster City as its county seat. This new county will be organized in April next. Homer was formerly the county seat, but it has recently been removed to Fort Dodge.

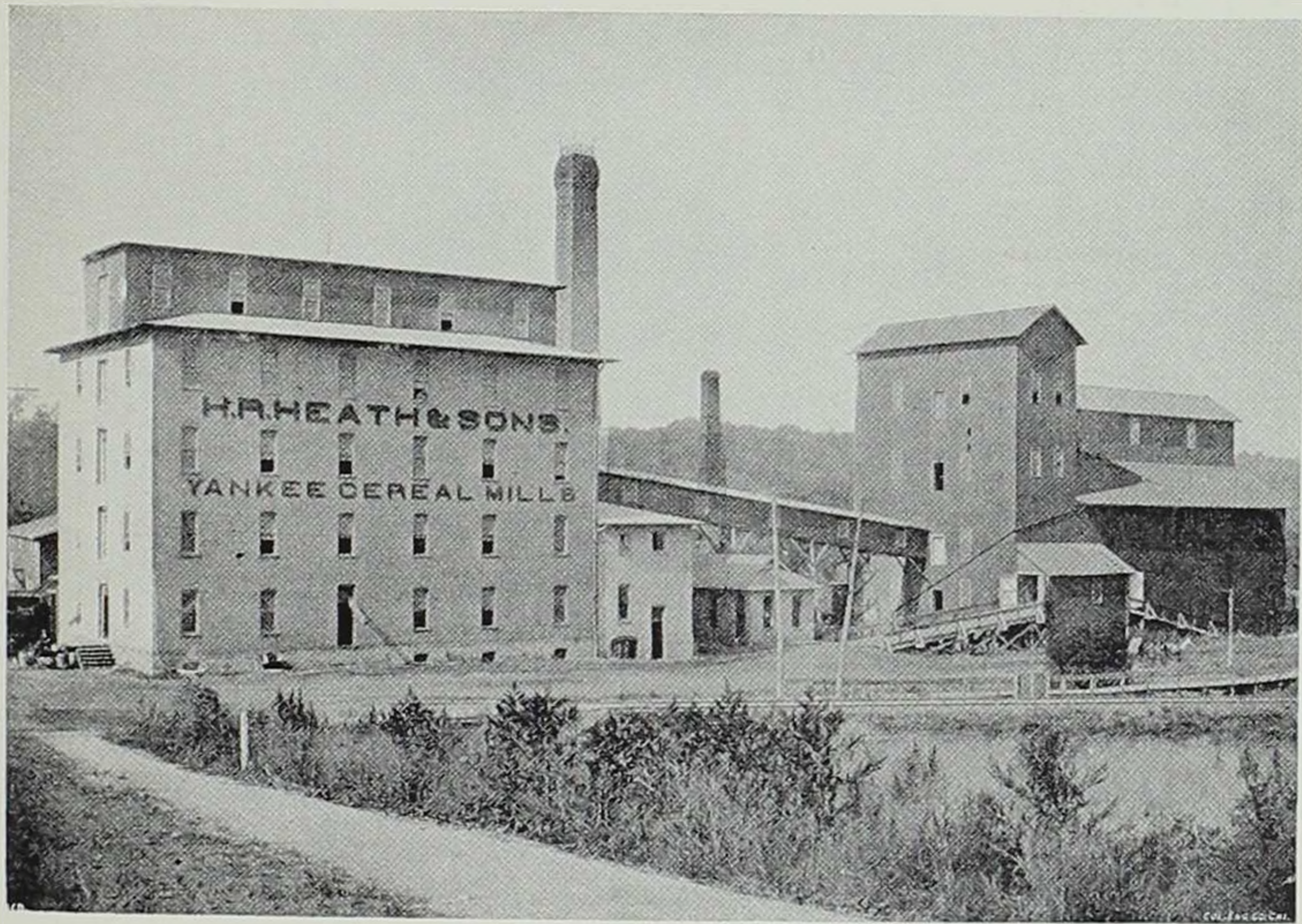
The county was organized in August, 1853. The census of the county, taken about that time, showed a population of four hundred and fifty-seven. The revenue of the county for the first

year amounted to nine hundred and thirty dollars.

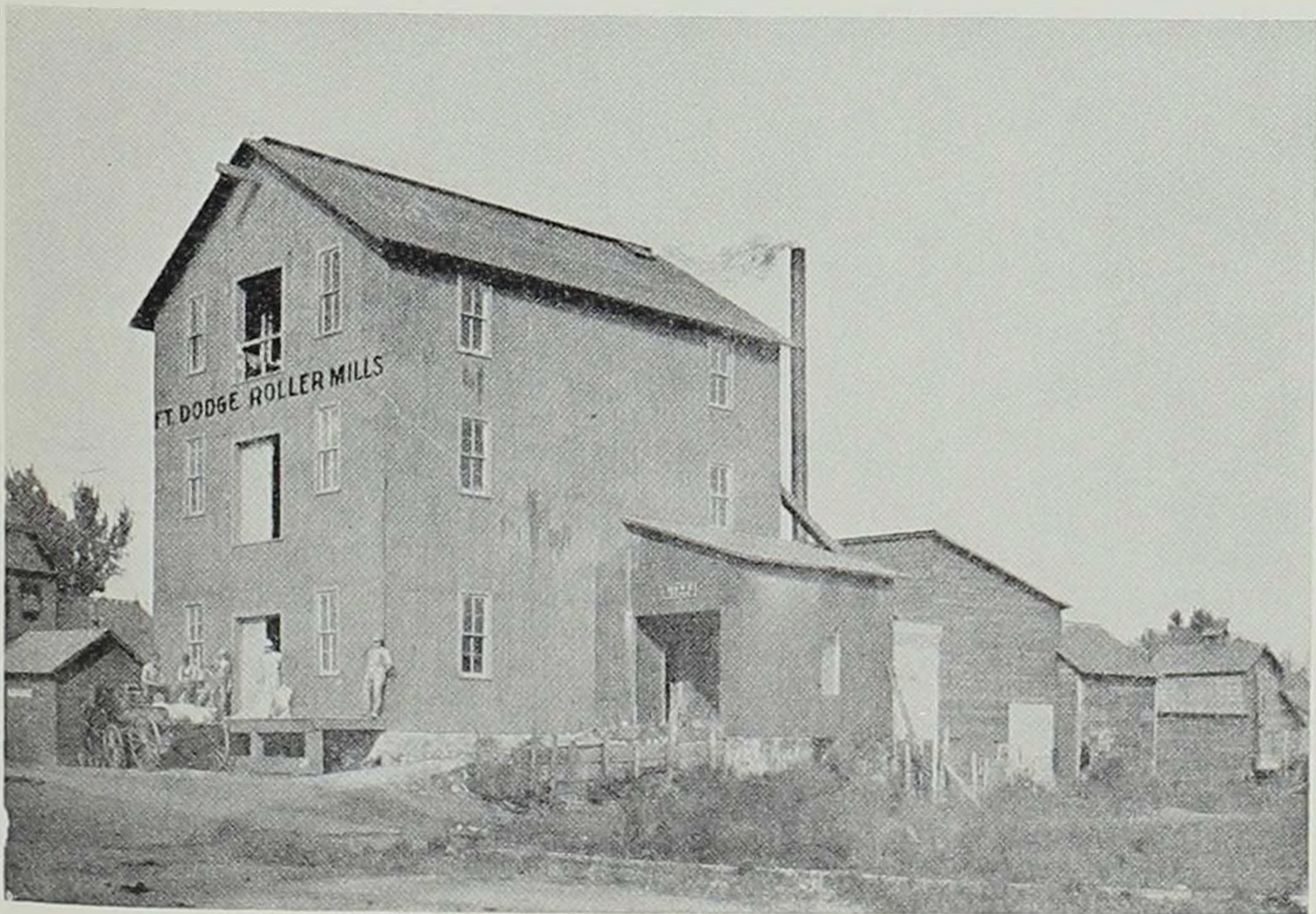
The population, as taken by the last census, was four thousand eight hundred and seventy-three. Since that time the population has rapidly increased, and will probably now number six thousand. The revenue of the county for the present year will amount to fifteen thousand dollars. In the original county there are forty Congressional townships, containing 920,600 acres of land, of which about 138,000 acres are timber lands. These timber lands line the streams of the county and are very heavy.

