

Come to the Turkey Valley

Glowing accounts of the future prospects of the Territory of Iowa appeared in the Territorial press a century ago. Some of these reports were in the form of editorials; others appeared as contributions of leading citizens. Copies of the Iowa papers found their way to the Atlantic seaboard where editors reproduced descriptions of the western country for their land-hungry readers. Indeed, such letters frequently gained a far wider audience than did most guide books and gazetteers.

In 1843 all of northeastern Iowa was dependent upon Dubuque newspapers for publicity, for no other towns above Davenport and Iowa City contained a press. Hopeful of attracting more settlers to the idyllic Turkey Valley in Clayton County, a resident of this region wrote a series of letters entitled "The North of Iowa" to the Dubuque *Iowa Transcript*. Through these letters he hoped to redress the "unproportional share of commendation bestowed upon the southern and more central parts of the Territory of Iowa" and gain more settlers for the Turkey Valley.

Although the author of "The North of Iowa"

did not reveal his identity, it is possible to venture a guess based on certain internal evidence contained in the half-dozen sketches dealing with the Turkey Valley. In the course of his reminiscences we learn that he was a native of the "State of New Jersey", that he himself rescued the skull of the wife of Julien Dubuque from the "jaws of a prairie wolf" in 1833 and deposited it in the "laboratory" of Doctor Timothy Mason in Dubuque. We are also informed that during the "early settlement" of Clayton County the author set out with some companions on a "kind of hunting, sauntering, or exploring expedition," up the Turkey River.

These circumstances were all applicable to Eliphalet Price, a prominent resident of Clayton County. Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1811, Price worked for a brief period at Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati before arriving at Galena in the fall of 1832. He was among the pioneers who crossed the Mississippi to the Dubuque mines before June 1, 1833, only to be driven out by troops from Fort Crawford. He was present at the execution of Patrick O'Connor on June 20, 1834. In the fall of that year he accompanied a party of hunters that explored the Turkey Valley and was so enraptured by its prospects that he returned to the region in the fall

of 1835 to become a permanent resident. He spent the winter of 1835-1836 on the present site of Osterdock. In the following fall Eliphalet Price and Robert Hetfield bought a mill and claim near Millville. Price soon disposed of his interest in this venture and selected a fertile tract about five miles from Millville on the north side of the Turkey River where he built a log cabin.

In 1839 Price married Mary D. Cottle. Eight children blessed this union. Price had a flare for writing and was especially interested in the history and archeology of northeastern Iowa. In 1845 he wrote a "thrilling and melancholy" story entitled "Mysterious Grave", and a little later his "Drummer Boy" won acclaim when it appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. He also contributed several articles to the *Annals of Iowa* in 1866 and 1867 under the title, "The Origin and Interpretation of the Names of the Rivers and Streams of Clayton County". In treatment, scope, and content this material is remarkably similar to the articles penned anonymously for the *Dubuque Iowa Transcript* in 1843.

Whoever he was, the contributor of "The North of Iowa" resented the fact that "numerous effusions" were printed about the soil, climate, and health of the southern part of the Territory while "little or nothing" had been said in praise of

the beautiful valleys of Clayton County. "No bard has sung its eulogy", he wrote, "no historian has recorded its ancient battle grounds; no antiquarian has contemplated the ruins of its towns and villages, once evidently the busy marts of a nation long since extinct."

Although admitting a steady immigration to northeastern Iowa since 1840, he advised westward bound emigrants to study the advantages afforded by the country where the Turkey River,

'with majestic sway,
Through hills disparted, ploughs her watery way.'

To enlighten anyone who might be interested, the self-appointed promoter set out in imagination up the Turkey Valley, painting word pictures of this scenic wonderland.

"The County of Clayton is the most northern organized county in the Territory of Iowa," he began, "and is bounded on the North by the lands of the Winnebago nation, on the East by the Mississippi River, South by the counties of Dubuque and Delaware and West by the county of Fayette and the Winnebago lands. . . . Just within the Southern Boundary of the County, from West to East, sweep the waters of the Turkey River — which is navigable for flat boats, at an ordinary stage of water, as high up as the Winnebago In-

dian Agency, being about sixty miles from its mouth. Where the river unites with the Mississippi, at this place, the land is low, heavy timbered, and subject to inundation; but, as you ascend the river, it gradually rises, and at the distance of three miles from its mouth, the prairie bottoms begin to present themselves to view. These bottoms afford beautiful farms, many of which are in a high state of cultivation."

