

SETTLEMENT OF ST. ANSGAR

A MINIATURE MELTING POT

In the spring of 1852 three men came to the junction of a small creek with the Cedar River. They had been following the course of the smaller stream for several days and had seen numerous wild animals scurrying about. The travelers spoke Danish, and since the Danish word for animal is pronounced almost like the English word for deer, they named the stream Deer Creek and thus it remains. The men were the Reverend Claus L. Clausen of Racine County, Wisconsin, a faithful parishioner named Gulbrand Guldbrandsen (Gilbert Gilbertson), and a third man, variously listed as Hans Gallagher, Gallagher, or Gallagher.¹ Like Caleb and Joshua of old, they were scouting for a promised land.

The story of how they came to Iowa begins in Denmark with the decision of a young Dane to come to America to preach. Claus Laurits Clausen was born in Aerö, a diocese of Sogn, Denmark, on November 3, 1820. He early decided to become a Lutheran minister and at first decided that he would become a missionary to Africa, but in 1841 he visited Norway and there talked with T. O. Bache, a merchant in Drammen, to whom he told his dream of world service. Bache advised the young man to go to America where the need of Christian teaching among the Norwegian settlers was great. Bache even had letters written by these people asking for religious instructors. All this appealed to Claus L. Clausen and since the language of the Norwegians, especially the written word, was similar to that of the Danes, he decided in favor of America.²

¹ No definite information concerning this man has been found. Possibly he was acting as a guide to available land.

² George T. Flom's *Chapters on Scandinavian Immigration to Iowa* (re-

And so, at the age of twenty-three, he left his native country for the land which he had chosen as his field. He was ordained as a minister in the Lutheran Church somewhere in eastern United States and he accepted his first call to northern Indiana. In 1848 he went to southern Wisconsin where he took charge of several counties, including Rock, Dane, and Jefferson.³

He found the families to which he ministered scattered over a large area in southern Wisconsin and he saw it would be difficult to secure and maintain that feeling of unity so vital in building a church in a new country. He also noted a feeling of sadness in the households he entered. These hardworking, God-fearing folks had found plenty of land but their hard work yielded little or nothing in return and many had died.

Clausen decided that his people must find some better land and a place where they might live closer to one another, so that their religious training might not be lost. In 1850 he decided to take a trip through the new, strange west, even crossing the Mississippi River if necessary to see what he could find. He started out alone and made an extensive tour of Wisconsin and central Minnesota. He did not, however, find the kind of land suitable for his needs, nor did he wish to bring his people among the Indians. The next year he started out a second time and tramped through northern Iowa and southern Minnesota. He found fairly

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³ J. F. Clyde's "The Norwegian Colony" in *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Sec. 2, p. 4.

good land but it had already been taken by others. Again his mission failed.

The following year, 1852, his dream still undimmed, he set out for the third time, this time with two companions, traveling as far as Albert Lea, Minnesota. The climate there was considered suitable but the land was wet, so the three men turned south into Iowa. One day they stood at a spot which seemed to fulfil the dreams of the Danish missionary. They crossed to the opposite side of the creek, noting its clear sandy floor, and walked through heavy timber of walnut, maple, oak, elm, and many other trees until they came to a wide open space. Here the soil was black and rich. The land was level and stretched out as far as the eye could see. Here was fertile soil, drainage, clear water, plenty of timber, and, in spots, good building stone. The Indians had ceded their lands in Iowa to the government. The men agreed that here was their promised land; immediately they turned homeward to tell their people what they had found.

That fall Reverend Mr. Clausen returned with Mikkel (also found as Mikkle, Mickel, or Michael) Tollefson Rust, Hans H. Smedsrud, and Ole H. Haugerud, Sr.⁴ They carefully explored the land and agreed that it was suitable for their needs. They then staked out some claims and built

⁴ Clyde's "The Norwegian Colony" in *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Section 2, p. 4. J. F. Clyde and H. A. Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 13, gives the name Levi Olsen Lindelien in place of Ole H. Haugerud, Sr. The difficulty encountered in verifying Norwegian family names is due partly to the changes names underwent in the process of Americanization of spelling, but much confusion is due to the variations in names used by Norwegian settlers. Mikkel Tollefson Rust, for example, seems to have discarded the "Rust", probably derived from a farm or place in Norway, and used the patronymic, Tollefson, as his American family name. Others, such as Hans Oleson Rust, seem to have used the place name as the family name.—For an account of Norwegian names see Marjorie M. Kimmerle's "Norwegian-American Surnames" in *Norwegian-American Studies and Records*, Vol. XII, pp. 1-32.

claim shanties and a log cabin for the minister. It was about six weeks before they felt they were ready to return to Wisconsin for the winter.

