

## Builders of the Hawkeye State

Not all Irish who came to Iowa remained in relative obscurity. Many gained local prominence. Goodly numbers won important positions and became known throughout the state and nation. As lawyers and politicians, as educators, doctors, and clergymen, as professional athletes, successful farmers, and captains of industry, the Irish of Iowa forged to the forefront. The following are but a few who became noted in one way or another.

Robert Fleming was born in Tyrone County in 1806. He came to the United States in 1831 and located in Davenport seven years later.

Fleming brought a large amount of flour with him with the intention of becoming a baker in Davenport. He made only one batch of bread and decided to follow some other business. Flour was a scarce article at that time, and the large amount he had left was in great demand. He refused to sell more than a limited amount to any one family. When someone asked for flour, Fleming asked how many were in the family. He then sold only a certain number of pounds for each individual. When he finished selling his flour, he bought a piece of land in Davenport Township. He farmed a few years and then went to Wapello County.

Alexander Reed was also born in Tyrone County. He came to America with his brother Thomas in 1826 when he was twenty-two. Reed landed in New York, went on to Philadelphia and then to Virginia. He ended up in Milton, North Carolina, where he became a plantation overseer for three or four years. He worked in the gold mines for about a year and also ran a distillery. Reed came to Jo Daviess County, Illinois, and then to the Dubuque lead mines in 1833. After a few months in the mines, he settled at his home in Bellevue. He was the earliest settler in Jackson County. When he came, there was nothing but Indians and deer. The first fall and winter he killed seventy-five deer.

John Tooley was born in County Kildare on October 15, 1847. At the age of two, his parents, Peter and Ann Tooley, brought him to America. After fifteen years in or near New York City and in Columbia County, Wisconsin, the family moved to Chickasaw County. His father bought eighty acres of land at \$3.00 per acre. John taught school in Stapleton Township in 1867 for \$30.00. He continued to teach the winter term for the next ten years. In 1884 he started in the grain and livestock business at Lawler. Tooley was elected county treasurer in 1887, and in 1897 President McKinley appointed him postmaster.

James Porter was born May 15, 1861, in a thatched roof cottage near the seashore on the Island of Inch, County Derry. He emigrated with

a large party in 1866. His mother, Rebecca Creswell Porter, was treasurer of the group. While they were at Castle Garden, the port of entry in New York, all their money, which amounted to about \$800 in gold, was either stolen or lost. They finally got to Philadelphia where they remained for three years. The family heard through a friend of the advantages of Iowa. In December, 1869, they migrated to Waterloo. James' father worked on a farm at \$32 and board for three per month. Within two years he was able to buy a small farm.

James Porter, junior, gathered corn at seventy-five cents a day to be able to go to Tilford Academy. He taught school and then went to Vinton Academy and the Keokuk Business College. In 1882 he went to Sutherland, O'Brien County, to work in the lumber yard. Porter bought out the owner within a year. In 1891 he went to Reinbeck and organized the Reinbeck State Bank. The same year he started the Bank of Ocheyedan. Before long, he owned a line of lumber yards in northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota. He also had several thousand acres of Iowa and Minnesota land.

Thomas Connolly was born in Ireland March 2, 1837, and came to Jackson County in 1842. His father died when he was nine. His first money was earned by hoeing corn at twenty-five cents a day. At the age of 16 he went to Dubuque to learn the wagon and carriage building trade. Before he was 18 he was the foreman of the largest establishment

of this kind in the state. In 1858 he went into business for himself, but was burned out after two years. Almost immediately he rebuilt his plant.

The name of Connolly on a carriage "came to be a guarantee of the highest work and finest quality of workmanship." Connolly was also president of the Bank and Insurance Building Company of Dubuque and the Dubuque Fire and Marine Insurance Company.

William John Haddock was an early alumnus of the State University of Iowa. He was born near Belfast on February 28, 1835. He graduated from the Normal Department of the University in 1861 and was admitted to the practice of law the next year. In 1872 he was appointed Circuit Judge of the 8th Judicial District of Iowa. The same year he was appointed by the Secretary of the Interior to a committee to investigate charges of fraud against Indian agents of the Pawnee Tribe. In 1864 he was chosen Secretary of the Board of Regents of the University.

