

Come to Hamilton County

“Springfield, Vt., Dec. 21, 1857

“MR. EDITOR. — You are aware that I have for a long time past been *talking* of moving west, but never could get my mind up to the starting point till now. But the general upsetting of fondly cherished hopes during the late financial crisis has turned the attention of New England more strongly than ever towards the West; and we with several of our friends are anxious to know what inducements your place and section of country presents to farmers, mechanics, merchants, &c., compared with Minnesota and Kansas. What are the chances of obtaining land at government price suitable for farms, for you know we must have *cheap land* these hard times.

“Are there any good openings near you for Merchants, Doctors and Lawyers? Any information you can give us on this subject will oblige

Your friend,

James R. Howe.”

This inquiry was typical of the letters which Charles Aldrich, editor of the *Hamilton Freeman*, received “almost daily” in the fall of 1857. From

them he inferred that there would be a "heavy emigration next spring from the east." Come "straight to north-western Iowa," he advised Mr. Howe, where "cheap land" and any number of openings were available.

To a letter from John McDermott of Norristown, Pennsylvania, asking many questions, he published a reply in the *Freeman* on January 7, 1858. " 'The times' are considered very 'tight' in this section; but most business enterprises are proceeding with very little interruption. The winter has thus far been very mild and open — the roads in splendid condition — and out-door avocations have scarcely sustained a check. To see the life and industry that everywhere prevail, you would hardly suppose the times were considered 'hard.'

"There are no houses for rent here now. By writing to Messrs. Willson, town proprietors, we presume comfortable houses can be procured at short notice. They can build almost any kind of a domicil in about three weeks! Houses rent from \$60 to \$120 per year.

"There are two good saw-mills in town — and plenty of timber close at hand.

"In regard to the best time to come, we hardly know what to tell you. If the winter continues as genial as at present, the quicker the better. But at the farthest, come early enough in the Spring to

look about the country some before locating. The best and cheapest route for emigrants from your section, in our opinion, is — Railroad to Pittsburgh or Wheeling, and thence by steamboat to Davenport or Dubuque.

“There are no settlers in the sections named. The land in that vicinity is very fine.

“Next to money, about the best property a man of moderate means can bring with him, is a good horse team. He can either trade it for land, or find profitable employment with it.

“We believe North-Western Iowa to be one of the finest countries the sun shines upon. Scientific authority of the highest character backs us up in saying, that we have a soil not surpassed in fertility — a healthier climate than Western N. Y. or Pa. — a moderately fair supply of timber — any quantity of stone coal, building-stone, limestone, sand, common clays, fire-brick and potter’s clays, iron, gypsum, &c., &c. Good farmers and mechanics cannot but prosper anywhere in this vicinity. In many of the surrounding towns there are good openings for professional men.

“Nestled down in one of the prettiest little nooks in creation — in the center of this rich and fertile region — is one of the smartest and widest-awake towns in the West — called Webster City.”

That prospective settlers might have a clearer conception of the location, character, and business opportunities of the Hamilton County seat of government, Mr. Aldrich reprinted some "Notes on Webster City" written on December 15, 1857, by the travelling correspondent of the Dubuque *Express and Herald*. Of course the outspokenly Republican *Freeman* was not mentioned among the resources of Webster City, but what could be expected of a sheet so blindly partisan as the Dubuque paper!

"Nearly a year has rolled around since I visited this beautifully situated and thriving town, a description of which I gave to your readers then, and now business has enabled me to spend a few days with its hospitable and enterprising people. No one can become acquainted with the inhabitants of Webster City and not be pleased with them and the town. Education, refinement and morality are the distinguishing features of society, and the great object of the citizens seems to be to advance, not alone in wealth, but also in those attainments, mental and intellectual, that elevate the human mind, and enable man to enjoy life as designed by the Great Creator.

"Consequently, we see here no bickerings or jealousies among neighbors, but an universal desire to help each other forward in their struggles

in a new country. Such a community is naturally strong, and bound to prosper, and to keep gathering in more of the same material continually.

“Although the monetary crisis and panic have thrown their blighting mildew more or less upon all the new towns of the West, and have materially retarded their growth, yet Webster City has progressed, and is still progressing with a rapid and substantial increase, a sure sign these times that it is bound to become an important and commanding point.

“Over forty good buildings have been erected, and are in course of construction this season. Extensive preparations are making for building during the coming spring, and the buildings which are then to be put up are to be first class, either brick or stone. A handsome and durable bridge is now being thrown across the Boone river near the center of town, north and south, which connects the town with a beautiful addition on the east side recently laid out by Messrs. Grechenek and de Zeyk, Land Agents, Civil Engineers and Surveyors, of Webster City. These gentlemen are Hungarians, and were with Kossuth during the memorable struggle of Hungary for freedom. They purchased largely in this place, and have done much by their activity and enterprise for the advancement of its interests.

"A large, handsome and elegantly designed Town Hall, the plans for which were drawn up by the above firm, is now in course of erection, to be built by the Webster City Building Association, at a cost of about seven thousand dollars. The building will be two stories high. In the first story, three large and handsome store rooms will be fitted up. The Hall will be above these, and will be sixty feet deep by thirty wide, and will be fitted and furnished in the best modern style for public meetings, concerts, balls, parties, &c.

"Webster City is considered as one of the most promising towns on the line of the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road, and justly so, I think. With a commanding and central position in the rich agricultural valley of the Boone river, and with no competition from rival towns to impede its growth, it has everything in its favor to push it forward. The farming interests have kept pace with the growth of the town, and both town and country are prospering. An excellent and energetic class of farmers are fast making their fine farming lands equal to any in the state, and are now beginning to put up excellent farm buildings and improvements.

