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The Iowa Sun

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The Iowa Sun

Hot and tired, Andrew Logan, Pennsylvania printer, drove into the sprawling village of Davenport on July 7, 1838, atop a wagon with his two small sons and an antiquated printing press. He found himself in the midst of a heated controversy. In the political fight between Davenport and Rockingham over the location of the seat of justice in Scott County, there was no little strife as to which town should get Logan's services as a champion of its cause.

He chose Davenport, however, as the site for his printing office and, locating "on Water Street upstairs in Mr. Davenport's new building", he printed the first number of *The Iowa Sun and Davenport and Rock Island News* on Saturday, August 4th. Logan announced that the paper would be published every Saturday morning. From the first he was an ardent booster of the town he had selected for his home, beseeching his readers to be governed by the principles influencing independent voting and feeling confident that their votes would be cast for Davenport as the logical seat of justice. Although prejudiced himself, Logan promised in his prospectus to maintain po-

litical freedom of expression and to "freely keep the columns of the *Iowa Sun* open to all temperate and well written communications from all parties." Careful to avoid religious discussions, the editor stated that "our columns will be closed against all sectarian principles on the subject of religion."

Logan admitted "having been born and educated a democrat, forming our opinions and political principles in accordance with the doctrines of Jefferson, Clay and other eminent statesmen", and he stated that "we issued our prospectus with the view of giving our paper a party character." He soon discovered, however, that "party politics can be of no consequence to us while we retain a territorial character, consequently this paper shall be conducted on principles calculated to promote the interests of the territory without regard to national politics."

The prospectus pledged the paper's support to the administration of the Territorial government and declared that the *Iowa Sun* would print abstracts of Congressional and Territorial legislation. All the latest items of foreign and domestic news were promised while the *Sun* "cast its rays over the moral and political landscape, regardless of those petty interests and local considerations which might contract its beams." The editor planned to furnish subscribers with factual mate-

rial concerning the country along the Mississippi River, and lastly provide readers with literary pabulum in the form of "original and selected tales, poetry, etc."

This ambitious prospectus established a difficult goal to attain, considering the old press and well-worn type the editor had to work with and the limited facilities for gathering news. Moreover, during the first two years, he had no regular assistants save his two small boys, the elder of whom was but twelve years old.

And so on the first Saturday in August, 1838, the *Iowa Sun* appeared as a six-column, four-page paper measuring about fifteen and a half by nineteen and a quarter inches. This format corresponded approximately to the Dubuque and Burlington papers. The pages were printed practically solid, and the typography was remarkably readable considering the poor equipment used. Most of the type was set in sizes approximating the Brevier and Bourgeois type now in use. Headlines were unknown at the time, and stories were merely labeled. For instance, "Rare Sport" was followed by an account of a fight among four alligators.

Logan's paper was to cost three dollars a year in advance or four dollars at the end of the year. This rate corresponded to subscription prices of

the other Territorial papers. Later in the fall, however, the editor found that advance subscriptions were not being paid and, faced with the necessity of making a living, he announced, "As money is scarce, the editor proposes to take all kinds of country produce in payment in advance or within one month of the time of subscribing." Seeking to increase his circulation, Logan asked for wider patronage and promised to "use all diligence to render the *Iowa Sun* worthy of such support."

The first issue of the *Sun* brought favorable comments. "The sheet is near the size of ours," observed the editor of the *Iowa News*, "and considering the circumstances in which it is put forth, bids fair to take a respectable stand among others in the territory, although behind them in mechanical execution. The editor of the *Burlington Gazette* dramatically expressed a hope that the *Iowa Sun* may "shine steadily and brightly, and after each weekly setting rise again with renewed brightness." He later referred to the *Sun* as a "clever and respectable" paper.

Editor Logan might well be called a one man chamber of commerce, for he devoted much space in nearly every issue to glorifying the "Queen city of the far west" and the surrounding countryside. In the first issue he maintained, "We are for Iowa; for all Iowa, from beginning to end; from north to

south, from east to west," but, more specifically, "of all the places in this territory or in this world for the loveliest of all cities, the spot on which we write (Davenport) is beyond all comparison, the most beautiful." After Davenport was named the county seat, Logan crusaded to have the Territorial capital located there.

Burlington, championed by the *Gazette*, seemed the most likely site, and the editors in the rival towns carried on vituperative debates through their columns. In one instance after the *Gazette* had spoken disparagingly of Davenport as a place for the legislature to meet, Logan retorted that "we would not allow that editor or any other editor to pounce on our lovely little town" in such a manner without answering the "unexpected and unmerited insult." Then in words ringing with city pride he prophesied that "Here, with or without a Legislative Assembly, the Queen city of the far west, must be built."

