

WORTHINGTON

BY JOHN N. GRIGSBY

If you should stop in Worthington along I-90 in southwestern Minnesota, you might be told that it has a population of 10,000 and that it once was known as the "Turkey Capital of the U.S.." You also might note the absence, with maybe an exception or two, of a slew of bars or taverns which are so prevalent in many communities.

Should you consult a history book you also could learn that Worthington was "born" in Toledo, O., 760 miles away.

In fact, the birth took place 125 years ago in the office of The Blade when four men, three of them associated with the newspaper, organized a company to set up a colony for settlers seeking new opportunities as the vast wastelands west of the Mississippi River were opened to development just after the Civil War. But it was not just another "wild west" town -- they wanted a colony with family values in mind.

The four were David R. Locke; also known as Petroleum V. Nasby, and Dr. Abram Perry Miller, co-owners of The Blade; an associate also named A. P. Miller, but no relation, and Prof. Ransom F. Humiston, an educator who had made a fortune not only in developing the University Heights area of Cleveland but in the sale of Cleveland Institute, a classical college he had established.

As described in a history of Worthington: "It appeared that given a suitable location, a colony might be built which would not only prove profitable but which also would provide an opportunity for demonstrating the desirability of maintaining strict moral standards. Chief among them was abstinence from alcohol."

The book adds that "to put it simply, the colony founders didn't drink and they didn't think anyone else should also," Mr. Nasby, who also was a noted orator, was one of the nation's top leaders in fighting the liquor industry with a "pulverize the rum power" campaign although he acknowledged he was a compulsive drinker who had fought addiction for years.

Although it took place 130 years ago, the Toledo connection apparently has never been publicized here. It came to light recently when Ken Peterson, 55, a native of Worthington, who has lived in Toledo for 16 years, acquired "From New Cloth: The Making of Worthington" written in 1976 by Lew Hudson, a former Worthington newspaper man. Mr. Peterson's sister had found the book at a Worthington garage sale.

It tells how in searching for the perfect site, Professor Humiston and Dr. Miller, the major stockholders of the newly formed National Colony Co., of Ohio, embarked on a journey which was to take them some 20,000 miles by train, stage coach, boat, horseback, and on foot across prairies from Iowa to Utah and from Missouri to the Red River of northwestern Minnesota.

STORY AS WRITTEN FOR BLADE  
BY JOHN N. GRIGSBY  
ENHANCED BY  
STORY AS WRITTEN FOR BLADE  
BY JOHN N. GRIGSBY  
ENHANCED BY

## WORTHING--2

They arrived in Nobles County located on the twin Okabena Lakes in southwestern Minnesota and they liked what they saw: -- fertile soil, ample undeveloped and unbroken prairie, and the fact that this spot had been chosen for a station on a new railroad line between St. Paul and Sioux City S. D.

In negotiations with the Sioux City and St. Paul Railroad Co., the Ohioans in September, 1871, obtained control of several thousand acres of land in 12 townships in Nobles County and three and a half townships adjoining in Osceola County, Iowa, 15 to 20 miles away which the railroad had obtained as land grants from the government. .

Although the founders initially had considered Blade as the name of their colony, the village was established as Worthington, serving as headquarters for the developers then known as Miller, Humiston & Co. Dr. Miller's wife was a descendant of the prominent Ohio family which had included the first governor, Thomas Worthington, and Gen. J. T. Worthington, There also is a Worthington, near Columbus, O..

Glowing advertisements were placed in eastern newspapers as to the "fertile soil, convenient markets and healthful climate, superior mail, railroad, school, church, and other privileges and no ague, no consumption, no liquor traffic, no desperadoes, no Indians."

The ads told how "we have the climate of the mountains and the soil of river bottoms, the atmosphere is dry, a specific for all pulmonary and bronchial affections-- consumption and ague are unknown here.". The land is undulating prime, watered by streams and lakes and have the soil of sandy loam from two to four feet in depth, the ads continued saying "this county lies in the very heart of what is called the cream of the prairie.."

Also cited were the lakes and luxuriant grasses which were so adaptable for stock raising.

Settlers began arriving almost at once taking out claims on the lands and many setting up residence in the village as houses, stores, and other commercial enterprises were erected. . Miller & Humiston expended \$40,000 to \$50,000 in locating colonists and in backing enterprises designed to found a prosperous community.

By the end of 1872, Nobles County was the talk of the land as colonists flocked in from New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and other states.

