

THE PALIMPSEST

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Industry in 1840

In 1840, seven years after permanent settlement began in the Black Hawk Purchase, the first federal census was started in the Territory of Iowa. The statistics of the sixth United States enumeration were "completed and closed within five calendar months" — between June 1 and November 1, 1840. They revealed that industry was still in the handicraft stage.

Only eighteen of the twenty-two counties that had been established by law were included in the Census of 1840, and they contained 43,112 inhabitants. The five most populous counties were Van Buren — 6,146, Lee — 6,093, Des Moines — 5,577, Henry — 3,772, and Dubuque — 3,059. The smallest population was in Jones County with 471, and Delaware County with only 168 inhabitants.

Although there were some who opposed the federal government making such investigations the *Iowa Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser* of February 6, 1841, felt otherwise. "The

census of 1840," the Burlington editor declared, would mark an era in the history of American Agriculture and would "furnish a more correct view of our country — our whole country, in this respect than has ever been given. . . . There can be no doubt that the tables which are provided from these returns will furnish abundant matter for the consideration of the statesman as well as the agriculturist; and probably the example now first set of such an enumeration of the products of labor, will be followed at each succeeding census of this great nation." The contrast between this first manufacturing report on Iowa and those of recent years staggers the imagination.

The Census of 1840 clearly revealed the humble beginnings of industry in the Territory of Iowa. The following categories of manufacturing called for in the Census of 1840 were not represented in Iowa: commerce; fisheries; machinery; hardware, cutlery, etc.; precious metals; various metals; granite, marble, etc.; cotton; silk; flax; mixed manufactures; powder mills; sugar refineries; chocolate; paper; cordage; musical instruments, and ships. Several of these are of considerable importance in Iowa today and provide a livelihood to thousands of citizens.

The following industries — filling only a scant page of a book — were represented in the manufacturing enumeration of the Territory of Iowa in 1840.

MANUFACTURES	<i>Estab- ments</i>	<i>Men Employed</i>	<i>Capital Invested</i>	<i>Value of Product</i>
¹ Cannon and Small Arms	—	2	—	—
Bricks and Lime	—	39	\$ 8,200	\$ 13,710
Wool	—	—	—	800
Tobacco	—	2	—	40
Hats, Caps, and Bonnets	—	—	—	19,900
Value of straw bonnets				5,100
Tanneries	3	4	4,400	—
Other Leather, Saddleries, etc.	5	—	1,645	4,875
² Soap and Candles	—	1	—	—
³ Distilled & Fermented Liquors	2	3	1,500	—
Drugs and Medicines	—	7	—	2,340
Glass and Earthenware	4	7	350	1,050
⁴ Printing and Binding	4	15	5,700	—
Carriages and Wagons	—	3	1,400	1,200
⁵ Mills	118	154	166,650	95,425
6 — flour				
37 — grist				
75 — saw				
Furniture	—	12	1,350	4,600
⁶ Houses	—	324	—	135,987
All other manu- factures	—	—	8,450	34,445
	136	573	\$199,645	\$419,472

¹ Small arms made — 40² 9,740 lbs. of soap

4,436 lbs. tallow candles

282 lbs. spermaceti & wax candles

³ 4,310 gallons distilled and fer-
mented liquors⁴ Weekly newspapers — 4⁵ Barrels of flour — 4,340⁶ Brick and stone houses built — 14
Wooden houses built — 483

Industry, however, was still in an embryonic stage a century ago. Most of the pioneers erected their own homes, made their own candles and soap, raised much of their own food, and made most of their own clothes. The simplicity of industrial development is attested by the minute directions for the preparation of shoe blacking which found their way into the pages of the *Iowa Sun*. "Perhaps the best in the world is made from elder berries. Mash the berries in your hand in a large kettle of water, set them in the shade a few days, filling it with water. After it is cool, strain and wring them through a coarse cloth, and then boil it down to the thickness of molasses. Put a small quantity with a feather on the brush, rub the shoe until there is a fine gloss. The same will make good writing ink."

But if industry was undeveloped it was nevertheless important. Population was growing steadily each year. Skilled artisans were making their way slowly westward, attracted by the high wages and the opportunity for a better life on the frontier. Lack of regular transportation and communication doubtless delayed the establishment of trade and industry during the long winter months. Eleven decades later, in 1955, the returns from industry far surpassed those from agriculture.

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