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# River Town: Davenport's Early Years

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*Antoine LeClaire*

# RIVER

## DAVENPORT'S

BY LOREN

When the early settlers of the Iowa frontier began to lay out the first towns, the Mississippi River was the focal point for their locations. It was the artery of transportation for the people and goods coming in, and—the settlers hoped—for the products that would soon be exported. Each new town was the cutting edge of the frontier slicing ahead of more established surrounding settlement and leaving many miles of territory to be filled in behind and around the town.

Towns were centers of economic activity, centers of cultural and political life, and models

for social structure, so that urbanism was an experience shared even by many rural settlers. Frequently the settlement of an area was a centrifugal movement—moving outward from the outfitting of a town to the farms—rather than centripetal, moving inward from already established farms into a central town.

Settlers usually created the new towns in the image of those they remembered in the East. This provided on the frontier a physical, cultural, and institutional continuity with the life and homes left behind. While the rural population was usually more numerous, it could not exist without the town.

The geographic features of the land that be-



# TOWN

## EARLY YEARS

### N. HORTON

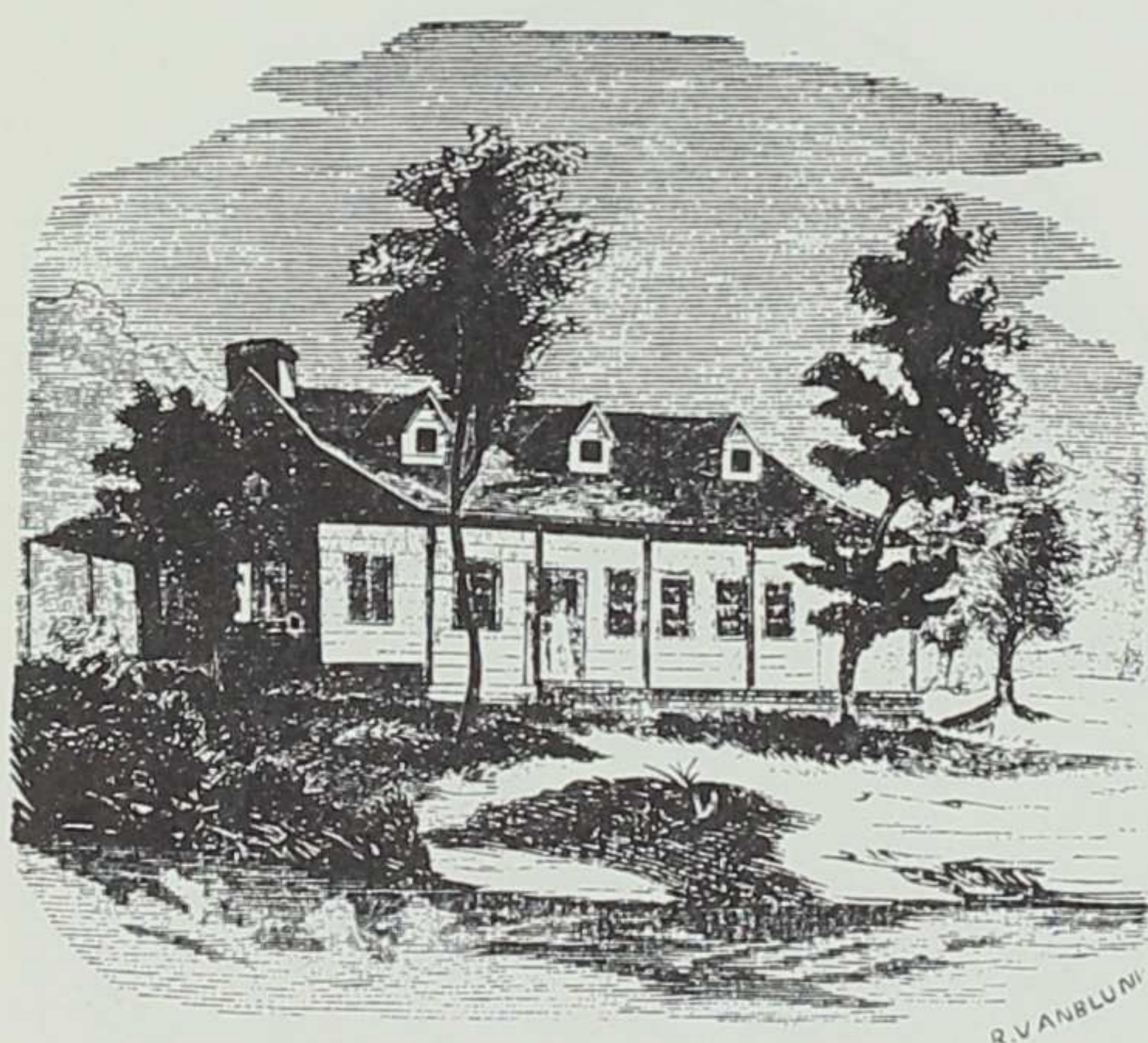


*Colonel George Davenport*

came the site of Davenport were crucial to the founding of the town. Here the Mississippi River flowed in a relatively straight channel, east to west. The Upper Rapids of the Mississippi lay just above, where the river channel was divided by several islands. These later became key factors in the development of transportation routes. The land on the north bank of the Mississippi was divided by a bluff into two plateaus. In some places Hamilton limestone outcropped, particularly on the face of the bluff, and in other places it lay many feet beneath the soil surface. This limestone, builders would find, was suitable for foundations, and for rough masonry walls. The bluff dividing the

two plateaus rose at a relatively sharp angle, and was pierced in several places by ravines, none of which carried water suitable for power sites. However, the upper clay in the bluff and on the plateau was unusually well suited to the manufacture of brick. And, approximately two miles behind the brow of the bluff, the upper plateau was split by Duck Creek. Flowing parallel to the river but in the opposite direction, the creek offered several potential power sites. Behind Duck Creek, the level and fertile prairie land stretched for 15 miles before it was interrupted by another significant waterway. Although neither of the plateaus was heavily timbered, hardwood trees were found in mod-





*Antoine LeClaire's old residence*

erate quantities throughout the area. Both the upper and lower plateaus were well drained, and the river front was mainly free of swamps, marshes, and bogs, except for some large sinkholes found in the west end of the future site of Davenport.