### WORTHING--3

In describing the rapid influx of newcomers , a Minneapolis Tribune reporter in August, 1872, wrote that "I asked each pioneer settler how it happened that he came to Nobles County. In nine cases out of ten, the answer has been that t it was because of the National Colony advertising. The advertisements and 'readers' had been seen in the Toledo Blade or other papers patronized or the settler had his attention called to the project by some friends who had read the advertisements."

(In those days, The Blade, in addition to its daily publications, also published the Weekly Blade, one of the nation's most popular periodicals which boasted subscribers in every state as well as in provinces of Canada.)

Advertisement for Worthington also explained that "the colony is founded upon a temperance and education basis. These features entered into the original plan of Dr. A. P. Miller and Prof. R. D. Humiston, the founders, and were among the chief inducements which brought to this locality the intelligent class of people who have located here. No intoxicating beverages are sold in the county. The town charter of Worthington prohibits the liquor traffic."

In a history of Nobles County, written in 1908 ,the author, A. P. Rose, wrote that "The settlers were a homogenous class, being nearly all American born, and with the current of their religious faith flowing calmly down between the banks of an observably narrow, but strikingly orthodox, stream.

.....  
"The evangelical denominations were all represented, with Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist churches leading in point of numbers." He added that the temperance basis " attracted a people who were strong in their religious and temperance beliefs. . The standard of morality was high, (particularly so for s new community,) and the courage and pluck of the first settlers is beyond question."

The boom was really on in 1872 when when 500 to 700 families moved in and 10,000 to 20,000 acres of raw prairie land was broken up, Humiston & Miller, in addition to helping finance private enterprises erected Miller Hall, a two-story community meeting place. Professor Humiston started a school and aided in establishing a union church. The other A.P.. Miller arrived and he began a newspaper, the Advance. .

Worthington had 13 buildings by the fall of 1871, but a year later it counted 85 including two hotels, four dry goods and grocery stores, three hardwares, two lumberyards, a furniture store, two groceries, two flour and feed stores, a bakery, three restaurants, a livery, meat market, three land agents, two blacksmiths, a harness maker, two cobblers, three physicians, two notaries public, a printer, and a newspaper.

## WORTHINGTON--4

The new settlers faced a brutal 1872-73 winter. Two severe snowstorms with high winds and temperatures of 14 degrees below zero struck the area in November followed by the worst blizzard in more than 50 years in January when temperatures stayed at 18 below for three days. Dozens of people died in the storm All telegraph lines west of Chicago were shut down.

.....  
Worthington recovered, thanks largely to Professor Humiston who advanced money for fuel and supplies to newcomers who were nearly destitute after their journeys from the east.

There had been a fair crop from the newly-tilled ground in 1872, but the summer of 1873 brought was generally described as a "whopper" crop in the entire area. Yields were far greater than first expected. Mills were running smoothly, merchants had thriving business, the community was growing with a high quality of residents, a "no liquor" law had been adopted--it was the legendary dream come true for the developers.

Thousands of acres of new sod had been broken in the spring of 1874 and weather conditions were perfect, but then Mother Nature spoke -- with a loud voice .

With the humming of their wings resembling an approaching windstorm, millions of grasshoppers swarmed into Nobles County first on July 2 and then again on July 15, the clouds of insects darkening the sky.

Every corn and wheat stalk bent to the ground under the weight. The sound of collective eating was like a herd of big hogs munching corn. Within four hours virtually every field was stripped bare. The insects were piled up in drifts one to two feet high as others moved to greener pastures. But another invasion came in Aug. 3.

Although a few farms were spared, there was a meager harvest, most major crops were lost, the Okabena mill operated only part time, poverty became a way of life.

As Mr. Hudson put it, "Professor Humiston's prairie dream was in jeopardy of dying before it had a chance to live." The professor had never fully repaid for thousands of dollars he had provided to settlers during the blizzards. But he continued to provide additional funds as appeals were made to the state for extra help for the unfortunate settlers.

Grasshoppers continued to a lesser extent each summer until July 1879 when "they came, ate a little, then left, never to return again "

## WORTHING--5

They left behind a bankrupt colony company--Professor Humiston and Dr. Miller lost their fortunes, while scores of Toledoans who had hoped to reap big profits lost their investments in the project which had offered such promise.

Professor Humiston in 1879 returned to the east where he died in 1889. Dr. Miller earlier had returned to Toledo where he again became editor of the Blade in 1876 He he died in 1895.

The Ohioans had left too soon. With the disappearance of the grasshoppers, agriculture in Nobles County then zoomed with a bumper crop reported in 1880. . In addition to grain, farmers met success in raising purebred cattle and hogs. In addition to wheat the farmers found the deep black soil was great for flax and hay.

