

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

MAY 1937

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### THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

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### THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Hutchinson Singers

A handful of chilled Nevada music lovers pushed their way against a bitter Iowa wind on the first Friday evening of March, 1865. They had read in the *Story County Aegis* of a vocal and dramatic performance by the world-famous Hutchinson Family from the Old Granite State. The singers of the "tribe of Jesse" had been in Iowa since the previous December and were to remain until April. Recitals had been scheduled in over twenty-five communities, including Charles City, Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and Independence.

"Everybody has heard of the Hutchinsons," wrote the editor of the *Cedar Valley Times* a month earlier when the troupe had sung to a crowded house in the Baptist Hall of Cedar Rapids. These were no idle words, indeed, for the Hutchinsons were known throughout the nation and in England for lifting their melodious voices in the causes of temperance, abolition,



woman suffrage, and Christianity. "To those who may not be 'posted' or have forgotten," reminded the Nevada editor, "we would explain that Asa Hutchinson is one of the original brothers of the family, who, for many years have delighted the people of the country with their songs of Patriotism, Freedom, and Fraternity."

These Hutchinsons, far more important in the musical annals of the nation than the Baker Family or the Alleghanians, were natives of New Hampshire. The father, Jesse, was a quiet farmer with much musical ability. His wife also was talented. All but one of their thirteen children were musically inclined. In 1839 they announced their first performance in Milford by posting two slips of paper, one on the Town Meeting House and the other at the bridge. The announcement modestly read:

THE ELEVEN SONS AND TWO DAUGHTERS OF THE  
"TRIBE OF JESSE" WILL SING AT THE BAPTIST  
MEETING HOUSE ON THANKSGIVING  
EVENING AT SEVEN O'CLOCK.

"It was an anxious time for all," said one of the brothers, but Squire Livermore spoke on music and the minister prayed, "so that the concert might be interspersed with speakers and not fall through." The church was packed with sym-



pathetic listeners, and the chorals, hymns, anthems, and glees were enthusiastically received.

Before long, the four younger children, Judson, John, Asa, and Abby, were singing in many a New England village. At East Wilton, a concert netted six and a quarter cents. During these first endeavors they sang from note and not by rote, but in later years, as they became more assured, they memorized all their numbers. Finally, they were persuaded by friends to attempt a program in New York City. With timid faith they arranged for their debut in the famous Tabernacle on May 11, 1842. "The immense audience", noted the *New York Tribune*, "were perfectly delighted and could scarcely be prevailed upon to release them from constant duty. We have seldom listened to sweeter melody than theirs."

The American Temperance Union, attracted by their sudden success, invited the Hutchinsons to take part in its program the following night. On May 13th they gave a recital at Concert Hall where they introduced a "variety of their most popular quartets, trios, and solos such as have not failed to please fashionable audiences in Boston and many other cities and towns in New England."

For these early concerts the Hutchinsons selected the type of music they later were to intro-



duce to Iowa. Dramatic and colorful narratives usually were first. These were followed by sentimental pieces and temperance selections. They accompanied themselves with a violin and violoncello.

For their program given at the Society Library Room in New York, on May 17th, the troupe chose the "Snow Storm", now quite forgotten, but then a favorite narrative of the sufferings of a mother who wandered with her child over the Green Mountains in search of a husband who had already perished in the storm. This was followed by the "Vulture of the Alps", described in handbills as a thrilling song "portraying the agonized feelings of a parent at the loss of an infant child, snatched suddenly from its companions by the ravenous vulture, while engaged in childish plays in the field." Then too, they offered "The Maniac", "The Grave of Bonaparte", "The Mountain Bugle", and "King Alcohol", their favorite for over forty years.

King Alcohol has many forms  
By which he catches men;  
He is a beast of many horns,  
And ever thus has been.  
There is rum and gin, and beer and wine,  
And brandy of logwood hue;  
And these, with other fiends combined,  
Will make any man look blue.



## CHORUS

He says, "Be merry, for here's your cherry,  
And Tom-and-Jerry and port and sherry,  
And spirits of every hue."  
Oh, are not these a fiendish crew,  
As ever a mortal knew?