Preparations for the trek were begun at once, although it was decided to wait until late spring to start. The men spent the time settling up affairs and finishing work in the fields. No records have come down concerning the feelings and the activities of the women but it would be safe to say they did not question the decision of their menfolks and that they put in their time packing clothes, furniture, and treasures. Clausen went to Mineral Point, Wisconsin, where he contracted for thirty or forty wagons.

And so, in the spring of 1853, as soon as the grass was high enough to sustain the cattle the migration began. On May 17th, a Norwegian national holiday, some seventy-five persons (twenty families with a number of unmarried men), with some two hundred head of cattle and thirty covered wagons drawn by oxen, started on their long, slow journey west. The Clausen family rode in a carriage drawn by horses, the only team of horses in the party.⁵ The first section was led by the Reverend C. L. Clausen and the second by Mikkel Tollefson Rust. Hans H. Smedsrud and Ole H. Haugerud, Sr., were also able to guide a group.⁶

Various designations of the place of crossing the Mississippi are given. Some accounts say the group crossed at Johnson's Ferry, others named McGregor. All agreed, however, that each settler loaded his belongings and family

⁵ Various dates are given for this migration. Flom's *Chapters on the Scandinavian Immigration to Iowa*, p. 70, and the *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), pp. 140, 141, give 1852 as the year. The same county history, on page 481, gives 1853 as the date and this is also found in Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 13, and in the *Saint Ansgar Enterprise*, June 20, 1928.

⁶ Clyde's "The Norwegian Colony", in *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County Iowa*, Sec. 2, p. 4; *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 141.

on a ferry boat, and that the boat was propelled by a blind horse and mule or by two blind mules to the west shore of the river. The Clausen group arrived first, crossed without difficulty, and went on westward, then turned to the north almost to the State line in order to avoid sloughs. Many times roads had to be built and bridges constructed out of rough logs cut from trees growing on the banks of the streams. Some of the travelers did not like the drab country and turned back to Wisconsin. Others left the group and settled in the rougher country of southeastern Minnesota.⁷

Soon after the second section crossed the Mississippi, a violent storm made travel more difficult than usual. The oxen had trouble pulling the wagons through the deep mud, and the streams were so swollen that it was sometimes necessary to rebuild bridges before it was safe to proceed. When they were about twenty miles from their destination they met some from the first group who had turned back. These people urged the newcomers to turn back with them; the land, they declared, was too wet to cultivate. The members of the second division, however, refused to be discouraged and they arrived at the appointed spot on the Cedar River on June 19th.

The third group had little trouble, aside from breakdowns and straying cattle, but when Hans Halverson and Ole H. Haugerud, Sr., were ready to take up their claims they found that their locations had been jumped by some Norwegians from Spring Prairie, Wisconsin. In time Halverson made a new claim two miles south of his original one and Haugerud bought Erick Stoveren's claim, giving him in exchange a new wagon.⁸

⁷ *Saint Ansgar Enterprise*, June 20, 1928; *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 141; J. F. Clyde's historical sketch in the *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County Iowa*, Sec. 2, p. 4.

⁸ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 142.

The land had not then come into the market and had been surveyed only into townships six miles square so the colonists had to wait until the survey was completed the next year before they could make their purchases. After the ground for each family had been staked off they began the making of their homes. Some lived in wagons for a time, while others began building cabins at once. These were rough-looking affairs made of great logs notched on the ends to fit together and placed one on top of the other until the walls were raised. The roofs were made of clapboards and as there were no nails these clapboards were held down by poles laid across them. Some settlers dug holes in the ground and covered them with sod which made fairly comfortable quarters until they were able to do better.

As it was almost the end of June before the colonists arrived, and not until late July before the settlers were ready to work the fields, they were unable to plant much but they did gather a fair crop of potatoes, rutabagas, and corn that fall.

