

# EXPLORE & DISCOVER

The Forgotten Villages of Van Buren County, Iowa.



## Benton's Port

The Western Exchange Hotel was the local stage coach stop and was rented in 1857 by the L. J. Mason family who arrived from New York. By year's end the expanding Hotel purchased the nearby Ashland House. Built in the 1840s, the Mason House was constructed of locally fired brick and became famous up and down the Des Moines River as a stopover for river travellers and railroad men.



The town of Benton's Port printed its own money after the Panic of 1857.

## Doud's Station

Mr. Upton B. Doud coming down from the coal-loading chute in Doud's Station. The chute served as a railroad dock until early 1960s.



## Philadelphia

The long building to the far left was the site of the Benjamin Franklin Patchett home in 1856. It was registered as the Platt Store some time before 1883 when it was sold to Jacob Stong for \$600. The store passed down through the Stong family until it was closed by Mrs. Edwin L. Stong in 1938. A famous descendent, Phil Strong, wrote "State Fair" and "Honk the Moose".

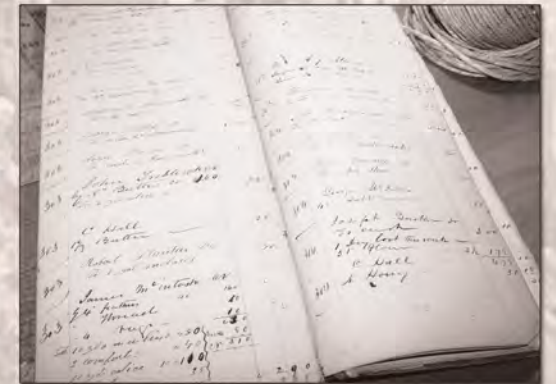


## Brisinal Store

The Brisinal Store and Bank pictured here and on cover was built in 1852. The settlements on opposite sides of the river became known as Bentonsport and Vernon.

## Desmoines City

A.W. Harlan owned a store in Desmoines City which received the first steamboat shipment of goods he purchased from Sweet Home Missouri in 1837. The store changed hands several times over the years. The ledger pictured here lists the daily transactions at the Desmoines City store in 1855.



## Utica Store

The Utica store was a post office, telephone office, grocery store, and feed store. A model T Huckster Wagon made afternoon deliveries.

The Van Buren County Historic Preservation Commission has posted plaques at each location of a forgotten village. These plaques list historical facts about the Forgotten Village which often, but not always, contain the founding date, a plat map and mention of thriving businesses.



## DISCOVER THE FORGOTTEN VILLAGES AND HIDDEN TREASURES IN VAN BUREN COUNTY, IOWA

Pioneers and settlers forged their way through the forests and across the prairie of what would become Van Buren County, Iowa. They followed some of the same game trails that were used by early Woodland Indians, the Sauk and Fox, early explorers, woodsmen and trappers. Like animal tracks in the snow, these trails crisscrossed the area, later becoming stagecoach routes, primary roads, railroads and highways. Bridges were eventually built across the Des Moines River where pioneers had forded or ferried their way from one side to the other. As settlements became towns and villages the indelible marks of all who have either passed through or settled here remain as history.

From Van Buren County, Iowa  
A Pictorial History  
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The "Forgotten Villages" project marks the sites of the former villages in Van Buren County in an effort to recall the sacrifices and contributions of early pioneers and to preserve the history of Van Buren County.



## Portland

Typical of many rural families in the mid 1800s was the Brodine Family pictured above. Below is the Roller Mill which was built in the eastern part of Portland in 1854.