"Don't forget the concert by those sweet native minstrels, the Hutchinson Family," admonished the New York *Evening Post*. "All who go in doubt come home enthusiastic in their praise. Let us give them a full house, aye, even to overflowing, and thus show to them that we are not behind New England cities in appreciating and encouraging American talent."

And New York did as it was bid, applauding and patronizing these unaffected songsters until their every minute was engaged. "A great charm of their singing," recalled a member of the Brook Farm experiment, "was a sort of wild freshness as if taught in their native woods and mountains, and their earnest interest in the objects that formed so much of the theme of their songs."

After their happy New York experiences they returned to New Hampshire, but in 1845 they left for a tour of England and Ireland. Charles Dickens gave a reception for them before their London premiere. Harriet Martineau reserved a concert room for them at the White Lion in the pastoral English village of Kendal. But the coun-



try folks, from Hawkshead and Grasmere, eager to hear the four American singers, overflowed the hall. Fortunately, a large lawn was found for an out-door concert.

"How is it possible to give an idea of the soul-breathing music of the Hutchinsons to those who have not heard it?" wrote Miss Martineau to the editor of *The People's Journal*. "One might as well attempt to convey in words the colours of the sky or the strain of the nightingale as such utterance of the heart as theirs. One can only observe the effects. There was now hearty laughter, and now many tears. Nothing can be said of the inner emotions which found no expression. Everybody congratulated everybody else on having come. A young servant of mine, who went all in high spirits at the prospect of an evening's pleasure, cried the whole time — as did others. At the end, when every heart was beating in response to the brotherly greeting and farewell offered in the closing piece — *The Granite State* — the parish clerk sprang up and called for three cheers for the Hutchinsons, which were given by as many as had unchoked voices."

Upon their return to the United States, the Hutchinsons gave most of their time to the abolition movement, a cause in which they had been interested for many years. They were intimate



friends, as well as co-workers, with Garrison, Greeley, Rogers, and other leaders of the anti-slavery group. "We were inspired with the greatness of the issue," wrote John Hutchinson, "finding our hearts in sympathy with those struggling and earnest people . . . and we sang for the emancipation of the millions of slaves in bondage." The "Negro's Lament" was one of the most popular of their selections.

Forced from home and all its pleasures,  
Africa's coast I left forlorn,  
To increase a stranger's treasures,  
O'er the raging billows borne.  
Men from England bought and sold me,  
Paid my price in paltry gold;  
But though slave they have enrolled me,  
Minds are never to be sold.

This was first sung at a meeting of the Boston Anti-slavery Society in Faneuil Hall in January, 1843. "The powerful description of the singing of the wonderfully gifted Hutchinsons," wrote the *Liberator*, "does not surpass the reality of their charming melodies. The effect on the thousands who listened to them was, in fact, indescribable. They added immensely to the interest of the occasion; and the manner in which they adapted their spirited songs (nearly all of which were original and impromptu) to the subjects that were



under discussion displayed equal talent and genius."

Perhaps the most famous of all the anti-slavery songs in the Hutchinson repertoire was the stirring and dramatic, "Get Off the Track." The words were written by the Hutchinsons and adapted to an old slave melody. First introduced in 1844, it became, with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the most powerful instruments aimed at the southern slave system.

Ho! the car emancipation,  
Rides majestic through the nation,  
Bearing on its train the story,  
Liberty! a nation's glory.  
Roll it along! roll it along!  
Roll it along! through the nation,  
Freedom's car, Emancipation.

Let the ministers and churches  
Leave behind sectarian lurches.  
Jump on board the car of freedom,  
Ere it be too late to need them.  
Sound the alarm! pulpits thunder,  
Ere too late to see your blunder.

Hear the mighty car-wheels humming:  
Now, look out! the engine's coming!  
Church-and-statesmen, hear the thunder  
Clear the track, or you'll fall under.  
Get off the track! all are singing  
While the "Liberty Bell" is ringing.



