

## THE AMERICAN OCCUPATION OF IOWA 1833 TO 1860

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the settlement of Iowa between the years 1833 and 1860. An examination of the maps of settlement which accompany the census reports published by the United States government will show that by the latter year the territory included within the present boundaries of Iowa had been occupied with the exception of a portion, somewhat triangular in shape, in the northwest. Even here islands of settlements are shown in the uncolored area and a colored line extending up the Missouri indicates that the population had reached the southeastern corner of the present State of South Dakota. On the other hand there were comparatively few white settlers within the present boundaries of the State before 1833. It had been crossed by explorers, however, some of whom had declared it unfit for habitation, and a few French and American traders had built trading posts along its eastern border. These may be considered briefly before taking up the subject of actual settlement.

Mr. Jacob Van der Zee in his *Episodes in the Early History of the Des Moines Valley*, published in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS for July, 1916, says that cattle were driven from points in Missouri through the Iowa country to Selkirk's settlement on the Red River in 1815 and 1821. The route used in this trade by Dixon and McKnight in 1822, is shown on "I. Judson's Map of the Territory of Iowa in 1838". During this same period a military expedition was traversing the State on its way from Council Bluff to the mouth of the St. Peter's (Minne-

sota) River. It was a detachment from Major Long's expedition led by Captain Magee of the Rifle Regiment sent out for the purpose of opening a road between Council Bluff and the military post recently constructed on the Mississippi River. Accompanying the party was Stephen Watts Kearny to whom we are indebted for our knowledge of the expedition.<sup>1</sup> Leaving Camp Missouri on July 2, 1820, the company consisting of about twenty men followed a route leading in a general northeasterly direction, veering occasionally either to the east or to the north, finally arriving at Camp Cold Water twenty-three days later. "A very great portion of the country in the neighborhood of our route", Kearny wrote in his journal, "could be of no other object (at any time) to our gov't . . . than the expulsion of the savages from it . . . for the disadvantages (as above) will forever prevent its supporting more than a thinly scattered population. The soil generally we found good, but bears no comparison to that I saw between Chariton & C. B."<sup>2</sup>

But the earliest white settlements were not made in that

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Stephen Watts Kearny*, edited by Valentine M. Porter, in the *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, Vol. III, pp. 14, 15.

This expedition was a part of Calhoun's plan for opening routes and erecting military posts along the entire frontier.— See Goodwin's *A Larger View of the Yellowstone Expedition, 1819-1820*, in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. IV, pp. 299-313.

<sup>2</sup> *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, Vol. III, pp. 14, 15, 104, 106, 107.

A somewhat similar estimate of the Iowa country was given in the *St. Louis Enquirer*, edited by Thomas H. Benton, in 1819: "After you get forty or fifty miles west of the Mississippi the arid plains set in. The country is uninhabitable except upon the borders of the rivers and creeks. The Grand Prairie, a plain without wood or water, which extends to the northwest farther than hunters or travelers have ever yet gone, comes down to within a few miles of St. Charles and so completely occupies the fork of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers that the woodland for three hundred miles of each forms a skirt from five to twenty miles wide, and above that distance the prairie actually reaches the rivers in many places."— Quoted in Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 132.

part of the State through which Kearny passed. The best known among the early French residents of the territory of Iowa and perhaps the first white man to settle within the present boundaries of the State was the French-Canadian, Julien Dubuque. He won favor with the chief of the Fox Indians, and in September, 1788, received from this friendly leader a claim to about one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land extending along the western bank of the Mississippi and including the site where the present city of Dubuque is located. This is said to have been the "first conveyance of Iowa soil to the whites, by the Indians".<sup>3</sup> Dubuque had already examined the country included in the cession and had concluded that lead mining could be profitably conducted. The actual work in the mines was done by Indian women and by old men of the Fox tribe whom Dubuque employed for the purpose, but he brought ten Canadians from Prairie du Chien to assist him in superintending and directing operations.

But Dubuque did not confine himself to mining. Farms were cleared and fenced, houses were erected and a mill opened. A smelting furnace was constructed on a point now known as Dubuque Bluff. He opened a store and exchanged goods with the Indians for furs. Twice each year his boats went to St. Louis loaded with ore, furs, and hides, and re-

<sup>3</sup> Negus's *The Early History of Iowa* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. V, p. 877. See also Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, Ch. X.

