

Then and Now

"What is thy destiny, oh Du Buque?" queried "Selaf" in the *Iowa News* of May 5, 1838. "Wilt thou rise and shine as the Queen of the North West . . . or art thou doomed to be the victim of selfish, base, mean, and groveling demagogues?" The writer [Joseph T. Fales?] believed Dubuque would "become the abode of many thousands of happy, moral, and intelligent individuals, whose powers and influence will be felt and known to the utmost limits of the Territory."

Dubuque's destiny was by no means certain a century ago. In 1840 it was a straggling log-cabin village of scarcely one thousand souls: in 1940 the "Key City" of Iowa counted 43,833 inhabitants. A century ago Dubuque County contained only 3059 people; today the Federal census shows 63,704. In 1940 the city of Dubuque boasted of a population greater than the 43,112 living in the whole Territory of Iowa in 1840.

In 1837 the first board of trustees scarcely dreamed they were launching a metropolis. In 1937 the expenditures of the city totaled \$555,470, divided as follows: general government, \$37,940; police department, \$79,091; fire department,

\$117,871; other protection (building, electrical, and plumbing inspection, police and fire alarm, dog catcher, etc.), \$17,335; health and sanitation, \$61,213; highways, \$131,178; library, \$30,077; recreation, \$56,005; and miscellaneous expenditures, \$24,760. These figures were approximately the same as the annual average between 1932 and 1937 inclusive. In 1923, however, a total of \$1,242,380 was spent — the highest in Dubuque history.

Let us consider some of the changes that have occurred between the era of the board of trustees and the present city manager form of government inaugurated in 1920. During the 1830's the pioneers traveled overland by covered wagon or on horseback. The advent of the first stagecoach was hailed with delight. During the 1840's the citizens of Dubuque still complained about bad roads and irregular mail deliveries. Today all the main thoroughfares in Dubuque are paved for streamlined traffic. In addition, four paved highways converge on Dubuque from Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Waterloo, and Decorah. Paved highways also lead eastward into Illinois and Wisconsin, affording ample facilities to more than twenty-five motor carriers operating to and from Dubuque.

The Mississippi River has played a significant rôle in the development of Dubuque. Steamboat-

ing was of primary importance: fully ninety-five per cent of the lead mined was shipped downstream to Saint Louis. In 1838 twenty-two steamboats were engaged in the Saint Louis-Dubuque trade. Now a single Federal Barge Line towboat can transport as much freight as those twenty-two steamboats combined. A century ago the city fathers were allocating a few hundred dollars to improve the levee and dig a canal: in 1926 the citizens of Dubuque voted 6736 to 2973 in favor of a modern river dock terminal which required a \$377,000 bond issue.

The railroad has been an equally vital factor. As early as 1836 John Plumbe, Jr., had visions of a transcontinental railroad. Unfortunately the railroad was slow in arriving at Dubuque. "The whole country — North, South, East, and West — cities, towns, hamlets, and villages, are crying out 'Railroads! Let us have railroads!!'" fumed the *Miners' Express* on December 12, 1849. "This cry is approaching us from all directions, while here we are in Dubuque as unconcerned as if 'Whiskey Hill' and 'Dirty Hollow' were ever to be the only thoroughfares from and to Dubuque." It was not until 1855, however, that the iron horse slaked its thirst in the waters of the Mississippi opposite Dubuque. Today the "Key City" of Iowa is served by four great trunk lines — the Illi-

nois Central, the Chicago Great Western, the Burlington, and the Milwaukee railroads.

A century ago volunteer fire fighters used buckets furnished by home owners. Since 1924 Dubuque's fire department has given the city the lowest fire insurance rate in Iowa. The effectiveness of the Key City fire fighters is readily demonstrated: between 1911 and 1920 the average yearly loss was \$350,000; between 1921 and 1936 it was only \$56,000.

In 1837 a lone marshal endeavored to enforce the law. A century later thirty-eight men and two women constituted the police department. Of a total of 2012 arrests during the fiscal year 1936-37, 765 were charged with intoxication and 641 with traffic violations. The efficiency of Dubuque's modern police department is attested by the fact that all fifty-nine automobiles stolen in the city were recovered. Moreover, of stolen goods valued at \$34,658, over ninety-one per cent or \$31,734 worth were restored.

In 1836 a young Philadelphian dipped water from the Mississippi and delivered it to the pioneers. Twenty years later the Dubuque *Express & Herald* complained to the "city fathers" because most of the water supplied by the "water carriers" of Dubuque was "obtained along the inner levee and at other most improper places." It was not

until October 21, 1871, that an adequate waterworks plant was completed. In 1898 the city bought the waterworks system for \$545,000. Now the municipal water plant is capable of pumping eight million gallons of pure water daily.

Streets and roads, steamboats and ferries, fire and police protection, the distribution of water — these were but a few of the problems confronting the trustees. New and undreamed of improvements came to Dubuque, requiring the attention of the city council. The telegraph arrived in 1848, the first gas was turned on in 1855, the first railroad bridge spanned the Mississippi in 1868. In the latter year Solon Langworthy took a ride on the first street railway. A Dubuque editor declared in 1878 that only three electric lights would be needed to light the town. It was not until 1881, however, that the first electric light company was formed. The Western Telephone Company was granted permission in 1882 to erect poles in streets and alleys. Six years later the Key City Electric Street Railway Company was capitalized at \$100,000. The Illinois high bridge was constructed in 1887; the Wisconsin bridge spanned the Father of Waters in 1902. In 1940 the site for a new highway bridge across the Mississippi from Dodge Street was approved by Federal authorities.

The hopes and dreams of the pioneers have been more than realized in modern Dubuque. During the 1830's the first professional men were hanging out their shingles; in 1939 there were twenty-five druggists, forty-seven dentists, forty-eight lawyers, and sixty doctors. The lone circuit rider of a century ago has been supplanted today by eleven Roman Catholic, five Lutheran, four Methodist, three Presbyterian, and three Congregational churches. In addition the Adventist, Baptist, Christian Scientist, Episcopalian, Evangelical, Hebrew, Nazarene, and Spiritualist churches may be found in Dubuque.

In 1836 the citizens sought to establish a Library Association to influence the "moral and intellectual character of the inhabitants". A century later 18,095 borrowers had access to 65,720 volumes in the Dubuque Public Library, and the average annual circulation stood at half a million books. Loras College and Clarke College, the University of Dubuque and Wartburg Seminary, each attract students from the numerous public and parochial schools of the community. The city of uncertainty in the days of Joseph T. Fales has truly become a "Queen of the North West".

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