

The Editor and the English

George Sheppard and English Immigration to Clinton County

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MANY IMMIGRANTS to the farm districts of Iowa and other mid-western states in the last century came from England; the literature on their migration and settlement remains sparse, however. Jacob van der Zee's book on the English in Iowa, for example, might give the impression that many were the less employable sons of the aristocracy who, sent out as farm pupils, would have been more at home on the polo fields than in the cornfields. Clearly these were a minority, but because the majority of humbler English immigrants arrived independently in the Midwest, they seldom left any record of why or how they came.¹

A third set of English settlers, however, left a more tangible record. For tradespeople and small farmers, group migration mitigated the hazards of the ocean crossing and western settlement. Several studies have appeared on the group settlements of English potters in Wisconsin and of farmers and craftsmen from various parts of England in Illinois, Kansas, and Minnesota. For Iowa, Grant Foreman's 1946 study of an English group settlement discusses the migration of about sixty people to Clinton County in 1850 promoted by the Iowa Emigration Society of Hull, Yorkshire. George Sheppard, a former Hull newspaper editor, led an initial party which located at Wright's Grove (later named Sheppardsville and then Welton) in the

1. Jacob van der Zee, *The British in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1922). One exceptional record is Scotsman George Rae's diary which recounted his migration from New England to Crawford County in 1865. See Brian P. Birch, "Seeking a Prairie Farm: A Scotsman's Search through Missouri to Iowa in 1865," *Annals of Iowa* 46 (1982), 198-219.

center of the county. Many in this first group soon relocated, but one or more additional parties arrived over the next few months settling throughout the county, notably at De Witt and Low Moor. Unlike the first party, more of these later immigrants—mainly from the area just south of Hull in Lincolnshire—were farmers who remained in Clinton County.²

No records of Hull's Iowa Emigration Society exist but Foreman based his study on letters that Sheppard and his followers sent to England. Reprinted in the *Eastern Counties Herald*, the newspaper which Sheppard had previously edited, these letters described the party's journey to Iowa, the settlement's location in Clinton County, and the first steps in establishing the colony. Many more reports appeared, however, than Foreman cited, describing both the origins of the Society and its first settlement in Iowa. This additional material suggests that Sheppard, rather than merely being "identified with the movement," as Foreman stated, was the principal originator, organizer, publicist, and driving force behind the Society.³ Although the settlement at Sheppardsville dissolved, he deserves recognition for at least bringing Iowa to the attention of potential English settlers.

Sheppard first visited Iowa, including the Davenport area, during a trip to the United States in 1843. He became, in 1848, the editor of the *Eastern Counties Herald* and began developing his ideas on group, or associative, emigration for working people shortly thereafter.⁴ In an editorial in April 1848 he deplored

2. Grant Foreman, "Settlement of English Potters in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 21 (1938), 374-96; Charles Boewe, *Prairie Albion* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1962); William Chapman, *The Wakefield Colony* (Kansas) (Clay Center Times, 1907); Bryn Trescatheric, "Furness Colony in England and Minnesota, 1872-1880," *Minnesota History* 61 (1980), 16-25; Grant Foreman, "English Emigrants in Iowa," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 44 (1946), 385-420; *The History of Clinton County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1879), 636-41. Welton in Clinton County was, presumably, named after the village of the same name five miles west of Hull, Yorkshire, England.

3. Foreman, "English Emigrants," 386.

4. Although issues of the *Eastern Counties Herald* had in 1843 carried anonymous reports based on the journal of a voyage from Hull to New York, it included little news of immigration to America until Sheppard became editor in 1848. He had worked as a reporter on other papers in northern England and was 29 when he became editor of the *Herald*. *Eastern Counties Herald*, 2 and 9 February 1843, 4 (hereinafter cited as *Herald*.)

the lack of migration schemes available to the poor and blamed the advocates of emigration, "...for instead of combining to create something like a rational system of colonization, embodying the strength of the associative principle... they have either slipped in to advance personal interest, or have suffered emigration to proceed without method..." He continued, "The time has surely come when colonization under the guidance of enlightened men should be made to supersede the individual efforts..."⁵ A few months later he stated that in view of the public interest in emigration his paper would "endeavour to procure and to publish reliable and really practical information" on how and where readers might relocate.⁶ The following week a letter to the editor asked, "Is it not possible to form an emigration club in Hull? I am acquainted with several who would join any safe plan of this kind."⁷ Sheppard demonstrated his known enthusiasm for the subject in his short reply—that the interested persons "had only to meet" and the *Herald* would be pleased to assist their communication.

In February 1849 the *Herald* carried two lead stories side by side, one about associative emigration for working classes and the other about Iowa. The editorial on emigration focused on the Potters' Emigration Society, based in the Midland pottery towns, which had been organizing a farm settlement in Wisconsin and was now opening membership to workers from other trades and other towns. A branch had recently formed in Hull. Sheppard detailed the rules of the Society and outlined its activities for settling surplus labor on twenty-acre farms in America—thus raising the wages of labourers remaining in England. He concluded that the Society provided opportunities for "the working population... by association literally to work out their own social redemption..." He emphasized the benefits of associative action for Hull's working class: "We shall be glad if this notice of the subject proves the means of stimulating to enquiry and exertion the vast body of mechanics and labourers, in this town, who, having no accumulated savings, are prone to regard the brighter labour field of distant countries as paradises which they can never enter."⁸

5. *Herald*, 20 April 1848, 3.