As the emigrant proceeds up the Turkey Valley across these fertile bottomlands the scene changes. "Directly in their rear, the bluffs rise high and abrupt, covered with a heavy growth of superior timber, extending back from three to six miles in depth. At this point upon the main river, Little Turkey river empties itself. This stream affords a number of excellent mill privileges. Two mills have already been erected upon it. Near its mouth is situated the village of *Millville*." There, during the winter of 1839, the "Northern Army of Hunters of Turkey River" rendezvoused, prior to marching southward to repel the invading forces of Missouri.

Mindful of the emigrants' interest in history and tradition, the anonymous writer observed that the Turkey Valley was long the hunting ground and battlefield of powerful Indian tribes. At Park Prairie, a mile above the confluence of the little

Turkey with the Turkey, stood the ruins of the village of the powerful Fox chief, Kokishmo, a warrior whom Jonathan Carver mentioned in his *Travels in the Interior of North America*. There, according to tradition, Julien Dubuque came to woo the dusky daughter of the chief. In the "craggy, mountainous hills" of this "blood-bought" hunting ground, the bear, panther, lynx, wildcat, wolf, deer, and elk still roamed in 1843.

"Near the summit of a high hill, that rises from the prairie, directly in the rear of these ruins, is the entrance to a stupendous cavern, whose subterranean passages have been explored for some distance. It was here that Kokishmo placed his women, children and old men, when going to battle. A beautiful spring bubbles up from the centre of the great cavern, or hall, as it is sometimes called, and almost immediately disappears, running only a few feet. This room is supposed to be about sixty feet square, with an arch of solid rock extending over the whole, about seventy feet in height. From the arch or roof, clear white columns of spar descend, of various lengths, which, together with the particles of isinglass and lead ore, that stud the sides and roof, gives this stupendous cavern an appearance that no pen can describe, when lit up by the streaming light of the adventurer's torch."

The traveler could not help but register delight as he ascended the Turkey River above Kokishmo's village. "Innumerable springs gush out from the base of the high bluffs, and creep stealthily away among the tall waving grass of the prairie, until they mingle with the waters of the river; the groves of lofty timber — the abundance of spontaneous fruit — the clear transparent waters of the stream, meandering over a white pebbly bottom, and abounding with all the varieties of fish peculiar to the waters of the Mississippi, cannot but impart a pleasing recreation to the mind, fatigued with the business cares of life."

Continuing upstream past a number of "highly cultivated farms", the traveler reached Peck's Branch, named for Dudley Peck, a native of western New York, who located near the mouth of the river in 1835. A superb huntsman who persistently refused to trade his old-fashioned flint-lock rifle for a gun with a percussion lock, Peck found this region a hunter's paradise. "Near the mouth of this Branch, upon the main River, was formerly the great focus of resort for the wild Turkey. This bird usually descends upon the river bottoms late in the fall, to feed upon the horseweed and hackberry, and remains all winter. A few years ago they might be seen in great numbers along the river, for many miles, affording excellent sport for

the novitiate hunter, who had not yet learned to crawl upon the listening Deer or to drive the unwieldy Bear into his cave. But, of late years, as the emigrant has come in, unlike any other kind of game, they have diminished in numbers."

There were other reasons why Peck's Branch might prove attractive to the prospective emigrant. Rising in the "Colony", an extensive settlement in Delaware County, Peck's Branch meandered through "a heavy timbered country, well watered, and presenting a vast number of excellent farming locations. About three miles from its mouth, is an extensive mine or quarry of soft brown *Shale*, which, by many is thought to be the precursor of Stone Coal. When placed upon the fire it burns freely, producing a smell in nowise different from the Pittsburgh Coal. The land is subject to entry, and well calculated for farming purposes."

Equally attractive to the homeseeker was Cedar Creek, which emptied into the Turkey River about three miles above Peck's Branch. It rose on Highland Prairie in the center of the county and afforded an abundance of water power and many excellent water privileges. "It passes through a number of Prairie Bottoms, many of which are sufficiently large for farming purposes. The bluffs on each side rise high, with huge rocky sides, shaded with the tall Cedar, from which the

stream takes its name. The summit of the bluffs are crowned with large heavy timber, and a dense undergrowth of brush, which makes it a favorite resort for the black Bear. This animal abounds in this neighborhood, and not unfrequently weighs 500 or 600 pounds. Excepting the polar Bear, the black Bear of Iowa is perhaps the most formidable animal in North America. The Creek for a mile from its mouth, is wide, deep and sluggish, and is lined with tall elms, whose branches meeting, almost entirely exclude the rays of the sun. Here the wild Duck rears her tender brood, regardless of the marauding character of the night-prowling Wolf."