N. P. Rogers first heard this song when it was introduced in 1844. "It represented the railroad," he wrote in the *Herald of Freedom*, "in characters of living light and song, with all its terrible enginery and speed and danger. And when they came to the chorus-cry that gives name to the song — when they cried to the heedless proslavery multitude that were stupidly lingering on the track, and the engine 'Liberator' coming hard upon them, under full steam and all speed, the Liberty Bell loud ringing, and they standing like deaf men right in its whirlwind path, the way they cried 'Get off the track,' in defiance of all time and rule, was magnificent and sublime."

When, however, slave-holders would not "get off the track", the Hutchinsons did their bit to further the conflict by popularizing "The Battle Cry of Freedom" until it was "soon shouted in camps, on the march, and on the battlefield." Nor was this enough. John Hutchinson determined to take his singers into the camps of the Army of the Potomac. Unfortunately, however, they included in their programs Whittier's stirring "Ein Feste Burg," an inflammatory abolition poem set to the music of Luther's great hymn. General McClellan thereupon expelled them from the Union lines on the ground that abolition was not the primary object of the war.



Undaunted, the troupe appealed to Lincoln. Secretary Chase, it is said, read the lines judged offensive by McClellan, in a cabinet meeting. The President listened attentively and then is reputed to have said, "It is just the character of song that I desire the soldiers to hear." By presidential order, therefore, the Hutchinsons were readmitted to Federal camps and barracks. There they delighted regulars and volunteers with the "Emancipation Song", "The Slave Mother", "The Slave's Appeal", "Little Topsy's Song", and "Uncle Sam's Farm".

The West was not unknown to them. During the roaring forties they made excursions to several of the States of the Old Northwest. In the winter of 1848 they sang in Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Empire Hall at Cleveland, said the *Daily Herald*, was crowded and "hundreds who applied for admission found it was 'no use knocking at the door'." On their Columbus program, the Hutchinsons announced "A New Song for Ohio", and the German Protestant Evangelical Church was crowded with Buckeyes who paid fifty cents admission to see and hear the "nest of brothers with a sister in it." In Cincinnati they sang at Smith and Nixon's Hall and at the Melodeon. They offered for sale a booklet containing fifty of their most popular selections.



The quartet was a picturesque group upon any stage. Abby sometimes wore a green bouffant dress, pinched tightly at the waist. Her close fitting sleeves were ruffled above the elbow. The brothers chose white snug trousers and blue long-tailed jackets. Collars were soft and flaring, beneath which lay a large knot of wide black satin whose flowing ends were tucked under tan striped waistcoats. The Hutchinsons scorned white gloves, feeling that the wearing of them did not correspond with nature. The death of Jesse at the Carthage Water Cure Establishment in 1853 broke the intimate circle. He was the leader, and composer of several of their most popular songs. Judson was the humorist of the troupe. Asa was the basso and business manager, and Abby, the contralto.

Their songs frequently reflected the times. Westward emigration received more than usual attention in two numbers, "Westward Ho!" and "Ho! for California". Another geographical favorite in 1867 was "Away Down East", a Yankee realm described as a land of notions, a paradise of pumpkin pies, of apple-sauce and greens, and of pork and beans.

Nearly all of the Hutchinsons' Iowa programs began, as did their concerts everywhere, with their family song, "The Old Granite State".



Ho! we've come from the mountains  
Come again from the mountains.  
We've come from the mountains,  
Of the old Granite State.  
We're a band of brothers,  
We're a band of brothers,  
We're a band of brothers,  
And we live among the hills;  
With a band of music,  
With a band of music,  
With a band of music,  
We are passing round the world.

The fourth stanza counted them off:

Davis, Noah, Andrew, Zepha,  
Caleb, Joshua, and Jesse,  
Hudson, Rhoda, John and Asa,  
And Abby are our names.  
We're the sons of Mary,  
Of the tribe of Jesse,  
And now we address ye,  
With our native mountain song.

Iowans heard their motto in the next stanza:

Liberty is our motto,  
And we'll sing as freemen ought to,  
Till it rings o'er glen and grotto,  
From the Old Granite State.  
"Men should love each other,  
Nor let hatred smother,  
Every man's a brother,  
And our country is the world!"



