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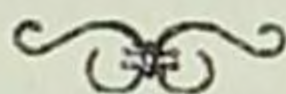
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From Many Lands

In 1840 the population of the Territory of Iowa, which was only two years old, numbered 43,112. A century later more than two and one-half million people lived within the state's boundaries. "Whence came all these people?" to quote an early observer of American life. The same person provides the answer to this question: "They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes." For Iowa one should add the Danes, Norwegians, Italians, Bohemians, Hungarians — in fact, almost every nationality of the world. The concept of the United States as a great melting pot for all races and nationalities has been repeated in Iowa on a somewhat smaller but no less complex scale.

Iowa has had many close associations with foreigners from earliest days. The first white men to set eyes on this land were Frenchmen, Joliet and Marquette. However, it was not until 1833 that permanent settlement began. Not a single permanent settlement was made during the 130

years covering the French and Spanish periods of Iowa history.

The tide of emigrants came first chiefly from Western Europe, the British Isles and British possessions in the Western Hemisphere. Although we may not be sure how fast this early tide of emigration rose, we do know that there were 20,969 foreign born persons in Iowa by 1850. This amounted to 10.9 percent of the total population. The peak was reached in 1890 when more than one out of every six Iowans was born in a foreign country. For another twenty years more than ten percent were foreign born. Even in the census of 1950, Iowa's population included 84,582 foreign born residents.

The first concentrations of foreigners in Iowa were usually in the more settled areas, especially along the Mississippi River, the Iowa River and the eastern half of the Iowa-Minnesota boundary. By 1860 Dubuque County led all others numerically and on the basis of percentages; foreigners numbered 12,958 or 41.5 percent of the total population. Other counties having more than 5,000 from the old country included Clayton, Clinton, Lee, Scott and Winneshiek. At the extreme northwest part of the state one could find few, if any, who had braved the tortuous voyage across the Atlantic, avoided the many pitfalls of the port cities like New York, found their way a thousand miles or more across the United States and tried

to gain a living from the tough virgin soil. For instance, there were only three families from Ireland and four from Norway in Emmett County in 1860.

During the next thirty years the number of foreign born in Iowa had tripled, to 324,920 or 16.9 percent of the total. By 1890 seventy-six of the counties had undergone increases. Thirty-five had more than twenty percent from foreign countries. Scott County had the greatest number with 13,208 although Dubuque and Woodbury counties were not far behind. With a greater emphasis on settling northwest Iowa, there was a comparable increase in that area while the percentage of immigrants in eastern Iowa became less.

For instance, Audubon County had only twenty-six foreigners in 1860. By 1890 large numbers of Germans and Danes brought the total to 2,345. Buena Vista had only one foreigner in 1860 but 3,547 in 1890. They were mostly Germans, Swedes, and Danes. Irishmen made up the principal group that caused an increase from twenty-one to 1,853 in Greene County while the Dutch accounted for more than half the increase, from none to 6,220 in Sioux County.

In the next three decades, 1890-1920, foreigners in Iowa decreased by approximately 100,000 while the overall population increased by twenty-five percent. Numerically, Polk County was in the lead with 13,603 while Sioux County had the largest percentage of foreign

born — 22.1. Even so, the census enumerators reported increases in a number of cases due to the larger and later influx of Russians, Italians, and Bohemians.

In 1920 the foreign born in Iowa were made up largely of those who had emigrated from home by 1900 or earlier. Fully 60.3 percent were in this group whereas 14.7 percent emigrated from 1901 to 1910 and 10.5 percent from 1911 to 1919. Some 14.5 percent did not report when they had emigrated.

By 1950 restrictions on immigration and lack of opportunities in Iowa for cheap land or industrial work began to have an effect. The number of foreign born was slightly more than 84,000 or only 3.2 percent of the total population. Thus, the state as a whole was back to the level which eight agricultural counties in south central Iowa had maintained throughout the century. Only ten counties could show more than five percent whose native lands were other than the United States. As might be expected, Polk County had the largest number, but that amounted to only 7,481 by 1950.