

Dubuque in 1858

[Dubuque was truly the "Key City" of Iowa in 1858. It served not only as the chief distributing point for the rich Iowa lands to the north and west but it also was the chief entrepot for steamboats bound upstream for the head of navigation at St. Paul. Two railroads — the Galena and Chicago Union (North Western) and the Illinois Central — tapped the Mississippi at Dunleith, opposite Dubuque. Another, under the impressive title of Dubuque & Pacific R. R., was building westward and was already approaching Manchester by the spring of 1858. Eclipsing all other towns in Iowa in size, Dubuque could boast seven newspapers in 1858, six of which were dailies. The future of Dubuque was truly rosy a century ago.

No other Iowa town offered brighter prospects to immigrant, both native American or foreign. As a result few travelers failed to pen glowing accounts of the "Key City" of Iowa. One such account, prepared by Woolsey R. Hopkins, appeared in the *Dubuque Weekly Express and Herald* under date of April 21, 1858, and is reprinted herewith. — THE EDITOR]

Dubuque City and County

The city of Dubuque, like that of Buffalo, Detroit and Chicago, owes its rapid growth mainly to its position.

There are few points on the Mississippi river where there is sufficient level land below the bluffs

on which to build a city, and when found, there is a difficulty in reaching the back country, or this back country is not found to be so rich and abundant as to prove a reliable source to the city.

Dubuque has none of these difficulties to contend with. Situated on a plain about 30 feet above the water of the river, it already covers a surface of two miles North and South, by an average of one mile in width. Not satisfied with this, our enterprising citizens are already filling in large portions of the low lands and slues between the present site of the city and the main channel of the river. This is done with great economy and rapidity by large trains of cars drawn by locomotives, running on a substantial track; the loading being done by a steam excavator. The past year 150 acres of land have become accessible by wide streets raised above the highest point of water, and terminating in a broad substantial levee, that defies the action of flood and ice, and affords a safe and convenient landing place for steamboats.

The bluffs of the Mississippi river decide the point where the cities shall be, for its bold rocky sides, defy the power of man to level them, and thus, with a population of ordinary energy, these points of land below the bluffs have no fear of competition in the vast back country that extends to the Missouri river. The nearest points to Dubuque at all adapted to the building of a place of importance, is north 30 miles and south about 50

miles; the one being Guttenberg and the other Lyons.

The position of Dubuque may be compared to the mouth of a great navigable stream. From North-West, West and South-West, for a distance of from 100 to 200 miles, trade and travel have as naturally found their way to this point as the branches of a great river run to its mouth. Neither have our enterprising citizens allowed these springs of trade to be diverted to other streams. Already the well constructed Dubuque & Pacific R. R. is striding towards its western termination, rail by rail, distributing merchandise and emigrants over the rich and beautiful prairies, and returning with the grain and cattle that farmers are already exporting. Another, the Dubuque Western R. R. has, even during this disastrous pecuniary period, stretched its grading 50 miles South-Westerly, while still another, the Tete de Mort R. R. is progressing south along the shore of the Mississippi River. Other R. R. Companies are making surveys North-Westerly to St. Paul, while from the North-East a R. R. is making its way towards us from Lake Michigan. This is one of the first Western cities that has projected a Horse R. R. to carry passengers to and from the suburbs of the city, thus combining business in the city with the comforts of a country home.

The Rail Road, however, of most importance to Dubuque, is the Illinois Central, terminating

on the opposite side of the river, and by connection with the Chicago and Galena R. R., forming a direct communication with the Atlantic sea ports.

Let all emigrants bear it in mind that they may come every mile from New York or Boston to Dubuque by Rail Road. Great numbers in the Eastern States, who are longing to live in the boundless, beautiful, fertile west, do not realize that about \$20 in money and 48 hours in time, will land them in our prospective city.

The population of Dubuque is now about 16,000; it having grown to its present size in about twenty-five years; and doubled its population within the last four years. It is not, as many Eastern people suppose, composed of temporary wooden buildings; on the contrary, one of the first features that presents itself to a stranger, is the substantial brick appearance of the city. In this respect it is far before most of the cities of New England and New York.

We have only spoken of Dubuque as a prosperous city; but any lover of nature will enjoy the superb views, from some of the fine residences on the bluffs, of river and prairie scenery, mingled with islands and woodlands.