Worthington population soared to 1,164 by 1890 and has continued growth as a shopping center for farmers and for food processing and manufacturing.

Turkey raising became popular around 1930 as Worthington acclaimed it was the "Turkey Capital of the U.S." observing the event each autumn with a Turkey Day festival which has drawn as many as 80,000 visitors. Until recent years 100 or more turkeys led a big parade on Main Street. Turkey raising has tapered off but Turkey Day continues, a major event besides the customary parade, being the Turkey Trot , an annual race between birds from Worthington and from Cuero Tex., the current Turkey Capital.

In a telephone interview from his present home in Baxter, Minn., Mr. Hudson acknowledged that much of the information as to the founding of the colony was taken from Mr. Rose's book. Mr. Hudson's book had been published in 1976 by the American Legion Auxiliary in Worthington as part of the nation's bicentennial

He said he and his wife spent two days in going through microfilmed copies of old newspaper and other material at The Blade library, but they found little relating to the Worthington project except for one glowing letter, by Dr. Miller describing Worthington in June 1872. An advertisement for Worthington the same day consisted primarily of testimonials by new settlers, mostly from the Toledo area, telling how pleased they were with the colony.

A year earlier, the Weekly Blade had published 20 articles, one each week, written by Dr. Miller describing the journey through the west, but the reason for their mission was never mentioned. Mr. Hudson, former regional editor of the Worthington Daily Globe, used Dr. Miller's journal in writing a five-part series in 1976 titled "Wanderings in the West."

Mr. Locke, who had invested in many ventures, apparently took no active part in the colony operation other than as an investor, although he often traveled in the west.

In his book, Mr. Post confessed confusion because his only references showed two founders each named Miller and each known only as A.P. Local references show Dr. Abram Perry Miller had been co-owner of The Blade, but no indication was given of what kind of a doctor he was.

Mr. Hudson's book tells how the temperance factor was tested right from the start. One of the first enterprises was a store that stocked liquor to meet demands of pioneers after their exhausting journeys from the east. The colony organizers had to exert their power on errant businessmen. The founders had set aside substantial sums to prosecute liquor dealers, but much of it went down the legal drain that first year as they successfully fought off three men who wanted to start saloons.

Nobles County commissioners on Sept. 3, 1872, rescinded liquor licenses which had been issued earlier and on Nov. 5 voters approved a county-wide ban on liquor. Mr. Hudson wrote that "as years went by the city was first dry and then wet and then back again as opposing forces waxed and waned. Probably no single issue has been the subject of so many elections throughout the entire history of the city."

Worthington last voted wet in 1947 after which a municipal liquor store was opened with profits to go towards the city's budget. Townspeople point out that is always has been located next door to the police station providing officers with a watchful eye over patrons. The city voted to permit the sale of liquor by the glass in the 1960s.

The temperance heritage may still have an influence considering the virtual lack of taverns today. Liquor by the glass is available at the country clubs and the American Legion, VFW, Elks, and Eagles lodge halls, and there is a bar in the Holiday Inn. Beer also is available at carryouts. But neither Mr. Peterson nor Ray Crippen, retired editor of the Worthington Daily Globe, can cite any public drinking spots other than maybe one or two taverns in town, and one just outside.

Mr. Crippen also noted that Worthington has 20 churches. "Considering that there are only 10,000 people here that appears to be a pretty good ratio," he said.

As a boy, Mr. Peterson recalls reading a historical marker in a Worthington park telling how it had been founded by settlers from Toledo. "I had never heard of Toledo and I certainly never dreamed I'd some time be living here." He came here in 1980 as an accountant for the Champion Spark Plug Co, and now operates a Duraclean carpet cleaning service agency.

From John Grigsby  
Memo on art for Worthington story

Nov. 26

Photo of Prof. Humiston on Page 11 of Hudson book is good for copy.

Ray Criippen, former editor of Worthington Globe, (507) 376 6518

Bob VanEnkenvoort, managing editor of Globe, (507) 376 4553  
Photogs Ken Klotzbach and Brian Korthlas do free-lance

7711

Lew Hudson author (218) 829 8844

Ken Peterson Toledo 385 0419

Ssuggested art

--Worthington today

---Newspaper morgue should have good picture of turkey parade with llots of birds

--There is pioneer village at ede of town with some restored buildings showing  
Worthmington of past years.

-- There is an historical marker there telling how  
settlers from Toledo had started the town

--Material at hisitorical museum adjacent to library Tom Zishka is curator phone  
(507)372 2981 I havn't talked to him

--Ruth Hein is also an historian with some data , but I haven't contacted her  
ohone (507)372 5207