6. *Herald*, 7 September 1848, 3.

7. *Herald*, 14 September 1848, 5.

8. *Herald*, 1 February 1849, 3. For further information on the Potter's



George Sheppard

As if to stress his belief that Iowa was one of these paradises, the adjoining column carried an editorial by Sheppard demonstrating to readers that Iowa was not an uncivilised western wilderness. Pointing to a report in the *Davenport Gazette* on the governor's annual message to the Senate, Sheppard noted that while it was written in a style "rather different from our quiet fashion" it afforded "some insight into the economy of a region which thousands of our countrymen are yearly adopting as their home." Observing that the report emphasized Iowa's progress in such diverse fields as the construction of railroads

Emigration Society and its settlement in Wisconsin see Foreman, "Settlement of English Potters," and Marguerite Boote, "The Emigration of Staffordshire Potters to America," *Eleventh Wedgwood International Seminar* (1966), 61-68.

and the opening of schools, Sheppard concluded that "however much one may sneer at western rudeness and republican bombast let us at any rate acknowledge that in the important work of education, even Iowa is far ahead of England."⁹

These editorials launched a campaign for emigration from Hull to Iowa. Sheppard headed this scheme and over the next year his paper included several reports and editorials on migration, especially to Iowa. In a *Herald* editorial in March 1849, under the heading "Associative Emigration," Sheppard pointed to several group emigration schemes being organized across the country. He detailed the prospectus of the Provident Emigration, Land and Benefit Society, in which "each member who settles on the society's land will be entitled to one allotment at the cost price to the company; but, for every additional allotment thus appropriated, another will be reserved for sale at an improved value, consequent on the progress of the settlement." Sheppard also introduced Charles Fourier's similar idea of cooperative settlements which retained certain individual property rights—a forceful idea for promoters of group settlements. Sheppard would cite Fourier again in his public lectures supporting the Iowa Emigration Society, just as he now linked his continuing belief in the advantages of Iowa to those of associative emigration: "The verdant prairies of Iowa . . . offer facilities for associative action which cannot be found in the thickly peopled countries of Europe, and seem to invite the disciples of Fourier to exhibit the strength and sincerity of their convictions by proving the practicability of the principles they profess."¹⁰

Five months later, in a report entitled "Iowa as an Emigration Field," the *Herald* quoted briefly from George B. Sargent's recently published *Notes on Iowa*. (The author had forwarded a copy to Sheppard.) In reproducing portions of the *Notes* describing the fertility of the state's soil and the low cost of settlement there, Sheppard added: "Having stood almost alone in our advocacy of the strong claims of Iowa as an emigration field, we regard these 'Notes' with peculiar interest, affording as they do complete confirmation of statements made in the

9. *Herald*, 1 February 1849, 3.

10. *Herald*, 22 March 1849, 4.

Herald many months ago. . . .” He added, “We have received a very interesting letter from Iowa, for a portion of which we shall endeavour to find room next week.”¹¹

The letter, addressed to George Sheppard from Messrs Cook and Sargent, land agents of Davenport, duly appeared in the *Herald* the following week. Introducing it as being “of value to those who seek recent and authentic information with regard to the value of land, and the most eligible fields of settlement in the Far West,” the letter mainly described the rapid settlement occurring close to the Mississippi River in Scott County. Since Sheppard later determined to locate the Hull settlers close to the river, it is interesting to note that Cook and Sargent here informed him that, while cheaper land was still available farther from the river in Jackson and Jones counties, “the opportunities for realizing an interest on the outlay would not be so good [there] as it would nearer the Mississippi river.”¹²

Events which would put Sheppard at the head of a group of people destined for Iowa now moved rapidly. In the *Herald's* first issue for 1850 two separate news items briefly reported on the formation in Hull of the Iowa Emigration Society with S. Cortis as its secretary. With the establishment of the Society the *Herald* asserted that “the application of the co-operative principle to emigration is about to be tested” and “we shall watch its progress with increasing interest.”¹³

The paper's next issue outlined the Society's prospectus and quoted at length from its proposals to ensure that the emigrant party enjoyed a comfortable passage to Iowa where a favorable location would have been prepared. The proposal placed particular emphasis on the advantages of group travel to secure “the conveyance of the members and their families, in the best and cheapest manner, from England to Iowa, U.S., and for their economical and advantageous settlement in that state.” In contrast to the experience of the individual emigrant who is “exposed to the rogueries of numberless harpies and, after

11. *Herald*, 30 August 1849, 4.

12. *Herald*, 6 September 1849, 4. The letter was dated 1 August 1849, from Davenport. Foreman quotes a different letter to Sheppard from Cook and Sargent, reproduced in the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, 3 November 1849.

