

HISTORY OF COLESBURG, IOWA

By Arleen Troester

The material collected and compiled for this history of Colesburg came, in a great part, from personal interviews with descendants of the early settlers who still live in the community. Books used were: History of Delaware County, Iowa, Western Historical Col., 1898; History of Delaware County, Iowa and its People, Vol. 1 & 2, Captain John F. Merry, 1914; and the pamphlet Souvenir History of Colesburg, July 4, 1897.

Today there are no living persons who remember the beginning of the town of Colesburg. We who know this country only as a settled and highly prosperous agricultural section of our state can hardly realize that little more than 100 years ago the site on which this little town now stands was almost a wilderness, with miles and miles of surrounding timberland. Then came the prairie which the early pioneers looked at dubiously, shook their heads and said, "No good, poor soil, will not even grow a tree." So they passed into the dense timber where they lived until they could build a small cabin, perhaps only one room, which became their home. One can almost picture this small cabin alone in the great timber, the shades and silence of night closing around it, the darkness deepening; soon would be heard the howl of the wolf or the scream of a panther, or perhaps an even more terrifying sound — the stealthy step of the Indian as he passed their door on his way through the timber.

Indians were numerous at that time and many a housewife's heart was frozen with terror on glancing up to see a stalwart Indian standing in her doorway, perhaps followed by others. Their usual demand was for food which was quickly given them from the settler's scarce supply, often all he had. To us who sit in our comfortable homes surrounded by plenty, it is hard to conceive what the pioneers had to endure.

The records state that the first person known to have built a cabin in this township, in 1838, was Henry Leegarden, a trapper and Indian trader. It is believed, however, the years before some hunters and trappers named Van Sickles had a trapper's cabin here.

Silas Gilmore was the first permanent settler in the area of Colesburg, having arrived in early 1839. David Moreland and P. C. Bolsinger were among a small group which arrived from Uniontown, Penn., in May, 1839, and settled near Gilmore. This settlement became known as Moreland Colony, from which the present township of Colony took its name. Other early settlers in the Colesburg area were:

David Knee, S. G. Knee, John Knee, James Knee and O. H. P. Knee, whom came from Pennsylvania in April, 1855; J. B. Moreland, from Pennsylvania in April, 1839; John S. Merten, from Missouri in September, 1843; Lawrence and E. L. McNamee, from Missouri in September, 1842; R. Stedman, from Canada in July, 1855; Jeremiah Page, from Missouri in 1847; Rea's, from Ohio in 1848; Ed Smout, from Pennsylvania in 1852; Jacob H. Smith, from Pennsylvania in 1858; R. Wilson, from New York in 1851; Perry C. Bolsinger, from Pennsylvania in 1847; F. C. Nichols, from New York in 1852; Thomas Cole, from New York in 1847; Daniel Cairl, from Pennsylvania in 1854; T. E. Averitt, from Wisconsin in 1855; W. S. Adams, from Pennsylvania in 1854; Thomas Carrigan, from Canada in 1851; Benjamin Coleman, from Pennsylvania in 1850; Joseph Chapman, from New York in 1850; Joseph Grimes, from New York in 1845; E. Hubbard, from Pennsylvania in 1841; H. H. Klaus, from Missouri in 1845; Patrick Hogan, from Pennsylvania in 1845; Rudolph Kellar, from Pennsylvania in 1855; John Klaus, from Missouri in 1842; Philip Stillinger, from Ohio in 1855.

The town of Colesburg was named after the Cole family. The ancestors of this family came to the United States on the Mayflower, and settled in Massachusetts; however, in the late 1700s, Luther and Andra Chase Cole, the parents of the founders of Colesburg, moved to Augusta, Oneida County, New York. It was in Augusta that the founders of Colesburg were born. In 1815 the Coles, together with the McNamees, the Pages, and the Clarks, all later identified with the early history of Colesburg, emigrated to St. Charles, Mo., from where they soon went on to Cape Degris, now a part of suburban St. Louis. Liberty Washington Cole, son of Luther Cole, made frequent long hunting trips from Cape Degris, and, in the course of these, "discovered" the north-eastern section of Iowa. He returned to his relatives with

glowing accounts of the new region, which he visited at regular intervals, becoming ever more enthusiastic over its settlement possibilities.