"It is, indeed, a great honor," wrote Logan in a sarcastic vein, "to be permitted to live in any part of a territory which contains such a wonderful town as Burlington, particularly if its greatness should not become so imposing and inconvenient as to disturb, or destroy, the peace and harmony of the lesser planets, which may wish to revolve around so mighty a centre." And in carrying on

the fight, the editor observed, "Our village is improving with rapid strides. Almost every day witnesses a new building springing up, as if by magic." Logan urged people to move to Davenport for health's sake, and pointed out that whereas surrounding towns were being harassed by epidemics, "this highly favored spot has alone remained healthy."

The *Iowa Sun* was an interesting and informative paper, and Logan strove for variety in the news content, believing, "variety the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavor." Important legislative acts, messages to Congress and Presidential decrees were published. Poetry was to be found in the *Sun's* columns and occasionally short fiction and essays. There were few editorials in the modern sense though Logan frequently editorialized his news. His comment was often tempered with humor. "We suppose John will land a force on Nantucket ere long and issue a similar order," he wrote, following an account of Britain's acquisition of the Falkland Islands and a subsequent hands-off decree.

Logan was highly cognizant of the fact that he was publishing a paper in an agricultural community to be read by farmers and those interested in farming. Hence much space was devoted to discussion of crop conditions, farming techniques,

and timber cultivation. Concerning animal husbandry, the editor wrote that "a good cow is one of the greatest benefactions, which divine Providence ever bestowed upon the human family in the form of a quadruped" — in perfect harmony, no doubt, with the opinion of his subscribers in the rural community. Logan himself was chiefly interested in farming, and, ever a community booster, ran many articles eulogizing the vegetables and produce of the surrounding country. "We Yesterday saw a water melon," he observed, "raised about one and a half miles west of the village, which measured four feet one way and three and a half feet the other."

On another occasion Logan described a trip around the farms near Davenport when he "saw many beets that would have measured from 20 to 30 inches long and from 14 to 18 inches in circumference." His enthusiasm for Scott County produce led him to be badly "sold" once by a practical joker. This fellow stuck half a dozen potatoes together with pegs. Logan viewed the "phenomenal" vegetable "defying any other soil under the sun to produce its equal." Later, upon discovering the hoax, the editor was greatly chagrined, and, it is said, "did not puff mammoth vegetables for three whole weeks."

Editor Logan included entertaining items —

to-day's human-interest stories — in the *Sun*. For the most part these stories, like the general news, were taken from other papers. An account of a "mermaid" captured off the coast of northern Ireland, and of an explorer's struggle with a lion are two examples. Occasionally running short of news, Logan resorted to fillers to round out his sheet. In one issue appeared this item: a woman "was so large when she died, that her friends had to go twice to her funeral." There was apparently no systematic scheme for gathering the news. Correspondents were sporadic in their contributions, leaving the editor the alternative of depending upon gleanings from other papers.

"A liberal discount made to those who advertise by the year," wrote the editor in announcing that advertising rates for one square or less would be one dollar for the first insertion and fifty cents for each continuance. Whether or not this offer influenced the amount of advertising is uncertain, but the fact remains that advertising space jumped from less than two columns in the first issue to nearly five columns by the end of December. All advertisements were one column in width and were measured in terms of squares. There were no cuts, and the advertisements usually appeared in the same type as the news material.

All newspapers in that day printed advertise-

ments of quack medicines, and the longest insertion the *Sun* carried in 1838 was a dissertation over a column long proclaiming that Miles Compound Extract of Tomato exceeded "all former discoveries in medicine, either from the vegetable or mineral kingdom." There were many "For Rent" advertisements similar to those appearing in to-day's papers. Professional cards were, perhaps, more numerous. If a lawyer was just opening a practice, he might supplement his name and profession with the assurance that "all business entrusted to his care will receive prompt and vigilant attention". Often was found the appeal of a man with accounts receivable requesting his debtors "to make immediate payment".

Evidently some advertisers were in the habit of letting their insertions run indefinitely and then complaining when presented with the bill, for "advertising customers" were asked "to mark the number of insertions on their advertisements otherwise they may be continued and charged accordingly."

In spite of a constant financial struggle with subscribers and advertisers, not to mention mechanical difficulties with the ancient press, *The Iowa Sun* and *Davenport and Rock Island News* seemed to flourish for a while. However, when a more modern press, the *Davenport Weekly Ga-*

zette, was introduced in 1841, the *Sun* was allowed to set and in 1842 the paper was discontinued. The press and materials were sold to some Mormons who moved the equipment to Buffalo in Scott County. Andrew Logan, carrying out his paper's watchword, "And Man Went Forth to Till the Ground", began farming six miles west of Davenport on the Iowa City road.

Editor Logan's strenuous efforts to "develop the boundless resources of this territory and to invite to our soil, moral, industrious and intelligent cultivators" did not go unappreciated by the citizens of rapidly growing Davenport, for it was written that "He has always been a good friend to the interests of Scott county, ever carrying with him the goodwill, respect and esteem of all who have the pleasure of his acquaintance."

LUTHER F. BOWERS