

The Character of the Country: Excerpts

EDITED BY

LOREN N. HORTON

"Since coming to Dubuque I have got to know the town very well and the character of the Country round about."

—James Lonsdale Broderick

In 1876, James Lonsdale Broderick, a land agent and a member of an old farming family, came from Swaledale in England to Dubuque for the winter. During his six months' stay he kept a diary of his travel, his impressions of Iowa and the people he met. Many of those people were relatives of families Broderick knew in England. They had emigrated to Dubuque during the early part of the nineteenth century when serious unemployment occurred in the lead-mining industry of Swaledale, an isolated valley in Yorkshire where farming and the mining of lead ore had been the chief occupations since Roman times. When Broderick visited this colony of Yorkshire people in Dubuque, he was well-equipped to observe their daily life and work habits. As agent for a wealthy and well-connected peer of the realm, Broderick was familiar with farming techniques and the raising of livestock. He shrewdly assessed what he saw and carefully noted what would be useful to him.

The following excerpts are taken from his diary, edited by Loren N. Horton, and on sale now from the Division of the State Historical Society.

DECEMBER, 1876. We went the other day to see Ryan's pig-killing and Pork-packing Establishment. It is not easy to describe the horrors of such a place. When we entered the ground floor, we could scarcely see anything, our eyes being accustomed and set to the bright snow outside. We seemed in danger of being run over by men wheeling barrels of lard and pork. The floor was very dirty. We went to the office, a room on one side, and got permission of Mr. Ryan to go above to see the pigs slaughtered. We passed a host of butchers cutting up, next gutting, then about 15 scrapers, arranged on each side of a long bench upon which the pigs were rolled from one to another. We had some difficulty in passing them as there was barely room to walk behind them on account of an opening between the flooring and the wall through which the scrapings fell. The vapor arising from the scalding-vat filled all the room with such a dense fog that it was impossible to see anything more than 1 yard off. We would hear the pigs screaming, the hot water splashing, see next to nothing, and the stench from the cleaners below was dreadful. Pushing forward we next came to the vat in which 5 or 6 newly-killed pigs were being scalded. Two men with poles were pushing them about and keeping them under water. When ready for scraping they are tipped out, one at a time, on to the bench.

Ed.

Climbing some steps we came to the

place where the atrocities were being perpetuated, a room divided by a partition 4 ft. 6 in. high or so, with a door to pass the pigs through from the catcher to the butcher. The catcher puts a short chain round the hind leg of a pig and hooks it on to another chain connected to the Steam Engine. Another man pulls a rope and the pig is drawn out from the rest, and hangs by one leg, head downwards, screaming lustily. The short chain is next attached to another, which hangs from a little pulley shaped wheel, and the Engine chain is detached. There is a bar of iron extending round the room on which the little wheel runs. The pig is then pushed forward through the door to the butcher, who takes hold of a foreleg and sticks the knife into it. It is then pushed on again to those just killed before. When the first is dead it is sent down a slide into the scalding vat, before mentioned. The pigs are driven up an incline to the top of the building thus saving an amount of lifting which would otherwise have to be done. It is very interesting and instructive to see such things done on a large scale, but I must say that I have not the slightest desire to go there again. As many as 700 hogs were killed in this establishment in one day.

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 FRIDAY, DEC. 8. Yesterday Evening Mr. Woodward and I went as invited by Mr. Coates to eat Venison with him. Mrs. Coates had made a pie of it which was very good, and some of it was fried, also very good but rather hard. We had Green Tea, as usual, since coming to Iowa, which was good, but I do not like it so well as good



James Lonsdale Broderick

black tea. After the cream is put in, it looks exactly the color of whey. After tea Mrs. John R. Waller came in and we had a long discussion on the election of President and Tax Officers, the franchise, and the merits of the two systems of Government in England and the U.S. I find that our Government has a great many admirers in America, who are tired of the constant

change of Office holders, re-elections, the ignorant vote, the Catholic vote governed by the Priests, and the shameful way in which the Newspapers of both Republicans and Democrats try to degrade the opposite Party and the characters of the individuals representing it. The American Newspapers are very poor affairs in the way of Politics and, to pamper the tastes of the multitude, indulge in monstrous headings and spiteful language. Some of them have, notwithstanding, the merit of sparing no pains in gathering news from all parts of the world. If the Americans desired better Papers, of course, they could get them, at the same price as the bad ones; therefore, they (majority) have no one to blame but themselves for it.

