

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.

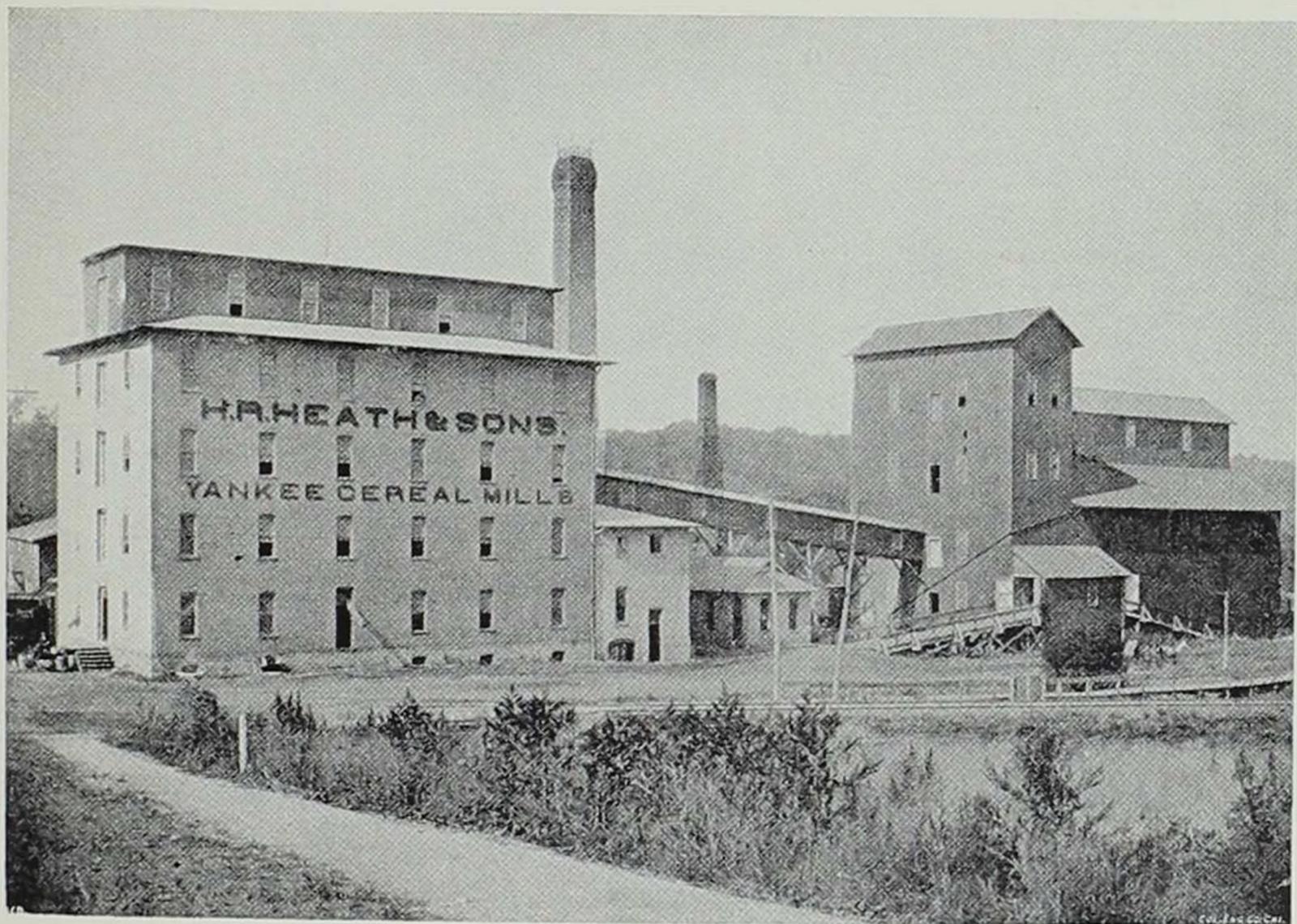
The county was organized in August, 1853. The census of the county, taken about that time, showed a population of four hundred and fifty-seven. The revenue of the county for the first

year amounted to nine hundred and thirty dollars.