Such things influenced both the founding and the growth of the town. Navigation of the river from the south halted at the foot of the Upper Rapids, making Davenport a logical river-port site, and the narrow channels of the river, and the islands, made it a logical and easy point for bridging, although the earliest settlers seem not to have recognized this. The lower plateau had a straight and level river bank, making it easy to construct wharves and warehouses for river commerce. It was also broad enough to accommodate a large town, and the prairies behind the bluff were prime areas for production of farm crops which would need marketing and processing. The presence of building stone, and clay suitable for firing into brick, coupled with the sparseness of timber, meant that buildings would be built of more durable materials than was usually the case in

rough-and-ready frontier towns. The Upper Rapids could provide water power for industry, and the absence of marshes indicated a site free of the usual health hazards.

Of course, certain geographic features also discouraged the choice of the site for the founding of a town. The scarcity of timber did, after all, mean an obvious lack of immediate building materials, and a long range shortage of fuel. The bluff was a natural barrier to the northward expansion of the town, and the agricultural area behind the town was completely uninhabited when Davenport was founded. There was already a town on the south side of the river—Stephenson, Illinois (now called Rock Island)—which could take advantage of any transportation opportunities in the area, so that Davenport would certainly have no monopoly on commerce. The water-power sites were all far upriver from the actual plat of Davenport, and the lower plateau was subject to flooding from the river, as well as washing and erosion coming down from the bluff. One corner of the original plat lay in an area rife with sinkholes. Why, then, was this site chosen for the platting of a town at all? Historical accident and something like greed led the founders to ignore the liabilities of the site, and to concentrate on its commercial advantages.

A treaty with the Sac (Sauk) and Fox (Mesquakie) tribes on September 21, 1832 extinguished the Indian title to the land in the area. General Winfield Scott signed for the United States, and Antoine LeClaire acted as the official interpreter. Known as the "Black Hawk Purchase," the treaty ceded the land for 50 miles west of the Mississippi River to white settlement. The land was to be officially opened for claim on June 1, 1833. Two sections of land were reserved for Antoine LeClaire, in honor of the esteem the Indians felt for him and



his wife. One section lay just east of the future site of Davenport, at the foot of the Upper Rapids, on the very place where the treaty was signed. The other section lay at the head of the Upper Rapids, where the towns of Parkhurst, Middletown, and LeClaire were later platted.

Antoine LeClaire was typical of the frontier entrepreneur. Beginning with fortunate advantages of both land and prestige, he exploited his opportunities to the fullest. Born in 1797 at what became St. Joseph, Michigan, he was the son of a French-Canadian and a Pottawatomie Indian. The family operated trading posts on the future sites of Milwaukee and Chicago. Through sponsorship of Governor William Clark of Missouri, LeClaire was well educated, attending a Jesuit Seminary (later called St. Louis University), and entered government service. From 1818 to 1842, he served as an official interpreter in the Illinois and Arkansas Territories, and in the Wisconsin area. LeClaire spoke French, Spanish, English, and 14 Indian dialects, and he acted as the official interpreter for numerous other Indian treaties. LeClaire was engaged in a wide variety of business and social activities. He was commissioned a Justice of the Peace in 1836 and also acted as the first Postmaster of Davenport. Land speculation formed the basis of his large fortune. From 1836 to 1861, LeClaire participated in 459 real estate transactions in Scott County. He owned a ferry, a mercantile store, a foundry, two hotels, a theater, a business block, a stone quarry, several farms, and also acted as commission and forwarding agent for Julien Dubuque's business partner, Auguste Chouteau of St. Louis. In 1853, Antoine LeClaire was one of the incorporators of the LeClaire and Davenport Railroad, and he also owned a large amount of stock in the Mississippi and Missouri Railroad, as well as in other companies. When he died in 1861 the gross value of his estate was more than \$444,000; and, even after final probate in 1877, the net



*Antoine LeClaire's second Davenport home, completed in 1856 (courtesy Putnam Museum, Davenport)*

valuation remained at over \$238,000.

Acquisition of wealth did not totally dominate Antoine LeClaire's life. Although he never held any major political office, his name appears on lists of almost every civic activity in town, usually as treasurer or as a member of the board of directors. A devout Roman Catholic, he donated two square blocks of land to the Church for use as building sites, and he himself paid the building costs for two churches. Of an ecumenical spirit, he also sold building lots to the Baptists, the Congregationalists, and the Christian Disciples at prices ranging from \$1 to \$26—far below their market value.

