

Land, Elixir, and Staples

Less picturesque than politics, but more vital to the Burlington frontier, were the sales of public lands begun on November 19, 1838. Buyers came from points many miles distant on horseback and by wagon. About two thousand men were encamped in and about the village where Governor Lucas addressed a throng on settlers rights. "The hotels are thronged to overflowing", wrote one of them. "Barrooms, dining rooms, and wagons are metamorphosed into bed rooms. Dinners are eaten from a table or a stump, and thirst is quenched from a bar or a brook."

Settlers from nearly every State in the Union had flocked to the little frontier village. The Massachusetts Yankee was there to seize any bargain; the Kentuckian with his soft southern accent mingled with his brethren from Virginia, Maryland, and Tennessee; large numbers were gathered from Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana; the Granite State was represented; the Hadleys were registered from South Carolina; and besides there were a considerable number of settlers who had but lately come from the District of Columbia.

Township bidders equipped with maps, plats,

descriptions of tracts sold, and names of claimants crowded about the public land office. Augustus C. Dodge, a young man of twenty-seven, was the register, but Bernhart Henn, a clerk, acted as the crier at the sales. Scores — hundreds — of claims were quickly sold and the settler then felt secure in his home. "He is the lord of the soil. With an independent step he walks into the land-office, opens the time-worn saddle-bags, and counts out the 200 or 400 dollars, silver and gold, takes his certificate from the general government, and goes his way rejoicing."

Settlers paid for their land in Missouri bank notes, silver, gold, and Spanish coins. One German paid for his half section in old Spanish quarter-dollar pieces. Speculators and money sharks hovered around the land office to lend money to the settlers at high rates of interest. In the first two weeks the sales netted \$295,000. It was estimated that ninety per cent of these lands fell into the hands of actual settlers. Perhaps nowhere in the history of settlement and immigration can there be found a more democratic and a sounder economic condition.

Again in October of the following year, a public sale of land in sixty-three townships was announced. One resident expressed doubt as to the need and wisdom of such sales: times were hard,

temptations would be offered to speculators, moneyed men might charge as high as fifty per cent, and farmers would be forced to accede to "these modern Shylocks" or to lose all. "Where all this purchase money is to come from is yet to be ascertained." Only gold, silver, and bills of the banks of Missouri and Mineral Point were receivable for lands sold. "Rags for the people", complained one editor, "but gold and silver for the office holders."

Hundreds of farmers came from great distances and at heavy expense to attend these sales. There was no bidding against the claims of *bona fide* settlers in the slow process of transferring titles from the government to the actual occupant of a farm. Speculators and money lenders supplied sums of money at interest rates from twenty to twenty-eight per cent. But they also gave bonds to transfer in full when all principal and interest should be paid. By April the receipts from these sales amounted to over a quarter of a million dollars of which the sum of fifty thousand dollars was shipped to Saint Louis on the steamboat *Brazil*.

If security of title to his land was important to the pioneer, the preservation of his health was a subject of general concern. Medicines and pills were quick to penetrate the frontier region of Burlington to combat pains and to cure diseases — now unknown or happily forgotten. "What need

of Aladdin's lamp", once remarked James R. Lowell, "when we can build a palace with a patent pill." Even the staid *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* in 1839 advertised John B. McMunn's "Elixar of Opium", a drug for five or six maladies such as tetanus and hysteria. Recommended by eleven doctors, the compound was sold at thirty-seven and a half cents per bottle.

The frontiers along the Mississippi sometimes shook with fevers and ague but these were curable by Dr. Sands Vegetable Tonic Pills. Moffatt's Life Pills and Phoenix Bitters were remedies for a dozen different ills, including "general derangement of health". With due modesty the vendor was unwilling to abuse the gift of Providence and to assail the health of the Burlington community. He urged that the pills should not be taken in "inordinate quantities".

Dr. Fall's cure for "consumption, coughs, colds &c" was an Indian remedy discovered during a residence of twelve years among the Cherokees. The medicine, he promised, would provide the "greatest blessings that inventive genius and labors of men have ever bestowed upon suffering humanity in any age of the world." If such medicines satisfied patients on the Iowa frontiers, nature might cure their diseases.

Hasbrouk, a vendor of Wahoo, which was an

extract of herbs and a certain cure for fever and ague, declined to "resort to certificates to prove the wonderful cures affected by this medicine." Dr. Harlan's Mixture was also a cure for ague and fever. No cases of failure among a thousand patients were known — or recorded. The doctor trusted that the charge of "empiracy" would not be brought against him because only practising physicians were acting as his agents. Money refunded without cure. Quintel's Itch Ointment was a nostrum for skin diseases such as ringworm or an imported affliction called the "Illinois Mange".

But no measure or record exists of the cures by Jayne's remedies. His Tonic Vermifuge was medicine against worms and dyspepsia. His "Expectorant" was a remedy for eleven diseases and ills — from a cold to consumption. Nine diseases, including cholera, were curable by his Carminative Balsam, for "thousands of certificates have been received from Physicians, Clergymen, and families of the first respectability." "Attention! Bald Heads" in heavy type directed the plight of unfortunates of one sex to Jayne's Hair Tonic which promised to stop falling hair. In nineteen out of twenty cases it "will bring out a new and beautiful head of hair."

Though the vendors of patent medicine may have been foremost in the exploitation of adver-

tizing, they by no means monopolized attention. Dealers in staple ware proclaimed their services and catalogued their goods. Long prosaic lists of articles to be sold by Bridgeman and Partridge appeared in 1839 in the *Hawk-Eye and Patriot*. Burlington people were invited to buy mattresses, clover and timothy seed, boots, shoes, life preservers, plough moulds, bonnets, palmetto hats, saddles, bridles, wagons, hammers, nails, and mason's wedges. The store also had for sale a thousand barrels of salt, blasting and rifle powder, leather and hair trunks, and Madeira and Malagra wines. Housewives were told about shelves of drillings, shirtings, and calicoes, besides sugar, coffee, and snuff. "And a thousand and one other articles, which with the goods they are daily expecting, will render their assortment more complete than any ever offered in this Territory."

At C. J. Starr's store customers found a stock of groceries, boots, shoes, and hardware. In a home-made rhyme he cried his inventory of hardware:

Knives and Forks and Files
Wood Saws and Norfolk Latches
Candle Sticks and Coffee Mills
Halter Chains and Friction Matches.

William S. Edgar's drug store supplied the wants of many and ministered to their ills. Henry

W. Moore's advertisement of Rochelle brandy, Jamaica gin, rum, sherry, and American gin and brandy was given — and perhaps needed — but one insertion in the *Hawk-Eye and Patriot*.

Privation was a normal concomitant of pioneer life. Men and women worked hard and expected to have little more than necessities. But if any one in Burlington was ragged, hungry, or thirsty it was not the fault of the merchants.

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