

Gleanings of an Editor

In December, 1858, the editor of the Dubuque *Weekly Times* began a series of tours over northeastern Iowa for the purpose of collecting general information about conditions in that part of the State. The first trip took him through the central portion of the district, including Monticello, Anamosa, Cedar Rapids, Vinton, Waterloo, and Manchester; on a second journey, begun early in January, 1859, he went as far west as Fort Dodge, the return being made by way of Cedar Falls, Waverly, Forest City, and West Union; while on other excursions during February, March, April, and May, he visited practically every Iowa town within a radius of a hundred miles of Dubuque. The editor seemed to be very observant and took a deep interest in the persons and places that he visited. His observations were presented at length in a series of articles which appeared weekly in his newspaper.

The chief means of travel between the towns was by stagecoaches. Railroads had just begun to make their appearance in the State, and travellers had to be contented with the more primitive means of conveyance. The Dubuque and Pacific Railroad had reached Nottingham (Earlville) in 1858 and work had already begun on a branch line from Farley to Anamosa, known as the Dubuque Western Railroad.

This branch was completed to Sand Spring by April, 1859. The Chicago, Iowa, and Nebraska Railroad, which passed through Clinton and DeWitt, reached Mount Vernon the same year. Freight facilities were more sadly lacking than passenger carriers — a deficiency that was felt particularly in the marketing of farm produce. It was a common sight to see cattle driven from Fayette and the surrounding country through Dubuque to market.

For transportation of passengers and mail, the Western Stage Company operated lines throughout the whole northeastern section of the State. While the service was maintained with regularity and the accommodations were fairly good, still stage riding was not attended with Pullman luxury and was not always regarded as a delightful experience. For example, on December 17th in going from Cedar Rapids to Vinton the editor declared, "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 one 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."

But this was not an ordinary case. The Western Stage Company usually ran covered hacks or regular coaches which, being lined inside, were very comfortable. "Drawn by fast horses over fine roads, they afford a delightful mode of travel." It sometimes happened, however, that a passenger was not lucky enough to get a seat inside. On one occasion the editor of the *Times* was forced to take his place beside the driver of one of the sleds, but as it was mid-winter the cold soon drove him to make other arrangements. One of the nine passengers inside the coach was a girl six years old who was travelling free with her uncle. The uncle refused to hold the child, whereupon "we finally succeeded by offering to hold the girl ourself, which we did for twenty miles, much to our mutual comfort. Rather than have ridden those twenty miles on the outside, we would have held the girl in our lap had she been three times six years old!"

Ten miles an hour was considered a good speed for the stages, although numerous stops to change mails and to take meals often made the travelling much slower. However, this was not looked upon as a great hardship because the railroads made scarcely better time and the welcome extended by hotel keepers and especially the bounteous meals that were served more than compensated for the lack of speed on the journey.

The different towns throughout northeastern Iowa presented much the same appearance. Cedar

Rapids, with a population of three thousand, was the largest place outside of Dubuque, although Lyons was a rising municipality of twenty-eight hundred. Marion had a population of two thousand, Maquoketa fifteen hundred, Decorah eighteen hundred, DeWitt fourteen hundred, Fort Dodge, Vinton, Anamosa, Delhi, West Union, Tipton, Bellevue, Mount Vernon, and Lisbon had approximately one thousand each, while the other towns counted their inhabitants in the hundreds. Parkersburg consisted of "the house of the postmaster" and a "few hay stacks in the distance".

Cedar Rapids was already an industrial center. Three flour mills, a cloth mill, several machine shops, a sash and door factory, a sawmill, a soap and candle factory, a furniture shop, and a distillery were in operation. Thirty million bricks had been manufactured there in 1857. The immense water power of the river made "the Rapids" a natural site for manufacturing, and a great future seemed to be in prospect. There were several fine brick buildings in the business district, some of three stories.

West Union was a typical town of that period where the traveller would find "open doors, kindly hearts and cultivated minds." West Union was settled by Eastern people, "who have brought their refinements with them, and who still enjoy the luxuries of life, social and mental as well as physical." Two hundred and fifty children attended the "three schools, two public and one select." The churches

were Methodist, Baptist, United Brethren, Disciples, and Congregational — all with houses of worship except the last. The town boasted five general variety stores, three groceries, two drug stores, a book dealer, two hardwares, two shoe dealers, two bakeries, two wagon shops, three harness shops, two tailors' shops, two livery stables, a chair factory, a large cabinet shop, a plow factory, four hotels, and "a good steam grist mill, with a saw mill attached."