13. *Herald*, 3 January 1850, 2, 3.

all, very little comfort when on board . . . arrangements will be made for the selection of a first-class ship. . . . It is calculated that by contracting for a very large number of berths . . . a very material reduction in the fares will be effected."¹⁴

The group would also benefit from the selection and preparation of suitable land for settlement: "Instead of arriving in a strange country wearied by a long and toilsome journey, and then having to travel, with a view to the selection of a place of settlement, they will enjoy the means of knowing beforehand the spot to which they can most advantageously proceed, and of there finding accommodation for themselves and their families." The proposal continued to offer even more advantages to emigrants joining the society-promoted migration scheme: "If desired, it will be the duty of the agent to cause a cabin or a house to be erected, and to have a small quantity of prairie land broken, in order that the emigrant on his arrival, in autumn, may have an opportunity of putting in seed for the ensuing year's crop."¹⁵

Before the Society's formation, Sheppard seemingly did not arrange or address any public meetings related to emigration. A few days after the Society's prospectus appeared, however, the *Herald* reported on a public meeting about the Potters' Emigration Society, chaired by Sheppard, at Hull Town Hall. Sheppard praised this society as an example of "the importance of co-operation as a lever in the hands of the working classes for the amelioration of their condition."¹⁶ The principal speakers were William Evans, the founder of the Society, and Thomas Twigg, his agent in Wisconsin. Two weeks later Sheppard was the main speaker at a meeting in Hull where he outlined his views on the disruption of "the brotherhood of society," resulting from current industrial and social changes. He suggested solutions in the new systems of community liv-

14. *Herald*, 10 January 1850, 3.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Herald*, 17 January 1850, 3. The *Herald* made other references to the activities of the Potters' Emigration Society apart from those quoted here. These generally commended the Society to readers. In December 1849 the *Herald* printed a letter from a former Hull resident who had settled in Wisconsin and wrote favorably of the Potters' settlement at Fox River. *Herald*, 6 December 1849.

ing suggested by Rousseau, Fourier, and others, including those systems as practiced in the new American settlements.¹⁷

Less than a month later, in February 1850, the *Hull Advertiser* reported Sheppard's resignation as editor of the rival *Herald*, an event which passed unreported in the latter paper. We shall never know how cordial this parting was between Sheppard and William Stephenson, the *Herald's* proprietor. The *Advertiser* reported their "mutual regret" at the separation but since the same report erroneously stated that Sheppard was joining relatives in western Canada—and since the *Herald* chose to entirely ignore the change—the situation may have been otherwise.¹⁸

Sheppard now embarked on a series of public lectures about group emigration to Iowa. Local newspapers of eastern England reported several of these meetings. The *Herald* carried the longest report on the first lecture which Sheppard gave in Hull early in March. Taking the proposition that the over-supply of British labor depressed virtually all wages, and that cultivating the country's idle land was not feasible, he stated his belief that immigration to English-speaking parts of the world presented the only solution. The rest of his lecture addressed the question of suitable lands for relocation. Sheppard accepted that Englishmen "should naturally desire to remove to some part of the British dominions" but such areas "were not as a whole to be regarded favourably as emigration fields." Australia and New Zealand were too distant, and while he would choose Canada if he were to settle in the colonies, "he did not like the way in which their affairs were administered."¹⁹

At this point in his lecture Sheppard introduced his preference for the United States for settlement because of its "national greatness . . . peopled by a race having all the good qualities of the Anglo-Saxon character" and with "incomparable agricultural and mineral resources." But as the eastern

17. *Hull Advertiser*, 1 February 1850, 5 (hereinafter cited as *Advertiser*). Another account of this lecture was given in the following week's issue of the same newspaper. The *Advertiser* first recognized the growing interest in emigration with these reports; nothing on the topic had appeared in this paper during the previous year.

18. *Advertiser*, 22 February 1850, 5.

19. *Herald*, 7 March 1850, 4.

states were already well occupied, or were, like Ohio, "too heavily timbered to suit men not accustomed to the labour of clearing," he favored the prairies of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa. "A farm there might easily be brought into cultivation, as no clearing was required." In choosing between these states, however, one "ought to take care not to go so far north as to be exposed to a long and severe winter, nor so far south as to be exposed to the enervating influences of a very hot climate." He therefore preferred the district stretching from northern Illinois into southeastern Iowa as far north as Jones and Jackson counties. "These portions of Illinois and Iowa were as healthy and fertile as the best parts of Wisconsin, while they presented greater facilities for agreeable farming than were possessed by that state."²⁰

He concluded his lecture with some points on the character of the people in these western states whose "fortunes were chiefly those which their own industry had created" and who were "men in almost primitive simplicity . . . not so ignorant as our labourers, and not so polished as our aristocracy." Sheppard stated his belief that Iowa offered the best opportunities and called the attention of his audience to the Iowa Emigration Society "now being formed in this town by persons about to emigrate to that state. . . ." The *Herald* reported that the two-hour meeting, under the chairmanship of Hull's mayor, drew "an exceedingly numerous audience" and was "listened to with marked attention . . . expressions of approval were loud and numerous."²¹

