

Settlers on the Iowa Frontier

Settlers did not wait very long to respond to the appeal of new homes in Iowa. A group of fifty-one miners, at least two-thirds of whom were Irish, went to Dubuque in 1830. Some struck lead and remained until driven out by troops after the return of the Fox Indians. While in Dubuque they drew up a set of rules on June 17, 1830, known as the Miner's Compact. These were probably the first laws drawn in Iowa.

By 1833 a much greater influx had started. A number of Irishmen held important positions in those first years. Patrick Quigley was one of the leaders in early Dubuque. He ran a store in partnership with Alexander Butterworth, another Irishman.

Quigley was the first justice of the peace. He was later elected to the House in the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin, and from 1837 to 1844 he was trustee and treasurer of Dubuque. John Foley was elected to the Wisconsin Territorial Council. F. K. O'Farrell, merchant and realtor, was mayor from 1844 to 1846. Charles Corkery was probate judge of Dubuque County from 1844 to 1857.

A letter from "Joseph Buttereggs" in the Du-

buque *Iowa News* in 1839 tells of the forming of a regiment of soldiers. It was made up of many newcomers — Irish, Germans, Dutch, French, etc. "Such a heterogenous mixed multitude of nations, tongues, languages and people is to be found nowhere on this earth except in the Du Buque Lead Mines."

"A Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes" was also impressed by the mixture of peoples in Dubuque. "I was forcibly struck with the mixed mass of Germans, French, English, Irish, ect. [sic], intermingling with each other in that cheerful manner, which is the true indication of happy hearts and smiling prospects."

Within a few years of the first settlements in Dubuque the Irish tide began to sweep across Iowa. The town of Temple Hill in Jones County was started mostly by Irish direct from Europe. Between 1840 and 1842 Irish were starting to settle at Bellevue, Charleston (now Sabula) and Concord Township in Dubuque County. A large percentage of Irish were among the early immigrants to Bankston, Farley and Dyersville, while about fifty Irish families settled along the Maquoketa River near Cascade in 1842.

The 1850's saw many Irish settlements started throughout the state. After careful consideration of several frontier areas, Rev. Terence J. Donaghue, Vicar General of the Dubuque Diocese, decided to establish a settlement near New Melleray.

He wrote Father James Maher of Craigue, County Carlow, for emigrants from Leinster.

Colonists should sail by March 1. Wheat could not be sown the first season. Donaghue would give lessons in raising Indian corn, oats and potatoes, as good as they ever had. The emigrants must "be smart for we are a go-ahead people here."

Father Maher, in addressing a group of Leinster farmers, said men skilled in agriculture would be most likely to succeed. They should have enough money to buy 40 to 80 acres. It would be best to go in small bands and form a society. Thus depression of their spirits and roaming around the country would be prevented. "We shall take all possible care to admit none to our colony except those who have laid aside all foolish, exaggerated expectancies, and have formed . . . correct ideas as to the duties and laborious life of the emigrant." However, no such colony arrived in Dubuque County in 1850.

The first real colony of Irish was established by Rev. Thomas Hore in Allamakee County. Hore, a native of Wexford County, came to Arkansas in 1850 but could find no satisfactory location. He arrived in Dubuque on January 23, 1851.

After staying several days with the Trappists, he set out to explore the country. He selected and obtained title to several thousand acres. Only eighteen families arrived at Lafayette Landing that spring. Apparently most of the large party which

left Ireland stayed in St. Louis. Those who did come to Iowa built homes and started a log church. Soon other Irish families joined them.

Keokuk was a boom town in 1853. Many Irish who had stopped in the east came here by way of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Others came by way of the Gulf of Mexico directly from Europe. The Creightons were among the prominent men of Irish extraction in Keokuk at that time. They projected and started to build what developed into the Des Moines-Mississippi Canal. This gave plenty of work to fellow Irishmen for a time.

An academy or "select" school was started in 1853 in Keokuk. Many Irish sent their children there. Among those who paid tuition or contributed money were Mr. I. McCune, \$2,608.10, Mary O'Brien, \$35, and Michael Groghan, \$40 in cash and \$60 worth of cows.

Prominent Irish in Keokuk in the early days included Dr. O'Connor, doctor and druggist, Gregg and Madden, merchandisers, Patrick Gibbons who ran the distillery, and Martin Stafford, who operated the largest steamboat supply store.