Secular community service and philanthropy were also a part of LeClaire's life. He donated a block of land and \$3,000 toward the construction of a county courthouse and 13 lots for Iowa College. He gave his house to be used as the first railroad depot, and a two-acre lot from the treaty land was given to the town as a free public cemetery. He even planted trees along the streets of the business district at his own expense. Five-foot-eight-inches, at 386 pounds, Antoine LeClaire benevolently looms



Articles of agreement, made and concluded the  
 twenty third day of July, in the year of our Lord one  
 thousand eight hundred and thirty six, between  
 Ant. Le Claire of the first part and Geo Davenport,  
 James May, William Gordon, Tho: F. Smith, P. G. Hambaugh,  
 L. S. Colton, and Alex: W. McGregor  
 of the second part, as follows to wit: The said Ant.  
 Le Claire for and in consideration of the sum of  
 \$1750.00. dollars to him in hand paid by the sa-  
 id parties of the second part, as follows to wit: Geo Dava-  
 nport, James May, William Gordon, Tho: F. Smith, P. G. Hambaugh,  
 L. S. Colton and Alex: W. McGregor, two hundred and  
 fifty dollars each — the receipt whereof is here-  
 by acknowledged, have granted, bargained, sold, releas-  
 ed, and confirmed, and by these presents do grant,  
 bargain, sell, release, and confirm unto the said  
 Geo Davenport, James May, William Gordon, Tho: F. Smith, P. G. Hambaugh,  
 L. S. Colton and Alex: W. McGregor —  
 their heirs Exors and assigns  
 seven 7/8ths of a certain tract or parcel of land  
 being and lying on the west side of the Mississippi  
 river opposite Stephenson, known as <sup>his</sup> claim, and  
 bounded as follows to wit, commencing at the <sup>lower</sup> corner  
 of Ant. Le Claire's reserve in the Mississippi river running  
 thence N with the western boundary of said reserve 160 poles  
 thence W 160 poles thence S to the Mississippi river at low water mark,  
 thence up the meanders of said river to the place of beginning.  
 The said Ant. Le Claire is to give the remaining eighth  
 of said described land which shall entitle him  
 to an undivided interest in one eighth in a town to  
 be laid out on said land, he the said Le Claire to bear  
 an equal proportion of the expenses of laying out  
 and improving said town.

And the said parties of the second part for the con-  
 siderations heretofore mentioned, for and beho-  
 ve of their heirs, Exors and assigns covenant and agree  
 together with the said Ant. Le Claire, to lay out a town  
 on or before the 1<sup>st</sup> day of May 1836 on the said tract  
 or parcel of land said town to be held by us as joint  
 tenants. That we will bear an equal proportion of  
 the expenses in any wise accruing in relation to  
 said town, and that each shall be entitled to an  
 equal proportion of the profits in any wise aris-  
 ing from said town to be borne or received according  
 to the interest each may hold in said town that is  
 to say one eighth each.

That we bind our selves our heirs  
 Exors and assigns to make warrant deeds for  
 all land sold and that each and every one shall  
 be held responsible for the defense of the same.

This article shall continue in force until  
 all the lots in said town are sold unless annul-  
 ed by mutual consent. That we will in all matters  
 in relation to said town, be governed by the  
 will of a majority of the parties.

The said Ant. Le Claire hereby transfers all the right  
 title claim, and interest he has or may acquire by right  
 of settlement, or a act of congress or otherwise.

I have this day transferred Antoine Le Claire  
 all my interest and demand what  
 he has in the above named town of Davenport  
 and in consideration of the sum of \$1750.00  
 the said Antoine Le Claire has sold and  
 obligated himself to fulfill James May  
 the above article and to by Geo Davenport agent  
 perfect the title to all lots  
 held after the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1836. J. Smith By A. Leclair  
 as required in said  
 articles and I am to P. G. Hambaugh  
 fact the title to all lots  
 sold from the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1836  
 according to said Articles Alex: W. McGregor  
 Alexander Colton Alex: W. McGregor  
 Stanton Shaly

over Davenport as a rotund guardian angel and  
 guiding spirit.

Outside LeClaire's Reserve, the first regular  
 claims on the site of Davenport were made by  
 Dr. R.H. Spencer and Mr. A.M. McCloud  
 during the summer of 1833. Other land was  
 claimed within the limits of what later became  
 Scott County, but these two men were the first  
 to settle on the actual townsite. Because of a  
 quarrel between the two men, LeClaire was  
 able to purchase both claims for a mere \$150.  
 By the spring of 1833 LeClaire had built a log  
 cabin on the site where the treaty was signed,  
 fulfilling his agreement with the Indians.

On February 23, 1836 eight men met at the  
 home of Colonel George Davenport on  
 Government Island to discuss the platting of a  
 town on the north bank of the Mississippi  
 River. As a result of the meeting, the men  
 agreed to found a town on the claims purchased  
 earlier by LeClaire, and the Articles of Agree-  
 ment, signed by LeClaire, Colonel Davenport,  
 Major William Gordon, Captain James May,  
 Major Thomas F. Smith, Philip G. Hambaugh,  
 Levi S. Colton, and Alexander W. McGregor,  
 valued the land at \$2,000. Each partner paid  
 LeClaire \$250, and the tract was held by the  
 signators as joint-tenants. LeClaire retained a  
 one-eighth interest at the same value, and at  
 his suggestion, the town was named for Colonel  
 Davenport.

The partners agreed to continue the Articles  
 until all lots had been sold, or until the docu-  
 ment was dissolved by mutual agreement. A  
 survey was supposed to be made by May 1,  
 1836, but Major Gordon, one of the partners  
 and a United States Surveyor, did not get  
 around to it till May 14. Eyewitnesses claim  
 Gordon was drunk when he made the survey.

