

TOUR OF IOWA COUNTIES.

VAN BUREN COUNTY.

ITS PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE.

Part First—Description, History, Statistics.

Van Buren county is situated in the South-eastern part of the State, and is bounded on the east by the counties of Lee and Henry, on the north by Jefferson, on the west by Davis, and on the South by the Missouri line. It contains about four hundred and eighty square miles of surface, being a fraction over thirteen Congressional townships. It is divided into 13 civil townships, viz: Bonaparte, Cedar, Chequest, Des Moines, Farmington, Harrisburg, Jackson, Lick Creek, Union, Vernon, Van Buren, Village and Washington. This county was organized Dec 7, 1838, under the Territory of Wisconsin, and while Iowa was yet a part of that Territory. It is consequently one of the oldest settled counties in the State, and in many respects one of the most important. Its population in 1858 was 5171; in 1840—5146; in 1844—5616; in 1848—5579; in 1847—10,263; in 1849—11,577; in 1850—12,269; in 1851—13,000; in 1852—12,753; in 1854—13,843; in 1856—13,921; in 1855—15,877; in 1850—17,081; in 1863—15,822; in 1865—15,569, and in 1867—16,288.

The greatest of Iowa rivers—the Des Moines—runs diagonally through the county from the northwest to the southeast. Numerous tributaries empty into the river on both sides, among which may be mentioned Holcomb Creek, Chequest, Bear Creek, and Indian Creek on the South Side; and Stump Creek, Lick Creek, Rock Creek, Copperas Creek, Honey Creek and Reed's Creek, on the north side. Big Fox and Little Fox in the southwest part empty into the Mississippi in Missouri; and Big Cedar, crossing the northeast corner of the county, empties into Skunk River. Nearly all these streams afford an abundant supply of water for stock at all times, and all of them are skirted with the finest timber to be found in Iowa. It is so distributed as to be easily and conveniently obtained in every portion of the county. In timber and prairie the county is nearly equally divided—the former perhaps predominating. It is mainly composed of the following varieties: white oak, black oak, red oak, burr oak, hickory and white walnut hard and soft maple, hickory, luan, ash, elm &c., with some cottonwood along the streams. The red cedar is also found at several points on the rocky bluffs of the Des Moines. There are some fine groves of the hard maple, or sugar tree, and at the proper season, it is not uncommon to witness the social joys of an old-fashioned "wax pulling," reminding one of "days langsyne" away back east. How I do hope that no thoughtless axeman will ever unnecessarily destroy one of those grand old trees, around which, in the years to come, may cluster so many sweet associations of the past. When a ruthless hand is about to perpetrate a deed so cruel we must not fail to remonstrate with the earnestness of the poet: "Woodman, spare that tree!"

In consequence of its numerous streams, this county is more rolling than most others in this part of the State. Very little of it, however, is so broken or hilly as to prevent easy cultivation, and scarcely any portion is swampy or marshy. Along the Des Moines river on either side, alternately, are narrow belts of alluvial bottom lands. These bottoms were originally covered with heavy timber, but large portions of them are now in cultivation. The soil is somewhat sandy, warm, light, and exceedingly productive. The prairies of this county are generally small, with rolling surface, but equal in fertility to the average prairie soils. Good well water is everywhere easily obtained on the prairie, but along the river bluffs, and in the timber in many places it is necessary to provide cisterns. Good springs are found in many places. The county is rich in coal deposits. In almost every portion of the county coal has been mined to a limited extent, but now little more is taken out than enough to supply the local demand, and wood being so abundant, the demand for coal is very limited. The veins are from three to four feet in thickness. A considerable quantity has been taken from a three and a half foot vein near Business Corners in the North-west part of the county. This coal is well adapted to mechanical purposes, as it contains but little sulphuretted iron. Some three different seams or beds of coal are known to be exposed, but that of the second or middle vein seems to be most highly prized. The lower seam contains a greater proportion of sulphuretted iron.

Building stone is abundant, and easily accessible at all points in the county. The concretionary limestone is found outcropping along nearly every creek. There is also a species of sandstone which is easily worked, when first taken from the quarry, but on exposure, becomes harder. The limestone, however, has been chiefly used for building purposes. Stone taken from some of the quarries is susceptible of a very fine finish.—The block of Iowa marble contributed to the Washington Monument was taken from a quarry on Chequest Creek. A quarry in the vicinity of Doud's Station has been recently opened, the quality of which is fully equal to that found at Chequest. The upper layers of the concretionary limestone make excellent flagging stone, being easily quarried in strata of about three inches in thickness; There is no difficulty in manufacturing quick-lime on nearly every stream in the county. Fox river is the only stream on which suitable stone for lime does not exist in the greatest abundance. Clay and sand suitable for brick and building purposes are also abundant. A bed of fire-clay about five feet in thickness within 2½ miles of Keosauqua has for a number of years been worked. From this bed Mr. Dickson, of Vernon, has obtained his supplies for his extensive pottery at that place. The excellent reputation of the ware which he manufactures attests the good quality of the material. A variety of iron-ore is found at several places, but probably in quantities that would not justify the erection of furnaces.—A specimen presented the writer by Charles Baldwin, Esq., contains about 75 per cent. of the pure article. It was obtained about two miles north of Keosauqua. It is found in connection with the lower coal measures.

This county presents a fine field for the investigation of the geologist. In addition to the coal measures and concretionary limestone formations, the geode bed out-crops along the Des Moines River from Farmington to within two or three miles of Keosauqua, where it passes below the bed of the river and disappears. What our geologists term the Keokuk limestone, also first appears on the Des Moines River in this county two miles below Bonaparte, rising to an elevation of seventy feet above the bed of the river at Bentonport, and gradually depressing, finally disappears four miles above Bentonport.—Many fossils interesting to the geologist are obtained from this formation.

For manufacturing facilities this county is scarcely excelled by any other in the State. Though there are some good establishments, a large proportion of the immense hydraulic power in this county is pursued for the want of capital, or rather for the want of men disposed to invest their means in enterprises which could hardly fail to remunerate them.—Three of the four dams completed under the old Des Moines River Improvement project, are in this county, one at Bentonport, and one at Keosauqua. There are several other eligible points for dams in the county, each affording immense water power. The large amount of wood and coal would supply the fuel for steam machinery, in addition to the water power of the Des Moines. With her immense hydraulic power, wood, coal, and building material, Van Buren stands

unrivaled as a field for investment in manufacturing enterprises. Of this we shall say more as we notice the different points.

This is a great fruit-growing county. Being one of the oldest in the State, there are many grown orchards, and they rarely fail to yield a bountiful supply; especially of apples, and the various kinds of small fruits are abundant. Peaches more frequently succeed in this portion of the State than any other. A timber region is better for fruit than any other, and for this and other reasons, fruit-growing in this county has proved peculiarly successful. The soil produces abundantly all the grains, grasses and vegetables which will grow in this latitude. The general appearance of farms, with their improvements and stock, fully demonstrates that agriculture is profitable here, as it usually is elsewhere.

HISTORY.

On the 6th day of September, 1834, the Sixth Legislative Council of the "Territory of Michigan," passed, at its extra session, "An Act to lay off and organize counties west of the Mississippi river." This legislation created the counties of Dubuque and Des Moines. What is now the State of Wisconsin was then "Iowa county," and its laws, as far as applicable, were extended over the counties west of the river. June 15, 1836, Michigan became a State, and under an act of Congress of April 20th of the same year, Wisconsin, with the country west of the Mississippi river, became, on the 4th of July, a Territorial organization. The first Legislature of the new Territory was held at Belmont near the ancient town of Mineral Point, in November, 1836. The third Act passed by this Legislature was one dividing the county of Des Moines into Lee, Van Buren, Des Moines, Henry, Louisa and Muscatine.—The limits of Van Buren county at that time extended westward indefinitely.

The first court organized in the county was held at Farmington, April 10, 1837. Hon. David Irvin, Judge of the Second Judicial District of Wisconsin presided. A Grand Jury was empanelled, and several indictments were found, one of which was against N. Doose for exercising the office of Constable in the county, by authority of the State of Missouri. The next court was also held at the same place in April, 1838, the same Judge presiding. At this court Charles Mason was appointed Prosecuting Attorney, pro tem, for the county. A petit jury was empanelled to try an indictment for house-breaking. The party was found guilty and fined fifteen dollars.—About this time, or shortly after, commenced a controversy about the location of the permanent County Seat, which is doubtless seriously felt in its effects to the present day. Van Buren is emphatically a county of many towns, and nearly all of them have been competitors for the county seat. We may mention Keosauqua, Pittsburg, Philadelphia, Rochester, Columbus, Rockport, Bentonport, Lexington, Farmington, and Utica. All these towns, we presume, were once in Van Buren county, but some of them it would be difficult to find at the present time, especially those with the more pretentious and high-sounding metropolitan names. By an Act of the First Territorial Legislature, approved January 25, 1838, Benjamin F. Chaastain of Jefferson county, Michael H. Walker of Lee county, and Stephen Gearhart of Des Moines county, were appointed Commissioners to locate the county seat. The same Legislature had previously passed an Act locating it at Rochester, but the Governor had vetoed the bill. The bill appointing Commissioners also provided for holding the first term of District Court, after its passage, at Keosauqua, but forever after to be held at the place selected by the Commissioners. The location was made at Keosauqua.

Several enactments of the first Territorial Legislature pertain to the early history of this county. By an act approved January 15, 1839, "The Des Moines Mill Company" was incorporated, in which William Duncan and his associates were authorized to construct a dam across the river at a certain point named. The bill stipulated that they should build a lock not less than 130 feet long and 35 feet wide for the passage of "steam, keel, flat boats, rafts, and other watercrafts." This was the beginning of Iowa legislation concerning a river which has certainly proved a prolific subject of legislation from that day to this! An act approved January 19, 1839, also incorporates "The Plymouth Mill and Manufacturing Company," and authorizes E. B. Kimbrell, H. King Lewis R. Bissell, Martin A. Britton, and E. A. M. Swasey, and their associates, to construct a dam across the Des Moines river in the South-west quarter of section 23, township 68, range 8, with the same restrictions embraced in the other bill.

An act of the same legislature was approved Jan 21, 1839, "establishing" at different points some 12 Seminars of learning, three of which were in Van Buren county. One, styled "The Farmington Academy," was to be at the town of Farmington. Henry Bateman, Martin A. Britton, John Crane, Stephen Miles, and their associates, were the incorporators. Another institution to be styled "The Bentonport Academy," was to be established in the "town of North or South Bentonport," as a majority of the citizens of the town might decide. The incorporators were S. Richards, G. W. Howe, H. P. Graves, H. Buckland, Bertrand Jones, Henry Smith and their associates. "South Bentonport" is now known as Vernon. Still another institution was located at Keosauqua called "The Keosauqua Academy." The incorporators were J. N. Lewis, C. H. Ober, John Carnes, John Fairman, S. W. Summers, James Hall, Wilson Stanley, and their associates. All these institutions were for the "instruction of young persons of both sexes in science and literature."

The same Legislature also authorized William Meek & Sons to construct a dam at Bonaparte; and Henry Eao, George W. Howe, and Seth Richards, one at Bentonport, with the usual clause guarding the navigation of the river by the construction of locks, &c.

The first town in Iowa bearing the name of "Iowa City" was not that which is located in Johnson county, for on the 25th of Jan. 1839, certain commissioners were appointed to "review, lay out, and establish a territorial road from Mt Pleasant to Rome, in Henry County, from thence to Lockridge, thence to Smith's Crossing on Big Cedar, in Jefferson county, from thence to Iowa City, in Van Buren county."

In 1838 a conflict arose between the State of Missouri and the territory of Iowa, relative to a strip of land lying along the border between Keosauqua and the present State line. Missouri claimed that the "Des Moines Rapids" mentioned in her State constitution as a point in her northern boundary, referred to the rapids in the Des Moines river at Keosauqua.—Iowa claimed that the "Des Moines Rapids" in the Mississippi were the rapids meant.—Both parties claimed jurisdiction over the disputed territory. So intense was the feeling that a martial spirit began to develop itself.—Troops were organized, and history records no war more bloodless than the one which ensued. In this war, Van Buren County took a conspicuous part. Some of her citizens acquired great distinction as officers, among whom may be mentioned the name of Capt. J. H. Bonney. After a manifestation of the most undoubted pluck and heroism on the part of our troops, and the exhaustion of the supply of liquor on both sides, peace was declared, the enemy having concluded to yield her claim until the courts could decide the question. The tract was finally adjudged ours, and thus ended the first war in which Iowa, and especially Van Buren county, acquired military laurels! Of the heroic deeds and sufferings of her recent military heroes in the war for the Union, let the reports of our Adjutant General speak. Let her remember and appreciate their services as attested by the fact that she is about to erect at Keosauqua a noble monument to the memory of her fallen ones.

following statistics of Van Buren county:	
No. of dwelling houses.....	2,780
No of white males.....	8,185
No of white females.....	9,944
No of colored males.....	85
No of colored females.....	77
No entitled to vote.....	3,491
No of militia.....	2,839
No of foreigners not naturalized.....	683
No between the ages of 5 and 21.....	8,052
No of blind.....	9
No of deaf and dumb.....	8
No of insane.....	6
No of students attending college.....	118
No miles of railroad.....	30
No colleges.....	1
Value of manufactures for 1868.....	\$283,236
Bushels of coal raised.....	71,170
Value of minerals raised, not including coal.....	\$27,312
Value of agricultural implements.....	198,280
No rods of hedging.....	92,840
No of acres of land inclosed.....	123,684
No of acres of spring wheat for 1868.....	6,224
Bushels harvested.....	60,069
No acres of winter wheat.....	7,734
No of bushels harvested.....	69,062
No acres Oats.....	8,409
No bushels harvested.....	245,877
No acres of corn.....	51,364
No bushels harvested.....	299,460
No acres of Rye.....	1,880
No bushels harvested.....	22,690
No acres of barley.....	44
No bushels harvested.....	759
No acres of sorghum.....	506
No gallons ayrop from Sorghum.....	49,815
No acres of Hungarian grass.....	830
No tons hay from Hungarian grass.....	458
No acres of lime grass.....	24,476
No tons of hay from tame grass.....	18,397
No tons of hay from wild grass.....	383
No bushels of grass seed.....	11,149
No acres of Irish potatoes.....	657
No bushels harvested.....	24,235
No bushels of sweet potatoes.....	92,195
No bushels of onions.....	3,592
No acres of flax.....	347
No bushels flax seed.....	1,785
No pounds of lint.....	1,239
No acres of all other crops.....	505
No of fruit trees in bearing.....	57,854
No of fruit trees not in bearing.....	92,195
No of gallons of grapes raised.....	16,814
No of pounds of wine made.....	512
No of pounds of hops raised.....	774
No of pounds of tobacco raised.....	9,295
No of acres planted for timber.....	6
No hives of bees.....	2,882
No of pounds of honey taken.....	23,000
No of pounds of beeswax.....	983
No of hogs of all ages.....	24,138
No of cattle of all ages.....	15,698
No of milch cows.....	5,233
No of pounds of butter made.....	331,869
No of pounds of cheese made.....	19,263
No of work oxen.....	207
No of sheep in 1868.....	41,852
No of pounds of wool shorn in 1868.....	134,765
No of sheep in 1867.....	49,065
No of horses of all ages.....	7,517
No of mules and asses of all ages.....	709
No of dogs.....	2,185
No of sheep killed by dogs.....	1420
Value of sheep killed by wolves.....	\$174
No of acres of land assessed.....	305,350
No of acres of land enclosed.....	123,684
Assessed value of land per acre.....	\$5.07
Assessed value of lands and town lots.....	\$2,814,693
Assessed value of personal property.....	\$1,321,458
Total valuation.....	4,156,151

POSTOFFICES.

The following are the names of the postoffices in the county, viz: Bentonport, Birmingham, Bonaparte, Doud's Station, Farmington, Elkport, Home, Iowaville, Keosauqua, Kilbourne, Lebanon, Milton, Mt. Sterling, Mt. Zion, Pierceville, Pittsburg, Union, Utica, Vernon, and Winchester.

TO BE CONTINUED.

STATISTICS.

From the census report of 1867 we obtain the