

Early History of Mediapolis

The territory in which Mediapolis is located is in the fourth of the magnificent states carved from the vast territory acquired from France in 1803 known as the Louisiana Purchase. In 1812 the Territory of Louisiana was reorganized and named the Territory of Missouri. In 1821, the State of Missouri was organized in its present form and the remaining portion was left for a time without any organized form of government. This was a part of the Territory of Michigan in 1834. Then in 1836, the Territory of Wisconsin was organized including what is now the States of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. In 1838, the territory was organized embracing that part of Wisconsin Territory lying west of the Mississippi River, north of the State of Missouri, (Iowa Territory). On the 28th day of December 1846, Iowa was admitted in its present form as the 29th State of the Union.

It was a vast wilderness inhabited with the exception of a few military posts, exclusively by Indians. The Sac and Fox tribes lived here at one time, all up and down the Mississippi River, under Chiefs Black Hawk and Keokuk. Buffaloes and other wild animals abounded in every part of the state. It was destitute of woods, except near streams, where the most valuable lands were and settlers found good land for farming. The territory in which Mediapolis is located was ceded to the government by the Indians in 1832 and was known as the Black Hawk Purchase. These lands were opened for settlement on June 1, 1833. Nearly all the Indians had moved out of the area by 1840. Settlers moving westward camped near the spring at Kossuth. The spring was also an overnight camping place for Indians.

In 1834, the first permanent settlement was made near what is now Mediapolis and was known as Columbus. The early settlers came from Ohio, Pennsylvania and some from Kentucky by wagon train and riverboat, down the Ohio and up the Mississippi. A store was started in Columbus, but was later moved to Kossuth. In 1836 to 1850, the villages of Kossuth, Northfield, Linton, Dodgeville, Sperry, Kingston and Pleasant Grove, all were settled and became thriving villages with stores, churches, schools, post offices, blacksmith shops, hotels and even a doctor. Flour and woolen mills were the most important of the business firms.

One day in 1867, a group of citizens of Kossuth (a village one and one-half miles east of the present location of Mediapolis) happened to meet at the post office and they fell into a discussion concerning the prospects of a railroad from Burlington to Cedar Rapids. It was decided to call a public meeting to arouse interest in the proposal, and a few

weeks later the meeting was held. Senator Gear and Judge Tracy of Burlington were there and persuaded the people that a “north and south” railroad was an absolute necessity and would prove to be a profitable investment. Therefore, in good faith, the people of Kossuth subscribed \$20,000 toward this venture with the understanding that their village would have a station.

In 1869, however, the railroad engineers surveyed the roadbed one and one-half miles west of Kossuth where a station was later built. To ease the feelings of the community it was called “Kossuth Station”. A Mr. Hiram Leonard gave land for the railroad right-of-way on condition that it be laid as near Kossuth as possible. The railroad would run so near the west line that, to conform with the contract, the depot had to be placed on the east side of the track. When the depot was built in 1869 (before the rails were laid for the new railroad) railroad officials, although the road had not gone through, decided to use the name “Kossuth” on the new depot, the first. So the signs were fastened to each end of the building. Mr. Bullis, depot master from January 1, 1920 to March 1958, told this story to Mr. Ellis Harper, mail carrier and at one time postmaster. Boiling mad because the railroad had not come through Kossuth, a group of people from that community saddled their horses and rode to the new depot, where they took crowbars and removed the signs. It is reported that they buried the signs in a field, now the site of the swimming pool. After a few months, the railroad people put up new signs but they did not bear the name “Kossuth”. The depot was originally built on stilts as the surrounding area was low, but through the years the ground has been built up so that by 1962 when the original building was removed, the stilts could barely be seen. The upper half story of the depot contained four small rooms, which in the early days, housed the agent and his family.

In August 1869, the tracks were laid for a narrow gauge railroad which was later widened to standard gauge all in on day—125 miles on a Sunday, June 29, 1902. In the fall of 1869, the trains were running, and stopping at this station, but there was no town and no business here. That same fall, W.H. Cartwright, then doing business in Kossuth, saw what was inevitable and proposed that some of the people purchase the farmland lying immediately west of Kossuth, lay it out in lots, build a hotel, and make good sidewalks to the station. People of the Kossuth community ridiculed the idea that a town could be built any place other than the site of Old Kossuth. Cartwright, nevertheless, purchased the Issac N. Ware farm and laid out that portion of the town that lies east of the track and north of Main Street. About the same time, W.W. King bought the farm lying west of Cartwright and laid out the town west of the track and north of Main Street. Andrew Hemphill, who owned the farm on the south side, laid out the southwest part of town, but could

not plot any of his land east of the track. Cartwright moved his store to Mediapolis, and this was the beginning of business here.

Four years later the 'station' community was growing, sixty families were there, and the next logical step was to name this new village. The Rev. W. G. Kephart suggested the name "Mediapolis" meaning Middle City because it was exactly half way between the two county seats, Burlington and Wapello. Mr. Bullis said "a station agent by the name of John Wherle had nicknamed the town 'Muddyoplis' because, after heavy rains, there would be a lake just northeast of the station" and present location of Ben Mohler's building.

The Independent School District of Mediapolis, was established in temporary quarters in 1873, and taught by Miss Maggie Bruce.

In 1875, the town was incorporated. Chas. P. King was elected mayor, and Joseph Goudy, recorder. On the 27th day of July 1875, the first council meeting was held and records show that J.W. McDonald, D. Kelly, Joab Harper, L. Talbott, and J.A. Bridges were the councilmen present. This was the first five years of the town. It had become the largest village in the county and the merchants were doing a heavy business.

Mediapolis is located in the southeastern part of Iowa, Des Moines County, on Highway 61, 13 miles north of Burlington. Highway 61 was first called the Telegraph road and was one of the first roads laid out in the State of Iowa and the first road built north from Burlington in 1836. Later it was called the Wapello Road.

This above information was taken from pages 15-16 of the Mediapolis Centennial Book published for the Mediapolis Centennial in 1975. Those on the Book Committee were: Genevieve Miller Crew, Editor, June Hutchcroft, Mr. and Mrs. J. Kermit Eland, Mr. and Mrs. Donald A. Davis, Mary Jane Bridges, Mrs. Harold Nelson, Dr. and Mrs. Ronald Lofgren and Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Faris.

The 2000 census showed the population of Mediapolis to be 1644.