While his people were busy with their own problems, the leader was also occupied. He had built his home and staked out his land the fall before, so he was able to turn his attention to other problems. He was considered a very wealthy man for that time, and had purchased some 800 acres of land. Out of this he platted about one hundred and twenty acres for a town. Unlike many towns in Iowa, this one was named from the first; Mr. Clausen called it St. Ansgar, perpetuating the name of a missionary who had brought the Christian faith to the "far north" of Europe. The first white child born in the township was Edward E. Clausen, son of Reverend and Mrs. C. L. Clausen, born on September 21, 1853.

In spite of the fact that the first winter was severe and food was scarce, these Norwegian pioneers were so well

satisfied with the new settlement that they began sending back words of encouragement and invitation to their friends in Wisconsin and in 1854 another group of covered wagons followed the same trail to this newly settled country. About this same time, too, a group of English-born people came to join the community. Their number was not large and many moved on to Osage, but from this group, names such as the Martins, Clydes, and Rossiters came to be part of the directory of St. Ansgar.

Another language group destined to become a factor in the building of this prairie village was made up of Czechs or Bohemians as they were known at that time. They did not arrive in Iowa in large numbers until about 1868 and then but a relatively small number came to Mitchell County. Most of these chose farms in the township of St. Ansgar. The Czechs were not organized into a group as the Norwegians were nor were they as independent as the English. They had a leader, John F. Peshak, who helped them get settled and become part of the community. Some of the better known names in this group were Mederia, Zemanek, Krulish, and Bohach.⁹ The Czechs sent their children to the public schools and worshipped in churches with the other nationalities. They often consulted Reverend Mr. Clausen about their problems and mingled freely with others in a social way.

A fourth group of importance was made up of Germans who came north to St. Ansgar about 1870. They followed the trail of other pioneers and more or less settled in the village itself, for they were, on the whole, businessmen rather than farmers. The Lubiens brothers were among the first to arrive, followed by the Millers and Helfritzs. They settled in the town of Newburg, a village across the Cedar

⁹ Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 203, 204.

River from St. Ansgar, carried on such businesses as wagon-making, and conducted mercantile establishments. Several years later some settlers of Swedish and Danish extraction came and took up farms in this community but the number of these was never very large and as late as 1870 there were only about fifty-two Danes in Mitchell County.¹⁰

What was St. Ansgar Township like that Scandinavians, English, Danes, Swedes, Germans, Bohemians, and Americans could live together there in harmony? In the first place the soil was rich and there was food for all. The banks of the Cedar River were well lined with growths of timber: oak, butternut, walnut, hickory, hard and soft maple, ash, and other kinds of trees, which helped to furnish an abundant supply of fuel and building material. The climate was also suitable for these northern and central Europeans.¹¹

The few Indians who remained or returned after the tribes left Iowa were usually friendly to the whites. A story has passed on down the years that on one trip Hans Gallagher was making "griddle cakes" over a fire beside his cabin, when two warriors and a squaw came upon him. They came so quietly that when they gave their "How How", Hans was so frightened that he dropped his dinner in the fire. The Indians, in need of food, did not hesitate; they drew the cakes out of the fire and ate them with relish. They had no intention of doing any harm.¹²

Although life for these people was hard, all endured the same hardships. The houses were made of logs chinked with mud or clay which often dropped out to make extra

¹⁰ *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Sec. 2, pp. 8, 9; George F. Parker's *Iowa-Pioneer Foundations*, Vol. I, p. 143; Flom's *Chapters in Scandinavian Immigration to Iowa*, p. 122, n. 4.

¹¹ Nathan Howe Parker's *Iowa as It Is in 1855*, p. 20.

¹² *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 143.

work for the housewife. The roofs were made of poles covered with clapboards and were not completely waterproof. Rough benches and trunks served as chairs. Tables were made by driving wooden pegs into the logs and putting boards from boxes on them. Beds were of prairie hay on the floor.

Food had to be of the simplest type. Flour had to be brought from Decorah, West Union, and elsewhere. These trips were made either in the fall or in the spring. At such times several teams would go at one time and it took from eight to fifteen days to make the trip. The men had to camp on the way. One mother was asked by her children to make a pie of wild blackberries. She had neither sugar nor shortening, but they begged so hard she finally made a batter of cornmeal in a dripping pan, added the blackberries, covered them with more of the batter, and baked it. Her family ate it with great relish.¹³

Little by little the pattern of the community worked itself out. At first each group had its own interests; gradually these merged to form a composite picture. For one thing all groups and nationalities either were American citizens or planned to become citizens as soon as possible. The county and municipal organizations tended to unify the people.

