

## Benton County

*Vinton*

December 17th

Left Cedar Rapids this morning for Vinton, a distance of twenty-five miles. On this route we came once more in the range of the Western Stage Company, whose line we patronize in preference to any other, because, thus far in our experience in Iowa traveling, it is the best. Mr. Joseph Sharpe carries the mail on this route, and takes passengers when he can find them stupid enough to ride on his forbidding sleds and carts. Last week we were obliged to go from Sand Spring to Anamosa on one of his sleds—a Western patriarch of its family of vehicles. We had cold mail bags for a seat; nothing but *Ursa Major* to lean our back against, and paid our dollar and a half for the twenty miles ride in this covered carriage—covered by the blue concave through which comets have recently, and from time immemorial, been punching holes. When Mr. Sharpe runs coaches or sleds, or even carts, embracing any of the elements of comfort, and charges any price below robbers' rates, we may patronize him—when nothing better can be done.

The Western Stage Company runs well-covered hacks, when the sleighing, as, at this time, is

poor, between Cedar Rapids and this place; and as they keep none but supple horses, the traveler gets over the ground as rapidly as he could expect with any thing short of steam. Some of the way, today, where the roads were prime, the steeds seemed to almost fly. As the day was warm and we wished to see the country, we took a seat beside Jehu, and kept it all the way. The country is beautiful, and the ride was exhilarating. In crossing Bear Creek, into which the descent is decidedly declivitous, as there was a foot or more of ice on the shore, over which the wheels drop suddenly down, the feat is dangerous to outsiders. The driver gave us due warning of the perils of the plunge, and we grasped the iron railings at our side with both hands. Suddenly, however, our center of gravity advanced a fraction of a degree northward, and we were suspended by the side of the hack, our feet very near the water, and our shawl in it.—No bones were broken, and Bear Creek did not seem greatly disturbed by the adventure, notwithstanding it came very near converting us into a "stiff cold water-man."

We find Vinton, the shire-town of Benton county, most delightedly located on the south side of the Cedar river. It has broad streets, very wide, running at right angles and some of them as level as a house floor. It was first settled in 1851. Among the pioneers were C. C. Charles, John S. Tilford, and Dr. J. C. Traer. The last

two are still living here. Mr. Tilford has a nursery of ten or twenty thousand apple trees, most of which will be ready for transplanting next spring. His, we believe, is the only nursery in the county, and it will do very much toward supplying this section with fruit. In a very few years, we presume, Benton county will produce all the apples needed here.

Mr. Traer is a banker, and the local commissioner of the Blind Asylum, which is located here, and the site of which we have visited. It is half a mile from the village, on high ground, overlooking a wide extent of country. They embrace forty acres generously donated by J. W. O. Webb, and worth forty dollars per acre. The walls of the building, which fronts the east, are already up.—The whole length of the building will be 220 feet; the height from the basement to the top of the dome, 115 feet; its depth 70 feet. The center or main building—the part designed to be completed at first—is 108 feet long, and its height four stories above the basement. The outside walls are to have a front of dressed stone, the work being crandalled, with beveled joints, and will have a very neat and rich appearance. The rear wall and ends are to be of hammer-dressed stone. The building stands on a plat of twelve acres, twenty rods in front. The remainder of the land is reserved for gardens, orchards, &c. The cost of the center building,—now rising, will be about forty thou-

sand dollars. It is to be heated by steam, and lighted with gas.—Everything about it is most commodiously arranged. Dr. Traer visited the asylums of several States in order to get the best plan.—His efforts are untiring, and Iowa will ere long have a model Asylum for the Blind.

The stone used in the building is limestone, and is brought from a quarry three miles above the village, and directly on the south bank of the Cedar. In company with Dr. Traer we have visited the spot, and find as good a quarry of the kind as we have seen in these parts. The stone is of a very light gray color, and makes a richer front, in our estimation, than marble. The bank in which the quarry is found, is fifty feet high, and stretches for half a mile along the shore. The stone is very easy of transportation by water, and at this time by land, the sledding from that point to the site of the Asylum being good. There is, doubtless, stone enough in the quarry to build the Pompeii of the West. The nature of the stone may be gathered from the fact that a cute Yankee picked up one of our specimens at the Shields House, and with his jackknife made a handsome pipe of it in less than one hour. The pipe we have in our possession, and having no other use for such a domestic utensil, we shall, on our return to Dubuque, keep it on exhibition in our editorial sanctum—admittance one cent—children half price.

The population of Vinton is eleven or twelve

hundred. It has about twenty stores, and some of them, like Mr. P. Olmstead's dry goods store, are spacious and well filled. There are four wagon shops in this place; five blacksmith shops; two cabinet shops; a harness shop; two steam saw mills; an excellent flouring mill, the property of Taggart & Brother; and a brick Court House of fair dimensions, in the center of a beautiful yard 260 feet square, and decorated with maple, cottonwood, locust, willow, hickory, cedar and cherry trees. A high fence, with turned posts and pickets, the best in this part of the country—surrounds the court yard—showing much taste on the part of somebody.