Three weeks later Sheppard delivered a second emigration lecture in Hull. Mainly dealing with questions raised by the previous lecture, he suggested that "there were thousands in this town prepared at once to emigrate if the means were placed within their reach." He stressed the greater sense of freedom that life in the West provided, for "no man who had ever traversed the western states, who had communed with nature in her grandest moods . . . on the banks of its mighty rivers, or in its great natural gardens—the prairies—could fail to wish again to enjoy that privilege. . . . The man 'in crowded

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

city pent' might drag on an existence, but he was not what a man should be. . . ."22

Over the next few weeks Sheppard delivered similar lectures in other towns close to Hull, and attended additional meetings of the Iowa Emigration Society. He gave a two-hour lecture at the Theatre, Lincoln, forty miles south of Hull, which was described as "well-received" in one paper and as "respectably attended" in another. A third, however, reported that it merely was one stop on a lecture tour and noted the "smallness of the audience."²³

Meanwhile, Sheppard helped to organize meetings of the Iowa Emigration Society in Hull, prior to the departure of its first group of emigrants in June. One of those meetings, at the Wilberforce rooms, attracted 130 members and friends.²⁴ At another, the last before the first emigrants departed, Sheppard was formally appointed as the Society's agent in Iowa and plans were laid for two more groups to follow the first, one the next fall and one the following spring. Sheppard was "instructed to survey the most eligible parts of the state, and to purchase in one tract the land required for the whole party." The Society also fixed its plans for land allocation: "Each member purchasing land is to have a village allotment of an acre;

22. *Advertiser*, 29 March 1850, 5.

23. *Lincolnshire Chronicle*, 10 May 1850, 3; *Advertiser*, 10 May 1850), 6; *Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury*, 10 May 1850. The *Chronicle* carried several items on emigration from Lincolnshire throughout 1849 and 1850. In the 26 April 1850 issue, it reported that "considerable numbers of agricultural labourers, small farmers and others are leaving the neighbourhood of Lincoln to settle in the Far West."

Except for the lecture Sheppard gave in Lincoln in May, neither Hull newspaper reported meetings outside of Hull, even though the *Advertiser* had indicated that Sheppard planned to speak in Beverly and Barton. (*Advertiser*, 22 February 1850, 5.) Sheppard did not lecture at any great distance from Hull: Lincoln is forty miles distant and both Beverly and Barton are within ten miles of the town. No reports of Sheppard's lectures appeared in the district's other main local newspaper, the *Yorkshire Gazette*, published in York only thirty miles from Hull. This paper printed several items on emigration and on two occasions referred to the work of R. Cortis as a handling agent for emigrants passing through the port of Hull. It is not known if R. Cortis was related to S. Cortis, originally secretary of the Society and a member of the party that Sheppard took to Iowa.

24. *Herald*, 18 April 1850, 3. This report mentioned that some of those about to join the first party had previously lived in the United States.

space is to be provided for the erection of public buildings . . . water privileges—if such there be—are to be the common property of the entire body of original members. . . ."²⁵

SHEPPARD went to Liverpool on May 1 to arrange passages on the *Columbus* which sailed for New York two weeks later. The *Advertiser* reported the group's departure from Hull:

On Monday morning last a party consisting of several families and a number of single persons amounting altogether to about fifty, took their departure by the first train, at 6:10, from this town for Liverpool. . . . The party consisted of tradesmen, and others of this town, with their families and tradesmen, artisans and agriculturalists from the East and West Ridings of Yorkshire, and from Lincolnshire and other places. The company that assembled at the station, to witness the departure and take a long leave of old friends, was considerable. . . .²⁶

The party sailed the next day for New York. Nothing more appeared in the Hull newspapers until July when the *Herald* was relieved to quash rumours that the Iowa party had met a watery end on the Atlantic. The passage had taken seven weeks, however, and had been rough.²⁷ A week later the *Herald* carried a long letter from Sheppard, and a week after that a shorter one from a member of his party. These reports mainly recounted incidents on the long storm-ridden Atlantic crossing and observations on the six hundred emigrant passengers on the *Columbus* and the knavery of the cargo-handlers, or "runners," in New York. Most significant, Sheppard reported that he had addressed assembled passengers about his settlement plans in Iowa and several had joined his party. He expressed his optimism about the future of his proposed settlement: "We carry with us many elements of prosperity . . . fertile land with labour to till it . . . several of the most important trades: there are carpenters and cabinet-makers, tailors, a blacksmith, wheel-

25. *Herald*, 2 May 1850, 3. A similar report appeared in the *Advertiser*, 3 May 1850, 5.

26. *Advertiser*, 17 May 1850, 5.