The Des Moines River, one of the most beautiful streams in the west, runs through the county to the southeast, and drains one of the finest valleys of Iowa. Its banks are high, bold bluffs, heavily timbered, and filled with a very superior quality of coal. This stratum is immense and inexhaustible. Immense beds of gypsum, or plaster of Paris, from eighteen to twenty feet thick, are found just below Fort Dodge, on its banks, and extend back for a distance of four or five miles.

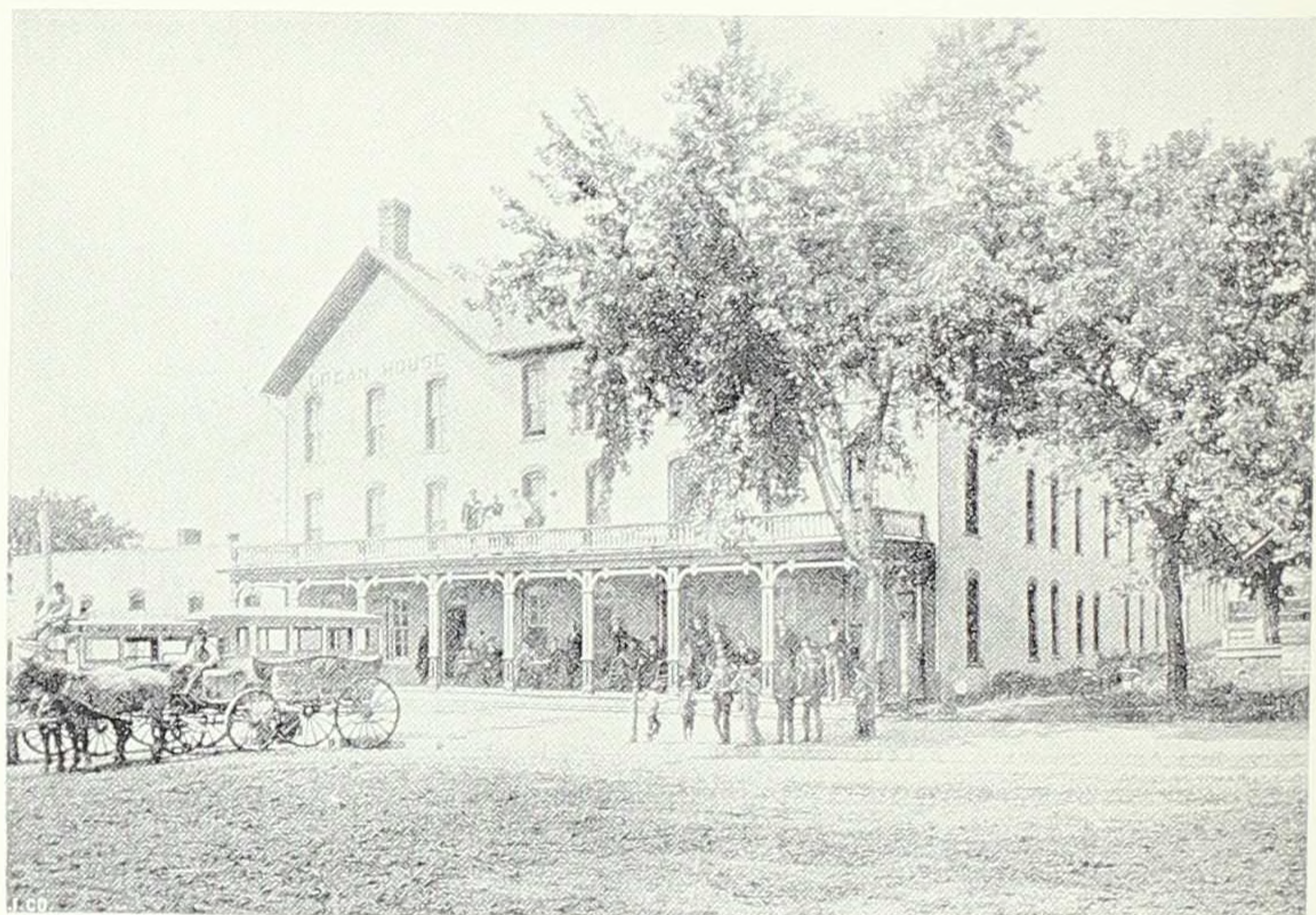
The Lizzard Fork, a fine pure stream, running in a westerly direction from the center of the county, north and south, empties into the Des Moines near Fort Dodge. The Boone River, a beautiful, pure stream, runs through the county to the southeast, and forms many fine water-powers. This river, by the division of the county, will be in Hamilton County. Its banks are heavily



