

Frontiers of the Pioneers

Between 1790 and 1890 the Federal Census located eleven shifting frontier lines in the United States. This "cutting edge" of civilization has been defined as a region where, at a given time, the pioneering process was actually going on. These frontier lines were drawn through regions having only two to six inhabitants per square mile. In other words, the area with less than two people per square mile lay beyond the frontier.

Five of these American frontier lines passed through Iowa — 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870. The first line barely impinged on the Half-breed Tract in present-day Lee County where a handful of squatters were engaged in the pioneer labor of breaking land and building homes on a log cabin frontier. Forty years later the westward march of empire had pushed the frontier line to northwestern Iowa, where it lingered but a moment in the sod house frontier, and then spilled over into the Dakotas.

The discoverer and explorer, the Indian and the fur-trader, the missionary and the soldier are symbols of Iowa's earliest frontier. These were followed by those sturdy pioneers — the farmers — who were the mainsprings in the westward move-

ment, particularly across the fertile prairies of Iowa. The land agent and the land speculator; the church, the school, and the theater; the steamboat, the stagecoach, and the railroad; the lead miner and the miller, the blacksmith and the gunsmith, the doctor and the lawyer — these are but a few of the many personalities and processes at work in pioneer Iowa. The beginnings of state and local history spring from these five frontiers of the Hawkeye State.

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