J. M. Mulroney was born in Ireland on November 11, 1832. He came to Williamsburg, New York, when he was thirteen. He was a student and employee in a blacksmith shop while there. Then he went to Connecticut to work at farming, railroading and in the woods. In 1849 he migrated to Mineral Point, Wisconsin. For years he operated a flatboat on the Mississippi, selling cedar posts and pickets. The gold rush attracted him in

1851. He mined for gold and ran a mercantile business in California until 1857 when he returned to Iowa and settled in Palo Alto County.

During the first election in 1858, Mulroney was elected county treasurer and recorder. Later he served as justice of the peace and was named the first postmaster at Soda Bar in Palo Alto County on July 22, 1865. That same year John Mulroney traded the cattle ranch he had operated for eight years for a mercantile business in Fort Dodge. There he became interested in building the Minnesota and St. Louis Railroad and in the construction of the Mason City and Fort Dodge Railroad. He contracted to do some of the work on the latter line.

Another Irishman in Fort Dodge was Dr. William Lloyd Nicholson, who was born in Tipperary County in 1832. He attended the University of Glasgow before coming to America in 1852. He came to Iowa in 1856 with Rev. John Vehey's colony, after stops in Quebec and Lewiston, New York. In the early days he made part of his living with a fishing rod and gun. His expertness with the latter was demonstrated one afternoon along the Des Moines River when he shot 128 prairie chickens. During the Civil War Dr. Nicholson was in the 32nd Iowa Regiment. He rose in rank from 1st Lt. to Regimental Surgeon and Lt. Colonel.

Until his death in 1890, Dr. Nicholson was sur-

geon for all railroads entering Fort Dodge. He was also the examining physician for the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association of Iowa. He contributed many articles to the sports magazine, *American Field*, as well as newspapers and other periodicals. Nicholson also had considerable ability as a poet.

Samuel McNutt was born in Londonderry in 1825. He came to New Castle, Delaware, as a child. He was a graduate of Delaware College and taught at New Castle before moving to Milwaukee where he was admitted to the bar.

In 1854 McNutt came to Muscatine where he taught school and helped issue the *Voice of Iowa*, which claimed to be the first Iowa educational publication. Two years later McNutt became editor of the Muscatine *Enquirer*; later that year he became associate editor of the Dubuque *Herald*, a position he held for three years. Then, in 1861, he became editor of the Dubuque *Daily Union*. He served as state representative for six years and as state senator for four years. He was a candidate for state treasurer in 1872 but was defeated by the railroad interests. He was appointed United States Consul to Maracaibo in 1890. Later he was judge of the municipal court of Muscatine.

Dennis A. Mahoney was born in Ireland in 1821. When ten years old he came to Philadelphia where he read law. In 1843 he moved to Dubuque and continued his law studies with Davis

and Crawford. During 1844 and 1845 he taught at the cathedral in Dubuque. Mahoney opened an academy at Garryowen in 1845. He was also postmaster and justice of the peace. Two years later he was admitted to the bar and could appear before the Supreme Court in Iowa City.

In 1848 Dennis Mahoney was elected as a representative to the Iowa state legislature from the district composed of Jackson and Jones counties. He was named chairman of the House Committee on Schools where he helped to draft the bill which became the Public School Law of Iowa.

Mahoney's work as a state legislator, as treasurer and later sheriff of Dubuque County, and as an articulate Democratic editor who opposed Lincoln and the Civil War, are well-known chapters in Iowa history. After serving five years as editor of the *St. Louis Times*, he returned to the *Daily Telegraph* at Dubuque where he died in 1879.

Thomas Cavanagh was a native of Galway who came with his father to Iowa in 1849. The Cavanaghs owned extensive land holdings in Ireland, the money from which they invested largely in Iowa lands. Thomas Cavanagh owned 1,500 acres in one body in Dallas County and extensive holdings in Greene, Boone, Carroll, Sac, Calhoun, Story, Dubuque and Polk counties. He laid out the town of New Ireland which the General Assembly renamed Redfield. His headquarters were in Redfield until he removed to Des Moines where

he was engaged as an attorney, real estate broker, and immigrant agent. His popularity led to his election as Mayor of Des Moines in 1862. One contemporary described him as "a fair type of the successful business men of the West."