The Nevada audience next heard "The Southerner's Prayer", which portrayed Jefferson Davis defeated and alone. Then followed that delightfully sentimental "Hannah at the Window", and the humorous "Johnny Schmoker". War veterans listened again to the stirring "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground" and "Johnny Comes Marching Home Again". Other comic and dramatic selections completed the program.

During their 1867 tour through Iowa, the band scheduled a concert for January 24th in the Metropolitan Opera House of Iowa City. "The present troupe", wrote the *Iowa City Republican*, is composed largely of scions of the original stock, but the gift of song was born in them, and they have had superior advantages for its development. We love to hear the music of this singing tribe." The group played in other Iowa communities and then moved on to Council Bluffs where they were the guests of Mrs. Amelia Bloomer during February and early March. Then they journeyed to Dubuque where they performed without a license, were arrested just as they were entering a railroad coach, and were fined \$5.50.

On New Year's Day of 1880, the Hutchinsons left their home in New Hampshire, spent a day in New York, and on January 8th reached Des Moines. They gave frequent concerts, sometimes



riding fifty miles across frozen country in an open sleigh. In Le Mars they were introduced to the notable Masonic lecturer, Robert Morris. Jesse Harriman, an ardent anti-slavery worker of many years before, met the troupe in Independence. On March 15th, a concert was presented at Ham's Hall in Iowa City. Reserved seats, according to the *Iowa City Daily Press*, were fifty cents and general admissions only thirty-five cents. Both types were on sale at Lee and Fink's.

During their Iowa City sojourn John Hutchinson saw Robert Hutchinson with whom he had sung in the Milford choir when both were boys. With this able Iowan was Samuel Everett, a minister who had baptized the singer many years earlier.

The words and music for two songs were written by the Hutchinsons while in Iowa. The first of these, "Vote It Right Along", a political satire, was composed in Decorah on July 15, 1867. The second, conceived near Iowa City on February 15, 1880, was a musical temperance tract, "Which Way is Your Musket A-p'intin' To-Day?"

The question, my friends, is of vital importance,  
The nation is waiting in anxious suspense;  
Each voter can wield a *political musket*,  
Then wield it, I ask, in your country's defense!



The issue before us is plain and unclouded—  
Shall our nation be ruled by King Alcohol's sway?  
I candidly ask every qualified voter  
"Which way is your musket a-p'intin' today?"

From this last Iowa tour the singers went to Minnesota where Asa, Judson, and John had founded Hutchinson in 1855 as a center for anti-slavery sentiment. Settlement began in the following year, a large German contingent arrived in 1857, and the community was ravaged in the Sioux wars of the sixties.

From Hutchinson the singers returned to their New England home and continued to give concerts. They sang at the funeral of John Greenleaf Whittier and lifted their wavering voices over the body of Wendell Phillips. Abby died in 1892 and by the turn of the century the Hutchinsons had passed from the nation's musical stage. For almost fifty years they had given their talents for the enjoyment of the American people and to the causes in which they passionately believed. It is well that a chapter of Iowa's musical history was brightened by the concerts of these unaffected songsters.

PHILIP D. JORDAN



## Rivalry Among the River Towns

Along the Mississippi River, Iowa towns had within a few years emerged from tiny settlements. Lusty and ambitious, they were soon boasting of advantages and achievements and an unparalleled future. The extravagant terms in which local newspaper editors proclaimed the virtues of their towns and the invidious comparisons that were made with the neighboring towns, displayed a lively, though sometimes bitter, rivalry.

Keokuk: "Our sister cities accuse us of being 'vain glorious' and somewhat extravagant in our estimation of ourselves. They cannot expect to enjoy the reputation and prosperity that Keokuk does."

Burlington: "Burlington is the greatest city in ancient or modern times! . . . It will be the geographical center of the world!"

Muscatine: "Muscatine is a much greater city than Burlington, and, of course, eclipses New York, London, or Davenport."

Davenport: "Greater inducements are held out by Davenport than by any city in the State."

Dubuque: "A proud city shall be reared where at present stands our flourishing village — when



the lofty spires of the State houses and churches shall glitter in the rays of the sun, and the glossy bosom of the fair Mississippi shall swell beneath the weight of commerce."