The Third General Assembly which had convened in Iowa City in the winter of 1850 had created forty new counties in north and northwest Iowa and Mitchell County was one of the number. In the summer of 1854 a petition for the organization of Mitchell County was prepared and presented to the county judge of Chickasaw County. This request was granted and an order was issued for the election of county officers on August 7, 1854. Since most of the settlers in and about St. Ansgar had come but recently from their native

¹³ *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Sec. 2, p. 3.

lands, even those who had become citizens had little knowledge of the English language, customs, and laws, so it was only natural for them to turn to Reverend Mr. Clausen for guidance in political activities.¹⁴

On an appointed day the electors met at the home of Dr. A. H. Moore which was near the present site of Osage. The first order of business was the nomination of candidates for the various offices. Neither creeds nor political parties were involved so far as local offices were concerned. A common wooden box with a hole cut in it was used for a ballot box and the tickets were written out by the clerks and other men selected because of their penmanship.¹⁵ Claus L. Clausen was elected school fund commissioner. Following the organization, record books were obtained and each officer opened his office in his own cabin.

On January 22, 1855, the Fifth General Assembly appointed John Harlow of Howard County, Joseph B. Dolley of Floyd County, and John Banack of Bremer County as commissioners to locate a seat of justice for Mitchell County. They were to meet at the home of the Reverend C. L. Clausen and were instructed to report the proceedings to the county judge. No record of this report has been found but it is known that a site known as Mitchell was chosen. This was challenged by the people of Osage and it was finally decided to put the matter to a vote. Feelings ran high and each faction sent men to watch the polling places, making it difficult for both the voters and the watchers.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Laws of Iowa*, 1850-1851, Ch. 9, 1854-1855, Ch. 120; Clyde's "The Norwegian Colony", in *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Section 2, p. 4.

¹⁵ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 145.

¹⁶ For an account of this county seat fight see Jacob A. Swisher's "The Location of County Seats in Iowa" in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. XXII, pp. 323-326. See also Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 18-23.

A story has been handed down that a merchant and a foreign-born voter met in front of the stone schoolhouse in St. Ansgar during the contest. The voter had difficulty with his English and stuttered. The merchant was from Mitchell and, being anxious to see that all went well for his home town, approached the voter and asked him to cast his ballot for Mitchell. The answer was very slow and difficult to make out. Finally after some time it proved to be a question, "What will you give me to do so?" The merchant tried very hard to convince the voter of the importance of having the county seat in his town and that he should vote for Mitchell. The voter finally made him understand he had been offered two dollars to vote for Osage. Again, after much unintelligible discussion, the merchant told the voter if he would vote for Mitchell he, the voter, might come to the merchant's store and pick out any pair of shoes for himself he desired. What the voter did is not recorded.

During all this conflict Mr. Clausen supported Osage. This aroused a good deal of discussion but it was not until after the election was held and the question settled in favor of Osage that he gave the reason for his stand. He had hoped and planned to secure the county seat for St. Ansgar in time and he felt St. Ansgar could obtain it much more easily from Osage than it could from Mitchell had that site been selected.¹⁷

In March of 1855 the Township of St. Ansgar, one of the first in Mitchell County to be settled, was organized by the order of Judge Moore. The first election¹⁸ was held in the store of C. L. Clausen and he was elected the first justice of

¹⁷ Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 23.

¹⁸ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), pp. 482, 485. Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 201. These names have, as usual, various spellings.

the peace. Mikkel Tollefson Rust, Jacob Asleson, and C. G. Classen were elected trustees. Knud Tollefson was made road supervisor.

The next year Clausen became a member of the State House of Representatives and it was mainly through his efforts that a bill was passed which affected the boundaries of several counties. This act, among other things, took from Floyd County the northern half of four townships and gave them to Mitchell County thereby making the two counties the same size.¹⁹

In 1860 at the September term of court, a petition was presented by S. R. McKinley and others who lived on the west side of the Cedar River, that a new township be formed out of the territory belonging to St. Ansgar Township. This request was granted and the Township of Newburg was organized, with the town of Newburg as its community center.²⁰ For many years much rivalry existed between this village and St. Ansgar, but when the railroad was built through St. Ansgar in 1869 the question was forever settled in its favor.