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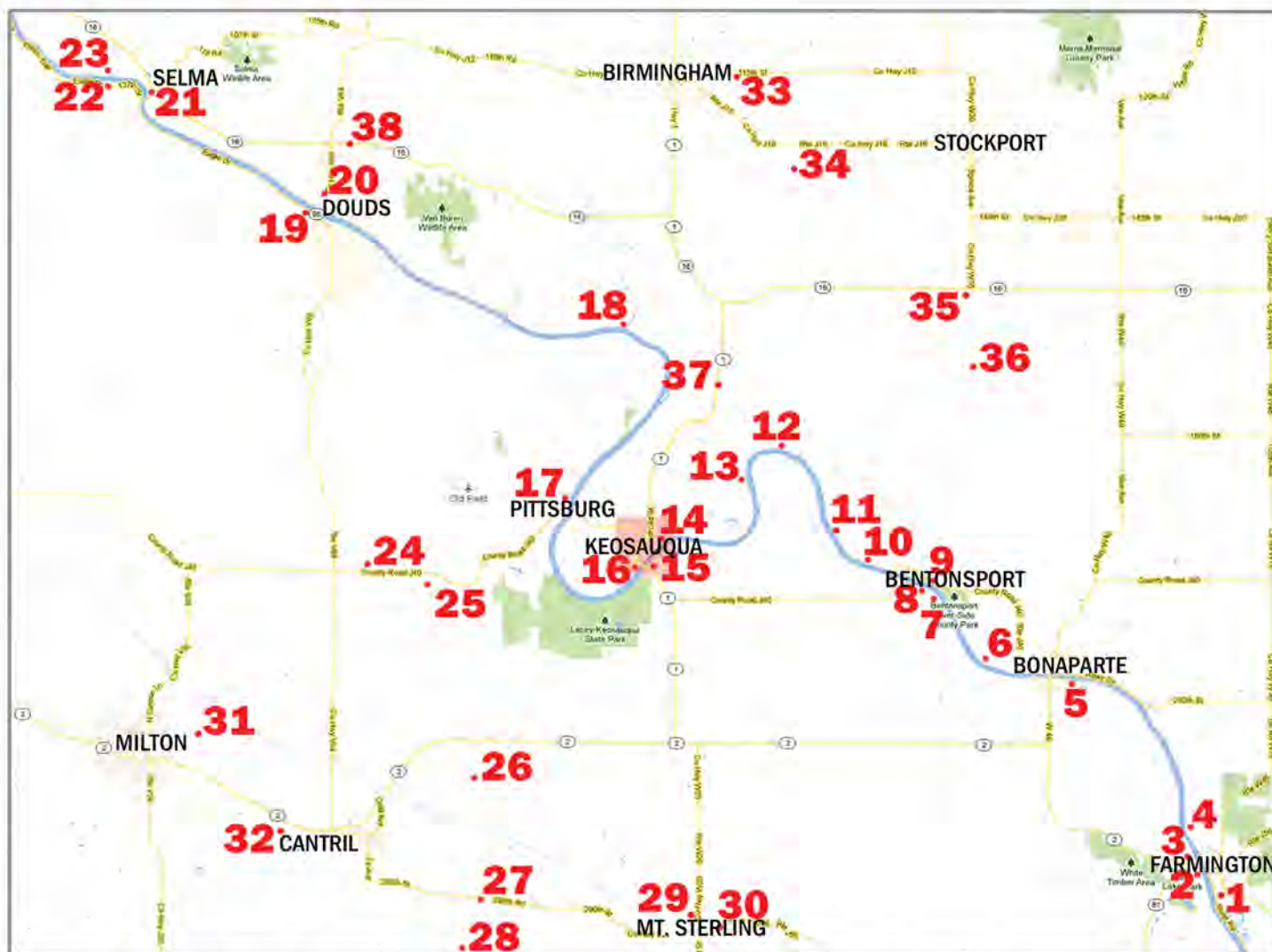
## FORGOTTEN VILLAGES OF VAN BUREN COUNTY, IOWA

Scout the scenic river valley in historic Van Buren County, Iowa for early settlements that are now ghosts of their former glory. Some of these settlements grew into the thriving towns of today, while others simply passed into history.

The Van Buren County Historic Preservation Commission has set plaques at each site to commemorate these "Villages of the Past". Use this informative guide to locate the forgotten villages.







#### FORGOTTEN VILLAGES ON THE RIVER

1. Salubria was settled in 1839 by members of Boston's First Society of Free Enquirers. The town flourished as a center of enlightened thought but slowly faded with the passing of its most famous resident, Abner Kneeland. N40.62286 W91.73480

2. Harrisburg was platted below the mouth of Indian Creek by Stephen Park Harris in April of 1840. It hosted a store and a ferry to Farmington. John Davidson, who in 1842 purchased the first lots sold, lived there until he died in 1886. N40.638700 W91.743583

3. Watertown was founded by William Kendrick, an early Justice of the Peace in Van Buren County. The plat was filed in the Courthouse, then in Farmington, in May of 1837. The site has been continuously occupied since its founding. N40.642683 W91.745550

4. Plymouth was surveyed in April of 1842 for John and Edward Colton. Later, the Lawrence Coal Co. expanded and resurveyed the town as Lawrence. From 1864 to 1865, the Lawrence Hotel became the Iowa Soldier's Orphans Asylum founded by Annie Turner-Wittenmyer. N40.653133 W91.748850

5. Palestine was settled by unknown parties before 1837. The Congressional Survey that year showed it was partly located on Reserved School Lands that could not be sold. This doomed the town and the balance of it was bought by Robert Cummins for the benefit of Philip R. Rice. N40.694733 W91.793550

6. New Lexington was platted by Isaac Reed in 1837 when the area was in Des Moines Co., Wisconsin Territory. It was home to Dr. James Turner, the Phrenologist, who with the help of others, robbed the grave of Chief Black Hawk and almost sparked a war. N40.697967 W91.814550

