

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## Land of Enchantment

Few sections of the United States can match in scenic beauty the magnificent vistas of the Father of Waters as one travels along the Great River Road from Dubuque through Clayton and Allamakee counties. In spring and in summer, in winter and fall, the four seasons bring with them an ever-changing panorama marked by long vistas, enchanting valleys, gurgling streams and rivulets, thickly wooded forests and sylvan dells, towering bluffs and fantastically carved minarets. There are stretches of highways in which one travels through deep solitude broken occasionally by a dairy farm or secluded fisherman's shack.

Little wonder that a drive through this colorful hinterland (from the lead mines of picturesque Dubuque along the towering bluffs hemming in such quaint towns as North Buena Vista, Guttenberg, Clayton, McGregor, Harpers Ferry, Lansing, and New Albin) should engrave on memories as well as on maps that this is indeed the land of the Great River Road.

But the Great River Road is more than a highway of beauty; it is also a highway of history. And Iowa history has its beginnings in northeastern Iowa. Clayton County has the distinction of being the first section of Iowa viewed by the white man. It was on June 17, 1673, that Joliet and Marquette and their five French companions paddled out of the mouth of the Wisconsin River and into the broad expanse of the Mississippi two miles below present-day McGregor. As they turned their canoes downstream, the intrepid Frenchmen noted on their right "a large Chain of very high Mountains" while on their left they observed the Mississippi was "Divided by Islands." The view from Pike's Peak today bears out the accuracy of this earliest description of Iowa by the white man.

A score of shadowy Frenchmen, among them Aco, Hennepin, Perrot, LeSueur, and Lahontan, have left a record of their association with the northeastern section of Iowa. They were followed by such men as Jonathan Carver and Peter Pond, two Connecticut Yankees who were probably the first known Americans to tread the soil of Clayton and Allamakee counties, when the area belonged to Spain. Both men were still subjects of King George III, but their arrival on the eve of the American Revolution—Carver in 1766-1768 and Pond in 1773—occurred during the Spanish regime in Iowa. In 1800 Basil Giard was granted the third and northernmost Spanish Land Grant in

Iowa by the Spanish Government. Embracing a portion of present-day McGregor, the Giard Tract extended inward a half-dozen miles and is commemorated today in the little community of Giard, on U. S. Highway 18.

The land west of the Mississippi, including Clayton and Allamakee counties, became a part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. In the years that followed, a score of Americans wrote their impressions of the area. Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike selected the Pike's Peak area as a good place to erect a fort because it would command both the Mississippi and the Wisconsin rivers. His superiors in the United States Army, unfortunately, chose a less favorable location at present-day Prairie du Chien, a spot that from its very inception was plagued by floods. Colonel Zachary Taylor was intimately associated with the area, and Lieutenant Jefferson Davis directed the operations of the sawmill on the Yellow River from which logs and lumber were produced for the construction of the second Fort Crawford.

Into this land of enchantment and history came Jesse Clement in 1859 to record what he saw in Clayton and Allamakee counties and to publish his findings in the *Dubuque Times*. The accuracy of his "Gleanings" and his forecast for future growth can be demonstrated by the following census figures taken from *The Iowa State Almanac and Statistical Register for 1860*:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Allamakee</i>	<i>Clayton</i>
1838		274
1840		1,044
1844		1,200
1846		1,500
1847		2,176
1849	277	3,000
1850	777	3,873
1851	1,300	5,000
1852	2,000	6,318
1854	4,266	9,337
1856	7,709	15,187
1859	10,843	18,669
1960	15,982	21,962

Aside from the factor of geography, the main reason for this difference in growth is the fact that settlers commenced trickling into the northern portion of the Black Hawk Purchase after June 1, 1833. This included virtually all of Clayton County and only a tiny fragment of Allamakee County, most of the latter county not being open to settlement until the Treaty of 1846 and subsequent removal of the Winnebago Indians from their home in the Neutral Ground in 1848. Thus, fifteen years elapsed from the time the first settlers began moving into Clayton County (1833) and those entering Allamakee County (1848).

Since Jesse Clement visited Clayton and Allamakee counties in 1859, it is not surprising that

the wide disparity in population — 18,669 for Clayton compared with 10,483 for Allamakee— should be reflected in the economic, educational, religious, and cultural growth of the two counties.

Because of their rugged terrain, the population of Clayton and Allamakee counties has never been large, yet the number of towns established by 1859 is utterly amazing. Jesse Clement visited the major towns and a few of the smaller mushroom communities that had sprung up. The following list of post offices in existence when Clement passed through in 1859 stands in sharp contrast to those still remaining a century later in 1964.

<i>Allamakee</i>		<i>Clayton</i>	
1859	1964	1859	1964
Allamakee	Dorchester	Cass	Clayton
Capoli	Harpers Ferry	Clayton	Edgewood
Clear Creek	Lansing	Communia	Elkader
Cleveland	New Albin	Cox Creek	Elkport
Dorchester	Postville	Elkader	Farmersburg
Elon	Waterville	Elkport	Garber
French Creek	Waukon	Farmersburgh	Garnavillo
Hardin	<hr/>	Garnavillo	Guttenberg
Ion	<u>1859 cont.</u>	Gem	Littleport
Lansing	Rossville	Giard	Luana
Lybrand	Union Prairie	Grand Meadow	McGregor
Lycurgus	Village Creek	Guttenburgh	Marquette
Makee	Volney	Highland	Monona
New Galena	Waterville	High Grove	North Buena Vista
Nezeka	Waukon	Honey Creek	Saint Olaf
Ossian	Wexford	Little Port	Strawberry Point
Postville	Wilson's Ford	Locust Hill	Volga

*Clayton*

1859	
McGregor	<u>1859 cont.</u>
Milville	<u>          </u>
Monona	Read
National	Spencer
New Stand	Strawberry Point
Panther Creek	Volga City
Peck's Ferry	Yankee Settlement

A statistical comparison between Allamakee and Clayton counties reveals their growth to 1859:

	<i>Allamakee</i>	<i>Clayton</i>
Acres of Land	390,986	474,298
Value per Acre	3.79	5.18
Value of Land	1,483,008	2,456,818
Town Property	146,970	537,731
Personal Property	337,921	772,963
Total Valuation	1,967,899	3,767,512
State Tax at 1½ mills	2,951.84	6,651.26

It was from such promising beginnings a century ago that Clayton and Allamakee counties have emerged and become two of the most prized counties in Iowa—rich in farmland, rich in scenery, rich in history, and rich in those elements that lend themselves to an abundant, a happy, and a contented life. Lucky is he who dwells in the Little Switzerland of Iowa. Lucky, also, is he who has the opportunity to travel the highways and byways of this fair Elysium.

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