Although several of the towns were described as occupying a "high and commanding" position, Keokuk's claim to the possession of the most advantageous location for trade and commerce was a constant source of envy. Situated strategically at the junction of the two rivers on which most of Iowa's commerce was carried, Keokuk had great commercial possibilities during the steamboat period of transportation.

"It may seem like idle boasting to those who may have nothing of so much consequence to boast of," declared a Keokuk editor, "but while we show due deference to the peculiar opinions of our sister cities, we must say that their accusations ['vain glorious'] partake of the nature of envy, and prove to all impartial minds, that 'the green eyed monster, jealousy,' perverts the truthful expression of their real opinions or blinds them so they cannot see anything worthy of remark. They cannot expect to enjoy the reputation and prosperity that Keokuk does, or have the same number of men of enterprise, mind and wealth, unless they occupy the same *ground* that Keokuk does, and thereby enjoy the same advantages and facilities." Keo-



kuk could also quote Horace Greeley who testified: "A place combining the natural advantages that Keokuk has must be one of those particular spots that is destined to more than realize the wildest anticipation regarding it." Little wonder that Keokuk assumed the title of "Gate City".

But the northwest was another realm for which Dubuque, the northernmost of pioneer Iowa river towns, had imperialistic aspirations. "Dubuque is destined to be the Queen City of the Northwest, the opposition of interested parties and rival towns to the contrary notwithstanding." And again: "We are at the most important point on the upper Mississippi, a point which has given our city the sobriquet of 'Key City'. As the key, she commands the whole of northeastern Iowa and southern Minnesota."

Burlington, Muscatine, and Davenport were pleasantly situated, and their natural wharfage was good. Muscatine lacked nothing, apparently, for the *Democratic Enquirer* declared in 1855: "Its peculiar location — in the bend of the river, throwing it 45 miles into the interior, will always make it the gateway of commerce for a vast scope, bearing in a measure the same relation to Iowa that Cincinnati does to Ohio!"

Political prestige had something to do with claims of superiority. Dubuque was the seat of



government of one of the two original counties while Iowa was a part of Michigan and Wisconsin Territories. Men of Dubuque had been active in politics from the beginning. And so, when Wisconsin Territory was formed, political influence, location, and population favored Dubuque as the capital of the Territory.

But Dubuque had a powerful rival. Burlington was the seat of government of the other original county in the Iowa District. In the contest for the prize of capitalship in Wisconsin Territory, Burlington became the Territorial headquarters until the new capital city of Madison was ready, and Burlington became the first, though temporary, capital of the Territory of Iowa when it was separated from Wisconsin Territory.

The rivalry of river towns grew in intensity as immigrants continued to enter Iowa in quest of the most favorable opportunities. Every point of advantage was emphasized to exert magnetic force upon prospective settlers. Population was the favorite measure of popularity to be used in comparisons. Never conservative, the estimates of population were apparently based upon hope. If the figures as presented by one town shone to the disadvantage of another, the injured rival explained discrepancies. "More than half the population of Burlington", Keokuk pointed out, "are foreigners



and a large proportion of them unnaturalized; yet *all* vote at the charter election . . . while in Keokuk non-naturalized foreigners are excluded from voting, our charter requiring six months in the city as a qualification to vote." Keokuk also explained in 1856 that her population was larger per square mile than that of any other town in the State, whatever her standing was in total numbers.

The United States census of 1850 reported a population of 4082 in Burlington, 3108 in Dubuque, 2540 in Muscatine, 2478 in Keokuk, and 1848 in Davenport. These were the five largest towns in Iowa. Fort Madison, also on the river, was sixth and Iowa City, the capital, was seventh. In 1854 the rank of the cities in population was the same except that Muscatine was fifth and Davenport third. By 1860, a more complete shift had occurred. Dubuque was first with 13,000, Davenport second with 11,136, Keokuk next with 8136, Burlington fourth with 6706 (the only town to decrease in that period), and Muscatine fifth, with 5324. Fort Madison, which had not figured in the rivalry of the other river towns during the fifties, dropped to ninth place by 1860.