7. East Vernon was platted in October of 1857 by the physician, Gideon S. Bailey. Bailey, active in both business and politics, was a co-founder of the Bentonsport Academy and was elected to the Iowa Legislative Council in 1840. N40.721988 W91.852923

8. South Bentonsport was platted by Isaac Reed and Henry Smith in June of 1837. It was the home to a flouring and woolen mill. The pottery started there by James Clark and Claiborne Lea would later become the Dickson Pottery. The town was renamed Vernon in 1852. N40.723383 W91.856083

9. Benton's Port was platted in March of 1836 by Sanford, Church and Sullivan. In 1839 H. P. Graves replatted it for the Bentonsport Association. The dam shared with South Bentonsport was completed in 1843 and powered mills in both towns. Bentonsport's Green Paper Mill was the first West of the Mississippi. N40.725744 W91.854109

Oakland adjoined Bentonsport on the East. The town was platted by Samuel E. Paine in 1857. The station and stockyards for the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines & Minnesota Railroad were located in this town. N40.725583 W91.854383

10. Jacksonville was a short-lived pioneer town known from an 1837 Road Viewing Report. This was probably the source of the "Jackson's Bank" coal "esteemed" by the blacksmiths in Bentonsport. N40.730800 W91.876633

11. Columbus was platted by John R. Sparks in June of 1837. It once housed a distillery and was the place of the first indicted murder in the county. It was eclipsed by Bentonsport with its dam and mills. The Eli McKinney family were the last ones to leave Columbus in 1857. N40.739667 W91.884817

12. Rockport was a pioneer village located at the mouth of Rock Creek. It is known from the 1837 Congressional Survey and from the 1856 speech by Judge George G. Wright's "Our Town" speech before the Keosauqua Library Association. N40.763033 W91.898817

13. Rochester was platted in March of 1837 for M. D. Strong, J. S. Willis and William Corriell. After legislation naming it the County Seat was vetoed, Rochester competed with other early towns in the election for County Seat but lost to the Van Buren/Des Moines City combine known today as Keosauqua. N40.754023 W91.920733

14. Des Moines City was platted by Russo King in 1839 but it was based on the survey William Duncan and Asa Wetherbee made before April of 1837. The dam and the water-powered mills along with A. W. Harlan's store were the heart of the town. It is now part of Keosauqua. N40.733583 W91.957450

15. Pleasant Hill was surveyed for John Purdom in July of 1850. The Purdom Place Hotel and the Pleasant Hill Christian Church are known from the deed records. The town is now part of Keosauqua. N40.725700 W91.956017

16. Van Buren was platted by James Hall for the Van Buren Co. in May of 1837. In August of 1838, an instrument was filed in the County Recorder's office merging the towns of Van Buren and Des Moines City into Keosauqua. N40.729067 W91.961717

South Van Buren was surveyed for James Hall as a sole proprietor in August of 1839. When the plat was filed in Feb. of 1840, the town was called South Keosauqua in line with the Des Moines City and Van Buren merger into Keosauqua. N40.729067 W91.961717

17. Rising Sun was platted in 1839 as two separate towns with the same name divided by the Chequest Creek. John Clayton platted the North part of the town and A. B. Williams and John Groom platted the South part. By 1842, both parts were called Pittsburg. N40.747100 W91.990433

18. Philadelphia was surveyed for John Patchett in 1839 but the plat was not filed until the Spring of 1850 when he left for California. He settled in Napa County where in 1858 he established its first commercial winery. N40.804150 W91.970867

19. Portland was platted in February of 1838 by Robert Legett and others like John Tolman, the long time Indian Trader. It was home to a steam flouring mill and the Rambo Pottery located on Clay Street. In 1883, Portland was renamed Leando after Leander Rambo. N40.833750 W92.089050

20. Doud's Station was platted by Elias & David Doud in January of 1867. It extended from the station of the Des Moines Valley Railroad down to the Des Moines River intersecting the paper town of Alexander. Today this area is known as Douds. N40.839467 W92.085133

Alexander was platted by Nathaniel Tolman, Edmund Boyer, Wm. J. Pope and Benjamin Parker in February of 1840. No deeds for this town were ever filed in the County Recorder's Office. N40.839467 W92.085133

21. Independence was platted by George Stump and Josiah Allison in September of 1851 but the town never developed until the Keokuk, Fort Des Moines and Minnesota Railroad arrived in 1858. In May of 1882, the town was renamed Selma. N40.872400 W92.153450

22. New Market was surveyed for A. J. Davis in 1849 and the plat was filed in December of 1851. It was commonly called Black Hawk City after Chief Black Hawk. Davis built a mill and distillery East of town which he operated until 1866 when he moved West and went into mining. N40.874855 W92.175484

