

June 2017

We are rapidly approaching the commemoration of our nation's birthday on July 4. A local group of dedicated volunteers, including this author, are busy organizing a celebration of this event. There is another anniversary to be celebrated this year, commemorating the 160th anniversary of publication of this newspaper, just 80 years after the founding of The United States. There have been many industrial, transportation and technological revolutions since 1856. But sometimes the more things change, the more they stay the same. One measure of comparison is the price of goods and services in 1856 and then adjusting for inflation to the present. For some of the comparisons I will leave to the reader to conduct their own scavenger hunt and what they pay today.

When publication began, Iowa had been a state for about 8 years and was still considered to be on the western frontier. You needed a guide to get around and the 1856-57 Iowa Handbook, complete with a new and correct map, for use by emigrants, tourists and settlers ran 188 pages long and cost 75 cents. Adjusting for inflation, this same publication equivalent price today would be \$20.34. What would you be looking for in 1850s Iowa but a home and land. The Herald advertised 3200 acres available in Lee and Whiteside County Illinois at \$10 an acre. If this was too steep a price, 600 acres were available in Jasper County Iowa for \$5.50 an acre. The present day equivalent of those prices would be \$271.16 and \$149.14 acres. Such a deal!

Once you purchased some land and erected a home, you need to clean and decorate the house. A roll of wallpaper was available at prices ranging from 6 ½ cents to \$2 a roll, \$1.76 to \$54.23 a roll in present day dollars. Need to sweep out the dirt floor or planks used for a floor, corn brooms were available but the prices had recently jumped in 1856 from \$12 to \$17 per hundred. That would be a move from \$325.39 to \$460.97 per hundred or \$3.25 to \$4.61 per broom, at cost!

If you had land, you might be farming and producing commodities for sale. In 1856, corn prices were \$0.35 a bushel, wholesale, \$0.40 a bushel retail. Adjusting for inflation, the current price would be \$9.49 or \$10.85 respectively per bushel. In addition, you might have hogs, with a price of \$5 per hundredweight, or \$135.58 in today's dollars. If you didn't have a garden you might need potatoes or onions. These were sold by the bushel so the head count will vary, but this would set you back \$1.20 for the spuds and \$1.25 for onions, or \$32.54 and \$33.89 today. If you didn't have chickens, eggs might be necessary, but at a price of \$0.30 a dozen or the current equivalent of \$8.13. If you had a dairy cow you were in luck as otherwise butter was \$0.30 a pound, \$8.13 in today's money. Need to wash down dinner, 7 ½ pounds of coffee were available for \$1.00 or the current equivalent of \$3.60 a pound, lattes had not yet been invented.

As a new state, Iowa had expenses and needed revenues to pay these. For the biannual period ending Nov. 30, 1856 the governor reported to the legislature total revenues of \$275,843.12 and total expenses of \$263,650.45. Adjusting for current dollars, today these would be \$7,480,000.00 and \$7,150,000.00. The population experienced a dramatic increase during that decade with statewide

population in 1850 of 192,000, growing to 675,000 by 1860. Since that time the function of government has greatly expanded, think of public education and transportation.

Where did these prices come from? Of course an old copy of the Clinton Herald, available on microfiche at the Clinton Library. It's price? In 1856 an annual subscription was \$2, "invariably in advance". A bargain at any price! The Herald became a daily in 1870 so making some adjustments; the current equivalent would be \$325 a year. Congratulations to The Clinton Herald for 160 years of supplying the public with information. As for the celebration the 241st anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, priceless.