Luke Shay, a prominent farmer and livestock buyer in Ringgold County, was born in Ireland in 1824. One month after his marriage to Julia Whelan, he sailed from Liverpool and landed in New York on May 10, 1848. After brief sojourns in Clarke and Union counties, he settled in Ringgold County where, after giving 200-acre farms to each of his children, he still had a 700-acre well-cultivated farm. His shipments of cattle and hogs amounted to 150 car-loads annually in the 1880's. His children inherited his industrious qualities and a grandson, Luke Hart, became Supreme Knight, or National head, of the Knights of Columbus.

John Brennan, who was born in Roscommon County in 1845, came to America in 1865, friendless and penniless. While working four years as a laborer, he studied law at night in Omaha. However, he became too deaf to plead cases before a jury. In 1869 he became a reporter for the *Sioux City Daily Times*. Brennan was an effective speaker, "especially when dealing with England's treatment of Ireland." He served as a campaign orator with Blaine in 1884. Later he became associated with Patrick Egan and John P. Finnerty in Irish meetings throughout the United States.

Brennan wrote a pamphlet, "The Irish-American Citizen, His Rights and Duties in American Politics," in 1866. He claimed that the Democrats asked the Irish to battle for "personal liberty" which means "liberty of the saloon." "This saloon institution is the crowning curse of our race in this country," he wrote. He thought no respectable Irishman should be engaged in the liquor traffic.

In his later years he gave much of his time to *The Northwestern Catholic*, published at Sioux City. Brennan died in Sioux City in 1900.

Henry O'Connor was born in Dublin in 1820 and died at the Soldiers' Home in Marshalltown in 1900. He received his early education at Tullow by private instruction from the monks. He came to the United States when twenty. He learned the tailor's trade in New York City. Then he moved to Cincinnati where he studied law and was admitted to the bar.

O'Connor came to Muscatine in 1849 where he was an anti-slavery Whig and later Republican. Soon he became a very popular orator. In 1858 he was elected District Attorney. O'Connor enlisted as a private in Co. A, First Iowa Infantry. He was in the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Upon returning home, receptions were given for the regiment in many towns. "Private O'Connor" had the responsibility of replying in each case. Before long Governor Kirkwood appointed him Major of the 35th Iowa Infantry Regiment.

Henry O'Connor, who was appointed Attorney General of Iowa in 1867, was constantly carrying the flag of Republicanism in the Midwest. During the presidential campaign of 1868 he spoke at Peoria in behalf of the Republican ticket. "The little Irishman covered himself with glory, and won universal praise."