In 1835, Andra Chase Cole, then a widow, came up the Mississippi River in a boat called the *Uncle Toby*, accompanied by her now grown family, including her daughter, Aurelia, who had married Lawrence McNamee, later a prominent citizen in the early life of Colesburg; McNamee's descendants still live in the Colesburg vicinity. The party landed at Dubuque and proceeded overland with their cattle and household goods to government land on the site of the present Colesburg.

Mary Cole, one of the daughters of Luther Cole, had married Ephraim Glasco, a New York financier, and did not arrive in Colesburg until later. After their arrival, however, their son, Luther Glasco, became one of the more interesting citizens of early Colesburg. In the Cole family annals, he is described as a handsome, aristocratic man, who used the large fortune left him by his father for his own cultural development. He traveled three times around the world, visiting practically all civilized places and he is quoted as saying that the most beautiful scenery in the world was to be seen from the hurricane deck of a Mississippi steamer plying between Dubuque and St. Paul. He was referred to as the "world tramper" by his family and friends.

On Aug. 10, 1848, the town of "Coles Burgh" was laid out by Hiram Cole and Laurence McNamee. It is one of the oldest towns in the county. (One of the reasons for Colesburg's early founding was its location near the old Military Highway which ran from Dubuque to Fort Atkinson; by an 1845 Legislative act, this road was located through Dubuque County by way of the Colony and Eads'. It was a one-day trip from Dubuque to an Inn located just a few miles south of the present settlement of Colesburg.) The name "Coles Burgh" was given in honor of Hiram Cole. The town originally contained three blocks with 30 lots.

In 1851, the town of Colony was laid out just south of "Coles Burgh" by David Moreland. Although legally two

towns, Colony and "Coles Burgh" were practically one, the Main Street running through the center of each. Since they were so close together, they later came to be known as one, called Colesburg.



from Souvenir History of Colesburg

Colesburg, Main Street in 1895

The first store in Colesburg was built by Hiram Cole in 1846; David Bier, however, was the first merchant, having operated a small general store in his home in 1843. The post office was established in 1846 and was named Colony; but, on April 3, 1849, the post office was changed to Colesburg. David Moreland was the first postmaster. Thomas Cole opened the second general store, in 1848, and H. T. Wright later opened a store just south of the Cole store; both were destroyed by fire. In 1849, Liberty Washington Cole and his brother Hiram opened a store and the Colesburg post office. Another Cole brother, Charles, was known as one of the outstanding apple growers of the Mississippi Valley. He established vast orchards in and around Colesburg and shipped apples to St. Paul and St. Louis.

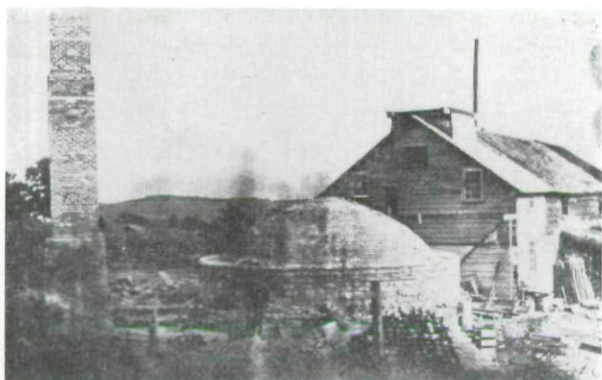
J. B. Moreland erected a general merchandise store in 1851. When this store burned, he built another which he operated a few years. This building was later used as a tin shop, the office of the *Colesburg Review* and then the *Colesburg Clipper*, both weekly newspapers.

P. C. Bolsinger arrived in the area about 1852 and built a large house and storeroom about two and one-half miles southeast of Colesburg. He named the place Waveland, expecting to start a town. Failing in this, in 1860 he built a large stone building on Colesburg's Main Street. This building, which he used as a store, was built with stone quarried from the Bernard Schenke farm near Colesburg; the stone walls of the building are approximately two feet thick. This building, still standing, is now owned by Fred Mitzner who operates an appliance store there.

David Roberts, a New Yorker, came to Colesburg in the early 1850s. His son, George E. Roberts, born in this town, became nationally known as a financier. He spent some years in Iowa as a journalist, writing articles dealing with the money question, upon which he was a recognized authority. Later he was appointed director of the U. S. mint, by Lyman J. Gage, Secretary of the Treasury. He was reappointed in 1902 by Theodore Roosevelt, but resigned in 1907 to accept the presidency of the Commercial National Bank in Chicago. Three years later, President Taft offered him the directorship of the mint and for the third time he occupied that office.

