

Pioneers in Person

White settlers came into Iowa as the snow falls on the prairies. At first only a few flakes appear, drifting aimlessly with the wind; they eddy about, most of them melting before they become noticeable on the ground. But more flakes fall, faster and faster, until the ground is covered with snow.

It was not until June 1, 1833, that the Iowa country was opened to white settlers and even then by sufferance rather than by official action, but there were white men in the Iowa country long before that — explorers who came to spy out the land and, having seen, drifted back whence they came; casual traders who brought their goods to barter with the Indians, then took their furs or lead and went elsewhere; missionaries in search of converts; a few settlers, who had been granted baronial estates; government officials intent upon affairs of state. Into the land which had held the Indians, first came the French and the Spanish, and finally, after the Louisiana Purchase, the Anglo-Saxons, more aggressive than the French, less tolerant, more land hungry — soldiers, traders, travellers, missionaries, and, above all, settlers.

Best known of the French pioneers in Iowa in 1833 was Antoine Le Claire. Born in what is now Michigan in 1797, Le Claire spent his youth among the French and Indians in the Old Northwest, learning to speak French, English, and a dozen Indian dialects. His intelligence and loyalty as well as his linguistic ability won for him the confidence of both whites and Indians alike and it was Antoine Le Claire who served as interpreter at the Black Hawk Purchase Treaty in 1832. By this treaty Le Claire was given two sections of land in the new purchase.

Le Claire saw possibilities in the new cession, not yet known as Iowa, and in the spring of 1833 he built a small house on the west bank of the Mississippi on the site of the present city of Davenport and became one of the first citizens of Iowa, both in point of time and in influence. He did not cease to be an interpreter but he became also a business man. Soon after he came to Iowa, Le Claire received an appointment as postmaster and justice of the peace.

For almost thirty years, until his death in 1861, Antoine Le Claire was a well-known figure in Davenport and the surrounding country. His swarthy complexion and black eyes were inherited, it may be, from his father, a French-Canadian, friendly to the Americans during the War

of 1812, but more likely from his mother, a grand daughter of a Pottawattamie chief. As the years passed, he became more and more portly, weighing it is said over three hundred pounds, but he never lost his ability to dance, nor his interest in public affairs.

A conscientious Catholic, Le Claire was generous to the churches of his own faith and to those of other denominations as well. More successful financially than most pioneers, he became banker and business man, public official and philanthropist. As his fortune increased he exchanged his plain pioneer home — still standing in Davenport — for a mansion on the bluff, and at his death left his family a considerable fortune. A town in Scott County occupies the grant made to Le Claire by the Indians in 1832 and bears his name.

New lands attract adventurous spirits. To such men distance means little and strange races do not repel. Such a man was George Davenport, one of the influential men on the Iowa frontier in 1833, although his home was on Rock Island and he never became officially a resident of Iowa.

Born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1783, Davenport became a seaman at the age of seventeen: an accident landed him in the Mississippi Valley. While his vessel was in New York harbor in the

summer of 1804, young Davenport fractured a leg when he jumped into a boat to rescue a sailor who had fallen overboard and had to be left behind when the ship sailed. He made friends with a young American officer and enlisted in the American army. At the close of the War of 1812, his term of enlistment having expired, he was employed by a firm supplying the army with provisions. During the construction of Fort Armstrong, he became known to the Indians as "Saganosh" — an Englishman — and taking advantage of their preference, he entered the Indian trade. In this he was unusually successful and at least ten years before the Black Hawk War had trading stations on Iowa rivers, and in 1825 was appointed "Post Master, at Rock Island, Missouri".

During the Black Hawk War, Davenport received the appointment of quarter master general, with the rank of colonel, and soon after the Black Hawk Purchase became effective, he joined some men in founding the city of Davenport. The end of Colonel Davenport's career was indicative of the crime wave on the frontier during the forties, for on July 4, 1845, he was murdered in his home on Rock Island by a band of desperadoes.

The rich lead mines at Dubuque attracted still another class of settlers. True pioneers were these men, bringing pick and shovel. These miners

were a cosmopolitan collection. Lucius H. Langworthy, himself one of those who came to Dubuque as early as 1832, wrote of them in a lecture delivered in 1855: "every considerable nation of Europe and all the States of our Union, were duly represented. The German liberalism, the New England puritanism and the Celtic nationalism mixed and mingled in all the elements of society."