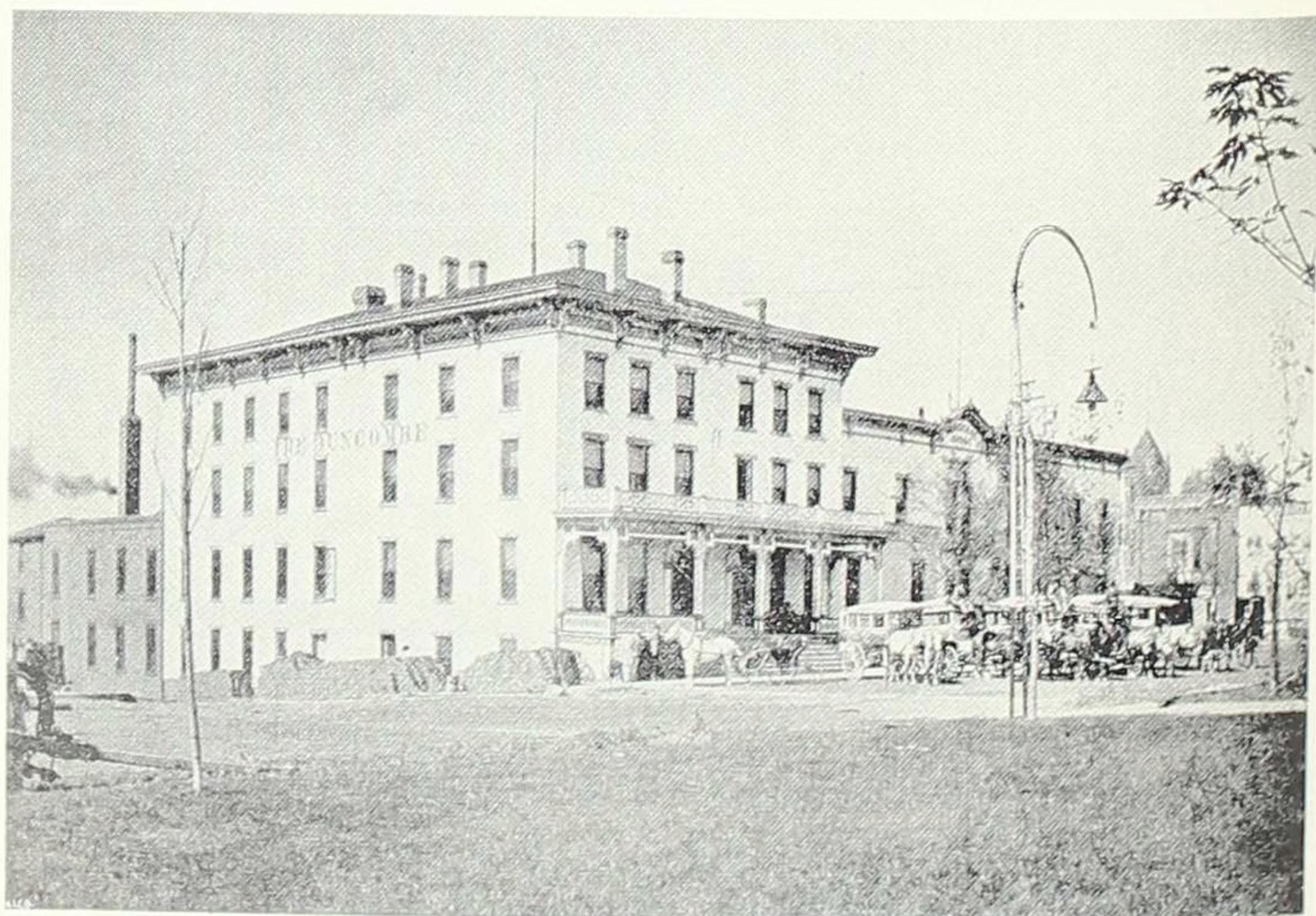
Yankee Cereal Mills—Owned by H. R. Heath & Sons



