

## Town and Countryside in 1843

A century ago, in 1843, the great tide of western expansion was pouring into the Territory of Iowa. In 1836 only 10,531 squatters were counted in the Black Hawk Purchase. Two years later, a census showed 23,242 in the newly-created Territory of Iowa. By 1840 the Federal census takers enumerated 43,112 inhabitants in the four Indian cessions that had been carved out along the eastern border of Iowa. The year 1843 gave promise of a steady influx of settlers as the government prepared to open on May 1, 1843, the eastern half of the new Sauk and Fox cession in the Des Moines Valley.

The first wave of immigrants flowed through the thriving Mississippi River ports. Early in April, Burlington and Fort Madison newspapers expressed delight at the large number of new settlers debarking at their levees, the steamboat *Osprey* landing 115 at Burlington alone. A few weeks later Iowans noted an excerpt from the *Montreal Courier* telling of a scheme to foster Irish emigration to Iowa and other northwestern States. Scores of mechanics were arriving in May, and it was estimated that they would be

surging in by the thousands in June and July. It was with no small satisfaction that Iowa editors noted "a large body of tailors, painters, and clerks had had meetings in London, and appointed committees to make arrangements for their embarkation for the United States and Canada."

The only adverse note in 1843 was the reduced number of land sales at the Fairfield and Dubuque land offices, a condition which was attributed to the "hard times" prevailing throughout the United States at the time. "Hundreds of respectable and worthy farmers", declared the *Iowa Standard* of March 23, 1843, "have been unable to enter even the smallest portion of their claims, and would now surrender them to a fair purchaser for a very small consideration. People at the east who contemplate emigrating to Iowa, will never have presented to them a better opportunity to obtain a favorable location than exists at the present time. For a trifling sum, excellent farms with good improvements upon them can be had, and in a few years, with industry and perseverance, the possessor will be rich and independent. We have heard of superior locations, having considerable improvement, and but a few miles from town, being offered for \$40 or \$50 in trade. The government price for a quarter section is but \$200; and thus for about \$250 or \$300, a substantial home might be

procured for a large family. Young folks and all folks at the east should think of this."

An Iowa editor who traveled through southeastern Iowa described Wapello and Davis counties in the New Purchase as two of the "most lovely spots that could be imagined." Another traveler reported that the New Purchase was, "taking it all in all, for every advantage under the sun, the greatest country that mortal man ever beheld." The town of "Ot-tum-wah", strategically located on the Des Moines River rapids, possessed "tremendous hydraulic power for the erection of any kind of machinery with all the facility nature could possibly afford. The town is on a narrow prairie of a quarter of a mile in width, with a gradual descent from the timber, which is of the best quality and of any quantity. We have seen, however, one mile below this spot on the river, a location more desirable, known by the name of Appanoose's field, which contains upwards of 50 acres in a high state of cultivation, at present planted in a good crop of corn. The town contains nine or ten buildings with one store."

Agriculture was the mainstay of the Territory of Iowa, giving employment to possibly nine-tenths of the population. Late in August the Davenport *Gazette* noted that several Scott County farmers were engaged "pretty exten-

sively" in raising hemp. "Three out of four fields which have been reported to us, will yield handsomely, encouraging the proprietors to extend their operations the following season. We were shown last week, a few samples of rope and twine manufactured by Mr. Moore of Rock Island which is considered superior to that made at St. Louis." The return to hemp raising a century later is but a part of Iowa's all-out effort in World War II.

That Iowans were alert to better farming methods is attested by the fair held by the Agricultural Society of Van Buren County on October 11, 1843. "A large number of premiums is offered, embracing almost every article of farming and household production", the *Iowa Standard* noted on September 7th. "Many more such societies should be formed in the Territory."

Farmers were then as now sometimes plagued by the weather. On September 7th the *Iowa Standard* promised an abundant corn crop despite the unfavorable weather earlier in the season, rains and warm weather having come at exactly the right time. Seven weeks later the same Iowa City editor reported the ground covered with snow on October 28th. "Our farmers, we are sorry to say," declared the *Iowa Standard* on November 2nd, "are not prepared for such visitors,

as snow and continual cold weather, as nearly their whole crop of corn and potatoes are still remaining in the fields."

The Iowa City editor was pleased, however, with the progress made on a mill dam three miles above Iowa City (Coralville) on the Iowa River. "It is the most business-like looking place that we have been at for some time. About thirty hands were employed in hewing, digging, &c. Yesterday it was proposed to commence laying the foundations of the work. Two months will probably see the dam nearly completed; the arrangements are already made, or in progress, that will insure a saw and grist mill to be put in operation by New Years, at farthest. Those engaged upon the work are taking stock in the most liberal manner. Upwards of \$2500 were subscribed within a few days making \$10,000 in all."

Typical of the newspaper descriptions of the country in 1843 was the travelog printed in the *Iowa Standard* on August 17th, which chronicled a tour through Johnson, Linn, Jones, Delaware, Dubuque, Jackson, Clinton, Scott, and Cedar counties. This genial raconteur observed three towns in Linn County. Ivanhoe he thought "very prettily named" and not "badly situated" when finally built. It was located on the Cedar River at the crossing of the military road between Iowa

City and Dubuque. Ivanhoe contained only "three or four Cabins and shanties" but Squire Wolf, the ferryman, had commenced building a large brick structure. The town was projected by Anson Cowles, an eccentric character from Utica, New York, who envisioned the erection of a large university, a zoological park for native wild beasts, and a palatial residence for the entertainment of strangers. A fall from a tree brought Anson Cowles's schemes to an abrupt end.