"A new and good stage road has been opened recently by the citizens of Webster City and Alden, by which the distance between the two places, or between the Iowa and Boone rivers is

shortened some eight miles. This road follows the proposed line of the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road.

"The present time, and the next spring, will be highly favorable times to settle here, and I now know of no point in the interior that offers superior advantages to new comers, to Webster City. The owners of property here are determined to sell to the right kind of men on the best terms. Sawed lumber can be had at very short notice, and buildings can be put up in quick order. Produce of all kinds is plenty, and can be had at reasonable rates, and merchandise is sold cheap in proportion, as the facilities for obtaining goods either from Dubuque or Iowa City are constantly improving. Rail Road facilities are fast approaching, and when our Dubuque and Pacific Road reaches even Independence, a trade will be poured in from this part of the West, that will be an agreeable surprise to Dubuque. Most of the trade now goes to Iowa City. Trade is done here mostly on a cash basis, and consequently there have been no failures as yet. Dubuque should seek after the business of this section of country.

"The Messrs. Willson, and other town proprietors are all in excellent spirits, and the motto of all the citizens seems to be Progress and Improvement. The Willson House, kept by D. A. Under-

down, Esq., is a large and excellent Hotel, and is well patronized.

"I am desired by the citizens to say that a good Jeweler and Watch Maker is needed here badly, and a liberal patronage will be insured to one who will settle here. At present all the work has to be sent to Fort Dodge. It is an excellent opening."

Inasmuch as "nine-tenths of our papers eventually find their way east," Mr. Aldrich believed that the publication of specific and accurate information about the locality was the best way of attracting settlers. Accordingly, on February 25, 1858, he printed "A Brief Description of Webster City and the County of Hamilton, State of Iowa".

"HAMILTON COUNTY is what was formerly known as Risley County. It was afterwards united to Yell, thus forming Webster County; and, during the session of 1856 and '57, it was again divided, forming Webster and Hamilton Counties.

"Hamilton County is 24 miles square, containing 368,640 acres of land, of which 271,940 have been sold; leaving 96,700 unsold, which is now subject to pre-emption and entry.

"The first sales of land in this County were made in the year 1852; but the first immigration of any importance was during the summer of 1855.

The County now contains about 2,500 inhabitants, and property valued at \$1,400,000, according to the Assessment of May 1st, 1857.

“The County is well watered by the Boone, Skunk and White Fox Rivers, the banks of which are skirted with belts of timber of excellent quality, varying from one-fourth to three miles in width. The Boone runs through the western portion of the County, from North to South; and the Skunk through the eastern portion, in the same direction. All of these streams are supplied with Limestone of excellent quality, and Bituminous Coal is found in abundance cropping out along the banks of the Boone.

“The Prairie is well watered by small streams and spring ponds, and is unsurpassed by any in this or any other State for fertility of soil. Water of superior quality is found by digging from 8 to 30 feet.

“In regard to the unsurpassed fertility of our soil, there can be no question. D. D. Owen, U. S. Geologist, made a thorough scientific exploration of this region, some years ago, the results of which were published under authority of Congress. After stating the constituents of our soil, he says this identical region is ‘the most fertile upland plain in America.’ His work may be found in almost every public library, and consulted by any

desiring further information. This is scientific evidence of the highest character, and it cannot be disputed.

“The County contains four Towns, viz: Webster City, Homer, Marion City and Hawley. Homer was the County Seat of old Webster County, but in the division of the County, the County Seat was located at Webster City by an act of the Legislature.

“Webster City was laid out in July, 1855, and it now contains between 80 and 100 buildings, and at the present time the total valuation of personal property and town lots amounts to \$150,000. The town now contains between four and five hundred inhabitants; three Hotels, two Mills, one Printing Office (*Hamilton Freeman*) six Stores, one Blacksmith shop, one Wagon Shop, one Livery Stable, two Law Offices, four land Offices, four Physicians, &c. A fine Bridge costing \$3000 spans the Boone River at this place.

“The route of the Dubuque & Pacific Railroad crosses the County from east to west, through Hawley and Webster City. Webster City being the central point between the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, it is supposed that the central or principal division of the Road will be located here.

“There being no competing town within twenty miles either east or west, and commanding the en-

tire trade of the Boone Valley from its source to its mouth — a distance of some 50 miles of well-timbered country — render the future of Webster City as promising as that of any inland town in the State. The liberal policy of the proprietors of the town gives life, energy and enterprise to every new undertaking.

“Hamilton County wants *good* Farmers. There is no county in this State where Farmers have finer prospects or choicer lands for raising stock than our own.

“Webster City wants a Grist Mill, a Tin Shop, a Wagon and Plow Manufactory, a Harness Maker, one or two Brick Makers, and a first-rate Jeweler; and, in fact, we need all kinds of mechanics. A great number of buildings will be erected the coming summer, and mechanics will find plenty of work and good pay.

“Our town lies in the direct line of the proposed Keokuk and St. Peters R. R.; and we feel assured that it cannot miss us, not only because of our being in the direct line, but from the face of the country through which it must pass.

“All the lands lying within the R. R. grant will be brought into market on the 21st of June, at \$2.50 per acre, besides 140,000 acres of new land in this District.

“We have a daily mail east and west, from

Dubuque to Sioux City; and a weekly mail north and south.

“Our inhabitants are all of an intelligent and enterprising class. We have good schools and good society.

“All persons who are looking for a home in the West, will find this a perfectly healthy location. We need *no* Physicians — those now here are not earning their bread at their profession.”

Apparently these enthusiastic descriptions of the “advantages, prospects and wants” of the Webster City region made a favorable impression for on March 4th the *Freeman* reported: “There is more travel over the road through this section than there has been for many months previous. It really seems a little like old times.”