Mining towns have usually been "wide-open" and the settlers at Dubuque's mines in the early thirties were no exception. According to Lucius H. Langworthy "there were but very few men in the whole country who did not indulge in drinking and gambling. 'Poker' and 'brag' were games of common pastime, while the betting often run up to hundreds of dollars at a single sitting . . . Balls and parties were also common and it was not an unfrequent occurrence for one to treat his partner in the dance at the bar, if he did not, he generally performed that delicate and flattering attention to himself. The Sabbath was regarded as a holiday and vice and immorality were prevalent in every form."

On the other hand, Edward Langworthy wrote in his reminiscences of Dubuque: "My experience proves that nowhere has ever such a state of society existed for honesty, integrity, and high toned generosity as was found among the miners in the

early days of mining in this country. No need here for locks to keep out burglars. We had none."

Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the mining community was the variety of types represented. The "tough" was present, but so was the gentleman. Many examples of this latter class are available, but one will illustrate the type. Lucius H. Langworthy was one of four brothers who came to the mining region in the early thirties. His father, a physician, lived originally in Vermont, but moved his family by successive stages to New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Lucius, his second son, was born in 1807. After attending an academy at Jacksonville, Illinois, young Lucius taught school for two years and in 1827 went to Galena to make his fortune in the lead mines. Lucius served in a scout company during the Black Hawk War. With two brothers, he crossed to the Dubuque mines in 1832, was forced to leave during the winter, and returned in the summer of 1833 to make his home at Dubuque until his death in 1865.

Successful in his mining, Lucius H. Langworthy soon became a prominent citizen, serving as sheriff of Dubuque County, director of the Miners' Bank, director of the Dubuque and Sioux City Railroad, and director and later president of the Dubuque

Western Railroad. His contribution to the community included the publication of several articles on railroads and two published lectures on Dubuque history.

The settlers who came into the Iowa country at such places as Davenport and Burlington were, on the whole, more representative of the typical pioneers, less cosmopolitan, showing fewer diverse types. These settlers were more likely to be American born, second generation frontiersmen, coming from States such as Kentucky, Indiana, or Illinois, Commonwealths still in the pioneer stage. As a class, these early pioneers were "rolling stones", of many and diverse occupations, common men taken from the rank and file of American life, temporarily dislodged from homes and occupations, seeking better opportunities, but not always finding them.

At Burlington there was Dr. William R. Ross, who brought a supply of dry goods, groceries, drugs, and medicines to Flint Hills in the summer of 1833. At this time Dr. Ross was not quite twenty-nine. With him came his father, William Ross, a man eighty years of age, who had come to America first as an officer in the British army during the Revolution and had returned to become an American citizen and one of the prominent business men of Lexington, Kentucky. The elder Ross

died in October, 1833, and is said to have been the first white person buried in this part of the Black Hawk Purchase.

Ross, apparently, was never unemployed. He practiced medicine, though rather casually. At one time he is said to have performed an operation with only a pen knife and a razor to lift a fragment of bone which was pressing on the brain. He ran a store and developed one or two farms. In 1834 he became postmaster at Burlington and was authorized to notify the settlers to hold an election. He served as the first clerk of the court and as the first treasurer and recorder of the county. He helped survey the site of Burlington and built a cabin to be used as a schoolhouse. He was admitted to the bar, although he did not practice. He served as clerk in the Wisconsin Territorial legislature at Burlington in 1837-1838 and in 1839 was elected to the House of the Iowa legislature, serving one term. He also served one term in the State legislature in 1850 from Mahaska County.

Nor were Dr. Ross's pioneer activities limited to business and politics. In Kentucky he had joined the Methodist Episcopal Church and almost as soon as he came to Iowa, he wrote to Peter Cartwright asking for a preacher for the new country. In the spring of 1834, Cartwright

sent Barton G. Cartwright, who broke prairie during the week and preached on Sundays. Peter Cartwright himself came to Burlington that spring to hold a two-day meeting in the pasture on Ross's farm, organized a Methodist class of six members, and appointed Dr. Ross class leader. It was Dr. Ross who donated the lots for "Old Zion Church", at a cost of a hundred dollars. He also dug the foundation of the church and served as trustee. Well may Dr. Ross be called a pioneer.

