

## The Dutch in Iowa

"Those Dutch are strong people," declared the eminent historian Thomas Carlyle many years ago.

They raised their land out of a marsh, and went on for a long period of time breeding cows and making cheese, and might have gone on with their cows and cheese till doomsday. But Spain comes over and says: "We want you to believe in St. Ignatius." "Very sorry," replied the Dutch, "but we can't." "God! but you *must*," says Spain; and they went about with guns and swords to make the Dutch believe in St. Ignatius. Never made them believe in him, but did succeed in breaking their own vertebral column forever, and raising the Dutch into a great nation.

The emergence of "Brave Little Holland" into a great maritime power has been vividly described by John Lothrop Motley in his *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* in 1856. The success of the Dutch East India Company was fabulous, annual dividends of 25 per cent and more were not uncommon for many years during the seventeenth century. But these profits came largely from the rich spice islands of the eastern hemisphere. The western hemisphere still lay open for exploitation.

Although the first Dutch ships had ventured into American waters as early as 1510, Henry Hudson did not take his *Half Moon* up the lordly



Hudson above present-day Albany until 1609. His objective was the discovery of a passage to China and the Indies. Failing to discover a passage to the western sea, the Dutch carried on profitable trading with the Iroquois. As a result Albany was established in 1624 and New Amsterdam (now New York) the following year. By 1644 New Amsterdam had become a cosmopolitan community in which eighteen languages were spoken; twelve years later the census showed a village of 120 houses and 1,000 inhabitants.

Unfortunately the Dutch soon were clashing with Swedish and English traders. After intense rivalry the English captured New Amsterdam in 1664 and granted it to the Duke of York. The Dutch recaptured New Amsterdam in 1673, but were forced to restore it to the British the following year. The latter promptly renamed it New York.

For more than a century and a half after the fall of New Amsterdam, Dutch immigration to the United States ceased. At last, around 1820, the Dutch again began filtering into the United States. By 1900, the number of Hollanders residing in the United States exceeded 105,000. Of these, over 30,000 lived in Michigan, about 22,000 in Illinois, and nearly 10,000 in Iowa. Thirty thousand more arrived from the Netherlands in the next decade. The total Dutch immigration to the United States between 1820 and 1920 reached nearly 340,000.



The 1930 Census revealed 133,133 Hollanders in the United States, of whom 32,128 lived in Michigan, mostly in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Holland.

The causes of Dutch immigration to America during the nineteenth century were not unlike those of other foreign groups — economic, social, and religious. Heavy taxes, a huge national debt, low wages, and frequent unemployment, when combined with the dense population, caused thousands of discouraged and dissatisfied Hollanders to migrate to America.

The vanguard of the Dutch who arrived in Iowa in August, 1847, was led by Hendrik Peter Scholte. Frequently referred to as the Moses of the Dutch in Iowa, Scholte had gone ahead and secured title to 18,000 acres of land in northeastern Marion County. When his followers arrived they laid out the town of Pella, built log cabins, and began truck farming and dairying. It was not long before their cheese gained a reputation for excellence in the St. Louis market. Meanwhile, Scholte advertised the colony in the Netherlands, and other Hollanders soon joined the Iowa communities.

The first contingent of Dutch who arrived at Pella faced the rigors and hardships of the American frontier courageously. At a time when things looked blackest, they were saved by one of the great movements in American history — the trek



of the Forty-Niners westward across Iowa. As one Dutch farmer recorded:

We sold the trekkers to California all we had, and bought up more from our neighbors who lived farther from the road. We sold a bushel of corn for one dollar, a bushel of oats for one dollar, a bushel of wheat for one dollar, 100 pounds of hay for one dollar, everything for one dollar: that was easy to remember. A yoke of oxen brought from \$50 to \$55; a cow from \$20 to \$25. The trekkers, however, could stand it. Some had cooks and negro servants. A man from Davenport came with 350 head of cattle. He had two more herds of the same size, altogether 1,000 head, on the way.

In the years that followed the Dutch continued to flow into the Pella area. The Iowa census of 1856 revealed 2,112 Hollanders in thirty-one Iowa counties, of whom almost 150 were recorded in Keokuk, the Gate City of Iowa, which had served as a jumping-off-point for the Pella settlement. The Census of 1860 showed Iowa had 2,615 Hollanders; by 1870 there were 4,513, or one-tenth of the total number in the United States.

Land became so expensive around Pella that the Dutch sought out cheap land in northwestern Iowa beyond the frontier. Henry Hospers, after whom a town in Sioux County is named, was the trail-blazer of this group. Hospers began publishing *De Volksvriend* in Orange City in 1874. The Dutch who settled in the Orange City area came from the crowded Pella community and from Wisconsin.



The movement of the Dutch into northwestern Iowa proceeded at a phenomenal rate. As a result the number of Hollanders in Iowa reached a peak of 12,638 by 1915. The Census of 1950 revealed that Iowa ranked sixth in the nation, with 6,078 Hollanders; only Michigan, New York, California, New Jersey, and Illinois had more. The Dutch stood fourth among the foreign elements in Iowa in 1950, the Germans, Danes, and Swedes being more numerous. The number of Dutch-born (1950) and those Iowans of Dutch parentage (1930) follows:

| North Western Counties |                        |                                   | South-Central Counties |                        |                                   |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                        | <i>Dutch-<br/>Born</i> | <i>Dutch-<br/>Parent-<br/>age</i> |                        | <i>Dutch-<br/>Born</i> | <i>Dutch-<br/>Parent-<br/>age</i> |
| Sioux                  | 1,954                  | 8,567                             | Marion                 | 552                    | 2,658                             |
| Lyon                   | 540                    | 2,032                             | Jasper                 | 351                    | 1,757                             |
| O'Brien                | 506                    | 1,667                             | Mahaska                | 340                    | 1,850                             |

The Pella Tulip Festival and the Orange City May Festival are yearly reminders to Iowans of the rich heritage of these sturdy Hollanders who more than a century ago came as strangers to a strange land and have become some of its most valuable citizens. The Dutch have an old proverb which runs: "God made the sea, but we make the shore." The courage, the diligence, and the faith which has lifted this tiny nation to one of giant stature in world history has been exemplified by its resourceful and independent descendants who carved out their homes in the Hawkeye State.

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