The original Articles of Agreement, signed by the eight  
 proprietors, that resulted in the founding of Davenport  
 (courtesy Putnam Museum, Davenport)



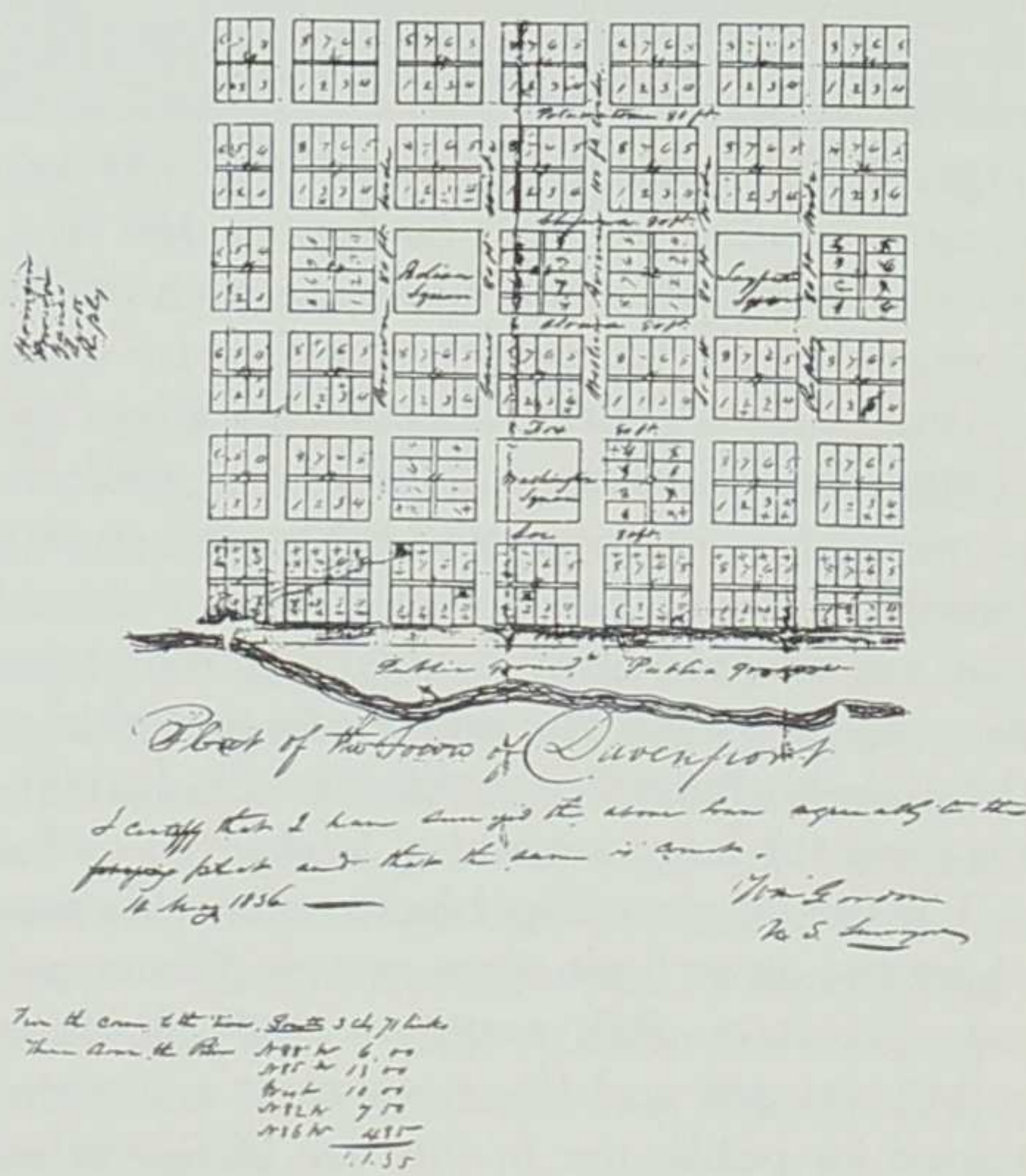
Errors in the original plat later caused difficulty, making a resurvey necessary on April 6, 1841. This revealed a  $7^{\circ}15''$  variation in street direction to the right of the cardinal compass points, and also indicated that the east-west streets actually lay four feet north of Gordon's description. Suspecting Gordon was mistaken on the side of the plat that abutted his land, too, Antoine LeClaire requested a resurvey by the County. On March 24, 1859 a certificate was filed in Scott County District Court by William Campbell, the surveyor, who had discovered LeClaire was right. All blocks of the original town of Davenport east of Ripley Street lay within the Reserve of Antoine LeClaire as originally subdivided by the first government surveyor of the entire Indian Cession. LeClaire made no effort to receive compensation for this error. In a sense, he could be said to have donated six blocks of land to the original proprietors of Davenport.

The first sale of lots in the new town took place in May, 1836. Chartered steamboats brought land speculators from as far away as St. Louis, but sales were sluggish and only 50 or 60 lots were sold, the prices ranging from \$300 to \$600 each. The major difficulty seemed to be the prospective buyers' doubts about the validity of the proprietors' titles to the land. Speculators feared they would only get squatter's rights to the land, and most of the remaining lots were purchased by the proprietors themselves. Their hopes of founding a flourishing town seemed doomed. A few settlers arrived and constructed buildings, but the financial panic of 1837, coming hard upon the founding, retarded growth.

The motives of the original proprietors are not completely clear but there are plausible explanations for their locating a town here at this time. Colonel Davenport and Antoine LeClaire were already residents of the area, and a successful town would bring them greater prestige and wealth. Levi S. Colton and Alexander

W. McGregor became permanent residents, prospering from their proprietorships and from their real estate holdings. Major William Gordon, the tipping surveyor, lived in Davenport briefly, then disappeared. Smith and Hambaugh were in the army, stationed at Fort Armstrong. Land speculation was probably their sole motivation, since neither ever lived in Davenport. Indeed, the army apparently transferred them from the area soon after they purchased the land. May was a Pittsburgh merchant who took no direct part in the proceedings except for the incorporation and later distribution of profits.

Perhaps with greater imagination and less of an eye toward immediate gain, the proprietors might have conceived any number of long-range goals for Davenport, including the domination of river traffic, exploitation of the agricultural potential of the Black Hawk Cession, and the use of water-power resources. Not only did adjacent Fort Armstrong provide



William Gordon's original—and inebriated—plat of Davenport (courtesy Putnam Museum, Davenport)



protection from Indians, but it also served as a potential market for Davenport's goods. No evidence has been found to indicate that any of the proprietors recognized the possibilities inherent in the site for railroad development. In any case, if frontier greed—land speculation and quick profits—was the major motivation, only LeClaire, Colton, and McGregor finally succeeded. The rest of the proprietors left Davenport, or died before the town really began to grow and prosper.