There were women, too, among the settlers, chiefly wives and daughters, who braved the hardships of the frontier. Many of them had been born on the frontier. There were, however, women who came from the Atlantic coast or from Europe. An obituary of a Mrs. John G. Bosch gives the information that she was born in Wurttemberg in 1810, came to Florida in 1825, and to Flint Hills in 1832, where she was married to her first husband, Francis T. Bercht.

The story of Louisa Massey and her attempt to avenge one brother's murder and protect another is well known. The rash but heroic act of this young woman gave her name to one of the counties of Iowa. Mrs. Noble F. Dean, said to be the first white woman at the Dubuque settlement, crossed the Mississippi in the fall of 1832. Mrs. Dean, it appears, was leaven of better things for

in 1834 we find her one of the founders of a Sunday School at Dubuque.

The frontier was not without its share of "cranks", men who had failed to adjust their lives to society, and, perhaps, hoped that in a new country they could overcome this lack. Almost always they were unsuccessful, for pioneer conditions were not a favorable environment for those who were mentally unstable or misfits in the social order.

One of these peculiar characters was Thomas Kelly who came to Dubuque among the pre-treaty miners of 1832. Locating a claim on what came to be called Kelly's Bluff, he devoted himself to digging, indifferent alike to the need of friends and the attractions of the saloons. After some fifteen years of hermit life, he loaded a barge with lead and shipped it down the river, after having insured the cargo for \$10,000. It is generally believed that the lead was lost at sea. At all events, Kelly disappeared for several years. Some say he went east to collect his insurance and while there was confined in an insane asylum. In 1854, however, he returned to Dubuque and went to work in his mine, as much a hermit as before. He was reputed to be very wealthy, but when he died in 1869 only \$10,000 in money was found and his real estate was worth about \$8500. Legend says

that most of the hoarded treasure of the old recluse has not yet been discovered.

Nor was the collection of 1833 pioneers lacking in still another element — the anti-social individuals who relied upon the lack of laws and courts to pursue their criminal careers or at least to commit crimes. Best known of these, perhaps, is Patrick O'Connor, native of Ireland by birth and miner at Dubuque by occupation, as early as 1832, who shot and killed his partner because he insisted on being admitted to the cabin shared by the two men. O'Connor admitted the killing but pointed out that there were no laws west of the river and defiantly asked what the miners were going to do about it. Their answer was an extra legal trial, and a month later an extra legal hanging.

Another early settler who seems to have been extremely unpopular was Alexander Hood. The antecedents of this pioneer who came into the Half-breed Tract about 1831 are unknown. He married Louisa Muir, a daughter of Dr. Samuel C. Muir and his Indian wife, possibly because he coveted her share in the Half-breed Tract, and seems to have been as unsatisfactory as a husband as he was as a citizen. At one time he came to the home of Isaac R. Campbell late at night in an intoxicated condition and demanded that Mr. Campbell get up. When he failed to do so

quickly, Hood went up to the bed and attempted to stab Campbell, very narrowly missing a small child. Campbell struck Hood with his rifle and nearly killed him. A message was sent to Captain Browne of the Dragoons asking that he send a surgeon, but the officer is said to have replied profanely that he would not, adding that Campbell should have killed him if he did not. Hood was later whipped at Warsaw, Illinois, for wounding a man, but his later life and his death are unrecorded or at least undiscovered.

The "crank" and the "bad man", however, were not representative of the men who came to Iowa in 1833. A composite picture of the pioneers at that time would reveal a man between twenty and forty years of age, American born, of a reputable and ambitious family, coming to Iowa from a nearby State, frequently a farmer by occupation. Although many of these men were married, they were mobile, moving easily from place to place, liking new enterprises. To some, change had become a habit. Like a child choosing toys in a large toy shop, many of them saw opportunities on every side, but were too bewildered to choose wisely.

These men were, almost without exception, versatile. The same man might be farmer and business man, manufacturer and miner, city plan-

ner and operator of some means of transportation, politician and justice of the peace. Torn from their religious and educational moorings, they yet brought with them an ideal which soon created these agencies anew. And so it was that the pioneers of 1833 laid the foundations and outlined the pattern of the industrial, social, and religious life of Iowa as it is in 1933.

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