In the matter of population Davenport was roundly called to task by the *Muscatine Journal* in February, 1856, for its obvious distortion of the facts: "The population is *put down* at 12,000. If



this is true, Davenport has increased at the rate of 500% since January 1, 1855."

An accurate statement of population statistics was in fact difficult for each year. Though immigrants were "pouring in by hundreds and thousands," with every house "full to overflowing", much of this population was transient. The inadequacy of housing facilities was felt by all of the towns. The necessity to accommodate the increasing numbers and the desire to impress them favorably for permanent settlement led the citizens to build extensively.

Desirable residence districts were widely advertised. "The bluffs of Davenport for residence can hardly be surpassed anywhere and are unequaled by any town I have seen on the Mississippi," was the comment of a traveler quoted for the benefit of Davenport.

Of Muscatine, a "stranger" wrote: "Like ancient Rome it is built on seven hills. Nature bestowed with an unsparing hand her gift of beautiful scenery surrounding and her enterprising citizens have done much to bring out and develop all those beauties which nature has lavished upon her."

Burlington had its advocate: "I prefer Burlington to any town site on the Mississippi. Almost every house has its piazza and porticoes and many



of them a gallery above looking toward the river, with large windows in front."

Keokuk could also quote the remarks of a traveler: "Another object of particular remark is the large number and preponderance of brick dwellings and stores, rather than frame shanties. In this respect Keokuk excels all the western towns I have seen."

With great numbers willing to settle in Iowa, and the towns welcoming the newcomers, the means of transportation was a matter of importance. Ferries carried the immigrants across the Mississippi. The number of passengers reported was as gratifying as census returns and provoked statistics from the "sister cities". Dubuque estimated ferry crossings as 38,400 in 1854. The Burlington *Telegraph* on November 15, 1854, said "not less than 30,000 have crossed the river at Burlington since the first of September". Keokuk demonstrated the extent of her ferrying business when the Keokuk and Hamilton Ferry Company constructed at this time a large double-engine ferry boat, with capacity to carry teams and stock of 200 tons burden.

Small flurries of excitement prevailed over each new improvement. The curbing and macadamizing of streets, the water supply, street lighting, and improvement of the steamboat landing were high



points in the early life of the cities worthy of long editorials and editorial answers. When Keokuk had streets lighted by gas for the first time on January 4, 1856 ("the works of sufficient capacity for a city of 75,000"), the *Gate City* and *Des Moines Valley Whig* took occasion to glory in the advancement of Keokuk. The Burlington *Hawk-Eye* thought best to deflate the ego of the neighboring town and countered with sarcasm. "The Keokuk papers", wrote the editor, "are making a huge to do about the immense business of the little hamlet, but even with all their *gas* they don't compare with the actual state of things in Burlington."

Opportunities for employment and investment in business, rather than civic improvements, finally determined the immigrant's choice of settlement. There was, it appears, a field for every type of manufacture. Iron works, including stove, engine, mill and boiler foundries were established; wood-working shops — sash and blind, wagon, and furniture factories — were started; mattress and upholstery factories were needed; brick yards did a good business; and distilleries of "alcohol and spirit gas" satisfied another class of workmen. There were flour mills, sawmills, pork packing houses. When raw material continued to be exported, a movement was begun to make Iowa still more industrial-minded. "Do we want a threshing



machine or a reaper? It comes from Ohio. Do we need furniture? A manufacturer in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, or the East, immediately supplies our wants. . . . Out of all the labor-saving machinery and other articles of daily consumption in the State of Iowa, what a beggarly amount is made here?" Thus to prevent the filling of Eastern coffers from Iowa cities, manufacturing continued to increase.

"Keokuk will soon be the point for all the wholesale business for the upper Des Moines. We expect to see the retailers in the country get all their supplies from Keokuk very soon — and, indeed, very many, at this time, never think of going farther than Keokuk to make their purchases, and find it greatly to their interest. So soon as our great water power is developed at this point, we anticipate that Keokuk will be the Lowell of the West."

In a similar vein spoke the rest. Trade areas developed, for each of which there was a "metropolitan" center. Dubuque extended her influence north and west. A petition by Dubuque for a military road to Fort Dodge on the Des Moines River aimed to attract the trade of the upper Des Moines away from Keokuk.