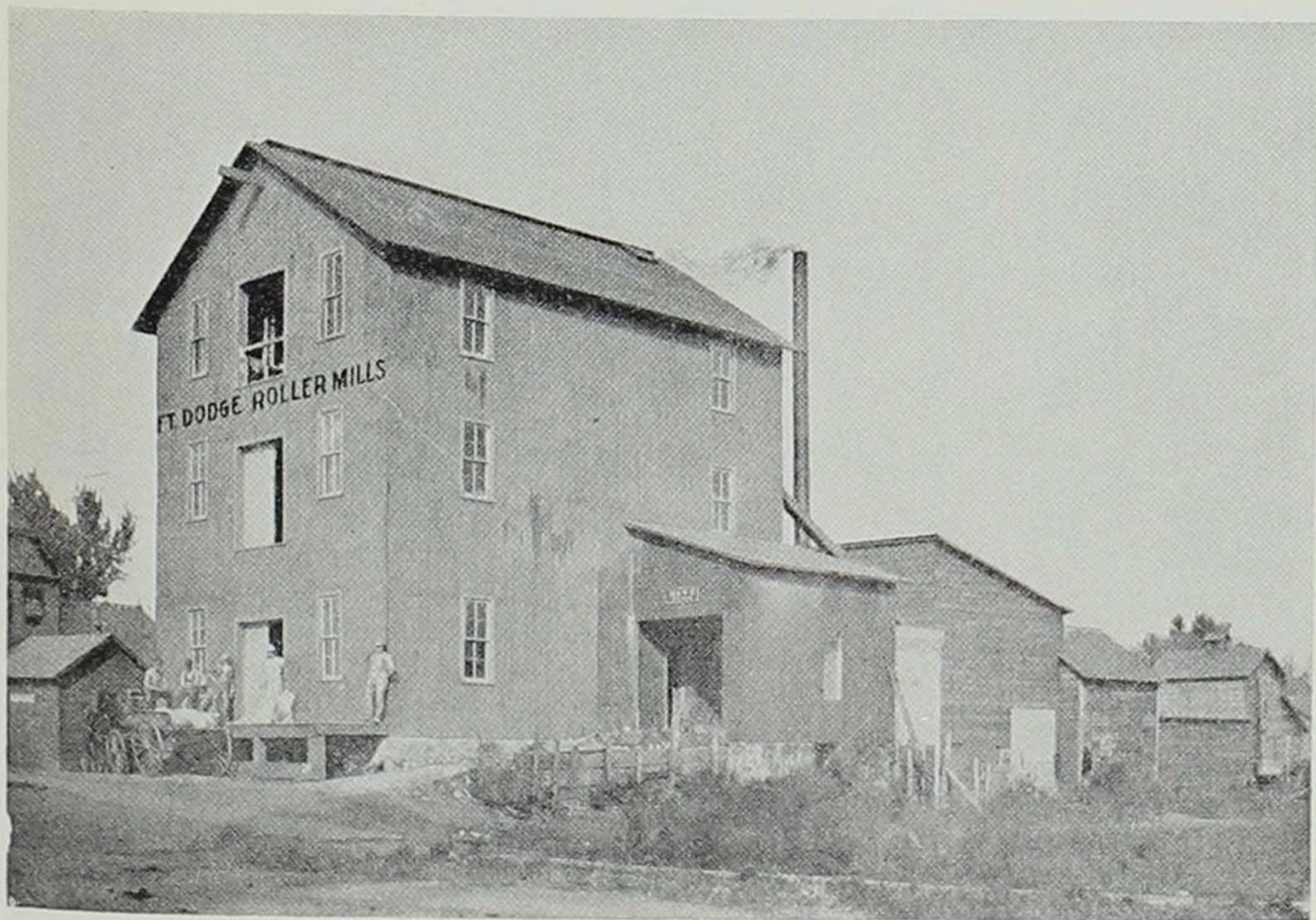
The population, as taken by the last census, was four thousand eight hundred and seventy-three. Since that time the population has rapidly increased, and will probably now number six thousand. The revenue of the county for the present year will amount to fifteen thousand dollars. In the original county 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.