In the spring of 1876 St. Ansgar was incorporated and the first municipal election was held in March of that year. Henry Lubiens, a merchant formerly of Newburg, was elected mayor, S. R. Moody recorder, and P. O. Asperheim, A. D. Bundy, T. W. Owen, L. Moe, and D. F. McCarthy trustees. L. Cole was marshal, P. A. Hjorth, treasurer, and W. Caswell street commissioner.

Since one of the reasons for the Norwegians leaving the State of Wisconsin for Iowa was a desire for religious unity, their leader, Reverend C. L. Clausen, lost no time in organizing a church and teaching the Christian principles

¹⁹ Frank H. Garver's "History of the Establishment of Counties in Iowa" in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. VI, p. 427.

²⁰ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 152.

according to the Norwegian Lutheran faith. During the first year of settlement the simple services were held under the trees. Here the first confirmation was held and the first baptism performed. When the weather did not permit outdoor meetings he held the services in his own home or in the schoolhouse. Finally, in 1864, a stone church was built by the members of the congregation and it is still in use. The Reverend C. L. Clausen served as its pastor until 1872 when ill health forced him to give up his work, leaving behind him one of the strongest churches in that community.²¹

The German element, like the Norwegian, enjoyed its own form of worship and teachings. At first the number of Germans was too small for them to support a resident pastor and they secured men to come and hold services in various homes. Finally, in 1874, Reverend E. Wiegner came and organized a German Lutheran church. He served other congregations; but services were held whether he was present or not. In 1882 a building, which had been built by the Baptists and later abandoned, was purchased and used for a church. This church building served until recent years.

The only other church in the community was the Methodist Episcopal. It was supported by the Bohemians, English, and other groups. Solomon W. Ingham, Sr., is credited with being the first man to introduce Methodism into Mitchell County.²² At first just a Bible class was formed at St. Ansgar and services were held in the homes of various members, the Keystone Hotel, and the stone schoolhouse. Finally, in 1878, a building was erected and a regular pastor was assigned by the Upper Iowa Conference. The Methodists later built another church to serve their needs.

²¹ This information came from the writings of Martin Moe, now in possession of his daughter, Miss Mamie Moe.

²² Stephen Norris Fellows's *History of the Upper Iowa Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1856-1906*, p. 36.

Second only to religious advancement was the urge for education.²³ Again, as may be expected, Mr. Clausen took a leading rôle. In 1853 he organized and taught the first school in Mitchell County, a private school for religious instruction only. It met twice a week in his cabin and all who wished to learn might come. Two years later, however, a secular school was started. It was held in a log building built by members of the community for educational, religious, and social purposes. This edifice stood on the main street of St. Ansgar and the teacher's salary was paid by a few of the citizens. The first teacher was a Miss Burt who received sixteen dollars a month.

Three years later a stone schoolhouse was built by the district. It was a simple boxlike affair with three windows on each side and a door in front. The inside was as uninteresting as the outside. There were long benches all built at the same height. The small children had to let their legs hang, for their feet did not touch the floor; and the tall ones had to stretch their nether extremities out in the aisle or curl them up as best they could. Here the basic studies were taught, the fundamentals of religion learned, and county elections held. The building even housed the first county fair in 1869.

The first teacher in this building was E. G. Rice, a native of Otsego County, New York, who had trained to become an educator but because of failing eyesight had come west to work on a farm. He worked for a time at various things but finally returned to his first desire — teaching. He taught in St. Ansgar for two years and then was elected county superintendent of schools. He was followed by E. L. Sawyer who taught all the grades and had over one hundred pupils.

By 1880 the stone building was far too small and a

²³ Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 55-57.

wooden structure with four rooms, a most modern edifice for that time, was erected. This would, it was believed, take care of the housing problem for education forever, but it had to be added to as time and necessity required.

Like pioneers in the other communities, the St. Ansgar Norwegians developed a passion for what was called higher education. Perhaps it was the desire to perpetuate the religious creed as it was in the case of Father Asa Turner in founding Denmark Academy. Be that as it may, the desire produced St. Ansgar Seminary. It served as what now might be called a junior high school or high school and it gave religious instruction in addition to the usual secular studies. It was well attended not only by those professing the Lutheran faith but by others as well, many students coming from long distances to study music and arithmetic.