27. *Herald*, 18 July 1850, 5. The report also reproduced an item from the *New York Express* of 27 June announcing the arrival of the *Columbus*. A shorter report appeared in the *Advertiser*, 19 July 1850, 4.

wrights, a gardener, and so forth; only a shoemaker is wanted to render our list tolerably complete. . . ."28

Sheppard also now recognized that they faced some disadvantages. The slowness of the voyage had delayed his program; he now planned to travel directly to Iowa, ahead of the main party, to select land as soon as possible. With land purchased, the settlers could get established before winter arrived. He also reported that since the early part of the voyage "a member of the society [had] expressed himself as aggrieved by a portion of the arrangements which had been resolved upon," a dissent that would continue during their early days in Iowa.²⁹

Sheppard's first letter from Iowa, excerpted in the *Hull Advertiser*, showed that having failed to locate suitable land in Scott County he planned to continue the search as far south as Henry County before going north again.³⁰ Sheppard's second letter, much more fully reported in the *Herald*, showed that he did not go south as planned in search of land. Instead he made a circuit from Davenport across seven counties—north to Jackson and west to Linn, before returning to Clinton via Johnson and Cedar—an area which he had traversed on his previous visit to Iowa. He found much of the open prairie still unoccupied but the timbered land he sought had been taken:

Seven years ago nearly the same route presented to me a wilderness. . . . Spots which I remembered as untenanted prairies now present thriving settlements; in every direction, evidence of cultivation is presented; and I soon found, therefore, that my task was likely to be longer and more difficult than I anticipated. In every county I saw immense tracts of prairie which are still purchaseable at the government price; but the timbered land has been scanned by keen eyes, and in a majority of instances the

28. *Herald*, 25 July 1850, 6 and 1 August 1850, 5. Foreman's article reprinted the full text of both letters—Sheppard's, written in June 1850, and the second written in late June. (Foreman, "English Emigrants," 390-404.) The *Advertiser* also printed a letter written about this time by J. Buck, another member of the party, similarly giving later emigrants from Hull advice on the best ways of reducing the discomforts and hazards of the Atlantic crossing and of New York which he recommended one should flee "as you would the devil." (*Advertiser*, 2 August 1850, 4.)

29. *Herald*, 25 July 1850, 6.

30. *Advertiser*, 9 August 1850, 6. This letter was written from Davenport on 13 July 1850.

best pieces have been transferred to private owners. . . . My object, you may remember, was to find prairie, timber, and water power in conjunction, within a moderate distance of good markets. The water power I abandoned, not because it is altogether unattainable, but because it is to be procured only in unhealthy localities, or at an inconvenient distance from the seats of commercial enterprise. . . .³¹

Eventually, Sheppard selected an accessible, undulating tract of land in Clinton County, twenty-five miles north of Davenport on the Dubuque road. In describing the chosen spot, no doubt with Hull's newspaper reader in mind, he employed the lyrical tones and comparisons with the English countryside commonly used by British travelers to describe the prairies:

The spot itself is excellent. It is composed of oak openings, studded with small but valuable timber and rich fertile prairie. . . . The deep loam which forms the soil on the prairie and in the valleys will produce maize, wheat, oats, and potatoes to perfection. . . . It is high and naturally well drained; many of our members are loud in their praise of the beauty of the location. Some see in it a close resemblance to the finest parts of the Yorkshire Wold. . . .³²

Although he said that the Society needed only 1,760 acres of land, including forty for village lots, Sheppard admitted that, since unsold timberland was scarce, he had taken up all the available groves at the settlement and he was proposing a trip to Wisconsin to contract for more timber. Future parties which he hoped the Society would sponsor would have to settle elsewhere in the neighborhood.

Sheppard had not made a wise decision on the land needs of the settlement, however. His selection of such a small area kept most of the party from farming their "village acres" to supplement their earnings as tradesmen. The land he chose for the few farmers in the party was at best mediocre, unlike much of the county which had been rated as second-class prairie.

31. *Herald*, 12 September 1850; see also *Advertiser*, 13 September 1850, 6. This letter, written from Davenport on 6 August 1850, was fully reproduced in Foreman, "English Emigrants," 404-407.

32. *Ibid.*

Figure I, based on the government land surveyors' field notes and plans drawn up in 1837, shows that Sheppardsville (Well-ton) was to be established on the edge of one of the county's extensive prairies and adjacent to more hilly, wooded land. Small areas of poorly drained land were also mapped nearby. The surveyors had not been impressed with the quality of the land in the township, particularly in the northwestern part where Sheppard located. Surveyor Wharry described the township as containing "good, bad and indifferent lands. The east side . . . is in general good prairie. The north west part is barren, broken and hilly. In the north part of the township is situated a swamp or marsh which is the source of a creek which is a dull sluggish stream. . . ." ³³ Those English who came a little later to De Witt and Low Moor found much better prairie land to the south.