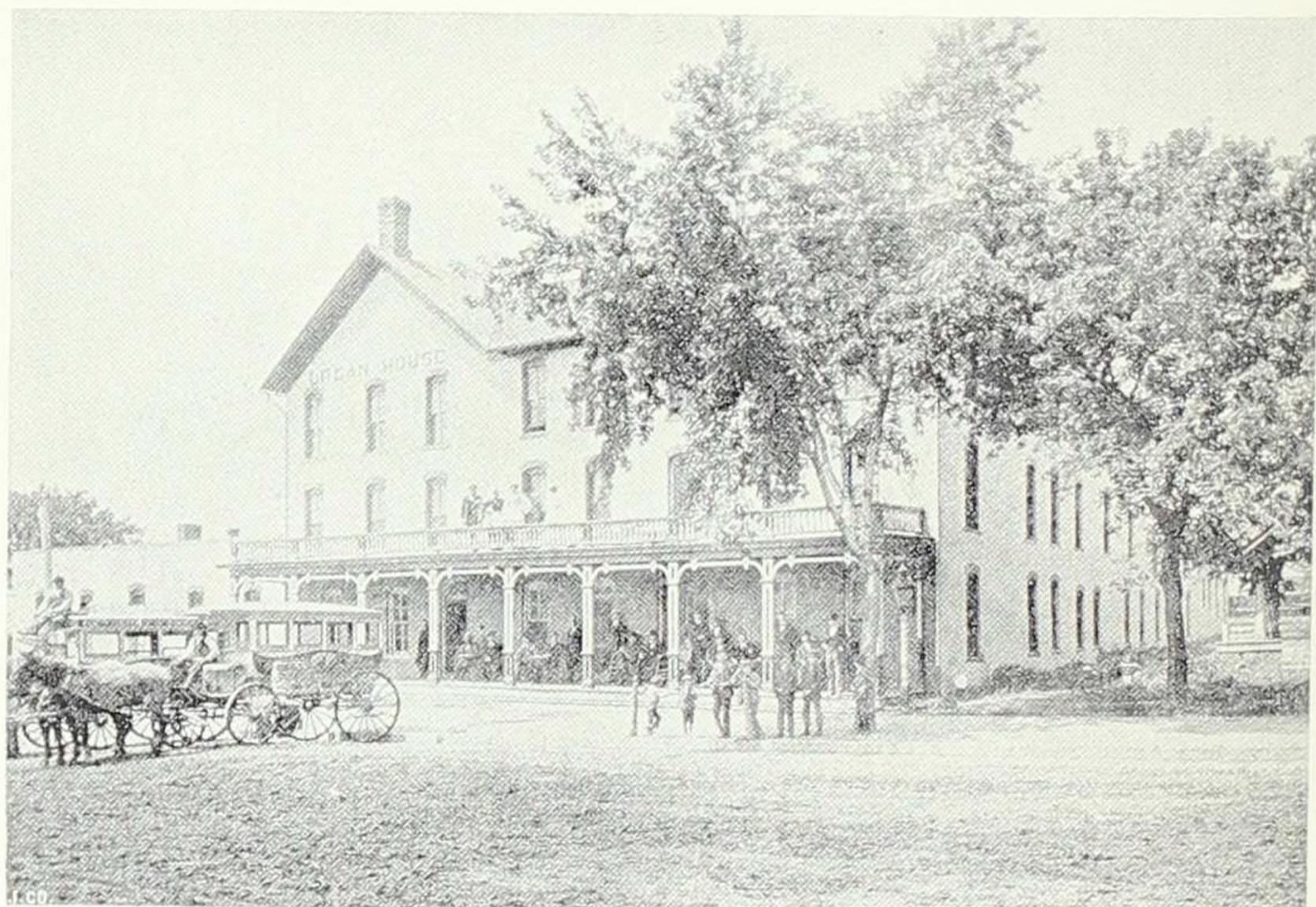
The Lizzard Fork, a fine pure stream, running in a westerly direction from the center of the county, north and