

A Destined Land

"Sioux City . . . is the terminus of civilization of the upper Missouri", the St. Louis *Democrat* declared in 1858, but the Sioux City *Eagle* asserted that the young frontier town was destined to become "a place of no small magnitude" and a market center for "a large scope of country". No section offered greater inducements to settlers than Woodbury County, Iowa, according to the *Eagle*. There the best land was still "untouched". There a home and farm could be obtained embracing "as fine farming land as can be found anywhere".

Dr. S. P. Yeoman, Register of the Sioux City Land Office, estimated in 1858 that 300,000 acres in Woodbury County were "susceptible of immediate and easy cultivation". That year there were about 100 "practical farmers" in the county, each of whom had an average of 40 acres under cultivation. Assuming each had purchased or preempted a quarter section they would together control 20,000 acres, leaving a balance of 280,000 acres of first class land open to settlement. This was the equivalent of 1,750 quarters in Woodbury County alone. Moreover, there were within

the county some 265,000 additional acres "well adapted to grazing purposes".

Those who wished to start farming before the Civil War might well have asked with the *Sioux City Eagle*: "Where . . . will they see a better prospect for doing so than in Iowa — Western Iowa." With \$200, the *Eagle* pointed out, a man might purchase a quarter section. For another \$100, thirty-three acres could be broken, and it would cost \$200 to enclose the field with "a good plank fence". With the further investment of his labor a man could raise 1,000 bushels of corn, 300 bushels of potatoes, 50 wagonloads of pumpkins, 500 bushels of turnips "and as many watermelons, cucumbers, muskmelons, beans, cabbages and other vegetables as will be used in a large family." Indeed, the editor of the *Eagle* believed, the original investment could be recovered and a handsome profit made the first season. "In a few years", he declared, "you will be rich and can go back and buy out the rich neighbors you left behind."

Dr. Yeoman noted other advantages in Woodbury County. He stated that "nature has left nothing to do in the way of improvement of the soil." Here "eagerly sought" fertilizers were unnecessary and "without value." Indeed, he observed, not even the most skilled chemist could

have made any improvements in the composition of the soil elements of Woodbury County."

Of building and fencing materials, Dr. Yeoman noted, "there is not an abundant supply"; within the county there were less than twenty-five sections of "fair timbered land." The timber was largely along the Missouri River and other streams, but the most valuable varieties were on the Little Sioux in the Smithland area. However, he in effect advocated a program quite comparable, on a small scale, to later and better known conservation programs. In the first place he opposed exploitation of the timber resources of the county for individual profit. "There is probably a sufficiency", he stated, "if properly distributed in accordance with a liberal spirit" for the welfare of all the people in the county. Secondly, he advocated economy in consumption. He opposed construction of zig-zag rail fences, which was "first suggested as a convenient mode of disposing of surplus timber." He believed four times as much fence could be constructed from the same quantity of timber, if the trees were sawed into lumber and the fence was built straight instead of zig-zag. Thirdly, he believed the supply could be increased by an intelligent program of reforestation and prevention of prairie fires which destroyed great numbers of young trees. "We may as

readily cultivate the most valuable varieties of timber as the grain in our fields", said this early conservationist.

While Dr. Yeoman foresaw that corn would "undoubtedly be the great staple" of western Iowa, he believed that more attention should be given to wheat-raising. He pointed out that even in 1858 flour imports into Woodbury County exceeded \$15,000 in value. This money, he stated, might just as well remain at home among the farmers if they would only turn to the production of wheat. Moreover, this would stimulate a milling industry, which was much needed.

He also insisted that "every interest calls upon us to devote more attention to the dairy". Neither butter nor cheese had ever sold for less than 25 cents per pound and the price of the former commodity had frequently reached 50 cents. Even so, the supply had not equalled the demand. Here, then, was an opportunity for innumerable farmers to engage in a lucrative industry in an area with "the most profuse annual supply of nutritive grass." With such favorable natural factors coupled with the "extremely small . . . expense attending a dairy", the profits to be derived from this important department would be readily estimated.

The annual expenditure for pork and bacon im-

ported into the county equalled that for flour, Dr. Yeoman reported, and this too was a defect which could be remedied only by the settlement of a greater number of farmers interested in hog-production. "An ample supply of stock hogs should be immediately procured", he continued. With bacon quoted at 13 cents and ham and lard at 16 cents in Sioux City it seemed that this industry might well prove attractive. Sioux City was favorably "situated upon the bank of the snorting, belching, roaring and muddy Missouri" and had "one of the best landings on the river", an early settler wrote to the Charleston (Illinois) *Ledger*. It was on a transportation artery which would facilitate disposal of surplus products along the Missouri, characterized by the St. Louis *Democrat* as "the longest river in the world", as well as "the most peculiar".

Nor were the material attractions the only inducement for settlement in Woodbury County. Here the educational, religious, and social advantages were "certainly equal to those generally found in the early settlement of any country", according to Dr. Yeoman. There was "a school in operation within the reach of nearly every family in the county" and he found that the various denominations had "started preaching . . . in all the settlements within our borders." Indeed, ev-

ery community tended to become "a miniature republic, with a common centre for trade, consultation and the transaction of . . . business."

There was much work to be done in Woodbury County and in western Iowa in 1858. While merchants, mechanics, bankers, and even politicians were needed, the *Sioux City Eagle* reported that the crying need was for men to till the land. "With industry", it concluded, "as large fortunes can be upturned from its fertile soil as were ever dug from the golden soil of California." This was truly "a destined land".

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