Muscatine, too, was a competitor for the upper Des Moines trade. A road to Fort Dodge from Muscatine would be no longer than the proposed military road from Dubuque to that place, con-



tended the Muscatine *Democratic Enquirer*, and moreover "the hydrography and topography are in favor of Muscatine".

Muscatine's area was central Iowa: "Nothing can stop us — we are a go-ahead people — everybody who visits us acknowledges that! Large and costly buildings, work on the streets, throngs of wagons laden with lumber, stone, brick, furniture, etc., drays rattling here and there with merchandise, and farmers' wagons filled with the produce of the country — all prove that Muscatine is *the city of Central Iowa*."

Burlington and Davenport had trade areas less clearly defined, but were nevertheless flourishing in business. Burlington, especially, was placing emphasis upon pork packing, which, indeed, was a major industry in each of the towns except Dubuque. Burlington's figures were tallest: the *Business Directory of 1856* avowed that "the pork packing business is carried on more extensively in Burlington than in any city of its age in the United States, and Burlington has already been named by some the 'Porkopolis' of Iowa." As to the excellency of pork houses, Keokuk doubted whether there was a "better pork packing establishment from Dubuque to New Orleans" than that of Messrs. Patterson & Conn of Keokuk.

With every year the prosperity of the towns in-



creased. Supply lagged behind the demand for products, and the scene was everywhere one of "gay and bustling" activity. The wharves were "literally piled high" with goods brought and sent from the river ports. The wharf registers revealed increasing steamboat arrivals with each succeeding year. Every town was a "commercial emporium".

There were several phases of the contest for supremacy, definitely commercial in character, which were especially critical to the life of the towns. They were the problems of improving navigation, building railroads, and bridging the Mississippi.

The rapids of the Mississippi causing the most serious obstruction to navigation were those at Keokuk. But what dismayed the steamboat captains meant profit to Keokuk. Her position was strengthened by the lightering trade. The cumbersome process of transferring the cargo over the shallow waters of the rapids on lighter craft greatly increased the cost of shipping. Freight charges above the Des Moines Rapids were said to be four times what Keokuk business men paid.

In furthering the plan for the improvement of the rapids, the *Muscatine Democratic Enquirer* bitterly attacked the opposition to it: "Open, declared enemies we do not expect," declared the editor in October, 1851, "but secret hostility is ap-



parent, especially at Keokuk, where some of the people are selfish enough to wish that the rapids may never be improved. Nay more, if their wishes and desires were gratified, navigation would terminate just above Keokuk! They think, or seem to think, that if the Rapids are not improved the whole upper country will become tributary to their power, subservient to their will."

A Keokuk editor, however, ignoring the charge or reversing his attitude, asserted: "Improvement of the rapids will result in the development of immense water power for manufacturing purposes, and will furnish unrivaled facilities for docks for the building and repair of steamboats, thus making Keokuk the great point on the upper Mississippi."

But before the improvement of the rapids had time to prove its effect upon the cities, the railroad fever spread through the West and inspired new hopes for each town. "What shall be the Metropolis of Iowa?" questioned the *Democratic Enquirer*. "It must be either Keokuk, Burlington, Muscatine, or Dubuque. [Davenport was not mentioned by the Muscatine editor.] Railroads will in a few years terminate at different points on the Mississippi, and those places where they do terminate are destined to flourish, while others must decline or progress but slowly. Now is the accepted time!"



And so they all awaited the coming of the railroads to the Mississippi. Which town was to be reached first? The advance of the rails from Chicago was watched with excitement. The five principal lines arrived at the Mississippi within a space of only three years. It was a remarkably close contest. The advantage came first to Davenport when the railroad was completed from Chicago to Rock Island on February 22, 1854.

The railroads "just across the river" immediately stimulated railroad building within Iowa. Each town projected its hopes in prophecy, and laid a veritable tangle of lines in imagination over the State to leave no possible need of communication unsatisfied. "Railroads or death to the town!" was the essence of the appeal in winning pledges for railroad bonds. Moreover, there was a prize for the swift — a railroad bridge would be built where two tracks on opposite sides of the Mississippi needed only a bridge to span the gap.