Ever on the alert for wild game of all kinds, our observing guide called attention to an otter slide on the side of a high bluff at the very mouth of Cedar Creek. "The warm water flowing from the Creek in winter," he explained, "prevents the river from freezing in the neighborhood of its mouth, and the Otter resort there at such times in great numbers to breathe the open air. They may frequently be seen of a still moonlight evening, in winter, sporting their gambols on the ice in this vicinity. They are very numerous in the waters of Turkey River, but are rarely hunted in consequence of their shy character."

Some four miles distant from the mouth of

Cedar Creek, the emigrant guide arrived at the mouth of Wayman's Branch, which joins the Turkey from the south. This stream was named for Colonel William W. Wayman, a native of New Hampshire and the first white man to settle in Clayton County. "Col. Wayman has a beautiful prairie farm at this place, with an extensive timbered bottom adjoining — the undergrowth of which is almost entirely composed of the wild Plumb tree, whose branches at this season of the year are bending with delicious fruit. The Black Currant grows here spontaneously in great quantities; while the Grapevine, reaching its tendrils arms from branch to branch, almost canopies the whole with a vineous arbor."

A short distance above, and emptying into the same horseshoe bend of the Turkey below present-day Elkport, our Baedeker of 1843 called attention to Elk Creek. "Near its mouth is a saw mill in full operation, owned by Messrs. Andrys. This stream rises in the county of Delaware, and passes through a dense forest of timber, composed almost entirely of the Sugar tree. There is, perhaps, no part of the Territory, where the manufacture of sugar from the saccharine juice of the hard Maple could be conducted more extensively and to better advantage than in the neighborhood of this stream."

A modern map of Clayton County shows the little town of Elkport between Elk Creek and the Volga River with the Turkey toward the east. "The junction of the Volga and Turkey rivers takes place about one mile from Elk Creek. The Volga rises away to the West, about 45 miles from its mouth. It is a narrow, winding, rapid stream, well timbered, with many beautiful prairie bottoms skirting its shores. About a year ago a German Settlement was commenced upon this stream, about eight miles from its mouth; but, in consequence of the late massacre of the Tegarden family, by the Winnebago Indians, they have abandoned their improvements." In 1841 the writer of this emigrant's guide was shown a small specimen of copper ore which was found by an Indian on a small tributary of the Volga.

Continuing up the Turkey, the traveler soon reached Panther Creek, so-named because a panther had carried away the child of an Indian squaw who was accompanying some Menominee Indians who had been granted permission by Kokishmo to hunt on the headwaters of the Turkey. Leaving this wild country, the emigrant of 1843 would shortly hear the lowing of herds and the bark of the dog, evidence of a farming community just ahead. Soon he would arrive at the "thriving and populous" Boardman Settlement

[Elkader] where Elisha Boardman settled in 1836 with his business partner, Horace D. Bronson. "Many of our most enterprising farmers are to be found here, with extensive farms, in a high state of cultivation. Mr. [Baldwin] Olmstead has established at this place a large dairy farm, from which he has realized a handsome profit during the past year, by finding a ready market for his butter and cheese at Fort Atkinson and the Indian Agency."

Then as now the Elkader area provided one of the most attractive farming regions in the entire Turkey Valley. Elisha Boardman had a fine farm located on a high bank overlooking the Turkey. "But what adds most to the value of the improvements, as well as to the future prosperity of the settlement, is one of the most grand and extensive mill-privileges, that, perhaps, is to be found on the northern waters of the Mississippi. The river, at this place, is two hundred feet in width; the rocks upon the opposite shore rise to the perpendicular height of fourteen feet, while the bed of the river is one smooth solid rock, extending from shore to shore, and reaching up and down the river for the distance of sixty yards each way. The whole body of Turkey river is crowded through this narrow gap, with surprising velocity. The capitalist who may be desirous of investing in

the erection of mills, would do well to have a little chat with Mr. Boardman. This place is only thirty miles from Fort Atkinson and the Indian Agency, which places are annually supplied by the General Government with about eighteen thousand dollars worth of Flour" hitherto furnished by St. Louis and Cincinnati.

The journal as presented in the *Iowa Transcript* closed five or six miles above modern Elkader where the emigrant would cross the southern boundary of the Neutral Ground occupied by the Winnebago Indians. A sufficient glimpse of this "Garden of Iowa" had nevertheless been provided to lure many a land-hungry settler to the area before the Winnebago ceded the region in 1846 and were removed to Minnesota. Since the letters were reprinted in other newspapers, they must have attracted many settlers to the Turkey Valley. In 1840, for example, Clayton and Delaware counties had 1269 inhabitants whereas in 1844 it was estimated that these counties contained a population of three thousand.

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