

TAKE A YELLOWED CLIPPING . . .

by Lida L. Greene
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Take a yellowed clipping. Not any clipping but one dated July 24, 1928, source unknown, and headed "Harlan Describes Drive of First Herd Across Iowa." It is guaranteed to take the reader down a long trail that begins in Sutherlandshire, Scotland, and leads to Jones County, Iowa along the wild and free Maquoketa River.

A librarian would be the first to admit there is no essential magic in a clipping. The task of maintaining a vertical file is a prosaic weekly chore. Usually a dull one. Sometimes, however, there is a yellowing scrap of paper as potent as a time capsule. We found one last week. "The First Herd Across Iowa" was the report on a radio speech by Edgar R. Harlan, former curator, 1909-1937, of the Iowa Department of History and Archives. Edgar Rubey Harlan was never content with being a book historian. He relived it. He slept in the wickiup of the Mesquakie; he followed the Mormon Trace across southern Iowa, platting it, section and township, to the Missouri. In this instance he had followed the trail of the almost-mythological herd through the prairies to the lake lands of the north.

The year of the herd was 1822, a full decade before the proud Black Hawk led his followers in fatal protest against the loss of Sauk lands east of the Mississippi. Two men, Dixon and McKnight (whose given names are lost), secured cattle and sheep near St. Louis, transporting them by keel boat to the upper curve of the Keosauqua, the great bend on the Des Moines River in what is now Van Buren County. The drovers sought out the higher ground above the Chequest, pasturing the animals northwest and north through the greening spring and summer. It was fall when they reached the head waters of the Red River of the North. What was left of the herd was rafted down stream to Lord Selkirk's Canadian settlement.

To a generation of television viewers reared in the tradition of Dodge City and the range wars, this episode will seem gently pastoral. Like many of man's remarkable exploits it will live largely in legend since there was no historian present to translate life into racial memory. For Dixon and McKnight it was more than a thousand-mile battle through uncharted territory. They knew the July sun, the quick and terrifying prairie storm, disabling bogs, swollen streams, the torment of insects warring against man and beast, the unrelenting fight against savage predators. They would never forget encounters with Sioux and Chippewa, when the unwary word or gesture might have meant loss of the herd or danger to the herdsmen. There must have been skirling of the pipes for the wayfarers when the rafts reached Ft. Douglas that fall. The battered remnant of the herd was too small to serve the colony well but the Scots knew, as a few men ever know, the need of a chant in praise of courage to survive.

The Highlanders, some of them, had homed along the Red River for a decade. "Selkirk's settlement". . .the phrase recalls the fact that there are communities in northeastern Iowa founded by emigrants from the Canadian colony. The card catalogue produced this reminder: Josephine Sutherland, *Scotch Grove Pioneers*, Centennial, 1937. One hundred and twenty-five years before, the Sutherlands had been crofters in north Scotland.

The life of a crofter was not an easy one. In all likelihood he lived in a one story hut, a *shieling*, with walls of undressed stone, chinked with moss and roofed with turf or straw. He rented a patch of poor land from the neighboring gentry where he raised oats, a bit of barley, kale and turnips, turning over most of the produce to the laird (lord). He might own a few sheep. Not many. Lords of the northland preferred to save the sparse grass among the heather for the deer that afforded the excitement of the chase.

The *Hielander* was a proud man. He was descended from the Picts and Scots whom the legions of Rome could never conquer. He loved this barren misty world with the tang of the sea about it. His loyalties were deep-rooted: the land, the laird and the kirk. Until, that is, the early 19th Century brought a disturbing change.

With the Industrial Revolution, sheep farmers from the south came, offering more rental for grazing lands than the crofters could afford. Eviction notices followed. In two parishes of Sutherlandshire, a single farm dispossessed 100 tenants. The Earl of Breadalbane in Argyll stripped the entire McIntire family of homes they had known as long as clan memory had existed.

When news of the dislocation of crofter families came to the Earl of Selkirk, he sent his agents into the north country. They talked to the homeless about a colony to be planted in Assiniboia, British North America. "Black soil seven feet deep," they promised. "Fish and game for the catching . . . grass as thick as heather before the spring burning . . ." There was the sound of Eden about it! Seven hundred of the Highlanders applied for transportation to the New World. Less than 100 families could be accepted.