Three more letters from the new colony, published in the *Herald* in late 1850, describe life in the settlement during its first few weeks. One from S. Cortis, written in August, mainly told of the early work of laying out the village and of building houses. Another, written in November by J. Buck, advised future emigrants from Hull on the easiest and cheapest means of reaching Iowa—by way of New Orleans up the Mississippi—and suggested that they bring the least amount of luggage possible while allowing for foods either difficult or expensive to obtain in the West. ³⁴

Sheppard's letter to the *Herald*, written only a week after his previous one, emphasized the difficulties he had unexpectedly encountered in trying to establish the settlement at a reasonable cost. The selection of land that would "enjoy the best markets" had been "more difficult and costly than a stranger might suppose it to be," partly because he had needed to inspect the land records at Iowa City to ascertain which lands were still available. "California fever" had also raised the price

33. Township report of J. Wharry, Federal Government Surveyor, August 1837, General Land Office Fieldnotes, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

34. Cortis wrote from Wright's Grove on 5 August 1850 (*Herald*, 12 September 1850, 6). Buck wrote from Clinton County on 1 November 1850 (*Herald*, 28 November 1850, 8). Part of Buck's letter was also printed in the *Advertiser*, 6 December 1850. Both were reproduced in Foreman, "English Emigrants," 408-410, 417-420.

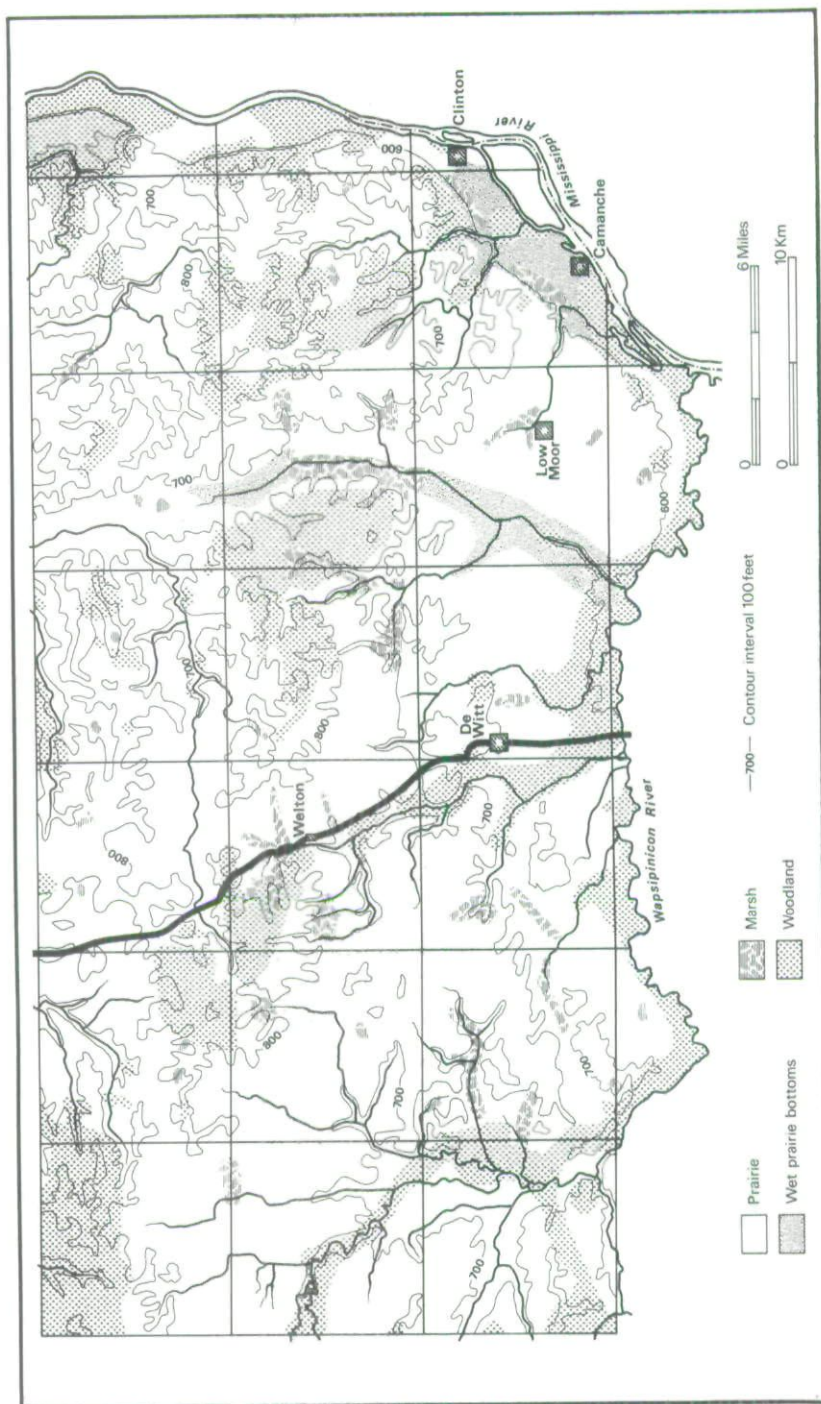


Figure 1: Vegetation cover of Clinton County, Iowa, 1837.

of stock and grain, but he was quick to add "although inconvenient for a time, [these higher prices] furnish obvious grounds for expectations of prosperity on the part of settlers, so soon as their farms are brought into cultivation." He also wrote of the future prospects of the colony: "... the village may be expected soon to become a thriving place, a tavern is to be opened forthwith, and ... considerable traffic is anticipated. A store will be opened in another month—the only store in a circuit of many miles. ... There is no doubt that the society's location in Clinton County will forthwith enhance the value of contiguous lands. ..."³⁵

After leading the settlers to Iowa and securing land for the colony, Sheppard announced his intention to end his personal involvement with the settlement scheme:

From the commencement of my connection with the society, I have been accused of selfish purposes. ... With a knowledge of these imputations, I declared my intention not to become a holder of land in connection with the society's estate, and by that declaration I am determined to abide. ... My agency terminates on the last day of the present month. ... All that I can afford to do will then be done, and I shall leave the settlement without having been enriched one farthing by its formation. ...