Two buildings were built to house the Seminary in the north part of town — a wooden structure, with a brick veneer, for classwork and a larger wooden building for dormitories. The first building cost four thousand dollars and the second seven thousand dollars. After a long time, however, conditions worked against the Seminary. Waldorf College in Forest City was started by the Norwegians there, taking many of the students who otherwise would have come to St. Ansgar. The type of work in the public high schools improved; and Cedar Valley Seminary in Osage was a close neighbor and rival. As a result of these conditions, the St. Ansgar Seminary finally closed its doors in 1910. The brick building was turned over to the church as a meeting place for different organizations and the dormitory was redecorated and made into an apartment house.²⁴

St. Ansgar had an economic as well as a cultural development. When N. Howe Parker wrote his book for the immigrants in 1855 he stated that a flouring-mill was “much

²⁴ *Saint Ansgar Enterprise*, June 20, 1928.

needed" in this section of Iowa. Flour was brought forty-five miles and grain made the same distance to mill.²⁵ It is doubtful whether Mr. Clausen saw this statement or not but he had already sensed this need and very soon after his arrival in the summer of 1853, as soon as the problem of claims was settled, he had looked about for a good place to build a flour mill. He finally started one on the spot where the town of Newburg was later located, but a freshet came in the fall of 1853 and washed the dam away. He then sold an interest in his mill to a Mr. Brink from Marion who proved to be dishonest and gave his partner a lot of trouble. The case was tried before Judge Moore and Mr. Clausen won the decision. After he completed the mill he sold it to S. R. McKinley in 1854.

Another mill had a long and interesting story. In 1861 S. D. Smith, who owned a water power site on the river southwest of St. Ansgar, sold it to G. W. Bowman who in turn sold it to a Mr. Fife. A dam and a stone flour mill were built and the work of milling started. The property soon reverted to the possession of Mr. Smith, however, and he in turn sold it to H. D. Van Campen. This sale resulted in long and bitter litigation. After that the mill was owned and operated by various parties until 1887 when it was sold to Mrs. Emily Haines, a widow, who managed the mill by means of tenants. On March 14, 1894, the mill was mysteriously burned and the tenant disappeared following a threat of an arson charge against him made by an insurance company which had insured grain supposed to be stored in the mill.²⁶

The community also needed building materials. Soon after the first group of settlers arrived, Mr. Clausen built a

²⁵ Parker's *Iowa as It Is in 1855*, p. 120.

²⁶ Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 204.

sawmill on the east side of the Cedar River. Somewhat later Levi Cornick came and built a steam saw and lathe mill on the west side of Turtle Creek, a stream of water a short distance south of the road between the towns of St. Ansgar and Newburg. Both mills ran by water power. Since pine wood had to be hauled from McGregor or Cedar Falls, most of the native timber was used for the greater share of the buildings and these two mills were kept busy for about the same period of time. In 1865 Michael Olson built a wool-carding mill opposite the steam sawmill on Turtle Creek. This operated for several years but finally, with the establishment of the woolen mills in Mitchell, most of the carding, spinning, and weaving of the wool produced was done in Mitchell, and the Turtle Creek mill closed.

Another local industry which received some notice over the country was the raising of ginseng. There were two arbors, both owned by the same man, O. A. Gilbertson. One was located near Otranto and the other on the eastern edge of St. Ansgar. The work was carried on under a canopy or under maple, oak, and elm trees and as much as eighteen thousand dollars worth of roots were marketed in one year not to mention the seeds which were harvested and sold.

At the time C. L. Clausen was having trouble with Mr. Brink over the mill at Newburg, the case was handled for Mr. Clausen by James McKay, an attorney of Winneshiek County, who became interested in the fact that the settlers of St. Ansgar Township were without the facilities of government postal service. He was the postmaster in his own county and by means of his influence he was able to secure a post office at St. Ansgar in 1855.²⁷ Charles G. Classen is listed as the first postmaster.