Dubuque's title was later confirmed by the Governor of Louisiana territory, Carondelet. In 1805 he and August Chouteau, to whom he had given some of the land for the purpose of canceling a debt, filed a claim with the United States for a title. The land for which this petition was made extended along the west bank of the Mississippi for a distance of twenty-one miles and was nine miles wide. The claim remained unsettled for nearly half a century. The courts finally decided, long after Dubuque and Chouteau were in their graves, that the original grant made by the Indians in 1788 and the subsequent confirmation of that grant made by the Spanish Governor Carondelet in 1796 were both in the nature of permits or leases to mine lead on the lands described.—Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 113, 114.

turned with goods, supplies, and money. These semi-annual trips became important events at St. Louis, and he was recognized as one of the largest traders in the Upper Mississippi Valley. For twenty-two years, until his death in 1810, Dubuque and his Canadian countrymen lived among the Indians, worked the mines and carried on trade, and his headquarters became widely known as the "Mines of Spain".

Two other settlements had been made within the present boundaries of the State during the period in which Dubuque was operating in the vicinity of the place which still bears his name. One of these was within the present limits of Clayton County, and was known as the Giard Tract. Basil Giard, a French-American, had received more than five thousand acres of land here in 1795 from the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana. The grant was later confirmed by the United States after that country acquired Louisiana, and the patent issued to Giard was said to have been the first legal title to land obtained by a white man within the boundaries of the State of Iowa.<sup>4</sup> Another settlement was made during this early period by Louis Honoré Tesson, a French-Canadian, in 1799. Having received permission from the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, he built a trading post in Lee County where the town of Montrose now stands. Here he planted an orchard, and raised corn, potatoes, and other products for several years. His heirs received a confirmation of the grant from the United States in 1839.<sup>5</sup>

After Dubuque's death the Indians took possession of the mines, expelling the whites and evidently working them at intervals during the next twenty years. In the latter

<sup>4</sup> Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 111, 116, 117.

<sup>5</sup> Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 117.

part of the third decade of the nineteenth century the lead mines in northern Illinois and in southwestern Wisconsin attracted settlers by the thousands.<sup>6</sup> Among these enthusiasts was a New Englander by the name of James L. Langworthy. Having explored the old "Mines of Spain", he brought a company of operators to the west bank of the Mississippi in 1830, and again the white men began to smelt lead ore in the land once claimed by Dubuque. The new mining camp soon attracted settlers from the east bank of the Mississippi. The settlement of these squatters west of the river was in violation of the treaty compacts between the United States and the Indian tribes, and the government was soon requested to remove the intruders. Accordingly troops were sent over in 1831, the settlers were driven back to the east bank of the river, and a detachment was left at the mines to protect the Indians against further intrusion.<sup>7</sup>

In 1832 the Black Hawk Purchase was concluded. By this the United States secured from the Indians the cession of a strip of territory about fifty miles wide extending along the western bank of the Mississippi from the northern boundary of Missouri to the vicinity of a parallel running through Prairie du Chien.<sup>8</sup> The acquisition of this territory marks the real beginning of white settlements in Iowa. Not until several years later, however, when land sales were held, were the occupants able to procure actual title to the soil, but the mere absence of a title was not enough to check the advance of the frontiersmen. They came in large

<sup>6</sup> For a brief summary of lead mining in this region see Thwaites's *Early Lead-Mining in Illinois and Wisconsin* in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1893, pp. 191-196.

<sup>7</sup> Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 155, 156.

<sup>8</sup> Toole's *Sketches and Incidents Relating to the Settlement of Louisa County* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 50.

numbers, selecting the most advantageous sites along the rivers which flowed into the Mississippi. Burlington, Sandusky, and Fort Madison were occupied by white settlers during 1833. Into the Indian village of "Puck-e-she-tuk" whites had come as early as 1830. A school had been established there by 1833, possibly three years earlier. In 1835 the name was changed to Keokuk.<sup>9</sup> The strip included in the purchase had been divided into two counties. The territory north of the Iowa River was organized as Du-buque County, while the part of the purchase south of that stream was known as Des Moines County. At first these counties were attached to Michigan for governmental purposes but when that Territory was admitted to Statehood they were annexed to Wisconsin.<sup>10</sup>

By the spring of 1836 the frontier had been extended to Round Prairie in Jefferson County.<sup>11</sup> During that same year pioneers were exploring the valley of the Iowa River in the vicinity of Iowa City selecting claims and building cabins. During the following year they brought their families and induced others to migrate with them from Indiana into this remote western country.<sup>12</sup> In 1839 Iowa City was laid out and became the capital of the newly created Territory. To guide immigrants who were moving west and to

<sup>9</sup> *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. V, pp. 890-894. See also McCarty's *History of Palo Alto County, Iowa*, p. 12. McCarty says Keokuk was laid out in 1837.