Believe that, though absent from the settlement, I shall feel deeply interested in its welfare, and that I shall have pleasure in aiding your future movements to the full extent of the means within my reach.³⁶

Sheppard may not have been entirely sorry to leave for he clearly did not have the universal support of his followers. A "quarrelsome personage" who had voiced dissent during the trans-Atlantic voyage soon left the settlement, so that Sheppard could claim that "a gratifying spirit of friendship and union pervades the party." But other reports suggested other-

35. *Herald*, 26 September 1850, 6.

36. *Ibid.* Sheppard had previously defended himself against charges that he was involved in the scheme for personal gain. Just before he left England, he published a letter in the *Advertiser* denying that he was a land agent of the American government or a land speculator and that "it was my duty although certainly not my interest to undertake the task on which I am about to enter" (*Advertiser*, 5 April 1850, 5).

wise. Soon after Sheppard claimed this unity, Cortis wrote: "Poor Sheppard has had hard times of it: he had done his best for everybody, but some are so unreasonable that it would be impossible to keep straight with them. The English make the worst kind of settlers; they grumble and growl at everything—comparing all things with the state of things at home—forgetting that this is an entirely new country. . . ." ³⁷ On hearing that Sheppard was undecided about his future after leaving the colony, Cortis wrote, "we hope he will still settle amongst us."

Only five more letters from emigrants appeared in Hull newspapers. All were written in the first few months after Sheppard left the colony and they partially explain the settlement's subsequent and rapid demise. The first two were written from Sheppardsville in December 1850 and attempted to discredit unfavorable reports circulated by a disillusioned settler who had returned to England.

This former Hull resident, named Milne, had left England seven weeks after Sheppard led out the first party. Intending to join the colony, Milne only reached Buffalo, New York before he became "thoroughly disgusted with the country, [and] returned home by the same ship which brought him to this country, stating the crops to be bad, the prices the same." Thomas Wright's letter, written from Sheppardsville in December 1850 and published in the *Hull Advertiser* on January 1851, poured scorn on Milne's views and reiterated the emigrants' confidence in the future of their settlement. Wright even disputed that Milne reached "as far as Buffalo, which is one thousand miles from this place; but if he did, he is no judge of a wheat crop, for after leaving Albany till arriving at Buffalo, I never saw crops more promising. . . ." Wright added: "Milne also has told an untruth by saying wheat was only worth 15 s. per quarter. . . . at the time we came up to this country, it was selling for cash at one dollar per bushel, which is 33 s. per quarter. . . . I think this will satisfy all intending emigrants that such a cock-and-bull story as Milne's is not to be relied upon." Pointing out that Clinton County much resembled the best farming areas around Hull, Wright concluded, "no one man can do wrong by coming here, if he is

37. Letter from S. Cortis in the *Herald*, 23 January 1851, 6.

wishful of getting a comfortable living and an independency for his family."³⁸

S. Cortis also wrote to his father in Hull in December and asked that the letter "be inserted in the Hull papers, so that the false reports mentioned may be contradicted, and fears which may have been excited among those who have friends in Iowa may be allayed." Cortis was less forceful than Wright in encouraging more immigration to Iowa. But he concluded that he would "certainly be glad to see some sturdy farmers amongst us. . . . I do not consider many persons, now in England and belonging to this society, proper persons to emigrate, and have no doubt if they do come, some of them will return as disgusted as the person who 'suffered from the wicked delusions practiced upon the English.' One thing is certain—those who came out with us and were willing to work, are satisfied."³⁹

A month after these letters were published in Hull, another party of forty-nine people left for the Iowa settlement. The newspapers did not print notices of their departure and no additional reports appeared for two months. In April the *Herald* carried a short report from Benjamin Driffill, now secretary of the Iowa Emigration Society, reprinted from the *Davenport Gazette*, which announced the arrival in Iowa of the latest group from Hull. Perhaps most significant in the report was Driffill's statement that the new arrivals "are highly pleased with our town. Some will stay here if possible; others who have bought land at the settlement in Clinton County will go thither immediately. Instead of 49, 41 only have reached this point. . . ."⁴⁰

It was not just that Davenport—and other parts of America—were siphoning off more of the emigrants from Hull; the people at home in Hull, its newspaper editors judged, were also losing interest in the colony. No further report from a Hull settler in Iowa appeared in the town newspapers until July when a letter from William Smith, a member of the first party to go out, was reprinted in the *Herald*. Smith had settled in Davenport so that he said little about the village which, for the

38. Letter from Thomas Wright in the *Advertiser*, 31 January 1851, 7.

39. *Herald*, 23 January 1851, 6.