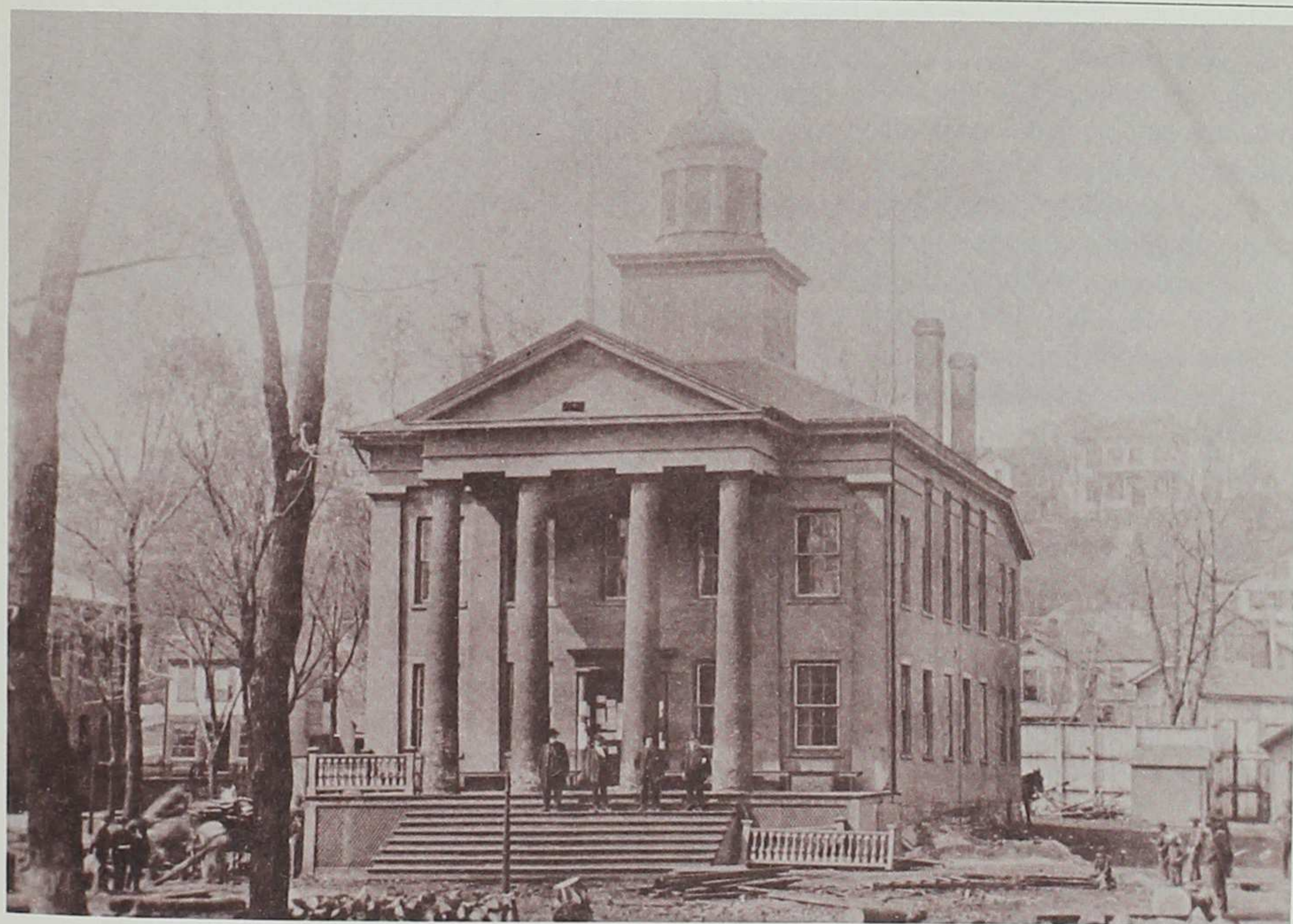
The commonplace, even off-handed platting of Davenport resulted from such motives and expectations. Originally platted in a gridiron pattern consisting of 36 blocks and six half-blocks intended to lie square with the cardinal compass points, the town lay in an approximate parallel to the Mississippi River. This was the only concession to topography. Low land, ditches, the bluff, the adjacent curve in the river bed were simply ignored. Such was the case with hundreds of other early town plats all across the United States. Also typical was the division of each block into rectangular building lots, although the Davenport town lots were larger than usual. Each block was 320 feet square, divided into lots 80 feet by 150 feet, with 20-foot-wide alleys bisecting each block. Common as all this was, there were also some unusual features in the original plat: alleys ran in different directions, and the streets, uniform in most plats, were of two widths. All streets were 80 feet wide, except the middle street of the major grid mass. This was Western Avenue, 100 feet wide, apparently intended as the main business street. Another unusual feature was the large amount of land set aside for public use. Three entire blocks and a wide area along the river front were reserved from private purchase. Still more unusual, all three public squares and the river front are maintained for public use to this day. A few other frontier towns began by reserving generously, but almost all of them rapidly succumbed to

private greed, subdividing and selling these public areas. Davenport's river front ranged from 90 to 209 feet in width. (Citizens of St. Louis bragged about their "enormous" public river front ranging up to 150 feet in width.) Another uncommon feature was the inclusion of half blocks in the original plat when no logical, topographical, or legal reason justified it. But other than these few exceptions, Davenport resembled most river towns of the day.