There is reason to believe that trading posts or settlements had been established at Sandusky, Burlington, and Fort Madison by 1820.—See Campbell's *Recollections of the Early Settlement of Lee County* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. V, pp. 883, 884.

<sup>10</sup> Parrott's *Recollections of the Early Settlement of Lee County* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor's *Recollections of Thirty-four Years Ago* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VIII, p. 337.

<sup>12</sup> Irish's *History of Johnson County, Iowa*, in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, pp. 23-26.

encourage them to move into the village capital one Lyman Dillion was employed to plow a furrow between Iowa City and Dubuque, a distance of a hundred miles.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of 1840 twenty families had settled at the former place.<sup>14</sup>

The population of Iowa in 1836 was estimated at 10,531 and the number had increased to 22,859 by 1838. By 1840, according to the census of that year, there were more than 43,000 people living in the Territory.<sup>15</sup> This means that from 1836 to 1840 the population practically doubled every two years — in fact it more than doubled during the first two. A glance at the census map showing the population of the United States in 1840 indicates that the southern part of the Black Hawk Purchase had been pretty completely occupied, and that the frontier line of settlement approached the Mississippi as it extended northward from Missouri's northern boundary, finally touching that river in the vicinity of the forty-third parallel.

This rapid growth was due in part doubtless to the advertising which Iowa received in the public press. In March, 1839, a correspondent in the *Buffalo Journal* had declared "that taking into consideration the soil, the timber, the water, and the climate, Iowa territory may be considered the best part of the Mississippi valley. The Indians so consider it, as appears from the name which they gave it. For it is

<sup>13</sup> *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 185; *Niles' Register*, Vol. LIX, p. 40. The population by counties is given as follows: Clayton, 1945; Delaware, 171; Dubuque, 3056; Jackson, 1432; Jones, 475; Clinton, 800; Linn, 1385; Scott, 2193; Muscatine, 1042; Cedar, 1225; Johnson, 1504; Louisa, 1925; Washington, 1572; Henry, 3782; Jefferson, 2780; Van Buren, 6030; Lee, 6096; Des Moines, 5646; attached to Van Buren, 136.

For the population of Iowa in 1836 see Albach's *Annals of the West* (Second Edition), p. 802.

said that the Sioux [Sac] and Fox Indians, on beholding the exceeding beauties of this region, held up their hands, and exclaimed in an ecstasy of delight and amazement, I-O-W-A, which in the Fox language means, 'this is the land.'"<sup>16</sup> On June 29, 1839, it was reported in *Niles' Register* that one of the citizens of Cincinnati had just returned from a tour of Iowa and had stated that the prospects for an exceptional harvest were the best he had ever seen anywhere.<sup>17</sup> During the fall of this same year the public land sales in Iowa City alone were at the rate of about five thousand dollars a day. Those lots fronting the public square where the State House was to be erected brought from four to six hundred dollars each.<sup>18</sup> In Burlington, the proceeds of the first four days of the sale in 1840 amounted to nearly seventy-six thousand dollars.<sup>19</sup> The *Chillicothe Ohio Gazette* reported in May, 1840, that between one and two hundred people were leaving that city to settle "near the centre of what will probably be the capital of Iowa, at the head of navigation on the Des Moines river."<sup>20</sup> The *Burlington Gazette* in the fall of 1840 stated that "the health of Iowa territory is, thus far this season, universally good. The crops of wheat, rye and oats have been as abundant as usual, and the crop of corn will be very large."<sup>21</sup>

These comments with scores of others like them played

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVI, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> "He spoke to us particularly of one field of wheat, which he saw on the prairies, consisting of six hundred and forty acres, which was a perfect level, so that it could be taken into one view, and was handsomely fenced; the stalks were then two feet and a half high, and the growth most luxuriant. We would go a day's ride to see such a field of wheat as that."—Quoted in *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVI, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVII, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVIII, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVIII, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> *Niles' Register*, Vol. LIX, p. 40.