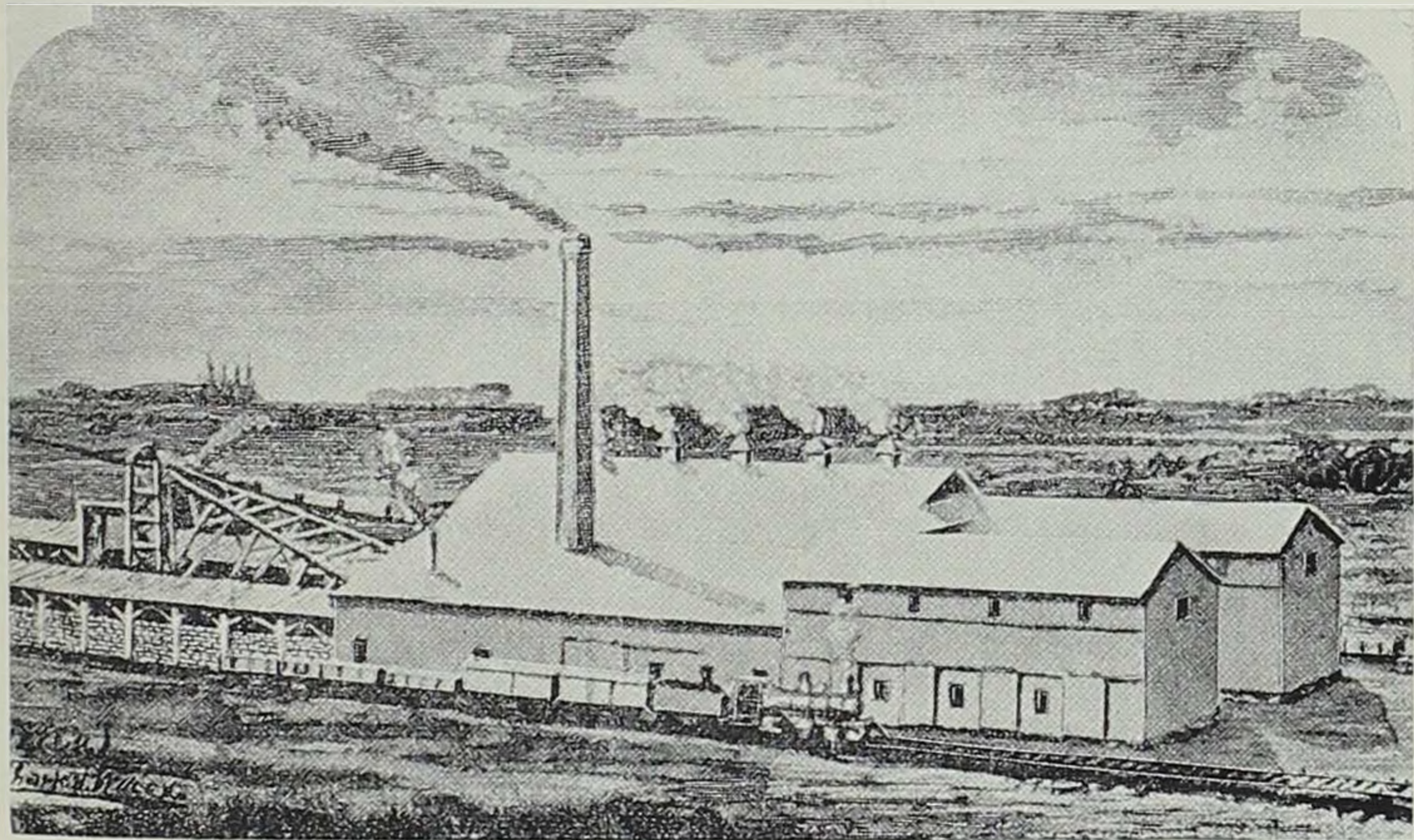
Fort Dodge Roller Mills



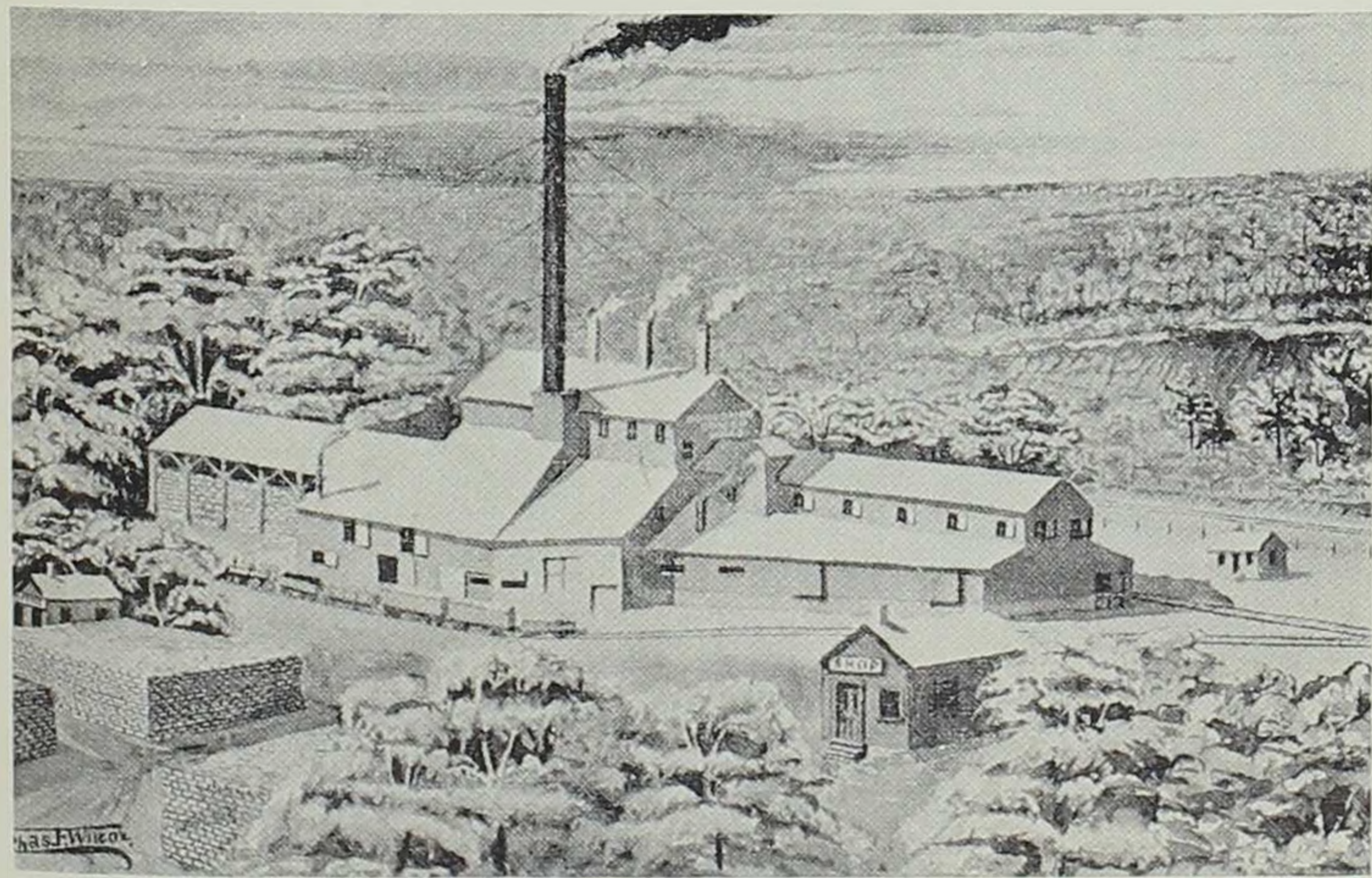
The Logan House—L. R. Chase, Proprietor



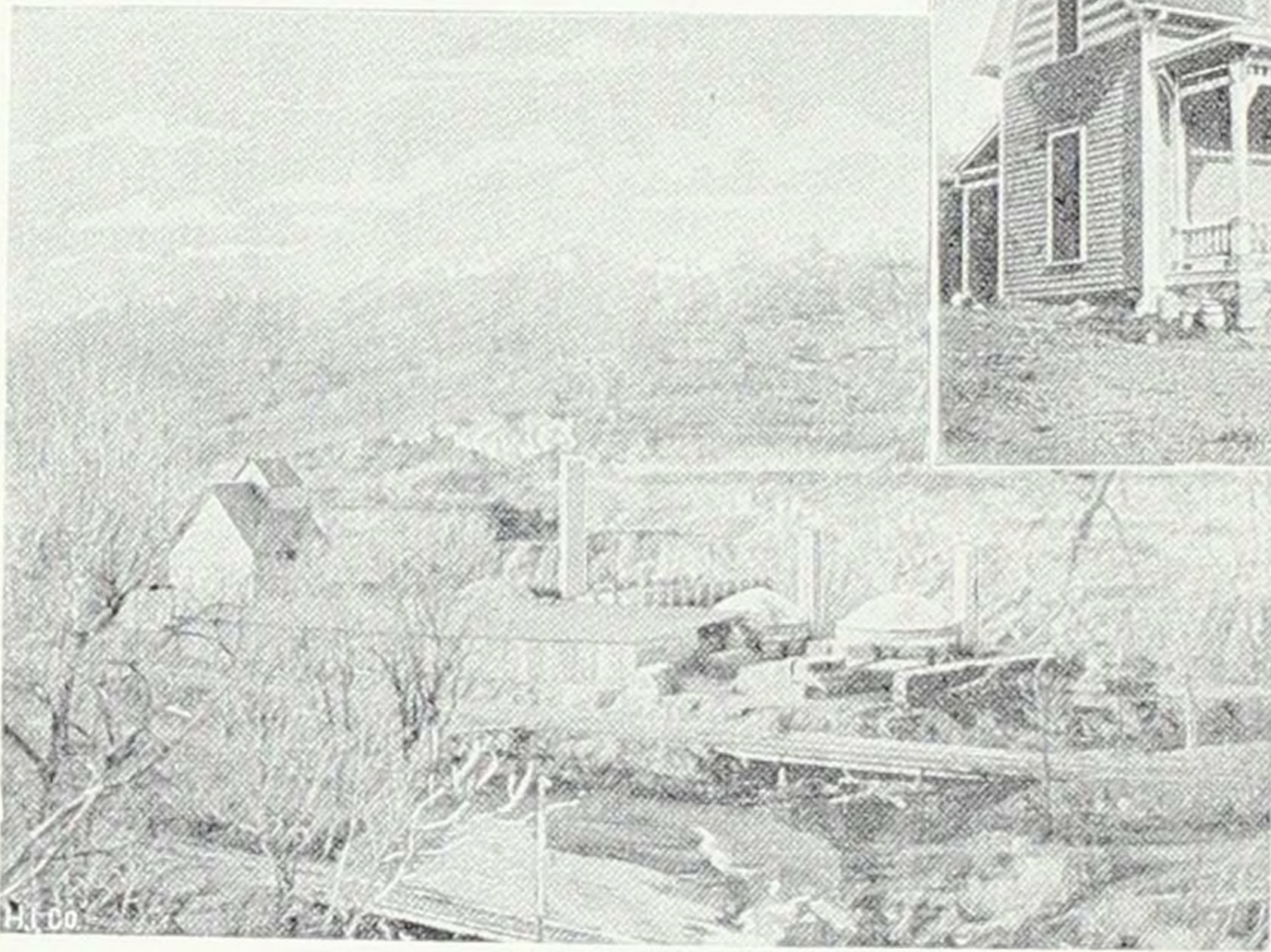
The Duncombe House—George W. Wilson, Proprietor