The towns were usually well planned, but presented varied appearances. Marion had "wide streets, laid out at right angles; good side walks; a large public square, well filled with shade trees planted one year ago; and other indications of enterprise and taste." West Union "is seen from afar as the traveller journeys thitherward, and it is *not* distance in this case, that 'lends enchantment to the view.' The nearer one gets to the town the better it looks, and the longer one stays there the longer he wants to stay." Monticello, however, reminded the traveller that "God made the country and Man made the town", but, "with a little taste on the part of the denizens of the place, and an uncompromising and abiding hatred of whisky, it may become one of the loveliest villages in the interior of the State." Waukon looked like a bright "New England village recently established in a beautiful woodland," while St. Charles (Charles City) was the "loveliest town on the loveliest of Iowa's streams."

The settlers in this section of the State came

chiefly from the East. New England was well represented, and many residents were from the States of the Ohio Valley — a fact indicated by the names of some of the settlements. Wyoming was named for Wyoming County, New York, whence came the founders of the village. It had “no lofty hills around it, like Wyoming in western New York; it may not have a Gertrude, with the roses of England blowing on her cheeks, as once had fair Wyoming, on Susquehanna’s side, immortalized by Campbell; but it has locked arms with a lovely little grove; slopes to the eastward to catch in its bosom the freshest beams of Phoebus; and has its feet perpetually washed by a brace of crystal rivulets, where they form a happy alliance.” La Porte City, with two hundred and twenty-five inhabitants, was laid out by Dr. Jesse Wasson, formerly of La Porte, Indiana. “As Rockford, Illinois, is the loveliest town in northern Illinois, so its child is one of the loveliest towns in northern Iowa.” It was settled by Rockford, Illinois, people.

The people took a great interest in education. Numerous schools and churches showed that the pioneers were as determined to educate their children and preserve their faith as they were to build homes and fortunes. Every town had at least one school. There were many select schools, conducted by talented teachers, in addition to the public schools — Cedar Rapids, Manchester, and Independence each had two select schools, while West Union, Garna-

villo, Cascade, Maquoketa, Waterloo, and Andrew had one each. Clayton County already had a high school located at Garnavillo. In one of the district schools at Hopkinton there were classes in philosophy, algebra, and Latin in addition to the common English branches.

In almost every community efforts were being made to develop higher education. Cornell College had been founded in 1854, and in 1858 reported nearly two hundred students; Upper Iowa University was also functioning in 1858 with about one hundred students. Both of these were coeducational, and the subjects taught — mental philosophy, belles-lettres, Biblical literature, mathematics, Christian ethics, Latin, Greek, natural science, English, music, French, and ornamentals — indicate that the courses were designed to develop culture. There was a Female College at Lyons where “special pains are taken, not only to cultivate the mental and moral habits of the young ladies, but also to protect their physical health, and to make their stay in the Institution not less agreeable than profitable to themselves.” A large educational establishment was being built at Hopkinton at a cost of ten thousand dollars to be ready for use in 1859; Wyoming had subscribed twelve thousand dollars for a female seminary; Fort Dodge had reserved several acres of ground to be given to the first party who would undertake to build a seminary. Andrew had started to build a normal school, but hard times had caused

the project to be abandoned; the Cerro Gordo County Teachers' Institute had held regular meetings for some time; and coeducation at the State University had been proposed.

Practically every town had a literary association and programs were held regularly, especially during the winter months. Even Marble Rock in Floyd County, with a population of only thirty families, had its literary association. West Union had a Junior Literary Association of eighty members as well as a literary society for adults. In many places lectures were given each week on subjects of a literary, religious, or scientific nature. At Manchester the editor found "a large school house full of well-dressed, intelligent and refined people, listening to a lecture on 'The Educated Man'." A more attentive audience he had never seen. At St. Charles there was "a flourishing Lyceum" which, "like everything else in this place," had "*life* in it." The village was, in truth, such "an Arcadian spot" the editor marvelled that half the townspeople did not turn poets, but instead they were "deeply interested in getting their daily bread — and butter." The president of the lyceum, James Jackson, was a mechanic — "a self-made man of fine talents and of no inconsiderable mental culture." The organization was doing much to improve the taste of the community. To the circumstance that the women were members of the lyceum and regular in attendance, the editor attributed the thrift of the society.