23. Iowa City was surveyed in July of 1839 for John Tolman, Peter Avery and others. When the plat was filed in August, the "City" was replaced with a blank space. In 1848, William Avery and Daniel S. Clark expanded the town to the Davis county line and formally named it lowaville. N40.877900 W92.175583

#### FORGOTTEN VILLAGES ON THE PRAIRIE

24. Mechanicsburg was platted in February of 1846 for John D. Elbert, Albert Spain and Nicolas Warner. The town hosted a "wool factory" owned by Spain and two parsonages used by circuit riders of the Methodist Episcopal Church. N40.725583 W92.046467

25. Hartford was platted in January of 1842 for John D. Elbert and Josephus Lee but the town never developed. Lee sold out to Chappell H. Bonner. Elbert went on to help found Mechanicsburg. The latter two were involved with the Lebanon M. E. Church, then located at the Lebanon Cemetery. N40.721950 W92.034883

26. Hedvolante was surveyed in July of 1839 for Aaron Word Harlan, an early settler in the Des Moines river valley. The plat was filed on October 4th shortly after he sold his store in Des Moines City. The town failed to develop and Harlan returned to Sweet Home, MO in 1843. N40.663490 W92.022350

27. Niles was platted on July 7, 1855 by Henry King, Calvin Thorton and Benjamin Holland. Located at the intersection of the Alexandria to Bloomfield and the Keosauqua to Memphis roads, it hosted the Dodge House hotel operated by Henry King. N40.626380 W92.024790

28. Upton, located on the Missouri line, was platted by John Upton in May of 1852. It's sister city, South Upton in Missouri was platted by William Phanes, May of 1856. Initially a rough and tumble town, it later hosted a Literary Society and Methodist church. N40.603810 W92.031830

29. Mt. Sterling's original plat is lost but lot sales commenced in May of 1853. Levi Hayes, Asa Blanchard and Samuel Laden all sold lots from their lands along the Bloomfield Road giving rise to one of the town's nicknames, String Town. Originally called Union Corners, the town hosted two mills and a distillery. N40.620608 W91.939796

30. Gwinnupsburg was platted just East of Mt. Sterling by John and Isabel Gwinnup in May of 1872. The Burlington & South Western railroad had just laid tracks nearby. In 1907, Gwinnupsburg and Mt. Sterling incorporated under the name of Mt. Sterling. N40.618351 W91.931947

31. Rushville was surveyed for Israel Kister in October of 1840 and the plat was filed in December of 1841. Kister came to Van Buren County from Rushville, IN which was named after Dr. Benjamin Rush. Only three lot sales were recorded at the courthouse. N40.675790 W92.135492

32. Crowderville was surveyed in about 1855 for John Crowder and Stephen & Sarah Gnash but the town plat was withdrawn in 1856. The only lot sale recorded was in 1859 to the local school district for the Elm School. This one-room country school was active from 1862 until the early 1950's. N40.647120 W92.097080

33. Parkersville/Parkersburg was found by the 1837 Congressional Survey to be a "village regularly laid out" with a store but no inhabitants. Samuel Parker, who lived in the area, was elected to the 1st Iowa Territorial Legislature but removed to the Oregon Country in 1845. N40.878772 W91.919385

34. Winchester was platted by John Runnells and Jefferson Cox in February of 1840. The town was located on the Keokuk to Agency road and hosted the Union Protection Society of Winchester. This group was more commonly known as the Anti-Horse Thief Association. N40.849242 W91.900400

35. Utica's plat was filed in June of 1857 by John and Emma Whetsel. By January of 1864 he had sold out to Samuel Nixon who deplatted part of the town. Utica was a crossroads town with buildings for a store, a school and two churches. N40.813000 W91.833780

36. Pierceville was surveyed as Dibbleville in 1852 but was platted as Pierceville by Roswell T. Dibble and Thomas Dibble, Sr. in 1855. Father Dibble was a member of the 1846 Iowa Constitutional Convention and father-in-law to George G. Wright, the future Senator and Iowa Supreme Court Justice. N40.784280 W91.833150

37. Summit's plat was filed in April of 1860 by John and Alexandria Taylor. As the name suggests, it was the highest point in the county on the Keokuk, Ft. Des Moines & Minnesota Railroad. In 1880, the Keosauqua & Southwestern railroad was built from what was then known as Mt. Zion to Keosauqua. N40.787100 W91.932040

38. Business Corners was platted in August of 1853 by Walter and Rebecca Whitten. It took its name from the Post Office opened there in 1849 with early abolitionist, Charles T. Gardner, as Postmaster. Coal and limestone were extracted at several locations around Business Corners. N40.856560 W92.073810