The Cardiff Gypsum Mill

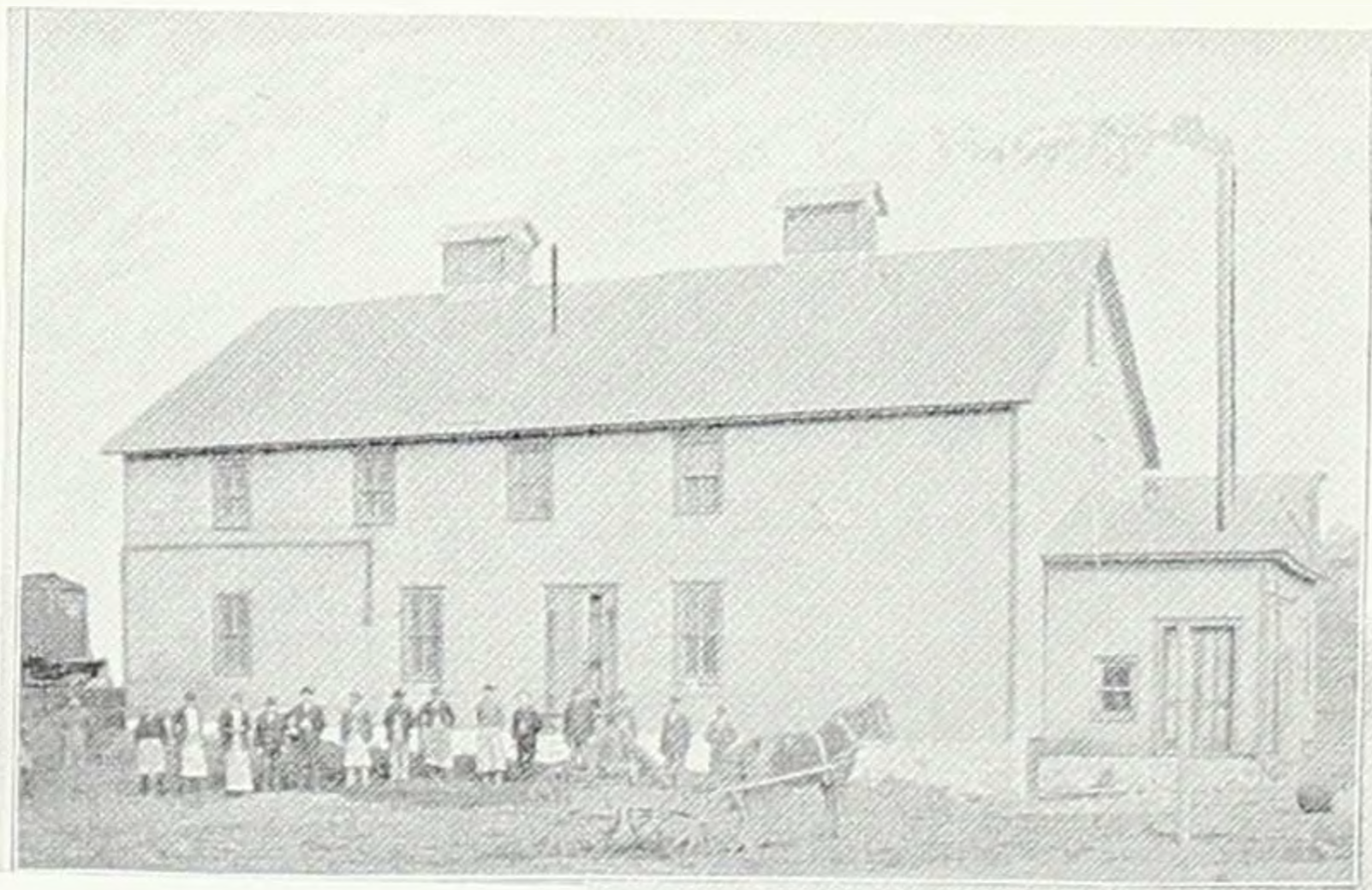


Duncombe Stucco Mills



Residence of
Mr. Frank Corey

Brick Plant of the Corey Pressed Brick Co.
At Lehigh, Iowa



Fort Dodge Cooperage Works

timbered, and an extensive and inexhaustible stratum of superior coal underlies them. On both the Des Moines and the Boone rivers this coal can be mined from the banks, as it is high enough above the water level, and when railroad facilities reach this county, these coal lands must come immediately into market and add an immense wealth.

On the Des Moines extensive veins of iron ore have been found, yielding a rich per cent. There are also strong indications of copper in the Des Moines Valley, and no doubt exists that there are extensive lodes. The Skunk River takes its rise in the northeastern part of the county, now Hamilton, and runs nearly through the entire county, in a southerly direction. There are many minor streams, as creeks and runs, and the county may be said to be extremely well irrigated. A beautiful lake, called Clear Lake, is situated in the southeastern part of the county.

POST OFFICES—Before the division of the county, Homer, Webster City and Marion City were in Webster County. They are now in Hamilton County. The post offices now in the county of Webster are Fort Dodge, Border Plains, Buchanan and Badger Mount.

No portion of Iowa is susceptible of heavier settlements, the various streams being well supplied with timber. The bottom lands of these streams are extremely fertile, and may, by the industry of

the farmer, aided by the beautiful natural scenery, be made as desirable and handsome locations as can be found in the West. No county presents a finer and more fertile soil, and none holds out greater inducements to farmers. Produce, owing to the immense emigration, commands the highest rates, and must continue to do so for years to come. When the farmer casts his eye over the map and sees beyond the Des Moines, and in all directions, north and south, the immense tracts yet to be filled up, he will at once see the proof of this. The county is rapidly filling up with the choice population of the Eastern States. The prairies are high and extremely fertile. The county abounds in fine springs of excellent water, and water can be reached in wells at an average distance of twenty feet.

The county only needs the completion of the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad to enable it to develop its resources, and to take rank as one of the richest counties of the State.

The timber in this county consists of oak, sugar maple, basswood, walnut, hickory, elm and honey locust. Large quantities of the finest building stone are found in all parts of the county, also limestone, water-lime, brick, clay and sand. Quite a number of water and steam sawmills are in operation, and the busy din of improvements is heard in all directions. Onward! is the watch-cry and all efforts will be richly rewarded.

Southwest Iowa in 1857

[The following "Letter from Iowa" by a correspondent who signed himself "S.J." appeared in the *Patriot and Union* of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on July 22, 1857. The descriptions of Council Bluffs and southwestern Iowa, the activities of claim jumpers, land speculators, and the frequent illegal side-stepping of preemption laws, are particularly revealing as they give an eye-witness account of squatter sovereignty on the Missouri slope. THE EDITOR.]

Fairfield, Iowa, July 8, 1857.

DEAR PATRIOT:—I arrived at this place on the morning of the glorious Fourth, by stage, in three days from Council Bluffs, a distance of two hundred and sixty-five miles. Passing through Ottumwa, twenty-five miles west of Fairfield, about the middle of a calm, moonlit night, I and my fellow passengers are witnesses, that whilst in the ballroom of the "Curlew House," kept by Major Douglass, formerly of Mercer, Pennsylvania,—freedom's anniversary was soothingly ushered in with the "poetry of motion"—its recurrence was loudly proclaimed in the street, from the cannon's brazen lips.

A day or two before I left Council Bluffs, a report (fully credited there) was brought in by a French trader, that Col. Sumner's command, on their way from Fort Kearny, to Fort Laramie, when near a place called O'Fallon's Bluffs, had been surprised by a large force of Indians, com-

posed of Cheyennes, Arrapahoes and other wild mountain tribes, and about a hundred of the soldiers killed. Whether this report is true or not, and if true, whether instigated by Brigham Young, or not, I do not know, but am well satisfied that these Indians are disposed to be hostile, and that the overland route to the Pacific needs the protection of the government. It is the custom of some members of Congress, and such editors as the sham philosopher of the *N.Y. Tribune*, at a safe distance to prate about the oppressed and magnanimous Indians.