Added to all this, statistics show that it is as healthful as any Eastern city. The climate being dry and bracing, has proved beneficial to persons of weak lungs, and many are now residing in the neighborhood of Dubuque, in health, who could

not remain on the sea shore, or in the States bordering on the great lakes without fear of death from consumption.

No one need be told when we enumerate these advantages, that Dubuque has already attached to herself a population excelled by no other place of its size in intelligence and enterprise.

With such a population, of course the cause of Education and Religion is not neglected. Beautiful church edifices are being erected by the Presbyterian, Congregational and Roman Catholic Societies, while the Methodists, Episcopalians and Baptists are already well provided with churches.

The furniture of Dubuque is of the most substantial kind. Two large brick school houses, capable of containing 600 scholars each, are finished and well filled, while a third is nearly completed. The city is furnished with gas. Hotels are abundant and commodious. Important manufactories, such as for White Lead, Shot, Agricultural Implements, Sash and Blinds, are in operation; while saw mills and planing mills are numerous. The best quarries for foundation stone are abundant, and brick of the best quality are plentiful and cheap. Market houses are large and well provided with meats, vegetables, and farming produce generally; in fact, in almost every respect the city possesses the comforts of one in New York or Pennsylvania.

The Lead Mines of Dubuque have long made

it, like her neighbor Galena, well known. The country for 50 miles north and 20 miles east and west, seem underlaid with lead ore. At times vast caverns are found, walled, ceiled and paved with crystalized lead, so pure that it shines like silver, and so pure as to yield 85-100 of merchantable lead. The richness of the land and the ease with which it is cultivated, renders this branch of industry comparatively neglected, and yet the revenue to our city from this source for some years back, has increased from \$500,000 to \$900,000.

The County of Dubuque is well worthy of such a city. With a river front of 30 miles; it stretches back on to the prairie for 24 miles, embracing within its bounds every variety of surface — from the bold rocky bluffs, where one may look down on the river from a height of three hundred feet, to the smooth covered prairie that only awaits the plow and the seed to return a plentiful harvest.

Wood is well distributed over the county, but the Northern part, particularly along the valley of the Little Maquoketa River, and its branches is heavily timbered — the tract stretching from the Mississippi river, fifteen miles West, with an average width of four miles. The timber consists of white and black oak, maple, ash and black walnut. This is the great source from which Dubuque obtains fuel.

These lands can be purchased at from \$10 to \$20 per acre, and will yield on an average 80 cords

of wood per acre. The average distance from the city is nine miles, and the price of wood in Dubuque from \$5 to \$7 per cord. The land is rich and strong. In what part of the United States, I ask, could a good axeman find a more desirable home, or a more profitable farm?

The Little Maquoketa River with its branches, along which the timber grows, is a clear rapid stream, with a gravelly or rocky bed, falling about two hundred feet in a distance of fifteen miles, and of course affords many good mill sites. These have not been generally occupied. Sawmills might be made very profitable in cutting up this large tract of valuable timber. Ere long, manufactories of various kinds will occupy the best points, and this whole section of the county will present the appearance of a New England valley.

In opening out from the sources of these streams, where large springs burst from the hill sides, beautiful rolling prairies present themselves, but not as they were a few years since, an uninhabited garden, but dotted over with farm houses, cultivated fields and orchards. The value of these lands vary with the neighborhood that surrounds them, being from \$10 to \$15 per acre.

Other parts of the county are as well watered as this, the streams all being rapid, and the country so thoroughly drained that there is scarcely any waste land to be found. Farming lands along the Dubuque and Pacific Rail Road are held at

higher prices than elsewhere, cultivated farms being worth from \$20 to \$30 per acre.

Flourishing villages are springing up, and none are seen without the church and school house. Dubuque city furnishes an example in this that is not lost on the county.

The population of the county according to the census of 1856 was 26,000, and the taxable property in 1856 was \$16,000,000.

Much land remains unoccupied, and good locations will be shown to emigrants on their applying to the office of the Dubuque Emigrant Society in this city. The office is on Locust street between Fifth and Sixth. We welcome emigrants to Iowa, and will give them advice and information without charge.

Germans, French, Irish, English and Yankees come, and you will find your own people settled and prosperous with a place left for you.