no small part in directing the attention of homeseekers to Iowa. As the number of immigrants increased in the Black Hawk Purchase and as the pressure of white settlers against the Indian territory along the western border of this strip became greater, it proved necessary to draw up additional treaties with the Indians in order to open more territory to the covetous frontiersmen. In 1837 and again in 1842 treaties were concluded with the Sac and Fox Indians by which the entire central and south-central parts of Iowa were thrown open to white settlers, except a strip about sixty-five or seventy miles wide along the western border of the territory.<sup>22</sup> By the terms of the latter treaty the Indians were given until the first of May, 1843, to yield possession of the eastern half of the cession, and three years in which to surrender the western half.

This condition did not prevent the Americans from exploring the country during the interval, but army officers patrolled the territory to check any attempt which the former might make to run lines or to mark off claims. The new acquisition was well known to the frontiersmen therefore when on April 30, 1843, men who had gathered along the border of the unoccupied Indian country waited and listened for the discharge of fire arms which would announce the hour of midnight and the time that formally opened the land to settlers. Between midnight of April 30th and sundown of May 1st, it is said that at least a thousand settlers staked their claims within the boundaries of Wapello County alone. Ottumwa on the Des Moines was surveyed at once, and about four hundred lots were laid out.

<sup>22</sup> Royce's *Indian Land Cessions in the United States* in the *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Pt. 2, pp. 766, 767, 778, 779. The excellent maps and notes in this volume are very valuable for working out the Indian land cessions in the various States. The cessions in Iowa covered the years 1824 to 1851.

Eddyville, Agency City, and Dahlonga also sprang up over night as it were.<sup>23</sup> Not only was the land along the rivers taken up by these immigrants, but they began to occupy the intervening spaces between the streams. Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Missouri furnished the most of the population, but there were settlers who came from Wisconsin, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.<sup>24</sup>

In order to protect the occupants from Indian depredations and to prevent the encroachment of the whites on Indian lands, Fort Des Moines was built in 1843 near the frontier. The rapid influx of settlers produced increasing dissatisfaction among the red men along the border as a result of which, six years later, Fort Clark was erected farther west on the Des Moines River. The name was later changed to Fort Dodge, and in 1853 the troops were moved from Fort Dodge still farther north to Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota River. During the following year the town of Fort Dodge was laid out and became the distributing center for northwestern Iowa.<sup>25</sup>

In the spring of 1846 the Mormons were compelled to leave Nauvoo. During their westward migration through southern Iowa many of them stopped within that Territory and erected homes. Settlements were made at Garden Grove in the northeastern part of Decatur County, near

<sup>23</sup> Biggs's *Sketches of the Sac and Fox Indians and the Early Settlement of Wapello County* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. III, p. 481; Boyd's *Sketches of History and Incidents Connected with the Settlement of Wapello County, from 1843 to 1859, Inclusive*, in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Horn's *History of Davis County, Iowa*, in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. III, p. 436.

<sup>25</sup> McCarty's *History of Palo Alto County, Iowa*, pp. 12, 13, 28. During the year 1848, McCarty says, some surveyors who had crossed the Des Moines River into the Indian country were attacked by savages, their instruments broken and the surveyors themselves were driven back across the river. As a result of this Fort Dodge was built.

Osceola in Clark County, in the eastern part of Union County, in the southwestern part of Cass County, and in the southern part of Mills County. But the principal Mormon settlement was near Council Bluffs.<sup>26</sup> These thrifty people thus made generous contributions to the settlement of the country in southwestern Iowa. Other settlers had moved into this section by 1847, and with the great overland immigration through southern Iowa to California in 1849 and in 1850 Kaneshville (Council Bluffs) became a typical frontier town like Weston and Independence in Missouri.<sup>27</sup>

Iowa never attracted foreigners in the same proportions as did Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, but in 1847 there came to Marion County a company of earnest and thrifty Hollanders who made no small contribution to the intelligence and industry of the State. About a thousand of them had left Holland under the direction of Henry Peter Scholte. From New York they had gone west to St. Louis and here Scholte left them while he set out accompanied by a chosen committee to select a home for his colony in Iowa. Land was offered them in Lee County but the title appeared doubtful and Scholte decided to seek advice from the agent of the United States land office at Fairfield in Jefferson County. After carefully investigating the selections to which his attention had been directed Scholte persuaded his companions to agree to buy from pioneers who had not completed payments on their claims and who did not therefore have clear titles.