In the western part of the State the season has been very good; the rains have been frequent and refreshing. The crops of every description are heavy and of good quality. The same is the case from Council Bluffs to Fairfield; except that in a small circle around this place, the drought has injured the grass. Grain crops are, however, first rate. Harvest has not yet commenced, being later than I ever knew it to be in Iowa. The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad is under contract to Ottumwa; the cars are to run to Fairfield by next winter.—Fairfield, fifty miles west of the Mississippi River, is the county seat of Jefferson County, and the center of a rich agricultural region, abundantly supplied with coal, timber and building stone. This place will be the western end of the railroad for a year.

About two weeks since, starting from Council

Bluffs, I took a hasty trip through the counties of Mills, Fremont and Page, in the southwestern part of Iowa. This is a beautiful, fertile, rolling and well-watered country. The two former counties contain a sufficiency of timber. The eastern part of Page County, and Taylor County, which I have hitherto explored, embrace a fine tract of country, well supplied with timber, stone and coal. In southern Iowa the coal fields begin thirty miles west of the Mississippi and the same distance east of the Missouri, leaving a 30-mile strip along each river destitute of this black diamond. The vacant government lands lying between the railroad grants, and south of the grant to the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, are subject to pre-emption.—Those entitled to the benefits of the pre-emption laws, are eagerly taking advantage of them. I saw almost numberless "foundations," on the prairies, in the eastern part of Fremont and the western part of Page counties. These foundations are generally four logs or poles, about twelve feet long each, and six or twelve inches in diameter, laid for the "foundation" of a house, so called. After laying his foundation, the pre-emptor has thirty days to file his pre-emption, at the Land Office, and a year to make proof and payment, and secure a title to his land. The pre-emptions made in this part of Iowa are generally not the work of actual settlers, but, as I was told, of the "little speculators," who now have a chance, whilst the "big

ones" are excluded by the closing of the Land Office. Some times the "big speculators" supply the means to pay for the land, for a liberal consideration. The pre-emption law was designed for the benefit of actual settlers only, who are required to make proof that they have improved and settled upon the land, for their own exclusive benefit. Of course the pre-emptor, by making a home upon government land, in good faith, can feel easy about his title, if he can raise the money in a year; and so actual settlers can and are securing their titles in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas. The class of speculative pre-emptors, there is abundant evidence to show, may and do secure titles to land, by keeping the technical letter of the law, whilst they violate its spirit and intention. In Nebraska and Kansas the public lands were settled upon before they were surveyed. The government lines when run, cut up the "claims" of the settlers (squatters), but as these sovereigns adhered to their own divisions, (having improved them), often entering the lands according to the legal subdivisions, they sell the fractions back and forth to each other and each settler is put in legal possession of his old claim. But as title can only be secured now, by pre-emption, each man has to swear that he is living on the land, and purchases it for his own "exclusive benefit." On this and other technical grounds many persons are reluctant to take the required oath.

The laws when framed by theorists, or mere politicians and lawyers, and executed by men of the same class, or routine clerks, are often drawn by the former, and explained by the latter in technical, office language, so difficult to understand, and easy to misconstrue, that the whole system may become involved in confusion. This is not the right way to frame and administer the laws regulating such realities as the solid lands of the west. I think the simple fact of settlement and cultivation of the public lands, ought to give a title to the same, good for years against all parties, except the United States. I do not know where land warrants can be located now, except in Missouri, and a flood of them have gone, and are going there. There seems very little prospect of the Land Offices in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska or Kansas being opened at any time soon, to others than pre-emptors. One-hundred-and-sixty-acre warrants can be sold at Council Bluffs and Omaha city, and I presume at Leocompton, to pre-emptors. I understand that one-hundred-and-twenty-acre warrants will also sell at Omaha city, but not so readily. Eighty-acre warrants are no sale there.

Having spoken of squatters induces me to give an explanation of "squatter sovereignty." In the settlement of a new country, the unwritten law outlaws certain crimes, such as horse stealing, claim jumping (that is, taking possession of a settler's claim) and entering the claim of an actual

settler, within reasonable period. The lawyer or other person, officer or private citizen, who defends a claim jumper in his course, will get neither business nor political preferment. Thus, men cannot do or defend that, which under the laws of the United States, is legal. The claims usually comprise double the quantity of land allowed to a pre-emptor. Squatter sovereignty is triumphant. The same principle, carried out, might have made Kansas a slave territory under the Missouri Compromise.

To return from these digressions, the counties of Mills, Fremont, Page and Taylor are fine agricultural counties, and new lands are being brought into cultivation; and the farmers are getting rich, and increasing in numbers. The markets afforded by the rapid increase of trade and travel on the Missouri River, the immigration and the quick growth of towns, together with the fertility of the soil, and the fact that neither a wet nor a dry season will materially injure the crops, makes western Iowa, and in fact, for similar reasons, the whole state, the land where farmers are sure to prosper. Glenwood, the county seat of Mills County; and Sidney, the county seat of Fremont County, are seven miles from the Missouri River. The former is in the valley of Keg Creek, the latter on the high and fertile ridge between the Missouri and the Nishanybotany [Nishnabotna] Rivers. These towns are not improving much this season,

but the case is different in regard to the country around them, which is being rapidly brought under cultivation. I never was in a more healthy country than western Iowa. The atmosphere is dry, clear and bracing. The soil is dry and free from mud. Neither the air nor the ground, is charged with "bad colds." This summer the numerous steamboats that navigate the upper Missouri, above Sioux City, have taken up pleasure parties, of families and others.

One boat recently started to go four hundred miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone. I have not been above Sioux City. The first white settlers in the vicinity of that now thriving town, were Canadian French, who had been in the employment of the Fur Company; but in the decline of the trade, they had given it up, and settled along the river, the most of them marrying Indian wives.

Southern Iowa in 1853

[The following account of "Southern Iowa" which was penned to the "Editors" of *The Independent* appeared in the issue of that New York paper on April 28, 1853. His projection of railroads to the Mississippi is somewhat optimistic (see the April, 1960 *Palimpsest*) but the hopes expressed are characteristic of the enthusiasm of the period. The correspondent, who signed himself "Viator," included the letter of a Jo Davies County bricklayer, who had memorialized the Illinois legislature for support of educational institutions that later became the Morrill Act which created the Land Grant Colleges. THE EDITOR.]

GENTLEMEN:—The emigration to California from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, is pouring across our state as in former years. The ferryboats at various points in southern Iowa, are white with their canvas-covered teams. Although, as Col. [Thomas H.] Benton says (in his recent pamphlet on the Pacific Railroad), of the forty or fifty thousand who now go annually from the frontiers of Missouri, they "actually mark out the whole way by the graves of the dead," yet the love of gold seems as potent to draw people to California as ever.

Southern Iowa is just now alive with interest in a railroad connection between the "Father of Waters" and the Missouri. Meetings are being held at points along the westward line; and before we are fairly in possession of a complete iron track, to the lake and trans-Alleghanian cities, the road to

the valleys of the Missouri and the Platte will be in a state of forwardness. The current of popular feeling, all over the state, has turned strongly from north and south to east and west railroads, and it will fix the more strongly on that policy, as the grand idea of a great main road across the Rocky Mountains, gathering into itself branches from all the states up and down the Mississippi River, grows on the public mind. Even the project of a road from St. Louis, through Iowa to Minnesota (which is of great moment to St. Louis) has been barred by a recent act of our legislature, making it a *sine qua non* with every railroad built in Iowa, that the legislature shall fix the termini. Until our cross-roads are built, the part of wisdom seems to be, as I have intimated, to rely for north and south communication upon the river, the obstructions in which, at the upper and lower rapids, it is hoped will be soon removed.