In Monroe County the majority of the early Irish came from Pennsylvania or St. Louis by way of Keokuk. Almost all of them worked for a time on railroad construction. Many helped to build the Keokuk-Fort Des Moines Railroad and then bought land at \$1.25 per acre with their wages.

Fort Madison had a few Irish in the 1850's.

Among them was Richard Fahey, a stone mason, who contracted to erect the penitentiary.

By 1856 a large group had located in Chickasaw County. They formed a rural community known as "The Reilly Settlement." Floyd County received Irish families about the same time, while Irish settlements near Independence, Fairbanks and Monti were started in Buchanan County.

Typical of these people were the ten or twelve families who settled at Masonville about 1860. "Often these hardy settlers travelled by team or horseback to attend Mass at Independence, the trip involving two day's time and effort."

The Irish colony of Gilbertville was started in 1854. A number of young men stopped on the Cedar River, liked the location and decided to found a town. A plot of the proposed town and glowing accounts of the advantages and opportunities of the area were sent to various large cities to entice settlers. Gilbertville became for a time the leading town in Black Hawk County. All stages from the east made it a station; freight wagons from Dubuque made it headquarters.

By 1856 the Irish in Des Moines were numerous enough to build a frame church at 6th and Locust Streets. The location was considered to be somewhat out of town at that time. One of the members wrote: "Instead of following the road we would go along the cowpaths through the hazel-brush, as we did not want to meet the Know Nothings."

The first drayman in Des Moines was Michael Kennedy who settled there in 1855. Another early settler was the "generous, good hearted" Michael McTighe. He was a prominent Democrat and member of the City Council. He also operated the well-known Shamrock House on 2nd Street between Vine and Market.

Frequently the Irish and Germans were establishing settlements about the same time. Both located south of the Pella Hollanders on Coal Creek, sometimes called Dutch Ridge. The Irish selected fertile lands and were soon living in comfort. The Germans picked the ridge lands.

In 1849 Colonel Mason of the 6th United States Infantry was ordered to choose a site for a military post on the Upper Des Moines River to protect settlers. He picked a point near Lizzard Creek. The next year Major Samuel Woods was sent to the new post, Fort Clarke, later changed to Fort Dodge. Among the first complement of soldiers were thirty-four Irish.

However, it was not until 1855 that the Irish began to establish homes in northwestern Iowa. In Pocahontas County, Michael and Roger Collins, John and Patrick Calligan, Charles Kelly, Michael Walsh and others started the Lizzard Settlement. At the same time another group was carving out farms in nearby Jackson Township, Webster County.

In 1856 John Rourke, James Maher, Patrick

Conlan and other Irish located at Island Grove in Emmet County. In the southern part of Island Grove was a gang of outlaws. Disguised as Indians, they would make frequent raids on these early settlers. Patrick Conlan was one from whom goods were stolen. He took his revolver and forced them to return the things. They soon left the area.

As early as 1838 Irishmen were entering western Iowa. The first known settler in Fremont County was a bachelor named Flanagan. He also had the dubious distinction of being the first man to die in the county, being murdered for a small sum of money in 1842.

Many of the Irish settlements in this section occurred after the Civil War. Thomas Ryan came to the United States from Tipperary in 1852. In 1867 he was placed in charge of building a section of the Chicago, North Western Railroad across Iowa. Two years later he helped surveyors lay out a town and named it Vail after a railroad official. The early settlers were nearly all from Ireland so Vail soon became the largest Irish community in Crawford County.

Imogene was settled even later. Frugal Irishmen came here as late as the 1880's. Since the farm land around Imogene was rich, they soon amassed considerable wealth. At least as late as 1942 the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in this small community, population

303, annually sponsored an essay contest for high school students. The winner was awarded a scholarship to some leading school.

Many emigrants had fond memories of their homeland and looked forward to reunions when there was enough money to bring loved ones. Pat, an Irishman who worked in the wood market, described to a Dubuque *Herald* reporter his girl friend in Ireland as "a fine, stroppin' goil wus Mary as iver tied a shafe of corn or driv a lump of a pig to market. The divil a bit of harm was in her and she was full of fun as an egg is of mate. She was as straight as a rush wid the complexion of the rose and peaches united in one."