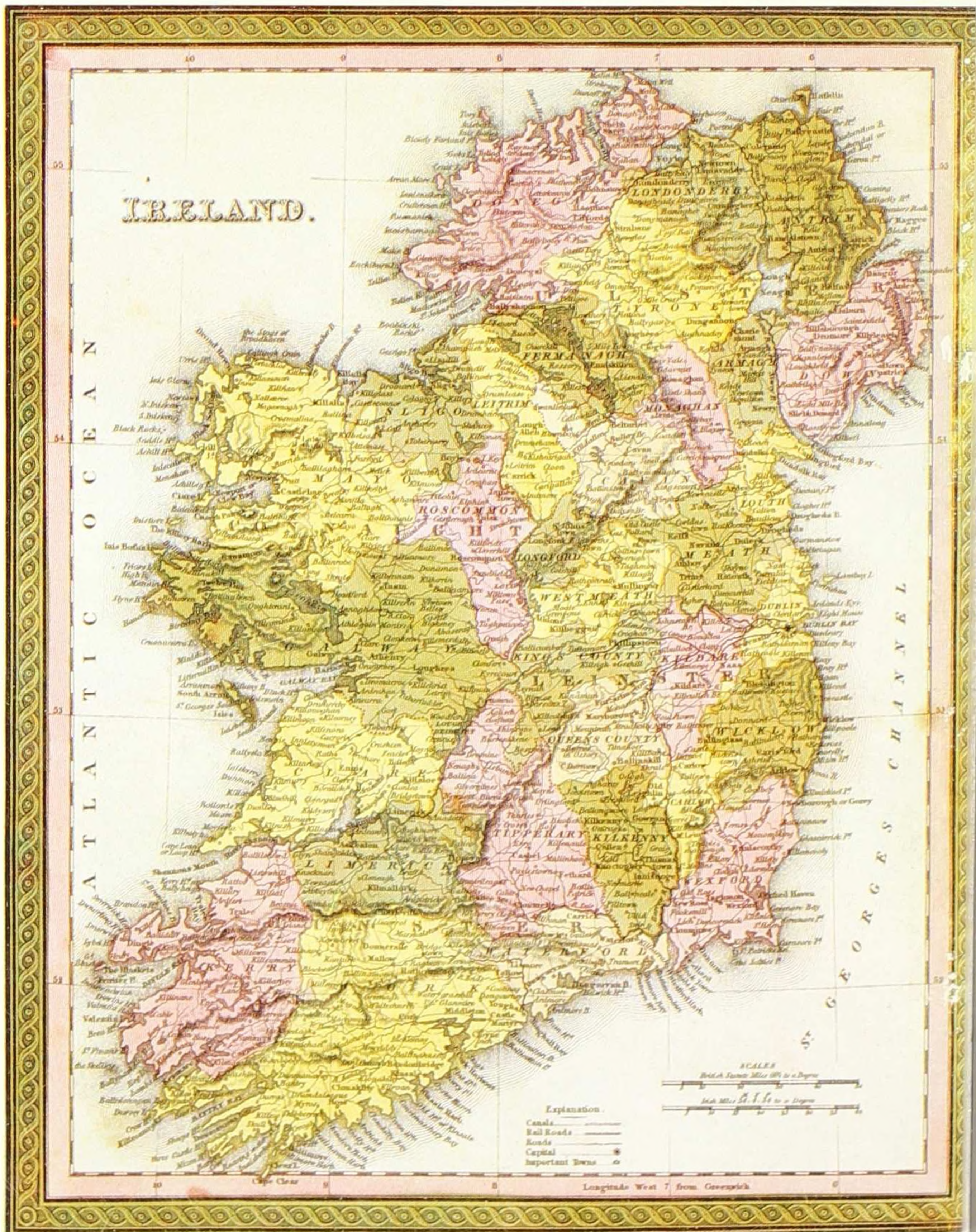
On July 5, 1869, the National Irish Republican Convention met in Chicago. Des Moines newspapers noted that O'Connor was to be there and would take "a distinguished part in the deliberations." He became a member of the National Executive Committee although Michael Scanlon of New York defeated him as chairman by two votes.

O'Connor was equal to any situation. During a political rally in Clinton one man became offensive in questions he directed at O'Connor. Finally he started to assault O'Connor. Others started to interfere, but O'Connor said, "Do not stop him; let him come on. I think I have shot better men than he is."

In 1872 he ran for the nomination as Governor on the Republican ticket, but he was unsuccessful. That same year President Grant appointed him Solicitor of the United States Department of State. O'Connor has been described as "a typical Irishman, impulsive, genial, courteous, warm-hearted, a man of many friends, with few or no enemies, a brave, self-sacrificing soldier in the nation's time of need, a lawyer of ability and learning."