south, empties into the Des Moines near Fort Dodge. The Boone River, a beautiful, pure stream, runs through the county to the southeast, and forms many fine water-powers. This river, by the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



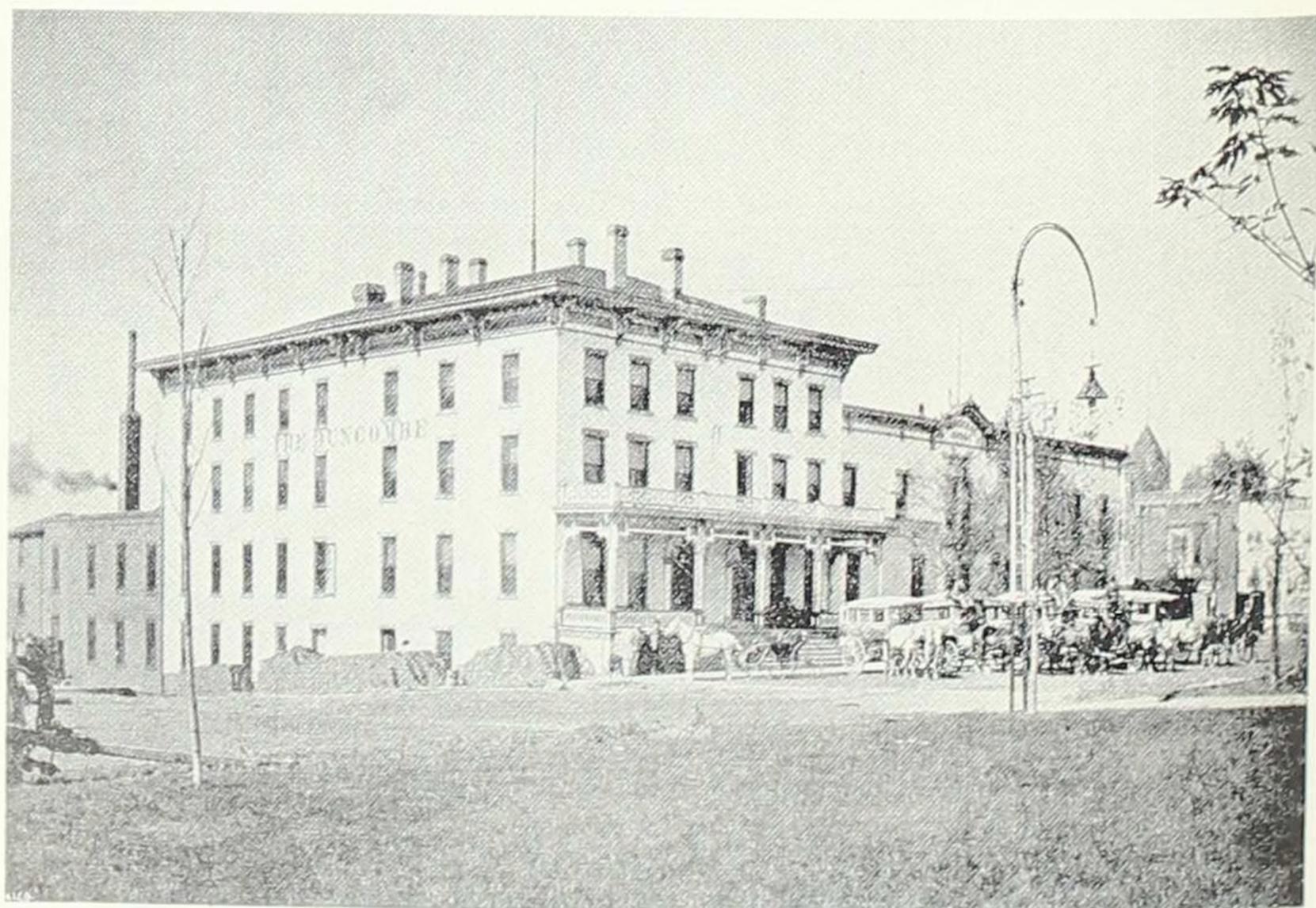