It seems now probable that Alton will be the first connection by railroad between the Atlantic and the Mississippi. While the public eye has been fixed on the completion of long single roads, combinations of parts of roads have been preparing a more speedy connection. The Chicago and R.I.R.R. [Rock Island] will be "through" about the first of next year, the Galena and Chicago [Union] and the Savanna branch roads, about the same time, and also the Rock River junction at Fulton, with perhaps another striking the river at

Albany. But the Rock Island road is already running to La Salle, from which a section of the Illinois Central will be in operation to Bloomington by September of this year. The Alton and Springfield road is also running, and when the section between Bloomington and Springfield is completed, in the early fall, the rails will connect the Mississippi at Alton with the lakes and the ocean. Late in the fall by another combination, (the Chicago and Aurora, Central Military Track and Peoria and Oquawka roads), southern Iowa will be in connection by rail at Burlington.

According to present probabilities, railroads will tap the river nearly every forty miles along the western boundary of Illinois. The legislature of that state authorized the building of bridges across the Mississippi at three points, viz: opposite Burlington, between Rock Island and Davenport, and between Fulton and Lyons (Iowa). There are almost insurmountable obstacles, however, of many kinds, to bridging it at any point below the falls of St. Anthony.

Southern Iowa is not only looking towards Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, but also towards great cities and railroad centers nearer home, viz: Chicago and Cincinnati. *Twelve* roads, some, however, uniting upon the same entering track, will converge at the former city, and *nineteen* at the latter. If the exports of this new and rich region, with the beautiful Des Moines valley

lying back of it, shall mainly flow to the lake, New York will share the trade with Boston. If our railroad eastward goes as far south as Lafayette, Indiana, you will share with Cincinnati and Philadelphia our grain, fruit, pork, &c. Hitherto, our exports have gone to St. Louis, and goods have been largely purchased there and at Cincinnati. The delay of the rapids improvement and the railroad movement are, however, changing, totally and fast, the course of trade. Among the propositions to extend the railroad to Peoria, eastward from that city, is one from Logansport, Indiana, which would carry this road, if acted on, between Fort Wayne and Lafayette direct to Crestline, Ohio, and would make it part of *the shortest and straightest route, running almost on a parallel of latitude from New York to the valleys of the Missouri and Platte, and the South Pass in the Rocky Mountains*. This would also give New York the trade of the Des Moines and Missouri valleys. The railroad distance from Southern Iowa to New York is 1100 miles, *via* Fort Wayne and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, but only 975 *via* Logansport, Sandusky, and the Erie Railroad.

Some interesting questions in respect to the control of ecclesiastical bodies over corporation property in literary institutions are about to arise in this state, under the attempt of the Synod of Iowa (Old School) to remove their "Des Moines College," at West Point, to some other locality. I may

give you some notes on these questions hereafter.

Denmark, a truly Puritan village in Lee County, has the honor of possessing probably the best academy in the state. It is now organized with excellent teachers from New England, and has the neatest and most commodious academical edifice (two stories) in Iowa, and about sixty pupils. This institution is largely a fruit of the vigorous and judicious labors of "Father Asa Turner." The villages and cities of southern Iowa are beginning to send many pupils thither.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction states, in his late report, that the school lands now belonging to the state amount to 498,101.84 acres, and the university lands to 46,031.24 acres. The minimum price of the latter has been raised to \$10 per acre. A large portion of the former lies in our numerous unorganized counties. There are 86,157 scholars reported in the state, of whom only 33,033 actually attend school. The school fund distributed on the 1st of March was \$556,185.94, or about one dollar and seventy cents to each pupil. During the past year \$18,821.69 has been raised by tax for the erection of schoolhouses, and \$28,739.55 by subscription for the pay of teachers. Normal schools are in operation at Oskaloosa and Andrew, connected with the state university, though as yet the university fund has yielded them no aid. The former has 47 pupils, and the trustees are erecting an edifice of two stories, 52 by 34

feet. A branch of the university at Fairfield has a building under way a second time, it having been destroyed by a hurricane two years since. A medical school in Keokuk was adopted in 1851, as a branch of the university, and \$5,000 appropriated to it. This school has six professors and twenty students. Nothing has been done towards organizing the literary department of the state university [classes began in 1855]. Twenty-nine deaf, dumb, and blind persons are reported in the state, to whom \$3,150 were appropriated last year. An asylum for the blind is now opened at Iowa City, under the care of Mr. Samuel Bacon, formerly connected with similar institutions in Ohio and Illinois. All the expenses of each pupil, except clothing and traveling, are to be defrayed by the state.

The last Illinois legislature passed the following resolution, moved by a very intelligent and public-spirited bricklayer from Jo Davies County.

Whereas, The spirit and the progress of this age and country demand the culture of the highest order of intellectual attainment, in theoretic and industrial science; and whereas, it is impossible that our commerce and prosperity will continue to increase, without calling into requisition all the elements of internal thrift arising from the labors of the farmer, mechanic, and the manufacturer, by every fostering effort within the reach of government; and whereas, a system of Industrial Universities, liberally endowed in each State of the Union, co-operative with each other and with the Smithsonian Institution at Washington,