The Odd Fellows and Free Masons have each a hall, and the Baptists and New School Presbyterians have neat little brick churches. The Old School Presbyterians and United Brethren also have church edifices. The Methodists have a large congregation meeting at present, in the Court House. There are one or two other religious societies in the place.

Vinton has two weekly newspapers—the *Eagle* and *Democrat*. We found Mr. W. W. Hanford of the former, and Mr. Fowler of the latter, busy at the case, acting the double part of publishers, and compositors. They are both industrious and worthy men, and are deserving of liberal support from the "sovereigns" of the county. The editor of the *Eagle* is Thomas Drummond, Esq., a young

man of decided talents and sharp points in his character. He was a member of the last General Assembly, he being in the Lower House, where he made his mark. His career may be like that of some other young men. Richelieu was Secretary of State at thirty-one. Bolingbroke and Pitt were ministers almost as soon as they were men. Pascal was an author at sixteen and John Quincy Adams held a place of honor at about the same age. Spurgeon, at twenty-five, draws the largest congregation of any man of any profession in Christendom. One of the greatest battles of modern times, that of Lepanto, was won by Don John, of Austria, at the age of twenty-five. Gaston de Foix was a victor on the plains of Ravenna, at twenty-two. The field is as wide now as it ever was for the display of genius and prowess on the part of young men.

Vinton has two hotels, Shields's and the Fremont House. We have never found kinder people in a public house, than Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Shields, who have the happy faculty of making their guests feel at home. They are considerate people; treat a stranger well, and charge him very moderately for entertaining him. When he goes away, he will have no objections to returning—sometime. We dined today at the Fremont House, in company with friends, Drummond and Traer. Mr. Russell Jones, the proprietor of the house, is full of cheer always, and, after dinner, of something

else. He sets a good table, and being an early settler here, is known and popular all over the country. He kept a public house here when the country was so full of people—in the days of briskest speculation, that a man was willing to pay twenty-five cents for the privilege of standing outside of the inn all night, and listen at the key-hole to the snoring within.

Our sumptuous dinner at the Fremont House was slightly marred by the indisposition of Mr. Drummond. Being "under the weather," he was able to eat nothing excepting two plates full of "chicken fixins," two slices of roast beef, and pastry to match! He is better this evening.

One of the best bridges in the Cedar Valley crosses the river at Vinton. Who built it we know not, though, to borrow a pun from Theodore Hook, if we should cross it we might be tolled.

There is good water power here. All that is needed is a race two miles long, which can easily be dug—and will be, sometime. Vinton is bound to rise, for the country is rich around it, and the trade and business of the county centers here. Two or three years hence, when the Cedar Valley Railroad spans Benton county, a livery stable for iron horses may be located here.

The first entry of land in Benton county was made in 1844; there was but little settlement, however, prior to 1851, when it became rapid and has thus continued up to this time, with some modera-

tion during the past year. The soil of the county is very fertile; it is well watered; has an abundance of timber and limestone, and holds out strong inducements to emigrants. It is partly in the valleys of the Cedar river and the Iowa, the former crossing the northwestern townships; the latter the southwestern.—Tributaries of these large and beautiful streams flow from elevated prairie land in the central part of the county. These tributaries are called creeks, and take the names of Prairie, Bear, Salt, Wild Cat, Mud, Crooked, Pratt, Hinckley, Rock, Big, Blue and Dudgeon.—Some of them we have crossed, and their water is as clear as crystal. Considerable timber is found on some of them. Several beautiful groves are found in Benton county.

In this county are four flouring mills, and sixteen saw mills. There are also sixteen post offices. Aside from the county seat, are several little villages. Marysville, the northeastern township, has three hundred inhabitants, and two churches. Benton City, six miles east of Vinton, on the Cedar, has at least two hundred inhabitants, and two steam saw mills, and two steam flouring mills.—Shellsburg, in Center township, ten miles southeast of Vinton, has two hundred inhabitants. Geneva, in Big Grove, six miles southwest of the county seat, has about one hundred and fifty. About twice its size is Irving, though a portion of it is in Tama county.



Most of these facts in regard to the villages in Benton county, we obtained from Judge Samuel Douglas, late Democratic candidate for Secretary of State. He is well posted in county matters, and highly communicative. All the county roads run on section lines alone, a plan originated by the Judge—though *this* fact we learn from another source; and the county is well supplied with roads, in building which Judge Douglas has been one of the prime movers. He has been in this county about four years. Twenty years ago he was the editor of the *Ohio State Journal*, hence he is of Whig antecedents. He also—at a subsequent period, we believe—edited the *Cadiz, (O.) Organ*, and also the *Tuscarawas Advocate*. He is a veteran ex-member of the editorial fraternity. From the exalted position of a journalist, he has sunken to that of a County Judge! Alas! Alas!