Yankee Cereal Mills—Owned by H. R. Heath & Sons



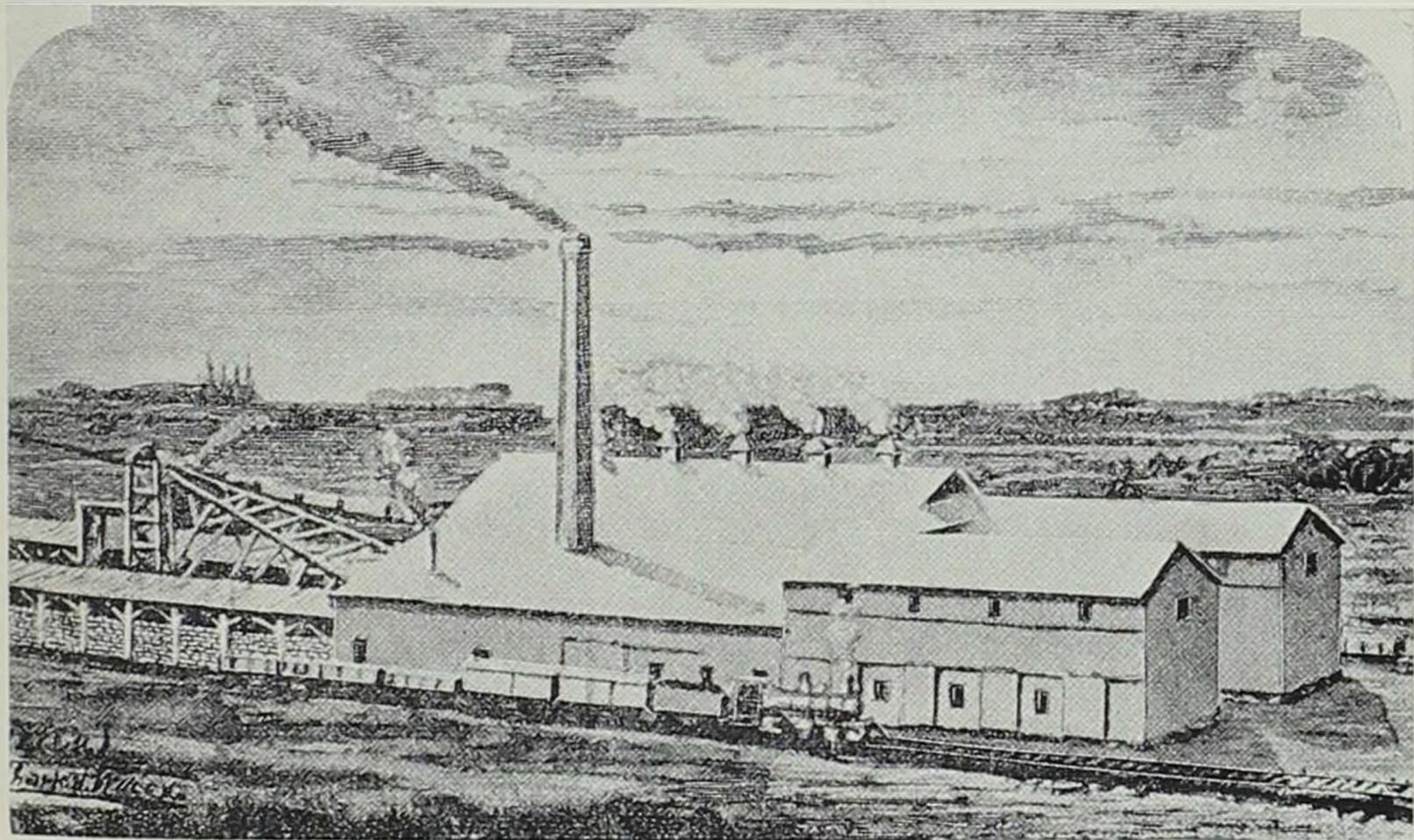
Fort Dodge Roller Mills



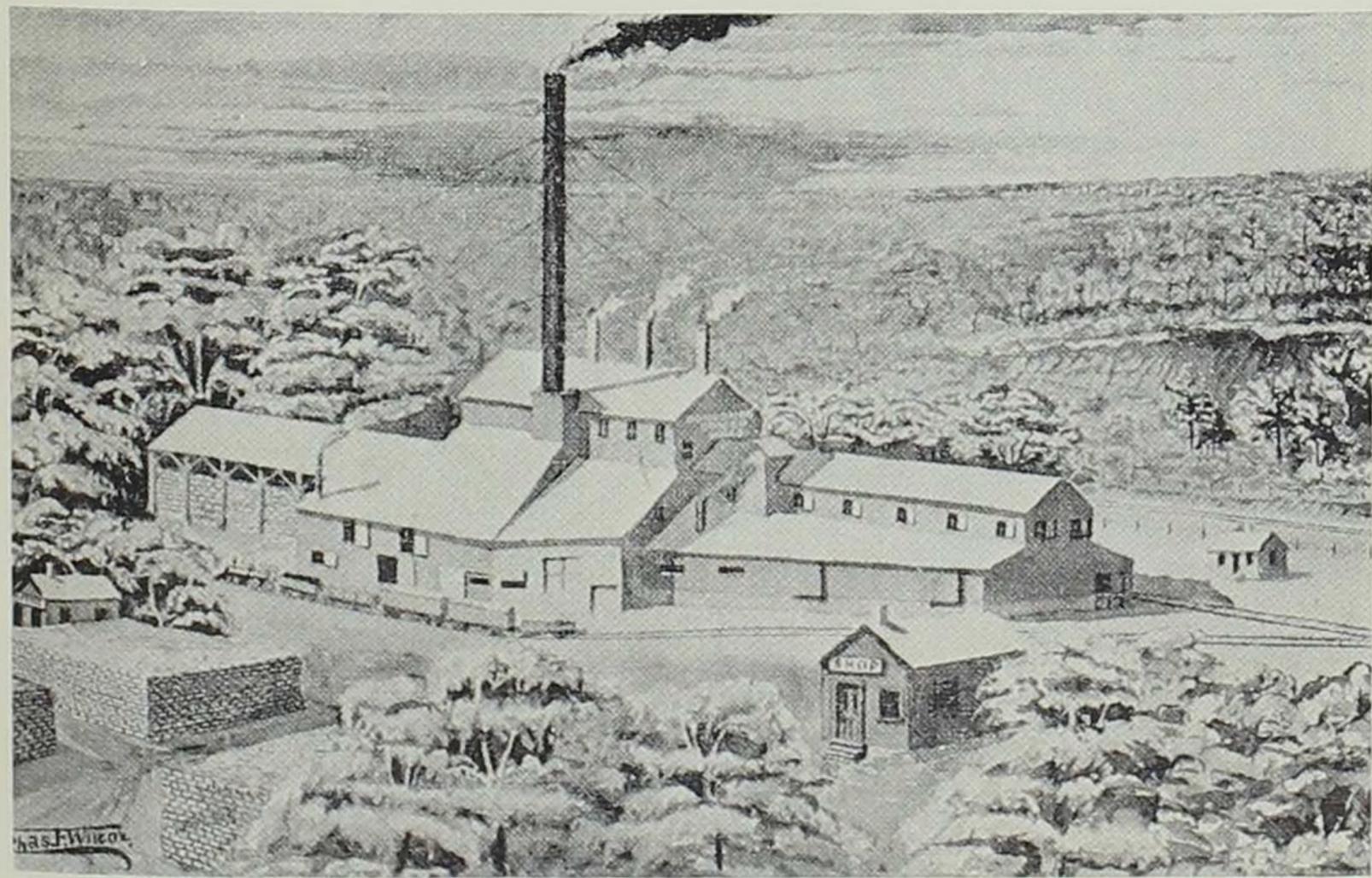
