

Business and Industry

Business showed an upward trend in the Iowa country. At Dubuque the firm of G. A. Shannon & Company advised readers of the *Iowa News* in June, 1838, that they had just received a heavy consignment of goods direct from New Orleans. Included in the cargo discharged at the Dubuque levee were ten bags of coffee, ten sacks of fine salt, fifteen baskets of champagne wine, and ten boxes of champagne cider. There were also fifteen boxes of codfish, two boxes of tobacco, ten boxes of raisins, five boxes of lemons, and seventeen of tea. Ragged roustabouts rolled down the gang-plank fifteen kegs of nails, twenty-five kegs of tar, two barrels of sugar, five barrels of molasses, six barrels of common brandy, a barrel of common gin, and some New Orleans rum. The remainder of the cargo included anything from rifle powder and hair powder to cinnamon and nutmegs, with a general assortment of dry goods, saddlery, hats, boots, and shoes chucked in for good measure.

The Territory of Iowa was not self-sufficient. Southern and eastern manufacturers generally found a ready market for their products among

the 22,859 inhabitants of Iowaland. Though most of the pioneers were farmers they were unable to satisfy their own needs, and so large quantities of seed, grain, and livestock were imported. A flotilla of steamboats plied the upper Mississippi between Saint Louis and the mineral region to leave their tribute of freight and passengers at the rapidly sprouting towns along the way. On April 18, 1838, the Fort Madison *Patriot* declared that nearly 300,000 tons of merchandise had been transported over the Des Moines Rapids in 1837 and estimated that the amount to be carried in 1838 would be very much more.

Not all the merchandise transported over the Des Moines Rapids was destined for the west bank of the Mississippi. A considerable amount was discharged at the various towns in Illinois. Galena, the metropolis of the mineral region, received the lion's share carried above the rapids while Quincy was the leading market between Alton and the rapids. Ambrose Kimball, a Galena merchant, advertised in the Dubuque newspaper throughout the year 1838 that the steamboat *North Star* had delivered a cargo of sofas, bureaus, dining tables, center tables, the latest ladies' work tables, high post bedsteads, common bedsteads, and 1200 chairs that sold from \$14 to \$150 per dozen. Iowa pioneers often traded in

Galena, Quincy, and Saint Louis. Merchants stocked their counters with goods from Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh. The stationery and supplies for the Territorial legislature were purchased at Saint Louis.

Although a large amount of food, dry goods, hardware, household supplies, and implements were imported, industries were being established in the Black Hawk Purchase. Charles W. Pierce and James Prine established a shop above the land office in Burlington where they were kept busy making "all kinds of cabinet furniture and chairs cheap for cash." An advertisement in the *Iowa Territorial Gazette* called attention to the "Coachmaking, Carriagemaking, and Blacksmithing" business which was carried on at the shop of Sterling & Withington at Burlington. These two enterprising manufacturers promised to repair all wagons and carriages at the lowest charges and on the shortest notice. They were also prepared to make sleighs to order in a "very superior style". The village blacksmith was an integral part of the flourishing pioneer community in 1838.

At Dubuque a wheelright and plough maker named Adam J. Anderson informed readers of the *Iowa News* that he had taken a home immediately adjoining Mr. Young's blacksmith shop. Anderson planned to carry on the wheelright business

in all its branches, including plough and sleigh making. In his well-equipped shop he was prepared to repair carriages of all sorts on the shortest notice and lowest terms for cash and cash only.

D. C. Eldridge erected a large shop near his residence in Davenport and respectfully informed the readers of the *Iowa Sun* that he intended to engage in the business of carriage making and blacksmithing in all their various branches. Eldridge made or repaired steel springs in good style and constructed all kinds of sleighs. His business was in such a flourishing condition that he employed a number of first-rate journeymen, and hoped to merit the patronage of a generous public.

L. W. Babbitt established himself as Burlington's leading gunsmith in July, 1838. He was prepared to manufacture "Plain or *Fancy Rifles* and Fowling guns, Patent Percussion Pistols, warranted to shoot, as well as rifles of the same calibre, *Repeating Rifles*, Prison and common door locks, Printer's chases, Friskets and Sticks, State and County Seals, Blacksmith's and Joiner's stamps for marking tools, Hand screw Plates, &c, &c." This versatile gunsmith could alter flintlock rifles so as to fire with "cap or pill percussion powder". He was also expert at "re-stocking, cutting, sighting, drawboring" and other kinds of

repairing. Old rifles and fowling pieces, Babbitt pointed out, could be browned, plain or in imitation of stub and twist guns. The latter type of guns could be browned and warranted to look as good as new. Mr. Babbitt always kept a good supply of rifle and percussion powder on hand.

