

# PEORIA IS BUSIER THAN EVER, BUT IT'S MUCH DRIER

JAMES O'DONNELL BENNETT

Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Sep 8, 1926;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1987)

pg. 4

## PEORIA IS BUSIER THAN EVER, BUT IT'S MUCH DRIER

### Recalls Days of Whisky, Pure Water, Ingersoll.

How Peoria, largest city in Chicago-land except Chicago, came back after the suppression of its huge whisky distilleries, its whisky distilleries, its genuine drama with its heroes in it—Farrington and Common Sense, Peoria is interesting in many ways. It is a city that goes and gets business, but does not forget beauty. But first a little story about the city's name.

BY JAMES O'DONNELL BENNETT.

"Peory! Peory! Peory!" mumbled the conductor as he thrust his head into the car of a train that was dawdling into Peoria one day to the late sixties of the last century.

"Peory! Peory!" he mumbled again, and yet again.

Edwin Forrest, actor of a stamping and orotund school now gone out of fashion, loved every vowel in a beautiful word and gave every one of them a thunderous value. The great man's combination Scotch-German double back action irascibility was not assuaged by advancing years, and now he could bear no more "Peory." He leaped from his seat in the car, advanced upon the culprit conductor, seized him by both lapels of his coat, and, forcing him backward and forward, majestically intoned:

"Pe-orr-ree-ah! Pe-orr-ree-ah! You mumbly murderer of a beautiful word!"

City with Gurgling Name.

So much for the most melodious name in the nomenclature of Chicago-land cities. Like so many others in our area, it is of Indian origin.

And now we come to a word of Gaelic origin—the word whisky.

In pre-Volstead days whisky was Peoria's life. So, at least, Peorians thought—whether they drank it or not. The late E. F. Baldwin, one of the old time editors of the Peoria Star, used to say that Peoria had nation wide celebrity for three things—

Pure water.  
Good whisky.  
Agnosticism.

A "concentration warehouse" now holds all the whisky and other "potable liquor," as they call it, remaining in Peoria. The quantity is not negligible. It comes to 550,000 gallons. The "concentration warehouse" is a measure devised to counter against the

and hamlets, Peoria counts a grand total of population of 108,500.

Such substantial growth, in the face of what was expected to be dreadful disaster, is fine for Peoria, of course, and instructive to the rest of us because it provides a bright side light on conditions in Chicago-land particularly and in our country generally.

How was the growth brought about? Not by waiting for the worse to come to the worst, but largely by re-aligning and adjusting the potentialities of the iniquitous old industry.

Other Uses for Alcohol.

Far example: Alcohol that used to go into the production of whisky now goes into the manufacture of paint and varnish solvents, photographic chemicals, lacquers, live stock and poultry food—of which last 3,000 tons a day are shipped by the American Milling company alone—commercial alcohol, and so on and so on. Business is good, such a firm as the Commercial Solvents company, for illustration, purveying hugely to the Duponts and the Eastmans and recently adding \$2,000,000 worth of new equipment to its plant.

Some of the breweries—also lured to Peoria by its pure water, as the distilleries were—are still operating, but not as beer producers. They now

make yeast, malt slrup, used in making doughnuts, and similar culinary nial products. One brewer has been so radically realigned that it is producing acetylene gas and cooking oils.

Is not all that readjustment a forthright industrial drama? Romantic, drama, too. For a people has to have imagination as well as brains and nerve to play it.

"Nose Paint" Still Available.

Peoria now has other slogans than whisky slogans. One of them voices Peoria's aspiration to be a glad handed convention city. It runs:

"Peoria is just 'one stop' from three-fourths of the total population of the United States."

Peoria talks less whisky now than it used to. Some say it does not—at least its basic element—drink less, and that the quality is worse. Men not fanatical told me that, and shook their heads.

To the visitor Peoria now extols not liquor but its 1,000 acre park system and its entrancing views from Grand View Avenue up and down the valley of the Illinois, views that Theodor's Roosevelt, who loved the excitements of high language, said were "un surpassed on this continent." They certainly are unsurpassed in Chicago-land.

When I asked the field marshal my

stock question, "What is Peoria's greatest asset?" he replied: "I'm not as good of quick answers as your and my friend, Heber Hudson of Bloomington, was when he instantly replied to your question with the words: 'The quality of its people,' so let me think. Yes, I have the Peoria's biggest asset is its location, with 14 railroads here, and the Illinois river running past our door, and we half way between Chicago and St. Louis and half way between the Mississippi river and the Indiana state line. You can't beat that for trading location!"

Had I asked Mr. Field that stock question of mine seven years ago he would have had to reply, "Whisky!"

The new answer beats the old one by many a league of fair Chicago-land. I think—about 1, too, like my glass full well and well filled.

(Tomorrow: Three Great Peorians—a Jester, a Diva, and a Bishop.)

Now Peoria Prospers.

By "we" he meant all Peoria's business element, minus the groaners.

They sawed wood to such good purpose that today Peoria—

Is building a new 16-story, \$1,500,000 hotel—the Fore Marquette—although the commodious old Jefferson is a right good hotel in no way outdated.

Is two and seven-tenths ahead of the peak time of the war in its employment of labor.

Has made a sixty per cent increase in its factory pay rolls in the last two years.

Has gained more population in the five years since 1920 than it gained in the ten years preceding.

Has developed its trading area—what it calls "our jobbing territory"—until now it extends 150 miles east, 150 miles west, 75 miles north, where it bumps into the Chicago area and atop, and the same distance south, where it bumps into the St. Louis area and does the same. Figuring roughly, Peoria estimates that it now is serving a population of more than half a million and less than a million, so said the field marshal.

Peoria points your kind attention to the fact that it is an "open shop town," is on friendly terms with labor, and has had practically no strikes since 1919. The last big strike was then—the Keystone Steel and Wire company brawl, but it was not, so I was told, due to local conditions.

Shows Steady Growth.

Peoria, as represented at that laconic luncheon, sums up thus:

In 1910, population 66,950.

In 1920, 78,121.

In 1925, 93,095. "This lot," the go-getters added, "is the best estimate we can get." I suspect the 95 to be added to make the total look natural.

Taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs

and taking in its continuous suburbs