

By Boat and Covered Wagon

On the first of June, 1833, the Black Hawk Purchase was opened to settlement and the ever growing stream of pioneers began to cross the Upper Mississippi. The first census of Wisconsin Territory in 1836 found more than ten thousand people living in the two Iowa counties. Two years later the total had more than doubled, while by 1840 forty-three thousand people had settled in the Territory of Iowa. During the following decade the population increased to nearly two hundred thousand, and the fifties saw such a tide of immigrants sweep into the state and out on the prairies that the inhabitants of the commonwealth more than trebled.

What allurements drew this flood of people from their far-off homes in Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and New York, or the nearer regions of Indiana, Missouri, Illinois? At a much earlier date the abundance of furs had lured the hardy frontiersman and trapper to the Iowa land. Then her veins of lead, with the promise of quick wealth in the hills and bluffs about Dubuque, drew rugged adventurers. But the fame of rich Iowa soil constituted the principal attraction for the pioneer.

Those who sought the "unsighted rim of the

western world" by the river route found the journey an ever changing panorama as the homely but efficient stern-wheelers slapped their way "along the wide Ohio between rough, uncultivated banks toward the wider Mississippi." At the start a confusion of sights and sounds attracted the attention of the immigrants. Drays rattled over the wharf, discordant cries of workmen loading a late consignment of freight mingled with the river songs of the Negro boatmen, and the hoarse puffing and panting of the high-pressure engine added to the general din. Finally a throaty blast from the whistle obscured the twin smoke-stacks in a cloud of steam, the paddle wheel turned slowly, and the boat slipped away on the long journey through the heart of the continent.

Stops were made at towns along the way to load and unload freight and to replenish the wood supply for the fire-box. Such halts allowed the cabin passengers time for a stroll and gave the immigrants an opportunity to renew their supply of food. As the boat plowed on, leaving a foam-tipped wake astern, passengers sat for hours on deck watching the rush of steam from the pipe above their heads and the smoke trails floating over the passing panorama of bluffs and hills, of groves and prairies. Sometimes on hot nights they remained on deck "until the stars were pale under the coming light of morning."

As returning steamers passed, the bells of both

boats rang out in salutation. Leaving the glassy waters of the Ohio, the boat turned its prow upstream on the turbid bosom of the Mississippi. Up the long, irregular sweeps of this river to Cape Girardeau, Chester, and Ste. Genevieve the journey continued. Herculaneum with its high shot tower and Jefferson Barracks on its limestone bluff were reached and passed. St. Louis came into view.

There the Iowa-bound travelers took passage on a smaller boat for the north. After more than a month of river voyaging the immigrants reached their destination. They disembarked at the river cities — farmer families and townsmen eager to push on to a new home, mechanics with their tools and personal effects hoping to find employment, speculators with an eye for profits, merchants with goods for the frontier trade, and visitors who came to see what inducements the new country had to offer.

Although many used the water routes to Iowa, travel by wagon predominated. Of this migration John B. Newhall, early Iowa press agent, has left a clear picture. During the years 1836 and 1837, he says, "the roads were literally lined with the long blue wagons of the emigrants slowly wending their way over the broad prairies — the cattle and hogs, men and dogs, and frequently women and children, forming the rear of the van — often ten, twenty, and thirty wagons in company. Ask them,

when and where you would, their destination was the 'Black Hawk Purchase.' "

At sunset halts for the night were made by the road-weary travelers. In the glowing embers of the camp fire the housewife cooked a simple evening meal for the hungry family. They went to bed as soon as it grew dark. Early in the morning they were up and on their way again. Slowly they crawled westward day by day, week by week. They joined others bound the same way. At times heavy rains made the road bottomless, and mired wheels and broken traces halted the caravan. Wagons were unloaded, and all helped in extricating them. Sometimes halts were made over night at taverns along the way. When the Mississippi was reached the movers gathered into encampments to await their turn to be ferried across the river.

Thus they came, the pioneers, to the land of their vision. Where they crossed the Mississippi, cities grew up on the Iowa shore — Dubuque, Clinton, Davenport, Muscatine, Burlington, Fort Madison, and Keokuk. The man-propelled flat-boat gave way to the horse ferry, and it, in turn, to the ferry propelled by steam, and each was taxed to capacity by the oncoming settlers. The way to Iowa was open.

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