

Progress Report—First Floor West

BY LIDA L. GREENE

If Ohio was the crossroads of the American movement westward then Iowa must consider itself one of the important way-stations. For one hundred and fifty years English colonists hovered along the eastern fringe of the continent. A few of the rugged with surnames like Sevier, Harrod and Boone established beachheads on the frontiers. After the War of the Revolution the new country found itself turning inland.

There were as many reasons for migration as there were coonskin caps along the Monongahela River. Some men needed the wilderness. Many were solid farmers who wanted wide fields for a growing tribe of sons. Government bounty lands for soldiers provided an impetus and the movement began, first a trickle and then a torrent that plunged through mountain passes into Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. By 1832 America was poised on the eastern shores of the Mississippi.

These were decades of almost explosive dynamism for America. Within a few years of the opening of Iowa territory there came the struggle for Oregon, the war with Mexico, the discovery of gold in California. Families on the move for two generations found it easy to follow the lures. So Iowa became a way-station on the route to Salt Lake City, the Columbia and the gold fields.

The Historical Library is never allowed to forget this role of Iowa in the Americanization of the continent. It is a very poor mail that fails to bring a query from California or Oregon about some relative in this state a dozen years before readying the Conestoga for the new frontier. Last week, for instance, Mrs. James Mills wrote to ask about great-uncle John Box, Lee County, 1933, five times representative to the territorial Legislature. We found him in Davis County, in an obituary from the *Bloomfield Democrat*, reprinted in the *Pioneer History of Davis County, Iowa*, compiled and published by the Federated Women's Clubs of the County, 1924-1927.

Doris Sumen followed the Crippen brothers, physicians, from France to Des Moines and the Iowa Department of History and Archives. An 1856-57 *Dubuque Directory* located *Crepin, Ernest . . . r Couler Ave bet Diag & Valeria*. A few years later and one of the men would be a pioneering doctor in Arizona.

These were among the lucky patrons. We could pinpoint their men. Too often there is no information in county histories concerning earlier settlers who continued west. Would county land records catch some of them? Or first marriages, old tax or jury lists? Everytime we say to a family historian: "Sorry! We cannot locate your John Doe," we wish we might poke into forgotten corners of some county courthouse.

It's true that the Library has a stack labeled *Iowa Records*. During the 1930's the Works Progress Administration compiled tombstone data from a number of counties. Daughters of the American Revolution chapters have faithfully transcribed a scattering of first marriages, wills and land grants. Only librarians and frustrated historians know the tremendous gaps waiting to be filled.

We need more and better Iowa records! This means dedicated researchers and an organization to coordinate their efforts. Something ought to be done? You're right! We've done it. Sixty mid-Iowa enthusiasts met in November to establish a new Iowa State Genealogical Society. After all, descendants of the lucky people who stayed owe something to great grandchildren of men who didn't know what a good thing they were leaving behind!

Iowa State Genealogical Society
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