

5-1-1933

Comment

John Ely Briggs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Briggs, John E. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 14 (1933), 211-212.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol14/iss5/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Comment by the Editor

BUILT IN DUBUQUE

At the time the *Ericsson* was launched, another steel-hulled seagoing boat was on the stocks at the yards of the Iowa Iron Works. The *Windom*, begun in 1893 and launched two years later, was built for the revenue cutter service. But early in the war with Spain this boat was transferred to the navy. Thus the Dubuque boat yard supplied two vessels that saw active naval service. There might have been more, but the bids of the Iron Works on three additional torpedo-boats in 1895 were too high to be accepted. It is not recorded that the *Windom* was ever under fire; but from May until August she was stationed at Key West and operated between that base and Havana.

While the construction of these seafaring vessels in Iowa was unique, the building of river craft was far more extensive. Dubuque was the boat-building center on the upper Mississippi in the nineties. The Diamond Jo yards at Eagle Point were making wooden packets and raft-boats and doing much repair work, while at the ice harbor the Iowa Iron Works had launched their twenty-second steel-hulled craft in 1890. Before

the end of the decade this company had built more than a hundred vessels. As many as eight boats were under construction at one time, including a ferry over three hundred feet long. The pay roll for the two hundred and thirty men employed in 1898 amounted to \$11,000 a month.

Before the boat-building industry reached its height, river traffic had begun to decline rapidly. Within a few years the packet and rafting business practically disappeared from the upper river. Nevertheless the Dubuque Boat and Boiler Company, successor to the Iowa Iron Works, continued to build huge ferry-boats, like the *Albatross*, and enormous towboats for the Ohio and lower Mississippi service. Powerful steel steamboats with their immense steel barge tows supplanted the graceful wooden packets. On one trip from Pittsburgh to New Orleans the Dubuque-built *Sprague* towed fifty-six 1000-ton barges of coal—four acres in area and the equivalent of twenty-two train loads.

Since the establishment of the government barge line in 1918, many of the towboats and barges have been built in the Dubuque yards. In some respects the *Herbert Hoover*, the largest Diesel-powered towboat on western waters, launched in 1931, is the acme of Iowa boat-building achievement.

J. E. B.