Among the first manufacturing enterprises to be established were a grist mill and a pottery, both started in 1857. The mill, a three-story structure, was built by P. C. Bolsinger and J. B. Moreland. It was operated by steam power and was known as a two run mill with a capacity of 50 barrels of flour a week. In 1887 it was remodeled to a roller mill by Silas Laurett and F. A. Grimes. For many years it ran at its full capacity, often times all night. The milling consisted of wheat, flour, graham, buckwheat flour and cornmeal and feed. Most of this was custom milling. Various brands of flour were made, such as Uncle Sam, Prairie Lilly and White Rose. As wheat raising became unprofitable, flour was no longer milled, but feed grinding continued for a number of years. The mill was finally abandoned and, in 1936, torn down.

The Colesburg pottery was built by David Roberts in



from Souvenir History of Colesburg

Colesburg Pottery Shop

1857. The building was destroyed by fire in 1859, but was rebuilt the same year when E. Jones became the owner. It was later purchased by Stegner and Stillinger, and, in 1871, by F. A. Grimes and R. C. Currie. As the clay in the area was particularly adaptable to the potter's trade, and as wood was in abundance, the manufacture of pottery was inexpensive. The pottery employed quite a number of men and made very fine patterns of hanging baskets, jelly cups, bowls, and other articles too numerous to mention. Some building bricks were made and, in 1878, about 100,000 flower pots were manufactured. Many of the products of the Colesburg pottery were hauled by team to Dubuque for market.

There were various other businesses in Colesburg, such as hotels, general stores, several blacksmith shops, a butcher shop and a saw mill built in 1876, but space prohibits the listing of all of these.

Colesburg Churches

Colesburg had the distinction of having the first religious service in Delaware County. According to tradition and record, Mr. Simeon Clark, a Methodist and very eccentric man from Dubuque County preached the first sermons in 1839. Clark was not an ordained minister at that time; his principal occupation was that of a bee hunter. It was while on

honey-hunting expeditions that he generally stopped on Sunday to preach to the settlers. Clark was called "preacher" by the settlers and "caphead" Clark by the boys because he generally wore no hat but tied a handkerchief around his head.

The Methodist Church was organized in the school house in the fall of 1842 by the Rev. Barney White, assisted by the Rev. Simon Clark. Thomas Cole was the first class leader and John Nagle and Missouri Dickson, stewards. The first board of trustees consisted of George Gilmore, Henry Klaus, William Gregg, Heseekiah Hubbard and Perry Perkins. In 1849, the Rev. John L. Kelly was pastor. The church building was erected in 1849 and dedicated in the fall of that year by the Rev. George B. Bowman. The Rev. George Larkin became pastor at this time. This structure was replaced by the present structure in 1891; both churches were erected on the same site.



*from Souvenir History
of Colesburg*
Methodist Church, 1900

The First Methodist Church joined with the Zion and Immanuel Churches in 1961 to form a single organization; they are presently served by the Rev. Ernest Allen.

The first Methodist camp meeting in Delaware County was held in Colony in 1844. The meetings were held at quite regular intervals and were looked forward to and attended by people from miles around. The people came from their homes prepared to spend about two weeks. Some had tents, others covered wagons in which they slept. The cooking was done by a camp fire near by. The camp grounds were lighted in the evenings; a scaffold about five feet high was built around the grounds, about a foot of dirt was piled on top of the scaffold and fire placed on the dirt. Lanterns and candles furnished the additional light. The people who attended these meetings were happy people and their singing could be heard a mile away as they went to the camp grounds. The Methodists were especially noted for these revivals — the revival

that reached the greatest number of people was a union meeting of three weeks held by "Billy" Sunday in 1899.



