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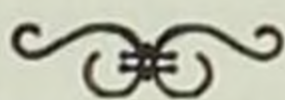
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VOL. XXXII

ISSUED IN OCTOBER 1951

No. 10

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Crossroads of Empire

Next to Black Hawk, Keokuk was probably the greatest Indian in Iowa history. Powerful in physique, brave of heart, and courageous in battle, Keokuk was one of the most brilliant orators and able leaders produced by the red men in North America. His name is proudly borne by an Iowa City and an Iowa county, while scores of streets and townships bear his name.

The city of Keokuk is one of the most strategically situated towns in Iowa. Located at the junction of two great rivers — the Mississippi and the Des Moines — the site was recognized as a key point by French, Spanish, and English fur traders years before the Louisiana Purchase. The Indians called the present site of Keokuk *Puck-e-she-tuck*, or foot of the rapids; the white men were quick to hail it the "Gate City of Iowa."

There was ample reason for a flourishing town to grow at present-day Keokuk. The dangerous "Lower" or Des Moines Rapids, stretching from Keokuk to Montrose along the Mississippi, made

Keokuk a logical point for the transfer of cargoes during periods of low water. Keokuk was also the depot for the transfer of all goods up the Des Moines River as far as Fort Des Moines, later the capital of Iowa. This was a highly significant fact, for the most populous counties in Iowa prior to 1860 extended along the western shore of the Mississippi, and along both banks of the Des Moines as far as Polk County. Thus the richest cargoes of the Upper Mississippi and the Des Moines passed the bustling Keokuk levees.

Since Keokuk was of such strategic importance, it was natural that some of the earliest and greatest events in the story of transportation and communication took place at Keokuk. The first steamboat — the *Western Engineer* — arrived at the site of Keokuk in 1820, only to be repelled by the Rapids. The first log cabin for the transshipment of freight was used at Keokuk six years before the Black Hawk Purchase was opened to settlement. The first telegraph to reach Iowa entered at Keokuk in the summer of 1848. The effort to canalize the Des Moines River in the years prior to the Civil War was the only venture of its kind in the story of Iowa. The first railroad to reach the state capital was built up the populous Des Moines Valley rather than westward from the Mississippi. Truly, Keokuk has played a dynamic role in Iowa history.

The significance of Keokuk was recognized

from the start — some of the first ferries and bridges to cross the Mississippi were located there. The construction of the Des Moines Rapids Canal between 1869 and 1877 was one of the great engineering feats of that period. And the completion of the gigantic lock and power dam across the Mississippi in 1913 was the first and greatest project of this kind to harness the Father of Waters. Today blueprints have been drawn to eliminate the present bottleneck to navigation on the Upper Mississippi by enlarging the locks to double the size of any that have been built thus far on the mighty Father of Waters.

The story of Keokuk, its ferries and bridges, its canals and its power dams, is intimately associated with the development of the Hawkeye State.

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