The Logan House—L. R. Chase, Proprietor



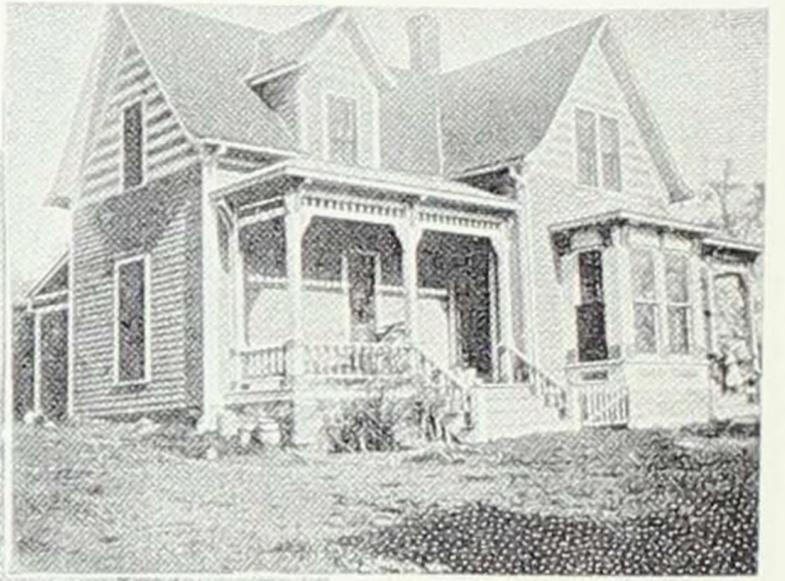
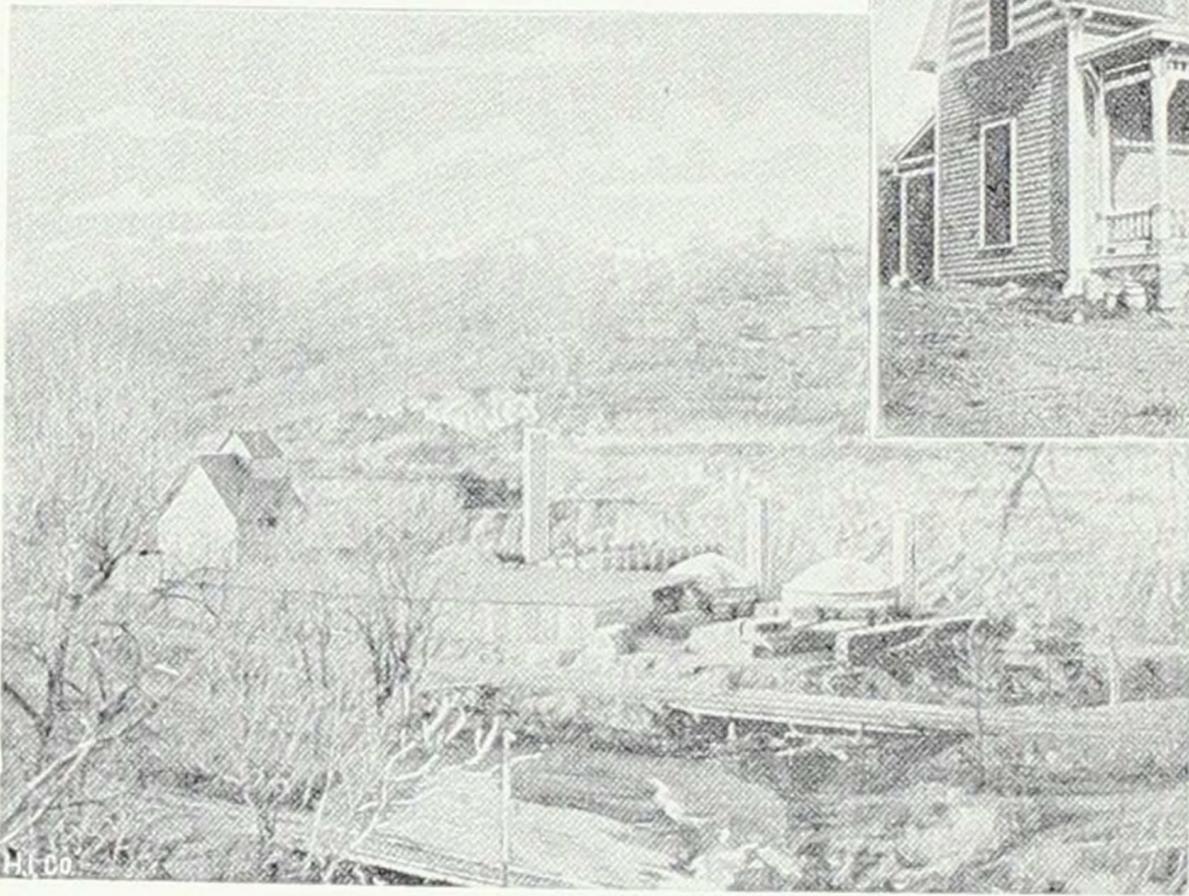
The Duncombe House—George W. Wilson, Proprietor