While Scholte busily examined the maps of the land office

<sup>26</sup> Negus's *The Early History of Iowa* in *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IX, pp. 578, 579.

<sup>27</sup> For a good account of Council Bluffs see Babbitt's *Early Days at Council Bluffs*. *The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IX, pp. 670-672, gives material on Council Bluffs as a frontier community.

in Fairfield other members of the committee were investigating the country in that vicinity. Finally, upon the recommendation of a Baptist missionary whom they met by chance the committee decided to investigate lands on the frontier about seventy miles west of Fairfield. On July 29, 1847, the missionary acting as guide conducted the committee into the section located in the northeastern part of what is now Marion County. So well pleased were they with the country and with the terms which they were able to make that deals were closed immediately with several pioneers living in the vicinity of the present town of Pella and south along the Des Moines River. Having purchased the land and completed other arrangements for accommodating the company the committee returned to St. Louis where their friends were awaiting their report.<sup>28</sup>

When the five committeemen made a report to their comrades in that city nearly all of them were eager to move northward immediately. Some of the members of the company, however, had secured profitable employment in St. Louis and it was decided to have them continue at their work temporarily while the others went ahead and prepared homes. About five or six hundred of the party, having supplied themselves with an adequate supply of food and clothing, took passage on a Mississippi River steamer and arrived at Keokuk within two days. Horses, wagons, and other things essential for an overland journey were purchased, and the company proceeded up the Des Moines Valley, arriving at their destination in August, 1847. Scholte had made a contract with some Americans for the construction of fifty log cabins and for the delivery of some lumber, all of which was to have been attended to before the

<sup>28</sup> Van der Zee's *The Hollanders of Iowa*, Chs. VIII, IX, and X, provided the most of the data on the Hollanders given above. See also *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXXIII, pp. 48, 167.

company's arrival, but these things had not been done. The Hollanders were keenly disappointed, for they had hoped to find at least the materials for their homes.<sup>29</sup>

Despite such a discouraging beginning the company proceeded at once to lay out a town which they called Pella, and to construct temporary dwellings to shelter them while they selected their lands, prepared to till the soil and to build more substantial homes. The streets of Pella — "Strooijen Stad" or Straw Town as it was called — were given such names as Extension, Addition, Washington, Franklin, Columbus, Liberty, Union, and Independence; while the avenues were called Perseverance, Inquiring, Reformation, Gratitude, Patience, Experience, Confidence, Expectation, and Accomplishment. In a few years these streets and avenues were lined with rows of simple wooden houses interspersed with a few dwellings of red brick, and the eighteen thousand acres of fertile land which Scholte had selected were converted into profitable farms on which the owners had constructed comfortable homes. Wild fruits grew in abundance in the woods, and on their farms the Hollanders raised good crops of Indian corn, flax, wheat, buckwheat, and vegetables. From their cows which were provided with shelter during the long winter, contrary to the custom of the American frontiersmen, the Dutch obtained generous quantities of rich milk and made more than enough butter and cheese to supply their own needs. In

<sup>29</sup> "Imagine a number of bakers, tailors and shoemakers, painters, office-clerks, business managers, and such like", exclaims their historian, "who had all their lives been used to the city life of Europe — some of whom hardly knew what a cow or a pig looked like, nor had the slightest knowledge of farm implements; who had left neat and comfortable homes and had never known or seen others — imagine such people suddenly transplanted to an open prairie, with here and there some timber, seeing nothing but grass, trees and sky, and finding no protection against the elements! . . . It takes but a few lines to tell it, but to live it is something wholly different." — Quoted in Van der Zee's *The Hollanders of Iowa*, p. 68.

fact "Iowa cheese", which was shipped by these thrifty farmers, became famous in the St. Louis market.<sup>30</sup>

Irish and German immigrants formed settlements south of the Hollanders, the former occupying fertile lands in the western part of Monroe County and the latter selecting what was considered a barren country on Coal Creek, sometimes called the Dutch Ridge. The Irish on account of their poverty were compelled to make their meager resources yield the largest possible returns, and by selecting fertile lands were soon living in comfort. The Germans, although in possession of sufficient funds to pay for the best in the country, selected the ridge lands which were covered with white oaks and dense undergrowth where they too established a prosperous community and lived a comparatively isolated political life.<sup>31</sup>

The United States census reports show that nearly one hundred and fifty thousand people moved into Iowa during the decade ending in 1850. These immigrants, as shown by the maps accompanying the reports, had occupied the eastern and southern parts of the State, with the exception of a very small area in the extreme northeastern corner and a circle around the present town of Quincy near the center of Adams County in the southwest. The entire north and northwestern parts of the State were still unoccupied. The decade beginning in 1850 was to witness a migrating tide which was to sweep over the waste places of the State and to inundate the valleys and hills with more than sufficient human energy to build up a Commonwealth of the first rank.

