

Destruction of Iowa Lakes

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there is a beautiful lake. It is about the only body of water within the county large enough to be called a lake. When I came to the county in 1838 this was known as "Keokuk Lake." I recently made an effort to find how the name came to be applied to it and in so doing I learned that it was the site of the habitation of the noted chief, Keokuk. His village was situated on the west bank of the lake. This village was probably vacated in 1834. In that year the Indians raised corn in this vicinity for the last time. There are parties yet living in this vicinity who saw the frame work of the buildings in this Indian village. A gentleman of my acquaintance who visited it a short time after Keokuk left it, says that it occupied nearly all the high bottom land west of the lake—at least forty or fifty acres. Wapello had his village on the Iowa river, near the present city of Wapello, in Louisa county.

DESTRUCTION OF IOWA LAKES.

A few years ago Owl Lake, in Humboldt county, was purchased, or otherwise legally acquired, by a private citizen, who proceeded to drain the water away and make dry land of its bed. In fact, the peaty bottom of the lake was soon so dry that it came very near being converted into a bed of ashes from an accidental fire. The fire was extinguished only by great effort and at considerable expense. Since then it has been noted for the large crops grown where fishes swam and water-fowl were abundant in the old days of thirty-five years ago.

Mud Lake, in Hamilton county has always been known as a beautiful sheet of water, abounding with water-fowl and fishes, with myriads of pond lilies growing along its

margins. Many beautiful natural groves adorned its banks. But during the past year it has also fallen a victim to private greed, and we understand that it has been made dry land. We hear it stated that it is to be converted into a "celery farm." When this matter first came under discussion a few months ago, Professor J. L. Budd of our Agricultural college gave expression to his estimate of this sort of work in the following indignant protest:

"The story comes that Hamilton county has sold the tract of land covered by Mud Lake—about 1,000 acres—for the small sum of \$4,000, and that the work of draining it will begin at once. All that we can say is that it is a burning shame. With an expenditure of \$1,000 the low points of bank, furnishing outlets in a wet time could have been raised by dredging, thus deepening the water from the inflow of springs, fully eight feet. This would have made one of the most beautiful lakes of northern Iowa, and by percolation would have added to the value of thousands of acres in that section, besides giving out much needed moisture to the air. Instead of draining lakes, thousands more should be made over all parts of the state where a clay bottom is found near the surface. The once fine body of water known as Goose lake has also been drained recently and dozens of smaller lakes which might easily have been made into things of beauty and aids in keeping up the needed soil and air conditions requisite for crop growing."

The Webster City Freeman of October 31, 1894, replied to the above and other protests as follows:

"There seems to be some misapprehension of the facts in relation to the disposition of certain so-called lakes in this county by the board of supervisors. The question of disposing of these lakes has been discussed at different times for the past dozen years or more. It is and always has been the opinion of the best lawyers that the county has no right or title in these meandered lakes, and that whatever it could get out of them was clear gain, and never, until they were contracted away, was there any special value attached to them. For years past they have been growing up to reeds and rushes and the volume of water in them has been constantly decreasing. The county has no authority to appropriate money for their drainage or improvement and there is no probability that private individuals would ever go to the expense of making these improvements unless they could reap some direct advantage thereby. It is quite certain that these lakes would, in time, become wholly dried up and then the question of ownership would probably be settled on some basis of riparian rights of

ownership. In fact the parties who are paying for quit claims from the county recognize this possibility and are making terms with abutting property owners upon this theory. In view of all these facts we cannot see wherein the supervisors have not done the proper thing in getting what they can for the county out of these lakes, and we believe the tax-payers generally will take this view of the case."

We copy these articles in order that they may be placed upon record; but we endorse the views so clearly expressed by Professor Budd. We look upon the destruction of these beautiful lakes as nothing short of gross, inexcusable vandalism. The \$4,000 received by Hamilton county is the merest pittance, even when cash values are taken into account. If the county could not improve her lakes just now, there can be little doubt that she could in the not very distant future. Surely, the legislature would grant the authority if it were asked. We have heard it estimated by a most intelligent gentleman that, with moderate improvement, Mud Lake—as it was—could be made to produce \$4,000 worth of fish every year. It could easily have been made a beautiful summer resort for hundreds of people who cannot go to the greater lakes. Sufficient water could be raised from a few wells along its margins partially, at least, to balance the evaporation constantly going on; and if the lake had ultimately gone dry, it might have remained for many years an object of surpassing beauty and of much actual profit to the public. With the water supply so gradually and constantly diminishing, it looks like criminal folly to destroy such a lake simply to enable a private citizen to "make money." Good land is still abundant enough in Iowa. Other communities in this state, and throughout the country, and all over the world for that matter, are devoting tens of thousands of dollars to the work of making lakes and ponds, while Humboldt and Hamilton counties, in Iowa, are selling them out for much less in comparison than a "mess of pottage." When a private citizen employs a brainy lawyer to devise means for the destruction of such a lake, the

county should be authorized to employ a brainier one to defeat him. It is certainly to be hoped that the next legislature may take some action looking to the preservation of our beautiful Iowa lakes.—*Daily Capital*, Des Moines, January 30th, 1895.

EARLY RECOLLECTIONS OF KEOKUK COUNTY.

BY J. D. HAWORTH.

Historians of states and countries, as well as of wars and peoples, seldom pick up the little events—the warp and woof of the lives of the men and women who make and mold the history that is read with so much eagerness in the years that follow. The little things are skipped, the common people are in a great degree overlooked, yet it is from and by these that others become great and of historical renown. Many things of small account at the time they transpire, of so little consequence that they are scarcely noticed, yet in after years their value becomes in many cases almost priceless, and large sums of money would be given for facts, stated by an eye-witness. Could we at this late day resurrect the thousand and one small facts that transpired during the days of the first settlement of the eastern States by our forefathers, what would we not give? Four hundred years and more have elapsed since this country was discovered, yet how short a time is that compared with the great space that has been drawn out since history first began. We have our histories of the early days of this country, yet how meager is that history—a mere outline! Nothing to tell us of the thousand small things that went to make up the lives, the joys or the sorrows of the people, who

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