

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.

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