There were several things which encouraged migration during this period. Railroad lines had been completed to the Mississippi, and so the eastern border of Iowa was

<sup>30</sup> Van der Zee's *The Hollanders of Iowa*, pp. 77, 78.

<sup>31</sup> Hickenlooper's *An Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa*, pp. 188, 190.

easily reached. It was during this decade also that the railroads began advertising western lands. Land speculators and land companies offered inducements which appeared most alluring to the land hungry men of the more densely populated areas farther east. Guides for emigrants were published in great quantities, and articles "containing glowing accounts of the beauty, advantages, and fertility of the Iowa country appeared in hundreds of Eastern newspapers until the name 'Iowa' became a household word; and those who were so fortunate as already to own a home in that far-famed State wrote enthusiastic letters to their relatives and former neighbors urging them to come and share in their prosperity."<sup>32</sup>

These inducements combined with a fatal epidemic of cholera in the middle States and a severe drought throughout the Ohio Valley during the summer of 1854 brought homeseekers to Iowa by the thousands, particularly during the years 1854 to 1856. " 'The immigration into Iowa the present season is astonishing and unprecedented' ", writes Mr. Clark quoting from an account published in an Eastern journal in June, 1854. " 'For miles and miles, day after day, the prairies of Illinois are lined with cattle and wagons, pushing on toward this prosperous State. At a point beyond Peoria, during a single month, seventeen hundred and forty-three wagons had passed, and all for Iowa. Allowing five persons to a wagon, which is a fair average, would give 8715 souls to the population.' " "Commenting on this statement," continues Mr. Clark, "an Iowa City editor added: 'This being but the immigration of the month, and upon one route only out of many, it would not be an unreasonable assertion to say that 50,000 men, women, and

<sup>32</sup> Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, p. 215.

children will have come into this State by the first of December, reckoning from the first of September.' ''<sup>33</sup>

During the fall and early winter of 1854 there was an almost uninterrupted procession of immigrants crossing the ferries at Prairie du Chien, McGregor, Dubuque, Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk. Sometimes they had to wait in camp two or three days for their turn to cross. It was estimated that twenty thousand people crossed the ferry at Burlington in thirty days, and at the end of that period the number increased to six or seven hundred a day. About one wagon in a hundred was marked Nebraska, the others were to halt in Iowa. And even at Keokuk such large numbers of settlers came in by boat that a journalist was led to say that 'by the side of this exodus, that of the Israelites becomes an insignificant item, and the greater migrations of later times are scarcely to be mentioned.' It was said that one thousand people from Richland County, Ohio, alone, came to Iowa that fall; while long double-header trains brought into Chicago thousands of home-seekers every week.<sup>34</sup>

In 1855 the number of people seeking homes in Iowa apparently increased. The report of the land office for the year ending June 30, 1855, shows that more than three and a quarter million acres of public lands had been occupied. With the exception of Missouri this was more than double the amount sold in any other State in the Upper Mississippi Valley during the year indicated. The land offices within the State found it impossible to keep up with their work.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, p. 216.

<sup>34</sup> Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, p. 217.



At the Decorah land office in northeastern Iowa "the rush was so great that the crowd would fill up the passage way to the office at night and stand on their feet till morning, in order to be first in. Some froze their toes and some their feet waiting for the office to open.' Finally, the scheme of drawing numbers for turns was hit upon, and since the land office could attend to only a certain number of purchases per day, those who drew large numbers betook themselves to their homes and returned a month or two later in time to take their turns."<sup>35</sup>

During the two years from 1854 to 1856 there was an increase of more than one hundred and ninety thousand in Iowa's population.<sup>36</sup> That is, the number of settlers who came during those two years almost equalled the total population of the State in 1850. "Seek whatever thoroughfare you may and you will find it lined with emigrant wagons. In many instances large droves of stock of a superior quality are met with. On our last days drive . . . we met 69 covered wagons seeking a home in the valley of the Des Moines." "The Immigration to Iowa this season [1855] is immense far exceeding the unprecedented immigration of last year, and only to be appreciated by one who travels through the country as we are doing, and finds the roads everywhere lined with movers." The steam ferry at Rock Island running one hundred trips a day was not able to accommodate the traffic.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, pp. 218, 219.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, pp. 218, 219.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Clark's *The Westward Movement in the Upper Mississippi Valley During the Fifties* in the *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association*, 1913-1914, p. 218.