During the summer of 1838 William Dolan and William H. Ladd established a tin, sheet iron, and stove factory in Burlington. In contrast to the economic theory of apostles of scarcity, these two enterprising artisans wrote "Industry the Means and Plenty the Result" over their advertisement in the *Iowa Territorial Gazette*. Modestly they declared: "Both of us being practical workmen, and having had considerable experience in the business, the public may at all times, rely on getting good articles, on good terms, as we intend selling at the St. Louis prices, wholesale and retail. We have now and intend keeping constantly on hand, Stoves of every description, viz. Franklin box, ten and seven plates, also the premium cooking which gives general satisfaction; some are now in operation in this place, which we will refer to on application. P. S. Sheet Iron Stoves and Stove pipe, House guttering and spouting, made to order on the shortest notice."

Some of the more skillful craftsmen had made their way to the Iowa country. By 1838 A. W.

Carpenter, an experienced jeweler, had established his jewelry and watchmaker's shop in Fort Madison. His store was located "on Water Street at the sign of the Golden Watch". Carpenter invited the attention of the public to his general assortment of clocks, watches, and jewelry, as well as to the great variety of articles usually kept in his line. He believed his experience as a jeweler, together with the superior quality of his stock, would give general satisfaction to all his patrons.

To have a local jeweler was no small advantage for the straggling frontier towns. Citizens of Davenport had to cross the Mississippi to Stephenson where R. H. Kinney, a watchmaker and jeweler, had opened a store. Kinney used the columns of the *Iowa Sun* to inform residents of Davenport that he kept "constantly on hand an assortment of Watches, Jewelry, and Fancy Ware, consisting in part of the following articles. Patent Lever, plain, English, French and Swiss Watches; Steel plated and Ribband Watch Chains, Watch Keys and Seals, Ear ornaments, Finger Rings, Breastpins, Tea and Table spoons, Silver Pencil Leads, Pen and Pocket Knives, Pocket Compasses, Percussion Caps, Caps, Wallets, Visiting Cards, Scissors, Silver and Steel Spectacles, Silver Thimbles, Silver Tweezers, Violin Strings,

Belt Buckles, &c &c." The versatile Mr. Kinney repaired all clocks and watches and guaranteed that they would perform well.

Fort Madison could point with pride to its two tailor shops. E. A. Dickey was ready to execute all orders as a merchant tailor "in the most Fashionable Style". According to the *Fort Madison Patriot*, Matthews and Husted "have made arrangements to obtain the latest fashions from Philadelphia, and are prepared to cut and make garments of every description which they will warrant to *fit* with ease and neatness. They may at all times be found at their stand on Water Street, in the building recently occupied as Bul-lard's Grocery, where they will be pleased to see their Customers."

Few women were employed in any other than household duties. Even the schools were usually taught by men, though Mrs. Louisa King's school for young ladies in Dubuque, established in 1836, was still flourishing in 1838.

Women were so scarce on the mining frontier that the wages of domestic servants ran from eight to ten dollars a month. A Dubuque editor pointed out that women received five times as much for sewing as was paid female workers in Philadelphia. Miss R. M. Pearce informed the Davenport ladies that she was prepared to clean and

dress bonnets, in the neatest and most fashionable manner. "She is furnished with the latest fashions from the eastern cities", the *Iowa Sun* reported, "and from a thorough knowledge of her business, and a disposition to accommodate she hopes to receive a portion of public patronage."

Only four newspapers were published in Iowa in 1838. These establishments were also equipped to do all kinds of job printing. The *Iowa News* was well supplied with job type and the proprietors were prepared to "execute on the shortest notice, all kinds of plain and fancy job printing such as blanks of all kinds, bills of lading, business and visiting cards, ball tickets, labels, etc."

The amount of capital invested and the number of men employed in the printing and publishing industry were small in 1838 — probably not more than in 1840 when fifteen printers and an investment of \$5700 were recorded by the federal census. If this seems like a small beginning for what has become one of the major industries in Iowa, it should be remembered that the total population in the Black Hawk Purchase was only about half the present population of the city of Dubuque.

Most of the communities of Iowa Territory were supplied with a grist mill and sawmill in 1838. A number of these had been in operation

since 1834, but most of them had been running less than a year. The steamboat *Rolla* brought a \$3500 steam sawmill to Dubuque from Pittsburgh in 1837. In Muscatine County alone Weare Long operated a sawmill on Sweetland Creek; Benjamin Nye had a grist mill at the mouth of Pine Creek; and Eli Reynolds and John Lawson ran a steam sawmill in Geneva at the mouth of Lime Creek. An important flouring mill in Des Moines County was owned by Levi Moffit at Augusta on the Skunk River. By 1840 there were six flouring mills, thirty-seven grist mills, and seventy-five sawmills operating in Iowa Territory. The capital invested in these mills was \$166,650, the number of men employed totalled 154, and the value of the manufacturers was set at \$95,425 yearly. In 1838 the figures were probably not less than half these totals.