So loudly did the rival towns press their railroad claims that an observer was led to comment: "These local claims and jealousies have already done much to retard the grants of lands to works of improvement. The bill to grant lands for railroads in Iowa has long and ardently been discussed in Congress and not brought to conclusion because of these local dissensions between rival



towns and railroads. Iowa is in position to advance with unexampled rapidity, if she will only bring her domestic broils to an end."

A memorial to Congress in 1852 asking a grant of land to aid a railroad from Dubuque to the Missouri River preceded by a few days a memorial for a grant in aid of a railroad from Davenport to Council Bluffs. The latter grant led to the organization of the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad — the first in Iowa. It is probable, however, that the first actual construction in Iowa was by the Lyons Iowa Central Railroad Company in 1853, though that road ultimately failed.

A bridge over the Mississippi became the principal object of rivalry. To Davenport there could be no doubt as to the proper place for a bridge. The Rock Island Railroad, efficiently advancing its interests, won the coöperation of the M. & M. Railroad for a bridge, and Davenport's patriotic citizen, Antoine LeClaire, furnished the site at the Iowa end. It was the first bridge across the Mississippi between Saint Paul and the Gulf of Mexico.

The years 1855 and 1856 were peak years of prosperity for the Mississippi River towns. All of them felt the boom period of the preceding five years culminate in the middle of the decade. Promise of good and active times ahead seemed



certain. Culture, every one was sure, would flourish along with economic and industrial enterprise. But a subtle change had been effected. Due to the railroads, the towns were losing self-sufficiency and gaining in inter-dependence, and with it the strong individualism and rivalry of the earlier days were waning. Hardship experienced by one town reverberated in all the towns.

The panic of 1857 broke business confidence and local pride. Business and prosperity, however, were alleged to be mercurial. They would rise again. But there was decadence in the spirit of rivalry. By 1859, dogs had become a subject of town pride. "Dubuque dogs are superior to ordinary dogs; they howl more mellifluously and longer every night, are homelier and present more varieties than any other dogs of any other city in the Union."

A rivalry that had contributed to the healthy growth of the towns was passing, as the interests of the State took precedence over local claims.

MARIE HAEFNER



## Comment by the Editor

### *THE GROWTH OF CITIES*

An observant stranger traveling up the Mississippi River in the spring of 1833 could have predicted where the first settlements in the Iowa country would be located. Even then, before any claims had been established, the most eligible sites for future cities were apparent. The junction of the Des Moines and Mississippi rivers, the presence of rapids, the location of military posts, the existence of lead mines, and the prospect of agricultural markets indicated clearly the natural advantages of Keokuk, Davenport, Fort Madison, Dubuque, Muscatine, and Burlington.

All these river towns were founded during the first year or two of settlement in Iowa. At first the mineral resources gave Dubuque a big advantage. The political prestige of Burlington, however, soon balanced the lead of Dubuque. By 1840 Davenport was running third, Fort Madison fourth, Muscatine fifth, and Keokuk had scarcely started in the race for supremacy.

During the second decade Keokuk became the gate city for river commerce and changed places



with Fort Madison in relative size. Railroads came in the fifties to alter the destiny of rival towns. Then the lead mines failed; the lumber industry flourished for a while and withered; factories, foundries, and mills contributed to the growth of the river cities. After a century Davenport is first in population, Dubuque is second, Burlington third, Clinton fourth, Muscatine fifth, Keokuk sixth, and Fort Madison seventh. Between the first and last the difference is nearly 47,000 inhabitants.

Particular causes of growth and decadence are easy to find, but the subtle influences that determine the character of a town are hard to define. Nobody knows how many people select their residence for cultural advantages. Some folks are attracted by low taxes and others by paved streets, good schools, efficient police, beautiful parks, and many services provided by public expense. Why were most of the cities located on the west bank of the Mississippi? How have occupations, religion, commerce, and nationalities affected politics and morals in the river towns? Why did Clinton eclipse her elder sister Lyons? Has rapid growth made any city better?

Perhaps the fundamental rivalry of cities lies deeper than statistical platitudes.

J. E. B.



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