As the town grew, its center of business moved away from the original plat, and the most important developments took place in various platted additions. The additions located in the LeClaire Reserve were the most important. The center of population and business shifted rapidly into this area, where it remains today. Once again, quick profits undoubtedly figured as the dominant motive in all the additions. Antoine LeClaire's own Reserve, immediately to the east of town, granted him by the 1832 treaty, had cost him nothing. LeClaire subdivided it into blocks and sold lots at virtually a total profit. LeClaire made nine additions to the original plat in his lifetime, and his executor made four more when he closed the estate. The first three LeClaire additions, laid out within five years of the founding of the town, soon became the center of both the business and the residential districts.

Each of the LeClaire Additions extended the town farther up river and farther up the bluff. And as the center of town moved eastward, the lower plateau became narrower. Another town, East Davenport, was platted at the point where the bluff actually overhung the river channel. The LeClaire Additions spread toward East Davenport. The smaller town was ultimately annexed by Davenport, which, through such additions and annexations, came finally to stretch a far greater distance along the river front than originally planned. Other additions, running at right angles back from the river, altered the shape of the town acutely. By





*First Scott County Court House, partially financed by LeClaire (courtesy Putnam Museum, Davenport)*

1861, the map of the inhabited part of Davenport was shaped like a reversed L—a significant deviation from the original gridiron pattern.

But no additions were platted west of the original townsite until 1849. That year the economic prosperity and the population boom that would stretch through the 1850s had begun. Judge G.C.R. Mitchell, Ebenezer Cook, George L. Sargent, and James McIntosh were the proprietors of the additions most significant in the growth of Davenport to the west, and in 1853 West Davenport was annexed. Another satellite town, this time to the north, was platted in 1868, and later North Davenport, too, was annexed.

When Davenport was founded on May 14, 1836, no one lived on the site. Since many of the lots were sold to speculators—and competition from Stephenson, Illinois and from Buffalo and Rockingham, Iowa was strong—the population grew slowly. By the end of the year it had failed to reach 100, and the Panic of 1837 further hampered growth. Most of the early residents came from the Cincinnati area in Ohio, or from Pennsylvania. A smattering came from other middle Atlantic and southern states, but almost none came directly from New England.

The decade of the 1840s was another of slow growth for Davenport. The total population in



1850 was only slightly more than double that of 1840. The boom in growth of economy and population came early in the 1850s. New industries, migration to western lands, the California gold rush, and an influx of refugees from the 1848 revolutions in Europe help to explain the boom. It was halted by the Panic of 1857, when the population actually declined. Then, beginning with the Civil War, the population again increased, doubling during the 1860s, afterward leveling to a plateau of slow but steady growth.

On December 21, 1837 the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature organized Scott County, and in February an election was called to determine whether Davenport or Rockingham would be the county seat. Becoming county seat was one way for a frontier town to insure growth, and the election was a heated one. Davenport emerged the winner, but charges of fraud led to a new election the following August. Dubuque County's sheriff certified that Davenport, again, was the winner, leading to further charges of fraud, further certification in 1840, an appeal of the decision to the Territorial Supreme Court in July of that year, and yet another election in August. Citizens of Davenport offered to build a courthouse and jail free of charge and to donate a lot for the buildings, resulting in a third victory for the town, this time 318 votes to 221. The battle was over, but not the suspicions, and Andrew Logan—editor of Davenport's newspaper—published a long editorial calling for quick construction of the promised buildings to avoid the seat of county government being stolen from the town once again.

The general growth and development of Davenport followed the familiar pattern of frontier towns. Proprietary interests, land speculation, the struggle over the county seat, and diversification of economy were typical. Davenport's earliest businesses were mercantile stores, service and craft shops, and markets

and processing establishments for farm products. A ferry service, supply operations for the army and the Indians, and land speculation completed the main commercial activities during the first few years. The major industries of the first three decades were built on these foundations. From the summer of 1836 on, steamboats docked in Davenport. Although this was a seasonal industry (and citizens marked the year by when the river froze over and when it thawed again), river traffic expanded rapidly.

No saw mill or flour mill was located in the town until 1848. Early in that year two steam flour mills opened, the Albion and the Aetna, and proved to be lucrative businesses until the Civil War, when fires destroyed both. A steam saw mill was opened in 1849, and in 1851, a foundry commenced operation. All of these industries prospered and formed a widening base for Davenport's economy.

Pork packing was another commercial enterprise. From the early 1840s until the coming of the railroad in 1856, local packing houses did a big business. But when the railroad made it easier for farmers to ship stock directly to Chicago, local packing houses declined in importance. After 1839, rafts of logs from the Wisconsin forests made Davenport a center for sawed lumber. Many local fortunes were made in lumbering, and observers noted rafts extending along the river front for blocks. Lumbering was the most important business in Davenport during the 1850s. City directories listed the capacity of the mills for various years, and in 1853 an estimated 100,000 board feet per week was being sawed. Allied industries expanded apace; so that by 1855 there were 13 carpenter shops, eight lumber yards, two planing mills, and five sash-door-blind factories in Davenport.

The first brick yard was established in 1838, and by 1856 there were eight, supplementing wood and stone as building materials. The city



census of 1858 lists a variety of craftsmen and industries that indicated the commercial pattern of the town and its growing dependence on lumber and building. Among the most significant occupations listed were 539 carpenters, 22 brick makers, 35 brick layers, and 78 masons. (Interesting as these figures are, they must be taken with at least a few grains of salt. In an era when government officials were taken less seriously, some Davenport citizens were not at all reluctant to pull the census-taker's leg. Five comedians, two jacks-of-all-trades, five loafers, and one professor of mental and moral philosophy are also listed in the census rolls.)