Meat packing had not assumed the dignity of an industry in 1838, although a number of butchers plied their trade. At Dubuque their habit of throwing bones in the street caused the enactment of an ordinance to halt such practices. J. B. Lawson of Burlington agreed to call on farmers at their residences or meet them at the land sales with cash to buy their livestock and other produce. Patterson & Mitchell, butchers, offered to pay top prices for "all kinds of fatted stock — cattle, hogs,

sheep, and for hides". They promised to "steadily and extensively pursue" the business of butchering in a satisfactory manner. A Fort Madison butcher kept fresh beef on hand to supply steamboat larders.

Wood was the chief fuel on the frontier. Although most of the pioneers doubtless cut their own supply, many, particularly in the towns, were unable to do so. For this reason some of the pioneers found employment as professional woodchoppers. In addition to winter supplies, the steamboats consumed large quantities of fuel. H. H. Gear advertised all winter in the *Iowa News* for woodchoppers to cut four or five hundred cords of wood on the Mississippi near the Tetes des Morts River. Located half way between Dubuque and Bellevue, such an immense supply must have been intended for steamboats which either turned up the Fever River to Galena at this point or continued up the Mississippi to Dubuque. Some of the men at Bellevue who were associated with William Brown's gang of horse thieves and counterfeiters found profitable employment as woodchoppers for steamboats.

Although most of the Iowa pioneers lived in log cabins, frame, brick, and stone houses were being erected throughout the Territory. The larger towns already had well-stocked lumber yards. At

Burlington, for example, E. Evans advertised 150,000 feet of white pine lumber for sale at from twenty to forty dollars per thousand feet at his Board Yard. J. Lamson had 30,000 feet of white pine lumber from New York State. J. Prime & Company had 3000 window sash for sale at his yard in Burlington. Some of this lumber was brought from distant Pittsburgh, but most of it was floated down the Mississippi from the Wisconsin pineries. "So soon as lumber can be brought down the river, building will commence," declared the *Iowa News* on March 31, 1838. By fall the editor expected lumber would be brought down the Wisconsin from mills built in the extensive pineries ceded by the Chippewas in 1837. The Fort Madison *Patriot* chided Dubuque for its lethargy, pointing out that steamboats had already arrived at that port from Pittsburgh and Saint Louis with lumber for building. Dubuque ignored this rivalry. She quickly demonstrated her interest in the huge rafts of lumber already coming downstream by allowing them free wharfage at the Dubuque dock whenever the raft was intended for the local sawmill.

Brick and stone were less commonly used for building, although Davenport could already boast of a brick-yard opened by Harvey Leonard. David Rorer occupied a brick house at Burlington,

said to be the first of its kind. James and Edward Langworthy added two brick houses to a number already constructed at Dubuque. J. N. Osborn informed citizens of Dubuque that he was prepared to execute promptly all orders as a stone cutter and mason. Stone masons were active in other parts of the Territory.

During the summer of 1838 three men set out across the Mississippi from Appanoose to Fort Madison in a flatboat loaded with stone and lime. Suddenly a squall struck them and the boat filled and sank. One of the men, Samuel Oliver, was drowned but the others managed to swim ashore.

Wages in the Territory of Iowa were high in 1838. Farm laborers received from twenty to twenty-five dollars a month, miners got anywhere from twenty to fifty dollars, depending upon their experience. Mechanics received from two to three dollars per day. A driver who furnished a yoke of oxen or a two-horse team could expect to be paid from four to five dollars a day. The *Iowa News* felt that such wages "must be to the advantage of the laboring and poor of the eastern States" who planned to migrate to the Iowa country.

Industry, however, was still in an embryonic stage a century ago. Most of the pioneers erected their own homes, made their own candles and

soap, raised much of their own food, and made most of their own clothes. The simplicity of industrial development is attested by the minute directions for the preparation of shoe blacking which found their way into the pages of the *Iowa Sun*. "Perhaps the best in the world is made from elder berries. Mash the berries in your hand in a large kettle of water, set them in the shade a few days, filling it with water. After it is cool, strain and wring them through a coarse cloth, and then boil it down to the thickness of molasses. Put a small quantity with a feather on the brush, rub the shoe until there is a fine gloss. The same will make good writing ink."

But if industry was undeveloped it was nevertheless important. Population was growing steadily each year. Skilled artisans were making their way slowly westward, attracted by the high wages and the opportunity for a better life on the frontier. Lack of regular transportation and communication doubtless delayed the establishment of trade and industry during the long winter months. A century later the returns from industry in Iowa were destined to rival those derived from agriculture. A number of the giant industries of the twentieth century trace their beginnings to the year when the Territory of Iowa was created.

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