The Cardiff Gypsum Mill

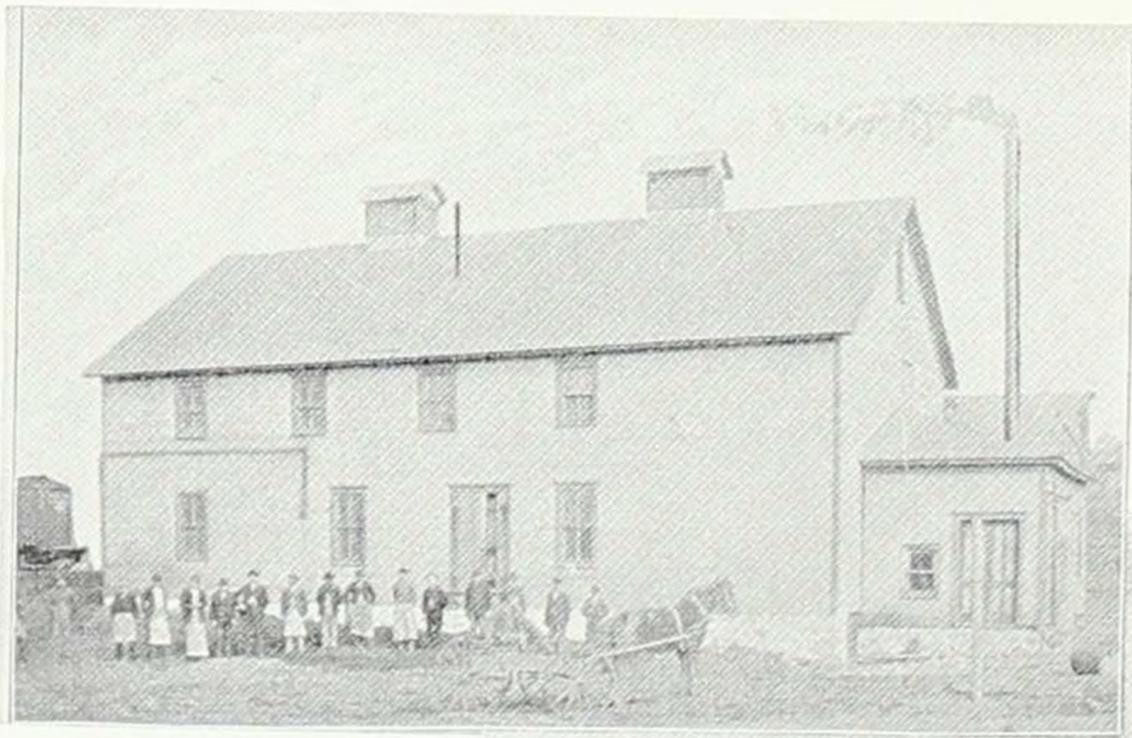


Duncombe Stucco Mills



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.