*from Souvenir History
of Colesburg*
**Congregational
Church, 1907**

The Congregational Church was organized in 1846 in the cabin home of James Cole. There were eight charter members: J. A. Reed, John W. Potts, Mrs. Eliza Potts, David Malvin, Catherine Malvin, Samual Malvin, Sarah Malvin and Mary Black. The Rev. James Hill was the first pastor; he was succeeded in 1847 by the Rev. E. B. Turner. A church was built on the corner of East Main and Church Streets in 1849. This church was later sold to James Potts who converted it into a dwelling

house. After a number of years it became the home of Dr. and Mrs. Jacobs. A much larger Congregational Church was erected in 1875 on West Main Street. However, after some of the active members moved from the area, the organization declined and finally dissolved. The church and property were purchased by the American Legion; the church was remodeled and used as a Legion Hall and, later, as a beer tavern.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized in 1859 and a building was erected the same year. This society became nonexistent many years ago and the building is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Keck.

The Catholic Church in Colesburg was organized in 1847 and was served by the pastors from Holy Cross. Father Michael Lynch was the first to serve the church. In October of 1854, Bishop Loras purchased land from David Moreland for a church which was built sometime between the years 1859 and 1862. Another Catholic church was erected in the summer of 1877; this church burned in 1940 and the present church was built. The St. Patrick's Parish continued to be served by the Holy Cross Parish until 1864 when it was placed under the supervision of the Elkport charge.

Colesburg Schools

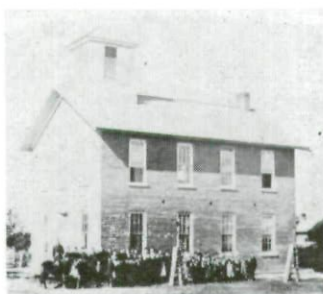
The first school house in Delaware County was erected in Colesburg in 1841 and was taught by Mrs. McCleland. Two months after school commenced, the building burned and the term was completed in the James Cole cabin, which was often later referred to as the old school house. In 1842, a school house was built of hewed logs; Maria Phillips taught a three-month term in this building with 15 pupils attending. She received \$1.25 a week and boarded with the pupils' families.

In the winter of 1843, William Hall commenced a school, but before the term ended, the building burned and Mr. Augustus Mallory's house just across the line in Clayton County was used as a school until 1853 when another school house was erected.

The first schools taught were private or subscription schools. Their accommodations, as may be supposed, were not good. Sometimes they were taught in small log houses erected for the purpose. A mud and stick chimney in one end of the building, with a earthen hearth, a fireplace wide enough and deep enough to take in a four foot back log, and smaller wood to match, served for warming purposes in the winter and a kind of conservatory in the summer. Writing benches were made of wide planks or puncheons resting on pins or arms driven into two-inch auger holes bored into the logs beneath the windows. Seats were made of thick planks or puncheons; flooring was also of puncheons. Everything was rude and plain, but many of America's greatest men have gone out from just such school houses to grapple with the world and make a name for themselves.

In the summer of 1853 a one-story brick school building was erected by Augustus Mallory, contractor; this house is now the property of the Edgewood-Colesburg Community School and is used as a superintendent's house. In 1872, when this building was no longer large enough to accommodate the pupils, a two-story brick building was erected. This became a grade school with four teachers.

The first high school was established in 1883 by members of the community. It was under the leadership of Superintendent G. H. Sumner, with Earl Wisdom superintendent of grades nine and ten. The subjects offered were reading, orthography, penmanship, arithmetic, grammar, geography, United States history, physiology, physical geography, civil government, word analysis, bookkeeping, algebra, composition and natural philosophy.



*from Souvenir History
of Colesburg*

High School 1905

Colesburg Incorporated

Colesburg was not incorporated until Feb. 21, 1893. It was then a progressive town of 400. Throughout all the early settlement, Colesburg contemplated having a railroad. Several times it seemed so close but did not materialize. At one time just previous to World War I, a track was laid from Dyersville as far as New Vienna on its way to Colesburg and beyond. Then came the war; metal was needed so the tracks were torn up and sent to France to aid the war effort. Never again did a track get that close. With the loss of the railroad, new businesses were not attracted to Colesburg. Later also came the catalogues from which anything could be ordered and the chain stores in larger towns with their capacity for ordering large quantities of goods. Automobiles enabled people to go out of town for their shopping. With all this competition, our small businesses could not compete and many were forced to close.

Colesburg is still a live, energetic town and always ready at all times to forward any laudible enterprise. Many new homes have been built during the last decade. The country surrounding Colesburg is peopled by a well-to-do class of farmers who have made the country one of the best portions of the state. The agriculture, dairying and stock raising carried on around Colesburg is excellent and the inhabitants, principally Americans and Germans, are known for their hospitality.

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