Streets were, and remained, one of the touchiest municipal problems. Width, grading, surfacing, drainage, clearance, and other conditions persisted as unsolved problems throughout the 19th century. A sewer was laid down the middle of Harrison Street, and sidewalks were specified to be 15 feet wide in 1839. An ordinance ordering the removal of all fences and obstructions blocking streets and alleys also passed in 1839. But in 1848, Davenport's newspaper reported that the streets of the town had sunken into the depths of mud and water, and that Front Street consisted entirely of a succession of ponds. "City fathers,"

the newspaper asked, "can you inform us who is superintendent of the Canal in process of construction down Brady Street? If it be the intention to have it cross Brady Street below Second Street, would it not be as well to have it bridged before the water is let on again?"

In the meantime, the real bridges were in ruins, and the streets had become impassable ditches. An ordinance was passed prohibiting obstructions in the streets. A year later, in 1849, people were still building fences across the street, but some progress had been made because of numerous petitions from citizens, and streets were guttered for better drainage. In 1854 the City hired a City Engineer, and by 1856 contracts for grading and surfacing streets were being let on a regular basis. At least two miles of macadamized streets and 13 miles of sidewalks had been completed by 1858. In 1862, Davenport began to require property owners to clear the sidewalks of snow and ice.

Fire protection, a universal problem in frontier communities, received its share of attention. In 1839, all owners or occupiers of houses were required to keep two leather buckets on hand at all times. A 50¢ fine was levied each time a fire occurred and a citizen could not produce his buckets. The same year an ordinance empowered fire wardens to enter buildings to check the fireplaces, hearths, stoves, and chimneys for hazards, and fines could be levied if the owners did not correct offenses. By 1840, a 25-member, hook-and-ladder company had been formed. In 1857, Davenport purchased a fire engine and other apparatus at a cost of \$10,000. And in 1858, a municipal fire department replaced the volunteer companies.

Sanitation and health also proved a problem. By 1840, an ordinance forbade citizens from throwing manure, spoiled meat, offal, decayed vegetable substances, or dead animals into any street, alley, or public square. Nor could citizens deposit logs, timber, shingles, bricks, or stone in these places for more than ten days

#### Note on Sources

The principal sources for the article are: the Antoine LeClaire papers in the collection of the Putnam Museum, Davenport; John Clark Fetzer's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, *A Study In City Building: Davenport, Iowa* (University of Iowa, 1945); Michael A. Lipsman's "Davenport 1832-1860: The Making of a City" (unpublished research paper, Grinnell College, 1971); J.M.D. Burrows' *Fifty Years in Iowa* (Davenport: Glass and Company, 1888); Charles August Fiske's *Memories of Fourscore Years* (Davenport: Graphic Services, 1930); Ambrose C. Fulton's *Life's Voyage* (New York: privately printed, 1898); and Franc B. Wilkie's *Davenport Past and Present* (Davenport: Luse and Lane, 1858). Other sources include numerous city directories, county histories, newspapers of the period, original records in the Scott County Courthouse and Davenport City Hall, as well as various maps, plats, photographs and other records in the Putnam Museum, Davenport, and in the Division of the State Historical Society, Iowa City.



without a permit from the town. Any person who allowed water to stand on his lot, or who allowed filth to accumulate on his property, was subject to a \$5-per-day fine. A municipal Board of Health was established in 1866, and that same year municipal garbage collection was begun. Also in 1866, Davenport outlawed the keeping of hogs in the city, indicating that for 30-odd years hogs had been kept in town.

The first cemetery in Davenport, donated by Antoine LeClaire, lay so low that graves often filled with water before a coffin could be lowered. Because of this, Gilbert C.R. Mitchell sold two acres to the town in 1842 as a municipal cemetery. The cemetery's small size and inconvenient location led to the creation, in 1856, of two additional private cemeteries. J.M.D. Burrows and others platted 40 acres as Oakdale Cemetery, and they paid a landscape gardener from Washington, D.C. \$500 to lay it out. Ambrose C. Fulton platted Pine Hill Cemetery, north of town, at the same time. The Roman Catholic Church established its own cemetery, although in 1854 the railroad was granted a right-of-way through it, and the graves had to be moved.

Early ordinances regulated the appearance of the town. In 1840, an ordinance stipulated a \$10-fine for anyone who injured or destroyed a tree on town property, streets, or squares. A local editor publically commended Antoine LeClaire for planting trees along the principal streets, and encouraged other property owners to do the same. The same editor criticized county officials in 1845 for not caring for the Court House yard, allowing it to be littered with dirty sawdust.