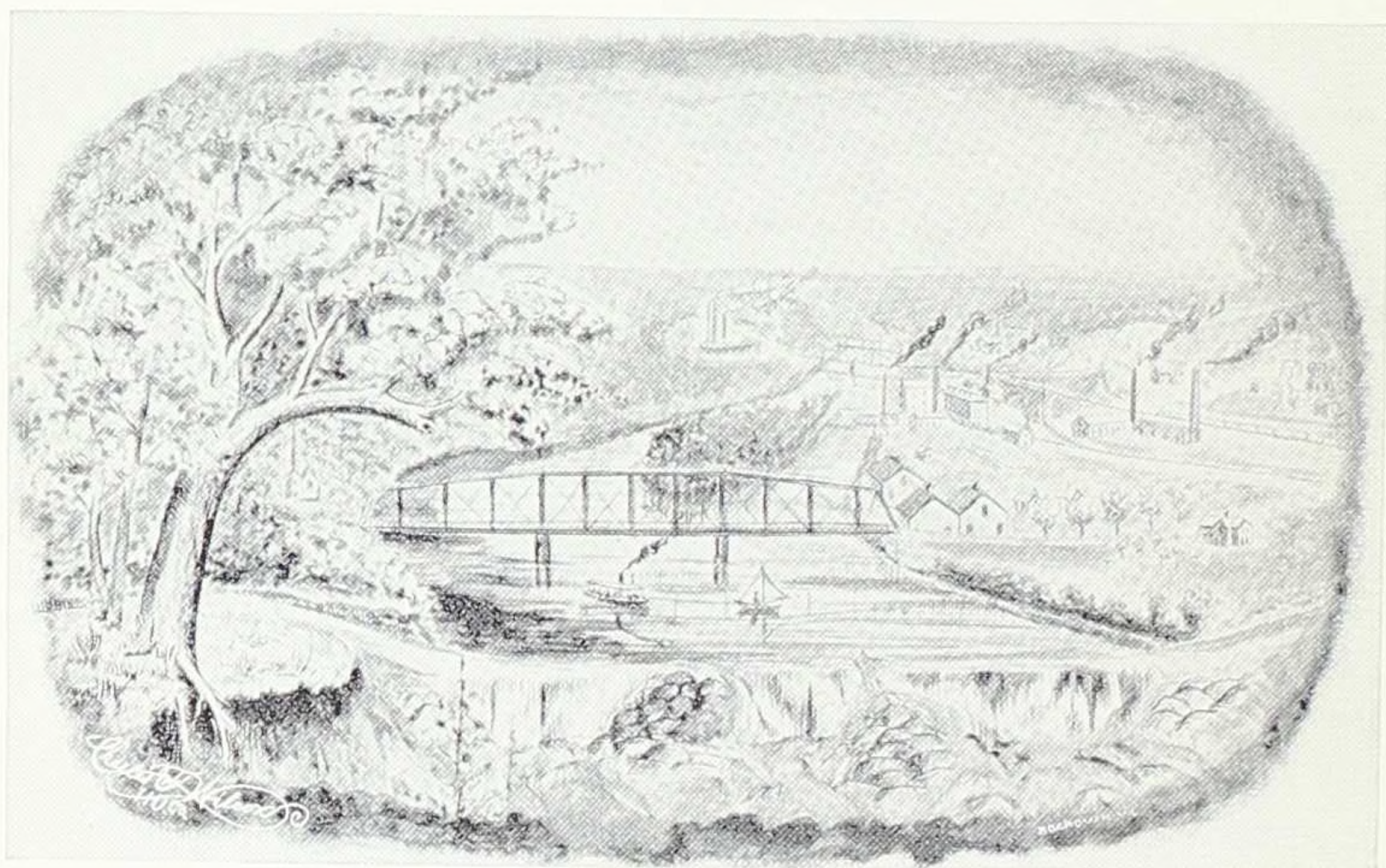
would develop a more liberal and practical education among the people, tend the more to intellectualize the rising generation, and eminently conduce to the virtue, intelligence, and true glory of our common country; therefore, be it

Resolved, by the House of Representatives, the Senate concurring herein, That our Senators in Congress be instructed, and our Representatives be requested, to use their best exertions to procure the passage of a law of Congress, donating to each State in the Union an amount of public lands, not less in value than five hundred thousand dollars, for the liberal endowment of a system of Industrial Universities, one in each State of the Union, to co-operate with each other and with the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, for the more liberal and practical education of our industrial classes and their teachers; a liberal and varied education, adapted to the manifold wants of a practical and enterprising people, and a provision for such educational facilities, being in manifest concurrence with the intimations of the popular will, it urgently demands the united efforts of our national will.

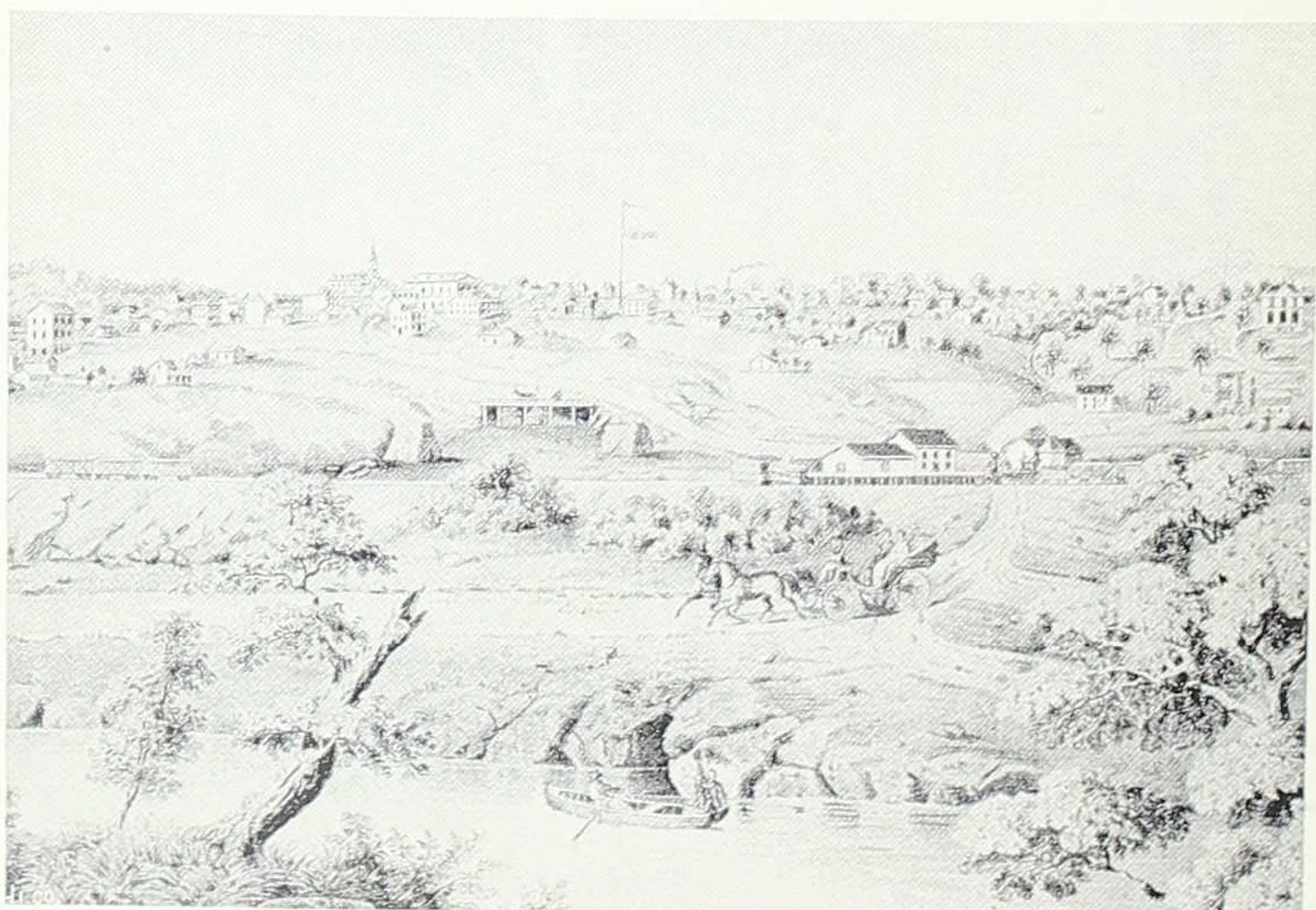
Resolved, that the Governor is hereby authorized to forward a copy of the foregoing resolutions to our Senators and Representatives in Congress, and to the Executive and Legislature of each of our sister States, inviting them to co-operate with us in this meritorious enterprise.

It is another indication of the spirit of improvement in western legislatures, that the legislature of Missouri appropriated \$4000 to a state agricultural fair, and \$16,000 to a geological survey.

It is another indication of the spirit of improvement in western legislatures, that the legislature of Missouri appropriated \$4000 to a state agricultural fair, and \$16,000 to a geological survey.—VIATOR



View of Des Moines River—From Below the Dam



Drawing by Bill R. D. T. Davis

Bird's-Eye View of Fort Dodge in 1869