40. *Herald*, 24 April 1851, 5. Driffill's letter had appeared in the *Davenport Gazette*, 27 March 1851.

first time, was given the name of Welton. But he did report that "building still goes on, and a large store is being erected by an enterprising American, which is likely to be of considerable benefit."⁴¹

The last letter about the settlement to be published in the Hull newspapers was written in June 1851 by J.M. Hunt, a paperhanger who had been in the last party to leave for Iowa. After an absence of five months from Hull, Hunt wrote to his friends and fellow-townsmen "to give them faithful particulars of the emigrant's trials and difficulties" as a counterbalance to "the glowing one-sided accounts sent home by many ardent settlers." The main difficulties he had encountered resulted from receiving bad advice on the costs of establishing himself in the settlement:

Previous to my leaving Hull, lectures on the beauties and capabilities of Iowa were delivered at the Mansion House. These set forth the cheapness of provisions here, the high wages, its beauty etc., which I have no doubt were the cause of many who heard or read them, (and who were struggling with the hard times), entertaining hopes that, by going to America, and purchasing say 40 acres of land, they would be provided for for life. . . . it too frequently occurs that they do not calculate the amount of money necessary for entering upon a farm. They perhaps give up a situation, and sell their goods at an immense sacrifice, expecting to reach their destination at a trifling cost, which is an error; for until you can get into a house of your own, there is no end to the expense. The removing of your luggage from place to place, especially by land, is very costly. . . . I can tell you I had to remain nearly a fortnight at Davenport on account of the roads. . . . you find you cannot do without a wagon and horse, or oxen, which will cost you from 100 to 250 dollars—the latter sum if you prefer a horse. Then your land wants breaking up, which will cost two dollars per acre, and the keep of a man to assist you. While this is going on you are expanding your capital, without the prospect of a return for some time, and with, perhaps, your wife fretful and homesick; there are other things, too, which require capital, and which an emigrant here cannot do

41. *Herald*, 10 July 1851, 6. Smith's letter was written from Davenport on 7 June 1851. A shortened version of the same letter was also reprinted in the *Advertiser*, 11 July 1851, 5.

without. . . . However, when a man is once comfortably settled in Iowa, I imagine it is an easy life, for it is a splendid country, and capable of producing everything grown in England; and, after a time, I have no doubt we shall have every facility of communication etc. in Iowa enjoyed in England.⁴²

Hunt was notably less effusive than the earlier correspondents had been about conditions at the settlement, though not about its future: he felt the Hull group "has every prospect of success." It is perhaps appropriate that this last letter should be more critical as a portent of the colony's coming difficulties. In welcoming the correspondent's honesty and freedom from "those errors of glowing description given by many," the editor of the *Advertiser*, in effect, accepted that the Hull immigrants to Iowa had finally exhausted their news value.

No more reports appeared in the Hull newspapers about the Iowa settlement although both journals continued to provide frequent items on emigration and even an occasional reference to Iowa.⁴³ The metal-rich areas of Australia excited most news stories on emigration possibilities. That these newspapers had for two years largely focused their emigration stories on Iowa, leading in turn to the establishment of the English settlements in Clinton County, was almost entirely the result of George Sheppard's drive behind the Iowa Emigration Society. He was not simply the leader of the first emigrant party; nor did he merely choose its settlement location. He organized the Society in Hull, attracted members to it, and shaped its associative principles.

He must also take a large share of the blame for the settlement's early decline. Sheppard chose for the colony a rural location with limited amounts of available land; inevitably some settlers would soon leave to farm elsewhere, while the craftsmen and merchants would find little to support them. Many of the second party would have to settle in other parts of the county, thus weakening the English colony's cohesiveness. Above all, Sheppard's early departure from Iowa—first to Washington to write for the *National Intelligencer* and then

42. *Advertiser*, 25 July 1851, 6.

43. On 25 March 1852, for example, the *Herald* reported a murder at Fort Snelling previously reported in a Burlington paper.

to Canada—deprived the settlement and the Society of their chief publicist.⁴⁴ Without that publicity Sheppardsville failed to attract more English emigrants and, with George Sheppard, faded from the Iowa scene.

44. Sheppard eventually became a staff member of the *New York Times*. This brought him into contact with the Lands Department of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Aware of Sheppard's knowledge of the American West and the English press, the railroad appointed him as a land agent in London in the early 1870s and he resumed settlement promotion activities. In particular he helped to organize emigrants for two English settlements in northwest Minnesota: Furness, colonized mainly by families from the Barrow area of northwest England, and New Yeovil, settled by emigrants from Dorset and Somerset. He retired in 1882 and later spent time in Nova Scotia and Maine before settling in Boston where he died in 1912. (J.T. Talman, "George Sheppard: Journalist," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 44 (1950), 119-134.)

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