

## Northern Iowa in 1845

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Northern Iowa in 1845." *The Annals of Iowa* 14 (1923), 58-60.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.4738>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

platform this year adopted at Chicago, and cordially approves the sentiments contained in Governor Cleveland's letter of acceptance and, in the language of said letter, we express our conviction that "laws unnecessarily interfering with the habits and customs of any class of our people which are not offensive to them or the moral sentiment of the civilized world, and which are consistent with good citizenship and public welfare, are unwise and vexatious." Therefore we pledge ourselves to use all honorable and legal means to secure the speedy repeal of laws in conflict therewith.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>*The Daily Gazette*, Burlington, September 4, 1884. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

(To be continued)

#### NORTHERN IOWA IN 1845

In Niles's *National Register* under date of October 18, 1845, (copy in Iowa State Library) is published an interesting letter from A. Whitney, a projector of the so-called Oregon Railroad. He had made a preliminary trip across northern Iowa, which was not then surveyed or carefully mapped, and wrote an interesting letter descriptive of this trip, of which the following is a portion:

St. Louis, Sept. 22, 1845.

Hon. James B. Bowlin:—

Dear Sir—As your city and state are deeply interested in the project which I have brought before the public, and believing that yourself and others may desire to have some particulars of my exploration, with my present views relative to the project, induces this communication which, if meeting your approbation, be pleased to transfer to the public, through the press of your city.

We left Milwaukee June 19, 1845, passed in a northerly direction to near Fond du Lac; thence, westerly to Fox Lake, thence to Fort Winnebago, thence down the south bank of the Wisconsin to Prairie du Chien, crossing the Wisconsin a few miles above Prairie du Chien. At Prairie du Chien I expected a guide, and again, at Fort Atkinson, fifty miles west of the Mississippi, but was disappointed. Without a guide and with but one laboring man, I felt a heavy responsibility and no small reluctance in leading the young gentlemen with me into probable danger and severe hardships and fatigue; but they, to a man, said "Go on, we will follow you, we cannot turn back." And they have fully redeemed their pledge, having gone through many hardships, much fatigue, hard labor, hunger, and thirst. I cannot say too much for them, nor can too much praise be awarded for their conduct. Unused to any labor, I feared it would be hard upon them, but they never finched; were ready

to wade through mud, water, and grass to their necks, with our provisions upon their heads; to swim rivers, to fell trees for bridges, and all other fatigues necessary for the accomplishment of our object.

Before leaving Prairie du Chien I fixed upon a route through which I would like to pass to the Missouri and, with compass in hand, made it within five miles of the point started for. By Burr's map of Wisconsin, embracing Iowa, &c. (which I found more correct than any I have seen) we crossed the Turkey River at Fort Atkinson, north lat.  $43^{\circ} 15'$ ; thence we crossed the different branches of the Wabisipinica and the Cedars, in about the same latitude to Clear Lake, in west long.  $93^{\circ} 25'$ ; thence northwesterly, till we came to a branch of the St. Peters, running northeasterly. My object was to find a dividing ridge between the waters which run north and those running southerly; and I will here remark that we did not find the Cedars or the St. Peters branch to correspond with Burr's or any other map I have seen. Thence due west to the Des Moines, latitude  $43^{\circ} 20'$  west, longitude about 95, which stream we crossed by felling trees for a bridge. Thence due west to a number of small lakes, forming the head waters of the Little Sioux, emptying into the Missouri; thence across Floyd's River; thence due west across the branches of the Calumet; then the White Stone or Vermillion; then Jaques' River, and then the great, the grand Missouri, fifteen miles below the great bend, making a distance from the Mississippi of more than five hundred miles, *over the finest country upon the globe*, capable of sustaining more than three times the population of the same space in any other part of the world! No swamps, no marshes, no flooding of rivers, except in the vicinity of the Wabisipinica, and then but a small distance, and undoubtedly the most healthy country in the world. I have never found the atmosphere so pure. The surface gently rolling to an almost level—always, however, enough undulating to let all the water off. While on this subject, I will remark that none of the rivers west of the lakes are natural rivers, but have formed themselves and beds by the constant wash of this vast and almost level prairie.

The soil of this vast country is as rich as it can be—none richer. In the whole distance, I did not see one half acre of useless, bad land; all covered with the best of grasses for cattle, and when cured, good hay. The farmer will want but the plough, the seed, the scythe, and the sickle.

As far as the Cedars there are tracts of good timber and of great extent; none beyond the Missouri, and then but very little till near down to Fort Leavenworth. Even there, it is of no great extent; about three miles in width on the river; sometimes much less, and sometimes none. But *coals are abundant*, and the growth of timber so natural, that without fires (which now spread over the whole prairies yearly, destroying all things) in fifteen years all from river to river would be a dense forest.

From the lake to the Mississippi, land good, route feasible; an abundance of timber must be then prepared and taken on, as the road progresses to the Rocky Mountains; and no streams difficult to bridge until we reach the Mississippi, which can be bridged in the vicinity of and above Prairie du Chien, and, as I understand, not below that place. From the Mississippi to the Missouri the streams can be bridged easily, and at little comparative expense; first rate material being abundant in the bluffs which form the banks of the rivers. The Missouri is a very difficult stream to bridge or to navigate; its waters rapid, many shoals, eighteen or twenty-two inches water, its bed quicksand, its channel constantly changing, and now full of snags, its bottoms, below the Calumet, four to five miles wide between the bluffs, and all quicksand, in layers or strata from one to three feet, and between each the water constantly leaches out, which, with the wear of the main stream, causes the banks to tumble into the river, and so on, till a new channel is made from one side of the bottom to the other; rendering it almost impossible to bridge anywhere below the entrance of the Calumet. But above this are two places of rock bed and one of gravel, where, too, the bottoms, from bluff to bluff, are very narrow, and a bridge may be erected without difficulty and with safety; thus you will see from my picture, that I have found all I desired, and far more than I expected when I set out.

\* \* \* \* \*

Most respectfully, your ob't servant,

A. WHITNEY.

---

We are pleased to see in the last *Iowa News* that Du Bu Que is improving rapidly this season, and that the village is also healthy. We rejoice in the prosperity of Iowa, of the whole of Iowa, and we can not cherish one sectional feeling which might operate to the injury of any part of our flourishing territory. In Iowa City, the seat of territorial government located by the last legislature, lots have been sold by the commissioners to the amount of many thousand dollars and several buildings have been erected already. Those who have visited the location all agree in the opinion that it is the best that could have been made, in the heart of a fine farming country, with an extensive quarry of elegant marble on the bank of the Iowa only a short distance from the point on which the public buildings are to be erected. The Iowa River to this point is not navigable for boats of any kind, but is said to be a fine mill stream.—The *Iowa Sun*, Davenport, Iowa Territory, September 11, 1839. (In the newspaper collection of the Historical Department of Iowa.)

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.