The other officers of Benton county are, John W. Filkins, Treasurer and Recorder; James Chapin, Clerk of the District Court; Joseph Dysart, Superintendent of Public Instruction; James Jones, Coroner; Elmyrrh Howard, Sheriff; Wesley Whipple, Surveyor. These officers are about equally divided between the Republicans and Democrats. From Mr. Joseph Dysart, the popular and efficient Superintendent of the schools of the county, we gather the following facts: There are twenty township school districts, and ninety-one sub-districts, and forty-one school-houses. A few

are well planned and properly seated; the majority of them, however, afford but indifferent accommodations to pupils. Forty-one schools were taught last summer four months. Of the teachers, nine were males, employed at an average compensation of twenty-one dollars per month; thirty-two females, whose average pay amounted to thirteen dollars per month. About seventy-five per cent of the textbooks used were recommended by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. There are now fifty-five schools in operation. Between five and twenty-one years of age there are 3098 persons—1662 males, and 1436 females. For the support of Schools the County Judge levied \$3,794.96—the townships boards \$5,816.99—in all \$9,611.95. For the erecting and furnishing of school-houses there was levied the sum \$6,518.94; for incidental expenses, \$688.65. Taxes for the support of schools were levied in all but four townships in the county.—Ninety-five teachers' certificates have been granted. The people generally manifest a deep interest in education.

The Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska Railroad is projected across this county, with a branch running up the Cedar Valley through Vinton. The Dubuque Western road will doubtless touch the southeastern part of the county.

From five to ten thousand gallons of sorghum have been raised in Benton county this year, and the farmers will go into the business much more

extensively next year. We met, as we came up from Cedar Rapids yesterday, two or three droves of fine looking shoats, raised in Benton county. We are told that there are several horses of the Morgan stock in this county. Mr. J. E. Van-Meter, of Union township, has a large stock of pure short horn and Durham cattle. But few sheep are raised here, and not many mules.—An agricultural society is needed in Benton county, and will probably be organized in a few months. It will do much to excite competition, and thus to improve the stock of the county. We say to the enterprising farmers and mechanics of Benton county, fail not to have a Fair in the autumn of 1859. Among other animals to be exhibited then, will be a calf, the property of "mine host," Mr. Shields. We have seen nothing superior to it in the Cedar Valley, except the calf at Waterloo, of which we spoke last September—owned by Henry Sherman.

About a mile from Vinton, are thirty or forty trappers, camped out, of the Mishquaqua [Mesquaki] tribe. Game of the fur kind is abundant in this county. We have seen today more muskrats' nests, within two miles of Vinton, than we ever saw before. Minks are also plenty, and their pelts are in fair demand. The Indians take no paper money for them, and prefer articles of clothing to silver, their favorite coin. Beaver and otters are caught within one mile of Vinton village. Thus,

as we told the members of the Vinton Literary Association last evening,

Beside the stream where beavers build today,  
And timid muskrats unmolested play,  
Tomorrow stands the village, spreading wide,  
Henceforth the home where Culture shall abide.

Sunday, December 19

At the seat of justice of Benton county, we find some very worthy clergymen. Mr. Chapin, Pastor of the Baptist Church, Mr. James Kirk of the Old School Presbyterian, and Mr. Nelson C. Robinson of the New School, are held in high esteem, not only by the members of their several congregations, but by the community generally. We speak of these gentlemen because we have made their acquaintance and have ascertained their standing. They are interested in the mental culture as well as moral welfare of the people of Vinton, and are doing their best to sustain a Literary Association, which has recently been formed. We trust they will make a movement, without delay, towards securing the erection of a Union School House—at present, the chief desideratum of this lovely village.

We were pleased, this morning, with Mr. Ashel Chapin's reading of the Scriptures. He read *naturally*, and evidently with the intention of making the sense clear and the sentiment impressive. Why is there not more pains taken with this exercise? Why should we have so much execrable and

excruciating pulpit readings? We know of one man who reads hymns so badly, that some people make it an excuse to stay away from his church. There is no reason why ministers should recite poetry worse than school boys a dozen years old. Even in a pulpit, the voice should fall when the sense requires it, though it be in the middle of a verse. We fear the spirit of Dr. Watts would rest very uneasily, could he listen to some Sabbath recitations. A hymn well read, makes a good impression, as well as when it is well sung. There is no devotion in murdering it in either exercise.

Again, why do ninety-nine hundredths of ministers and of praying laymen, fail to let the voice fall, in closing a prayer, before pronouncing the word "amen?" This word is as complete a sentence as there is in the English language. We have heard a great many doctors of divinity make a prayer, but few that were sufficient doctors of elocution as to close a petition at the throne of grace with proper cadences. Children, we believe, are invariably taught or allowed, in reciting the Lord's Prayer, to run the last two sentences into one, but doctors of divinity and all *men*, should not only put away "childish things" but childish methods of recitation.