# PERCENTAGE OF IOWA'S POPULATION BORN IN IRELAND, 1870 - 1950

<i>County</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1950</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>1870</i>	<i>1890</i>	<i>1920</i>	<i>1950</i>
Adair	1.3%	2.0%	0.6%	0.04%	Jefferson	2.0%	0.8%	0.1%	0.04%
Adams	1.2	0.3	0.3	0.02	Johnson	5.8	3.1	0.6	0.09
Allamakee	14.1	5.6	0.8	0.04	Jones	6.3	3.1	0.5	0.03
Appanoose	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.02	Keokuk	1.0	1.3	0.3	0.11
Audubon	0.8	1.1	0.2	0.03	Kossuth	3.4	0.8	0.3	0.05
Benton	2.5	1.6	0.4	0.04	Lee	6.8	2.6	0.5	0.05
Black Hawk	3.4	2.2	0.5	0.1	Linn	2.6	1.9	0.6	0.13
Boone	3.1	1.5	0.2	0.05	Louisa	2.4	1.1	0.2	0.03
Bremer	2.4	1.3	0.3	0.04	Lucas	1.2	0.9	0.3	0.05
Buchanan	6.7	3.7	0.8	0.06	Lyon	1.7	1.2	0.2	0.05
Buena Vista	3.7	1.2	0.3	0.04	Madison	1.9	1.5	0.4	0.09
Butler	3.6	1.6	0.3	0.04	Mahaska	1.2	0.9	0.2	0.04
Calhoun	1.6	1.7	0.4	0.08	Marion	0.6	0.4	0.1	0.01
Carroll	1.3	1.2	0.4	0.05	Marshall	1.5	1.4	0.5	0.17
Cass	2.3	1.2	0.3	0.06	Mills	2.0	0.8	0.3	0.04
Cedar	3.8	1.7	0.3	0.02	Mitchell	3.6	1.3	0.3	0.01
Cerro Gordo	3.7	2.3	0.5	0.09	Monona	2.1	0.9	0.3	0.06
Cherokee	5.8	1.6	0.7	0.18	Monroe	6.0	3.8	0.6	0.09
Chickasaw	8.0	3.3	0.4	0.03	Montgomery	2.1	0.7	0.2	0.03
Clarke	0.8	0.6	0.1	0.03	Muscatine	5.2	2.1	0.4	0.03
Clay	0.8	0.9	0.2	0.02	O'Brien	1.7	1.5	0.3	0.04
Clayton	7.0	2.3	0.3	0.05	Osceola	0	0.9	0.2	0.04
Clinton	10.9	4.9	1.0	0.15	Page	1.7	1.1	0.3	0.07
Crawford	4.1	3.2	0.8	0.14	Palo Alto	15.4	4.7	1.0	0.10
Dallas	2.1	1.5	0.4	0.03	Plymouth	5.2	1.9	0.5	0.06
Davis	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.0	Pocahontas	10.2	2.2	0.6	0.06
Decatur	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.02	Polk	4.5	2.3	0.5	0.09
Delaware	5.4	2.9	0.7	0.11	Pottawattamie	5.1	1.9	0.4	0.09
Des Moines	4.8	1.9	0.3	0.08	Poweshiek	3.0	2.7	1.1	0.25
Dickinson	1.8	0.9	0.3	0.08	Ringgold	1.3	1.1	0.3	0.03
Dubuque	16.7	5.2	1.1	0.19	Sac	1.4	1.1	0.3	0.04
Emmet	1.6	1.1	0.3	0.07	Scott	9.2	3.0	0.7	0.10
Fayette	3.9	1.6	0.4	0.06	Shelby	0.9	1.1	0.3	0.04
Floyd	2.9	1.3	0.3	0.09	Sioux	1.5	1.3	0.3	0.06
Franklin	4.8	1.6	0.2	0.08	Story	1.5	1.1	0.3	0.05
Fremont	1.3	1.1	0.4	0.09	Tama	2.0	1.3	0.3	0.11
Greene	3.1	2.9	0.5	0.06	Taylor	0.3	0.9	0.2	0.04
Grundy	2.1	1.2	0.4	0.12	Union	1.5	2.4	0.5	0.03
Guthrie	1.7	1.4	0.5	0.06	Van Buren	1.6	0.8	0.2	0.05
Hamilton	1.4	0.9	0.3	0.04	Wapello	3.5	2.1	0.4	0.04
Hancock	0.9	1.2	0.3	0.02	Warren	1.3	0.9	0.2	0.03
Hardin	6.4	1.1	0.2	0.05	Washington	1.7	1.3	0.3	0.06
Harrison	2.9	1.7	0.5	0.08	Wayne	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.04
Henry	2.1	1.4	0.3	0.05	Webster	10.0	3.2	0.7	0.13
Howard	7.7	3.4	0.6	0.05	Winnebago	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.01
Humboldt	4.2	1.5	0.3	0.04	Winneshieck	5.3	2.1	0.2	0.03
Ida	2.4	1.7	0.6	0.24	Woodbury	8.6	2.3	0.6	0.12
Iowa	5.9	3.1	0.7	0.13	Worth	1.5	0.7	0.1	0
Jackson	6.1	2.6	0.5	0.04	Wright	2.9	1.4	0.4	0.07
Jasper	1.1	1.6	0.5	0.12					



The above map is from S. Augustus Mitchell's *A New Universal Atlas Containing Maps of the Various Empires, Kingdoms, States and Republics of the World*. Philadelphia, S. August Mitchell, 1848. This map must have been seen by thousands of immigrants who arrived America in 1848 and in the years immediately preceding the Civil War.