These people came into Iowa by the hundreds of thousands during the decade ending in 1860. The majority passed on through the settled area to the frontier; others moved into the intervening spaces between the older settlements; and a few bought improved lands thus freeing the original owners who themselves joined the canvas-covered trains that were traveling toward the West. In May, 1855, the first settlement was made in Palo Alto County near the present town of West Bend. The immigrants came in ox wagons from Benton County through the frontier settlements along the trail from Fort Dodge known as the military road. The soldiers had passed over the route when they moved from Fort Dodge to Fort Ridgely, and subsequent supply wagons had left their marks on the prairie grass.<sup>38</sup> About a year later, in the summer of 1856, a settlement of about forty people was made in the vicinity of Spirit Lake near the northern border of the State. Other settlements were established farther west in Woodbury, in Cherokee, and in Clay counties before 1857.<sup>39</sup> During the year 1856 a colony of seven Irish families from Kane County, Illinois, made settlements about two miles northwest of the present city of Emmetsburg, and in a short time they were joined by many of their countrymen. Just east along the Des Moines settlers had already located (1855) at Dakota City in Humboldt County, at Algona farther north, and at Bancroft in Kossuth County. Scattered settlements might be found at Smithland and at other places in the valley of the Little Sioux.<sup>40</sup>

A brief summary of the growth of the population of Iowa and of the rapid shifting of her frontier line during the

<sup>38</sup> McCarty's *History of Palo Alto County, Iowa*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Levering's *Recollections of the Early Settlement of Northwestern Iowa in The Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VIII, pp. 275-279.

<sup>40</sup> McCarty's *History of Palo Alto County, Iowa*, Chs. III and IV.

period covered will make a suitable conclusion to this cursory study of the settlement of the State. We have seen that the population in 1836<sup>41</sup> was estimated at 10,531, and that this number had increased to 22,859 in 1838. The census of 1840 gives the Territory a population of 43,112. Ten years later there were 192,214 inhabitants in Iowa. In 1860 the total population was 674,913. This gives the average annual number of immigrants during the period from 1840 to 1850 at a little less than 15,000, but this figure increased to more than 48,000 for the decade ending in 1860. Such rapid growth in the Territory's population during these twenty years produced an almost constant shifting of the frontier line. In 1840 the frontier followed approximately a line running through Ottumwa and Iowa City, finally touching the Mississippi in the vicinity of the present town of Guttenberg.<sup>42</sup> By 1850 it had moved out toward the center of the State. If a line were drawn from the southwest to the northeast corner there would be tongues of settlement west and north of that line in the Missouri and Des Moines valleys, and there would be unsettled areas east and south of the line in the vicinity of modern Quincy, Marshalltown, and Oelwein. But the settled area west and north of such a line would hardly fill the unsettled parts east and south of it. By 1860, however, this line marking the settled from the unsettled area had been pushed into the northwestern corner of the State, and even there the white space on the map contains splashes of color indicating that settlers had occupied a part of this section. An additional illustration of the rapid growth of the State is indicated in the organ-

<sup>41</sup> Gue, in his *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 157, says that in 1832 the white population of Iowa was probably not more than fifty.

<sup>42</sup> See maps showing the population of the United States for 1840, 1850, and 1860 in *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, Vol. I.

ization of the counties. In 1840 the Territory had contained but eighteen counties; in 1850 the State had forty-nine. The number had increased to ninety-seven in 1860 — only two less than were found in the State in 1880.<sup>43</sup>

Thus by 1860 Iowa had completely emerged from the oblivion to which Kearny and others had consigned it forty years earlier and had become one of the prosperous States of the Union.

CARDINAL GOODWIN

MILLS COLLEGE  
MILLS COLLEGE CALIFORNIA

<sup>43</sup> *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, Vol. I, p. 59.