Musical talent was abundant and much attention was given to its development. Marion's glee club could "discourse as sweet music as one need expect to hear in the West." Waterloo had a harmonic society; West Union boasted of a brass band of nine pieces; while the Decorah brass band, "well known in all these parts, often goes thirty or forty miles to play on public occasions." The Iowa Falls string band was made up of three very accomplished musicians, whose services were greatly appreciated at dances in the neighborhood of that town.

There were more than thirty newspapers in northeastern Iowa in 1858. Dubuque, Maquoketa, Anamosa, Lyons, Vinton, DeWitt, Tipton, and Marion each had two papers, one Republican and one Democratic. These papers were mostly weeklies, and contained a wide variety of news, rather more general and national than local. They seemed to be dominated with an educational purpose. Most of them were notably partisan in politics.

Local pride was rife in each community. Nearly every town felt that its location, its resources, and the spirit of its people had destined it to become the metropolis of Iowa, and its citizens acted as if they did not wish to shirk the responsibilities thus thrust upon them by nature and by good fortune. It was predicted that Iowa Falls, Cedar Falls, Anamosa, and Cedar Rapids would become large and progressive cities on account of their water power; it was felt that the location of Hopkinton would make it a

great commercial center. Elkader seemed to offer every facility for paper and cloth mills. The people of McGregor thought that the railroad from Milwaukee to Prairie du Chien would transform their village into a great city; the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad had located a depot site in Fort Dodge, and a railroad from Keokuk was slowly progressing toward that town from the south; deposits of copper, iron ore, and coal were supposed to abound in the region of Fort Dodge and there were also gypsum beds that could not "be exhausted in one thousand years". The hills south of Webster City, "one of the neatest and liveliest young towns west of Independence," were crammed with coal. St. Charles was to be the junction point of the McGregor and Missouri Railroad and the Cedar Falls and Minnesota line, and the people of Nashua were rejoicing over the prospect that with the coming of the Cedar Falls and Minnesota Railroad nothing could prevent their town "from one day becoming a fine city like St. Charles and Waverly".

While many communities directed their gaze toward the glowing future, others were much depressed by the "hard times" of 1857. In Delhi, for instance, the value of town lots had decreased, and some of the inhabitants in 1859 were "much more temperate in their expectations of speedily realizing a fortune," than they had been eighteen months before. The editor suspected that some of them "would be contented with the assurance" that they

would be "independently wealthy, and prepared to retire from business in two years from this date." Maquoketa and Andrew were particularly hard hit by the financial depression, but Independence seemed to have weathered the hard times fairly well.

The Pike's Peak fever was raging in northeastern Iowa as well as elsewhere in the State. The steady train of covered wagons, bound for the West and carrying people whose hopes were high and who spoke always of gold, offered a strong temptation which many were unable to resist in spite of the fact that discouraging reports appeared continually in the papers. It was rumored that laborers received from twenty to twenty-five dollars a day in the West. From New Oregon, a little town of four hundred inhabitants, four teams and twelve men were to start for the new El Dorado, on March 2, 1859, and two or three other teams the following week. "So they go."

One of the chief criticisms of many places was the presence of saloons and distilleries. Where they were plentiful, there seemed to be a lack of community pride and brawls were not uncommon. It was one of these disgraceful brawls in which the founder of the town of Burrington participated, that caused the people of that community to change the name of their town from Burrington to Manchester. Monona seemed to suffer from the liquor evil too. Mud was abundant and loafers plentiful there. "The only drawback to the prosperity of the town,

that we can discover, is the multiplicity of whisky shops. They must be dried up or Monona will be ruined", wrote the editor. "Purged of whiskey", the place would "become a thrifty and happy village", he thought. Fayette was "a quiet little town, destitute of liquor." Lawyers could not or did not live there. A shocking murder, the result of whisky, had led to the formation of a temperance society at Lansing. Lectures were given weekly denouncing the liquor menace and as a result drunkards had been reclaimed and most of the whisky venders, for want of patronage, had been obliged to abandon their avocation. The Sons of Temperance were numerous in the vicinity of Hopkinton.

Such are a few of the pictures that the editor of the *Times* placed before his readers in 1859. At that time Iowa was peopled by substantial, energetic, and hopeful people who were proud of their new acquisitions and who were determined to add to the material resources of their new homes the culture of the homes from which they had migrated. The country had just passed through the panic of 1857. Hard times generally work disaster on new communities, and Iowa was a comparatively new community. That so few indications of disaster were found and so much evidence of enthusiastic thrift and genuine prosperity after the nation-wide crisis was due to a great extent to the perseverance and the courage of the pioneers.

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