Marion, with a population of two hundred in which bachelors and single ladies were all too numerous, was composed almost entirely of frame buildings. Three brick structures, a courthouse, and a tavern were to be erected that season. The Methodists and Old School Presbyterians also contemplated churches. Cedar Rapids was a place of "much natural beauty" with considerable advantages for manufacturing but handicapped by quarrels among the townsite owners. As soon as the "bad men" who had given Linn County an "unfavorable repute" were "routed out" it was expected the whole county would enjoy an immense growth.

Jones County was in a bad way because all the timber in the county was situated upon its outer borders, and so, of consequence, was the population. "This gives the county a very *hollow* as-

pect", the observing visitor recorded. Edinburgh, the county seat, located in the center of the county in the middle of a big prairie, contained a "two story frame tavern, a log court house, and two cabins. None of the county officers were to be found at Edinburgh except by accident."

Cascade in Dubuque County was hailed as a "flourishing" village with a half dozen frame buildings going up and a mill grinding very superior flour. Dubuque was described as one of the largest towns in the Territory with 1400 inhabitants, many engaged in lead mining. The town was well built, the larger business houses being of brick and the residences of wood, generally very neat. The city boasted four churches — the Catholic and Methodist congregations had brick edifices, the Presbyterians a stone building, while the Baptists worshipped in a frame building. The courthouse was a fine two-story brick structure.

Swinging southward the perambulating gazetteer found the land in Jackson County generally well-wooded and watered, and, in point of cultivation and settlement, prophesied it would doubtless excel any of the adjoining counties. The principal river town was Bellevue with nearly one hundred inhabitants. Andrew, the county seat, could count only eight or ten families.

The traveler found no towns worthy of note in

Clinton County, whose sparse population was attributed to its lack of wood and water. The fine river front in Scott County, on the other hand, could probably not be equalled by any other county in the Territory. Davenport was a "most pleasant and well-built town — but dull." The population was estimated at a thousand. There were five churches, an "elegant" courthouse, and a \$27,000 hotel — the LeClaire House. By 1843 Davenport's former rival, Rockingham, was "rapidly falling to decay". Scott County was composed of "broad bottoms of unsurpassed fertility and healthfulness, nearly all of which are in cultivation." About two-thirds of the population of the county was located upon or adjacent to the river, the interior being very destitute of timber and water, and sparsely settled.

Returning through Cedar County, the excursionist noted the rivalry between Tipton and Rochester for the county seat. Tipton, with a population of about a hundred, was "pleasantly situated" in the midst of a fine farming country.

Although the whole Territory was teeming with activity, the Mississippi River towns and the Des Moines Valley in southeastern Iowa were especially attractive to immigrants. Three reasons were particularly responsible for this growth: the proximity of this section to the more settled areas,

the highway afforded steamboats by the Mississippi and Des Moines rivers, and the concentration of newspapers in the southern half of Iowa — at Davenport, Iowa City, Muscatine, Burlington, Fort Madison, and Keosauqua. With the establishment of the *Iowa Democrat* and the *Des Moines River Intelligencer* in 1843 Keosauqua became the second inland town (Iowa City was first) to secure a newspaper. These journals serve not only as an index to population growth but they were also a deciding factor in attracting settlers to their respective regions.

The diversity in population in 1843 is indicated by the 1831 inhabitants recorded at Burlington that year — twenty-six States, one Territory, nine foreign countries, and the District of Columbia being represented. Ohio alone was the native State of 279 settlers compared with 226 who were born in Burlington and the Territory of Iowa. There were 175 Germans, fifty Englishmen, and forty-nine Irish in the metropolis of Iowa.

Every effort was made to attract more settlers. Who would not be impressed by the following item appearing in the *Lee County Democrat*? “The rapid stride of buildings now going up in our town is truly wonderful”, declared the Fort Madison editor. “There are now some fifty brick buildings about being erected and completed, be-

sides a number of frame buildings. But two years ago we could not number more than from 3 to 4 brick houses in our town, and now we can count from seventy to eighty good and substantial brick buildings completed. If our town continues improving so rapidly, it will take but a very short time to make it one of the largest towns north of St. Louis."

Only one northern Iowa town, Dubuque, could boast of having a newspaper in 1843. The entire hinterland — Jackson, Jones, Delaware, Clayton, and Fayette counties — was dependent upon the Dubuque papers for favorable publicity. Northern Iowa was perfectly aware of the preponderant population in southern Iowa, for the census of 1840 revealed 17,816 people in the southeast triangle comprising Lee, Van Buren, and Des Moines counties compared with 4328 in a similarly situated northern triangle containing Dubuque, Clayton, and Delaware counties. Southeastern Iowa continued to attract a larger share of immigration, for Lee, Van Buren, and Des Moines counties contained more than five times as many people in 1844 as could be found in Dubuque, Clayton, and Delaware counties that year. Four years previously the proportion had stood at four to one.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN