

The First Newspaper and Printing Press Is Iowa

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 7(1) (Jan. 1869): 50-53

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

On the forks of the Maquoketa, about eight miles west of Maquoketa City, is located a cave which ranks among the greatest curiosities of the West. It extends about an eighth of a mile under ground, and terminates in a large circular room, capable of accommodating five hundred persons. The cave, its entrance and surroundings, are of a singular picturesque wildness and beauty. A beautiful stream of cool, sparkling water flows gently between the hills above, on under the natural bridge, then trickles down through the rocks, and passes through the cave. After passing through the cave, its banks are composed of perpendicular walls of solid rock, a hundred feet high, which gradually diminish in height until the stream enters the Maquoketa River.

THE FIRST NEWSPAPER AND PRINTING PRESS IN IOWA.

THE FIRST AND LAST EDITORS AND PRINTERS FOR THE OLD PRESS.

[The following history of the first newspaper printing press of Iowa, we first found published in the Dubuque *Herald*, several months ago. We are not aware who is the writer. It is worthy of preservation in the ANNALS, and we give it a place.]

A paragraph has recently been running the rounds of the Iowa press, and appeared also in the papers of some other States, assuming that the first printing press in Iowa is still used in printing a paper in one of the northern counties. Similar mistakes have been made at different times in the statement that the first Iowa press was in use in other localities.

Without referring to the many blunders which have been made by the press itself in relation to the history of the State and of Iowa newspapers during the first twenty-five years of our Territorial and State existence, we will give a few facts concerning the first paper and the first press.

To John King, of Dubuque, belongs the honor of engaging alone in the first newspaper enterprise in what is now Iowa. He came here from Ohio in 1834, and having the foresight to perceive that "Dubuque's Lead Mines" would attract the elements that would eventually build a prosperous city, he

determined in the fall of 1836 to establish a newspaper in the mining village of Dubuque. He passed the following winter in Ohio, and in the spring of 1836 went to Cincinnati and purchased a Smith press and the necessary type and material to publish what would now be considered a small weekly paper. The discretion which led him to discover the value of a newspaper in building up Dubuque, led to another discovery—that he wanted a good man to set type and to help edit the paper. He found a young man at Chillcothe adapted to his purpose. He was Wm. Cary Jones, afterwards a successful editor and publisher in New Orleans, a son-in-law of Hon. Thos. H. Benton, and subsequently a very successful lawyer in San Francisco, where he died in 1867. Mr. Jones was Judge King's principal assistant the first year. Judge King made another discovery in finding Andrew Keesecker at work on a newspaper published in Galena. He imported him to Dubuque, where he set up the press, placed the type in the cases, and was ready for "copy."

He also set up the first type in Iowa, in the words "The Linwoods"—a story which occupied the most of the first page of the first number of the "Du Buque Visitor." The motto of the paper was, "Truth our Guide—the public Good our aim;" the date—"Dubuque Lead Mines, Wisconsin Territory, May 11th, 1836." The alleged fact in connection with the date, was of course a historical falsehood, but it was allowable in such an enterprise to anticipate what would naturally soon occur. The truth was, at that date, that all of Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin was under the territorial jurisdiction of Michigan. It was a month after the "Visitor" appeared, before the act of Congress was passed making the three States named "Wisconsin Territory." The act took effect on the 4th of July in that year. Two years afterward, Iowa and that portion of Minnesota west of the Mississippi became "Iowa Territory." The Smith press was for several years worked by Mr. Keesecker, who also set his own editorial without reducing it to "copy."

The paper changed owners and names several times in the first five years. Its first change was to "Iowa News," in

1838—then “Miner’s Express,” in 1841—then merged into “Express & Herald,” in 1855, of which the present Dubuque Daily, Weekly and Campaign Herald is the successor. It became a Democratic paper in 1837, and has continued so since.

Mr. K. is still a compositor in the Herald office, having set type steadily for Dubuque and Iowa readers for a period of thirty-two years. Judge King lives at his ease in his fine mansion in the north part of the city. He literally sits under his own vines and by the side of his own fig trees, though he fails to make the fruit of the latter as profitable as his grape crop or his newspaper.

But the history of the old press is the main object of this sketch. About the year 1842, the old press and material was sold to a stock company for use in publishing a paper—the “Grant County Herald,” still living at Lancaster, in western Wisconsin, and was edited by Gen. H. A. Wiltse, now of Minnesota.

A few years afterwards, the enterprising J. M. Goodhue, who had written many interesting sketches of the Upper Mississippi lead mines, for the Galena papers, determined to establish the first paper in Minnesota. He purchased the same old press, conveyed it in the winter to the Mississippi, and moved it, by ox power, on the ice to St. Paul, where it was for a long time used to print his “St. Paul Pioneer.” But the old Smith press almost valueless at Dubuque, soon sent it onward in pioneer newspaper work—the want of larger presses to print larger papers for a greater number of more reading people. Mr. Goodhue lived to require a larger press, and to see civilization continue to extend westward to the Missouri and along its northern tributaries.

In 1858, the old press, after twenty-two years service, was placed on wheels and again by ox power hauled over the prairies, through the forests, around the lakes and through the streams to Sioux City Falls, a town on Big Sioux River, in what is now Dacotah Territory, and about fifteen miles from the south-east corner of Minnesota, and within a mile or

two of the north-west corner of Iowa. Here was printed, in that year, the first paper in that territory, then unorganized, the whole country north of Iowa and of the Missouri River being included in Minnesota. The paper was called the *Dacotah Democrat*, edited by Samuel Albrecht. J. B. Barnes, at present a compositor in the *Times* office, Dubuque, set the type and did the last press work at Sioux Falls City, in that year. It also printed, about that time, the "message" of the "people's government," who died before some of his few neighbors met a more horrible death in the Indian massacre of 1862. In march of that year the Sioux Indians burned the town, killed many of the inhabitants and rendered the place desolate for many years. The small building containing the old press was among those burned. Its "bed" was warped by the heat, its "lever" was stopped for the last time, it had given its last "impression," and still lies among the rubbish of Sioux Falls City, though the town has recently been rebuilt and reinhabited.

This old pioneer press, therefore, printed the first newspaper on the immediate banks of the Upper Mississippi, the first in Iowa, first in western Wisconsin, first in Minnesota, and the first in Dacotah Territory. It was worked over twenty years in the valley of the Mississippi before it became the first press in the great valley of the Missouri. And yet the old press, associated so intimately with the settlement and development of four States and Territories, was manufactured in the first of the north-western States, only thirty-eight years ago. Steam power and cylinder presses have, in that time, taken the place, to a great extent, of the arm power and hand press of thirty years since. This reminiscence will, however, be of little interest except to those who are connected with or admire or practice the "art preservative of all arts."

The facts are given, not only to correct the alleged history of this press, but to suggest the propriety of procuring the remains of such a public servant for deposit in the rooms of the Iowa State Historical Society.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.