Thomas Douglas, Earl of Selkirk, was a Lowlander, but he knew the Highlands well. He spoke its Gaelic tongue and, with the poet Robert Burns, he was sensitive of the wrongs to its poor. In 1808, Lord Selkirk had gained control of Hudson Bay Company, a fur trading combine, and had secured through it 100,000 square miles of land, largely virgin prairie, in what is now Manitoba. Along with his purpose to establish and strengthen outposts of the trade, he was honestly concerned with settling some of the homeless of Scotland. In 1811, he launched his plan by sending a shipload of Glasgow and Orkney men, a rough, undisciplined lot, to prepare the way for the coming of permanent settlers.

The first party of Scotch families, some 70 in number, arrived at the Forks of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers in October 1812. The work party of men had been on the site for only two months. Few trees had been felled and no suitable shelters raised. It was a winter of great suffering for the pioneers.

In the spring, the Earl of Selkirk himself went to the Highlands. His charm and his pledges of aid heartened those in waiting. The new colony was ready to sail from the Orkneys

in June 1813. Out of the 97 in the company, four surnames were to reappear a quarter of a century later on the new Iowa frontier: *Sutherland*, one family and part of another (John Sutherland, the stalwart, would die before they reached the Red River); McKay, Alexander and Jean, his wife; *Gunn*, Robert, a piper, and Mary his sister; *McIntyre*, John.

History would call the 1813 colony the Churchill party. Tragedy dogged them. There was typhus aboard the sailing ship, and the Scots gave their first dead to the sea. Captain Turner, adamant to pleas, landed his passengers and their gear at Ft. Churchill, 150 miles above York Factory where preparations had been made for the colony's wintering. Only 41 were left in April 1814, to make their way southward.

The journey was a tattered and gallant march. Two or three of the strongest men went ahead with snow shoes and sleds to break trail. Behind came other stalwarts to watch for stragglers. Somewhere in between was the piper, who, if bodies began to falter, swung the pipes to his shoulder and breathed "The Road to the Isles" through the chanter.

The Churchill party reached the Red River of the North that summer, 800 miles by water and rugged portage. Where modern Winnipeg stands, Miles Macdonnell, in the name of Lord Selkirk, marked out land for every head of family. Each received 11 chains or 660 feet fronting the river, the holdings being two to four miles in depth. After the perils of the journey it must have seemed fair promise for the future.

It is a gallant story. Read it for yourself in the Centennial history of the *Scotch Grove Pioneers* by Josephine Sutherland. Between the Red River and the Black Hawk Purchase there were dangerous years when crofters became frontiersmen, years of attack by the Bois Brulee half-breeds, years of grasshoppers, black frost and hunger, years of longing for a kirk. In 1837-40 small bands of Scots made their way down the thousand miles of wilderness from Lake Winnipeg to found Scotch Grove and Upper Grove (Hopkinton). Their kirk was established in 1841, and the names on the charter roll had a fine presbyterian sound — Livingstone, Sinclair, McClain, Sutherland. The Highlanders had come home.

If you are in northeastern Iowa this summer, be sure to drive by way of Scotch Grove and Hopkinton. The Auld Kirk, almost anyone can tell you where to find it. And perhaps someone along a street or in a gas station can tell you whether there are still Sinclairs with the ancient querns (millstones) for doorsteps. Or direct you to a farm where the sons of John Sutherland turned the first soil in the new homeland.

Don't be in a hurry. I may want to meet you there.

FROM WESTMINSTER TO DES MOINES

by Leonard Abels
Des Moines, Iowa

The following article was written by Mr. Abels in 1959 at the direction of Atty. Gen. Norman Erbe. Mr. Abels was then serving as assistant attorney general of Iowa. The paper was presented before the Polk County Historical Society in 1967.

Photographs of Iowa's attorneys general appear on pages 52, 53 and 54, through the courtesy of LeRoy Pratt of Des Moines. The original photographs are on display in the office of the present attorney general, Richard Turner.

A chart showing terms of service appears at the conclusion of the article.

Historical Background

This is the story of Iowa's attorneys general. Before describing the men who have held the office and the events which marked their administrations, two questions should be answered: "What is an attorney general?" "How did the office happen to become part of our state government?"

The attorney general is the lawyer for the state. The office exists as part of our system of government, because it existed as part of the English system upon which ours is based. In England there was one sovereign, the king or queen. In the United States, we have a union of sovereign states, each with its own attorney general.

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