# Iowa Anecdote

## APPLIED NAMES

Pioneers in the conquest of a new country are likely to be indifferent to the rules of etymology. They regard the names of persons and places as purely utilitarian devices of distinction. Neither derivation nor orthography receive much consideration. Usage is the principal criterion of propriety. A boy christened Alexander may be called Joe. Immigrants often Americanized their surnames by simplifying the spelling or dropping syllables.

Typical of the freedom characteristic of pioneer name-changing was the experience of John Skrable — immigrant, banker, and honored citizen of Tama County. Born in Austria-Hungary, he was christened Martin Skrabal. As Martin, he accompanied the family to America in 1855 and helped settle on a farm near the town of Redman in Tama County.

The Skrabals, being newcomers, knew little English. Martin knew none at all. Anxious to learn the language of the community, the boy went to school. Utterly bewildered, he sat through part of the first day listening hopefully, but with-

out comprehension, to the inexplicable jargon around him. He knew no English, and the teacher knew nothing else.

Noon recess brought relief. John Graham, five-year-old son of the founder of Redman, approached the strange boy.

"What is your name?" he asked.

Martin, not understanding, shrugged his shoulders and nodded in a friendly manner. Repetition of the the question brought no better results.

Little John Graham looked at his new playmate for a moment, and then said, "Well, I'll just call you John, too." And then he began "learning him American".

Years later, Martin Skrabal was still "John" to all his friends. He liked the name, and substituted it for his own. At the same time, common spelling of his surname caused him to change it to Skrable. And so, as John Skrable, he entered upon a successful business career in the neighborhood town of Elberon. As John Skrable he lived in his adopted country and in death he carried his adopted name to his grave.

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