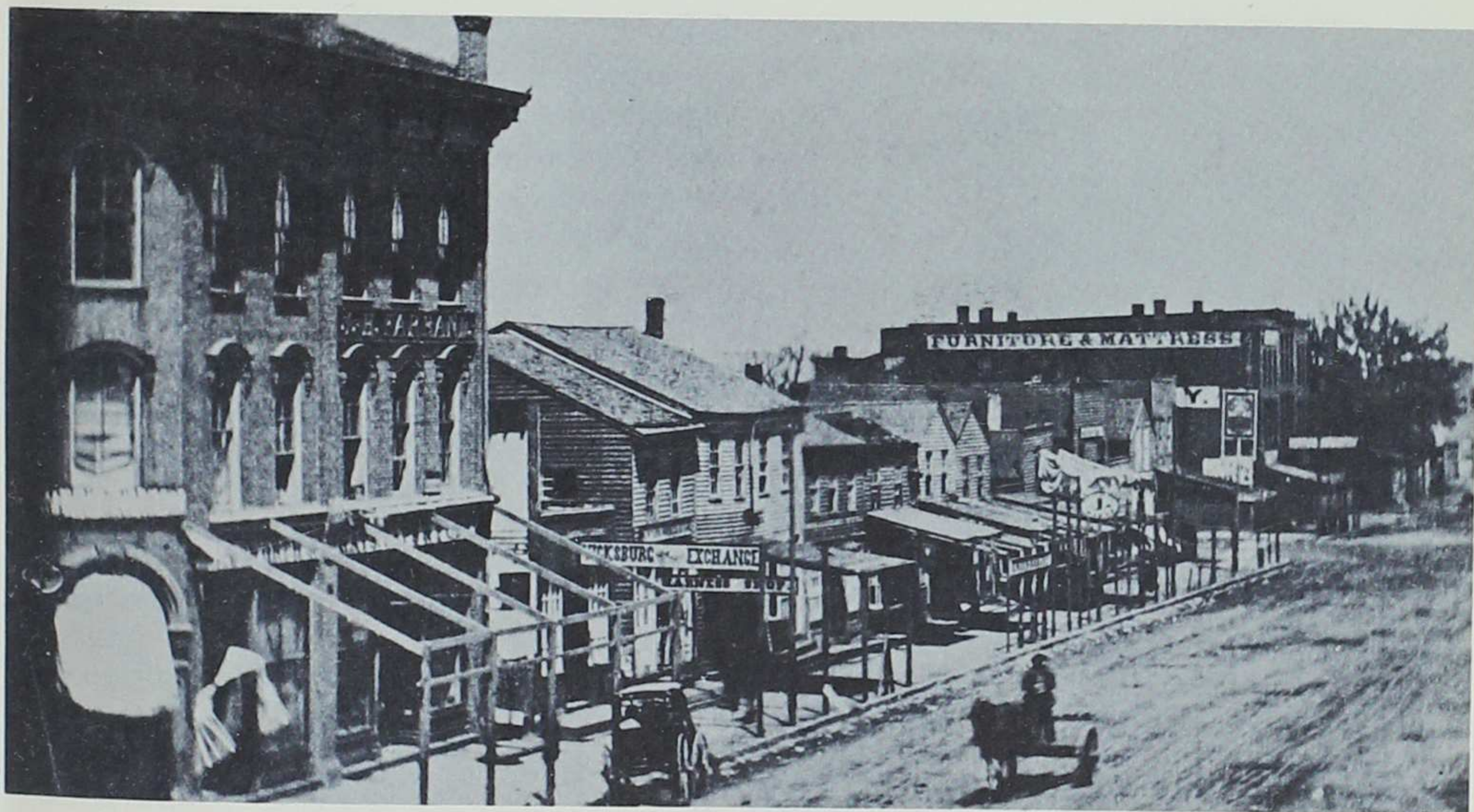
Davenport had to authorize other services and functions as the circumstances demanded. As early as 1843, an ordinance passed calling for the removal of obstructions from the steamboat landing. In 1844, citizens were prohibited from digging gravel and stone from the landing to fill their own private lots, and 13 years later the

city sold \$25,000 worth of bonds to pay for the filling and grading of the landing. The city awarded a 25-year franchise for gas street lighting in 1854 and within four years saw over 250 street lamps in operation. Municipal numbering of houses began in 1856, and the city appropriated \$10,000 the same year to build a city water works. In 1866, Davenport began zoning local buildings by type and location.

Though the existence of these ordinances, and certain newspaper comments, indicate the city government knew it was responsible for services and regulation, the subject matter of the ordinances point to the fact that a problem had to exist first before the city acted—few ordinances were passed without prior complaints from citizens about current conditions. But as the years passed, Davenport's municipal government, like most municipal governments, assumed a larger role in the lives of its citizens. The freedoms—perhaps even the anarchy—of a frontier town evolved into the organized society of an urban environment, resulting in the common restrictions on what an individual could and could not do. By 1860, a relatively complex city government had grown up, making its slow progress toward answering the needs of its people.

Davenport, in its early years, was spared three disasters common to young towns in the Mississippi valley. In 1850, the newspaper reported that though one house had burned down: "Our town has been happily exempted from fire thus far, this being only the second one that has occurred since it has had an existence." Although other buildings burned from time to time, no disastrous or major fires hampered town growth until July, 1901. Nor was Davenport ravaged by the epidemics so terribly common in frontier settlements. While cholera and kindred diseases devastated other river towns, Davenport escaped almost unscathed. Also, Davenport has never been dam-





*Davenport street scene, about 1860 (courtesy Putnam Museum, Davenport)*

aged by a tornado. In fact, local legend tells of a Father Charles Van Quickenborne, who said mass in 1831 and forever blessed the site against tornadoes.

If chance granted Davenport a special dispensation from disease and natural disaster, chance also dictated much of the city's planning. Indeed, the lack of an overall design for the city and its future runs counter to the very notion of "planning." The immediate dictates of economic profit often altered the shape of the town. When, for example, the railroad was built, the cemetery, the market, and many, many houses were moved, because the railroad was considered more important to the potential growth of the town. The river front was kept clear only because the business of the town depended on the steamboat traffic, and on the logs the river brought from Wisconsin. Business buildings were built as needed, or as they could be afforded, and in the style preferred by the owners. No attempt was made to create uniform facades on city blocks. The one excep-

tion to this is the block where all of the buildings were built by Antoine LeClaire.

The town "planning" was blatantly two-dimensional. Height, style, purpose, topography, and aesthetics played no role at all. No attempt was made to create views or vistas to or from public squares or public buildings. Ethnic or nationality groups had only a minimal influence on Davenport's architecture. As a center of river traffic, as the location of a major railroad and bridge, as a point directly west of Chicago through which immigrants passed heading west, the town prospered; the population grew faster than normal for towns of the time; yet, no nationally significant metropolis developed in Davenport.

Davenport was created on speculation. A few benefited from its founding and its growth; others did not. In this, Davenport was typical, all-too-typical, of other towns in the region at the time. Thus did Davenport fit into the national picture of sprawling growth and unchecked expansion. □