How this system of Universal suffrage, which now seems to be a source of danger to the U.S., will answer when a higher stage of intellectual development is attained, remains to be shown in the future, but certain, it is, there are at present large numbers to whom it is pure folly to entrust with a vote.

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MONDAY, DEC. 25, CHRISTMAS DAY. It is surprising where all the turkeys are raised that are eaten here, and the chickens. The beef about Dubuque is very inferior with scarcely any fat upon it. The people here won't buy fat meat, and when they do, they make the butcher take it off. And the hams are trimmed down till they are nothing but lean, the fat being melted down into lard. When one dines with the Americans they give one all kinds

of eatables and nearly all at once, filling the plate as long as it will hold anything. At the Hotels a man orders everything that he imagines he can eat, and they are all placed before him at once. He is then compelled to eat very quickly or some of his dainties would get cold. Is it not better to have things served up in succession, just as required, and to take a little more time? Of course the Americans live well, on three meals a day, with butcher's meat to every meal; in other words, they live upon "three dinners a day."

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MONDAY, FEB. 26. I saw Simon Brunskill at Wm. Woodward's. He is getting old. He cannot talk very well; there is something the matter with his throat. He seems partly paralyzed. He talked about my father and told me that he was a very strong young man and that he used to mow for them at Spring End [Broderick's home]. He remembers their building Gunnerside Bridge and their putting a bottle of Brandy into the South pier. Some old man, who was tipsy, asked for and got a taste of it before it was put in and shed tears when he saw it securely walled in, where he could never again get at it to taste it.

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TUESDAY, MAR. 20. We drove out to the [New Melleray] Monastery; as we had two very excellent horses and a light cutter, the sleighing was good The Brothers (Monks) were very kind to us. They put up our horses and fed them well. Father Bernard was trying to cure the paralysed arm of a

boy with a galvanic Battery. He does a little doctoring. There were others there for his advice. Father Albrecht and another showed us a very fine thoroughbred shorthorn bull that had taken several prizes. In Illinois last year he was shown against an imported bull that cost £3,000 and took the prize. He is a mixture of the Booth and Bates' breed. They have some very good thoroughbred cows. One or two of them were beauties. I found fault with one of their cows on account of its being too wide across the hips; one of them said he never heard of a cow being too wide in the hips before. I explained to him that the fashion in that respect had altered of late in England. They seemed to think me a great judge of Shorthorns. They had a number of young horses. Their cows were not all shorthorns; they say the first cross between the common cows and shorthorn bull make the best bullocks. Some of them, the shorthorns, have laid out all winter. They have any quantity of hogs, mostly black and black and white. They were all rooting in the middens for corn. We saw about 300 sheep. They have a splendid barn. The hay mow which is in the middle is furnished with a horse-forking apparatus [and] an entrance for the wagons loaded with hay. A wooden rail under the ridge tree is so fixed that when the forkful of hay is raised from the wagon it can be carried to any part of the building. The Brothers number about 58 and do all their own

work. We were invited to lunch and had beef, bread, cheese, butter, and each a bottle of wine of their own making. They are building a new Monastery and have got a portion of it completed. They have two steam-boilers from which to run 4 or 5 rows of iron pipes all round the Chapel and other rooms. When in the Chapel, Albrecht requested us to join their order and bring them some money into the concern. We jokingly declined saying we could not manage to rise at 2 in the morning for prayers, &c. They go to bed at 7 in Winter and 8 in Summer and rise at two. They occupy and own 2,900 acres of land at the Monastery and have another farm at Council Bluffs on the Missouri. They all wear cowls with a leather belt round the waist and long white smocks of cloth. We did not see more than 12 of them. □