Early in 1862 rumors started in Mitchell County that a railroad was to be built. This created much excitement

²⁷ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), p. 142.

especially when it was learned that the Cedar Falls and Minnesota Railway Company had already made some surveys. Three years later the county issued about fifty thousand dollars worth of bonds to aid the company, but, through a ruling of the court concerning the taxes, the bonds were annulled and destroyed except for about eight thousand dollars worth. Before the railroad reached as far as Mitchell County the property passed into the hands of the Illinois Central Railroad and under a long-term lease it finally came through St. Ansgar in 1869.²⁸

The coming of the railroad brought about changes in the community. It sealed the doom of Newburg, the town across the river. It had been a village of fair size settled mostly by the Germans. It contained a church, stores, school, and mills. Gradually the merchants began to move to other towns, the mills fell into disuse and the town of Newburg finally took its place among the ghost towns of Iowa.

By 1880 St. Ansgar began to take on the appearance of a typical Iowa town. Up to this time it had been merely a prairie village self-sufficient and satisfied. Now board walks and plank crossings were built. Hitching posts were erected and posts for oil lamps were put up along the main street. A town pump was provided with a fine watering trough for horses, and here and there stores sprang up. Lubiens' store was moved from Newburg and served as a general store where everything could be purchased from gingham and shoes to crackers and kerosene.

The most important mechanic in town was the blacksmith. O. K. Berg had the first smithy and his shop was recognized as a meeting place, a social center at times even more important than the country store. Here, while waiting for horses and oxen to be shod or ploughs to be sharpened,

²⁸ Clyde and Dwelle's *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 25.

many a discussion of religious and political flavor was carried on. Another important center on Main Street was the harness shop, which was operated by a Mr. Vacha. All equipment for horses could be found here and like the blacksmith shop it was a favorite "hangout" for men.

The first hotel, or lodging place, was started by Mikkel Tollefson, who had come with the Reverend C. L. Clausen on one of his early expeditions to find the "promised land". He built a cabin about eighteen by twenty feet in size where he and his family of eight lived. They took in lodgers and at times there were as many as twenty strangers boarding and sleeping in the family home. The charge was twenty-five cents for supper, lodging, and breakfast. The floor was made of puncheons. A wagon box was laid on the joists overhead, the remaining space being floored by laying "shakes" on the joists, and this upper story was used as a sleeping compartment by as many as it would hold. Beds were then made up on the floor below. The food that first winter consisted mostly of venison and rutabagas.²⁹

The next year a hotel was erected about which nothing is known except that it was sold to Johnathan Allen. In 1857 A. G. Owen put up the Keystone Hotel. It was, at the time, the largest hotel in northern Iowa, forty feet square and two stories high. Its cost, when furnished, was eight thousand dollars. It was operated by Mr. Owen until his death after which it passed through various hands and finally burned in 1883. The coming of the railroad brought "runners" and other strangers to town. This prompted the construction of the Dykeman House. It ran for some time and then was torn down. Under the same ownership and management another building was constructed about a block from the railway station.

Seven years after the first group of pioneers came to

²⁹ *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa* (1884), pp. 481, 482.

settle in St. Ansgar, A. G. Owen, the same man who started the Keystone Hotel, brought in supplies for a newspaper and began printing the *St. Ansgar Journal*. He decided it was not a paying proposition and discontinued it, but later the *St. Ansgar Gazette* was started, followed by the *St. Ansgar Register* in 1876. This was sold the next year to Martin Moe and W. A. Thomas. It was conducted by these two men for a year when Martin Moe sold his interest to Thomas who conducted the paper for another year and failed. Martin Moe then bought the property and started the *St. Ansgar Enterprise* which is still being published.

In one of the early books written to induce immigrants to come to Iowa the author stated that according to medical journals Iowa ranked as second in the point of health and might be first when the people were as free from toil, privation, and exposure as people in older States.³⁰ Whether there was anything to this prediction or not, St. Ansgar had no medical attention in a professional way until after 1860 when a Dr. C. B. Parks came and set up practice. Medical services were, apparently, not very remunerative, for he also operated a general store. He stayed only a few years and then drifted west.

And so, through the years, the various national groups — Americans, English, Norwegians, Danes, Czechs, and Germans — have united to make an Iowa community. Free to use their own language, to worship in their own way, and to think and speak as they please, these various nationalities have merged to make an Iowa community, with the varied contributions of these settlers built into it. Such is St. Ansgar, an Iowa melting pot.

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³⁰ Parker's *Iowa as It Is in 1855*, pp. 20, 21.