

## In Search of a New Home

To become an emigrant there must be some strong impelling force. The thought of venturing from one's home where his family had lived for centuries, crossing an ocean which might take weeks, and entering a new world lacking many of the refinements which were to come later must have caused many to consider carefully the great step they were undertaking.

The causes of emigration included bad weather, poor crops, meagre returns from the land, small wages, famine, religious persecution, political oppression and compulsory military service. The motives were the prospects of material betterment, personal independence, the spirit of adventure and curiosity. Other factors which had an effect on immigration were the efforts of steamship and railroad companies, emigrant agents and American consuls to spread the good word about the United States. The broad distribution of emigrant guidebooks and other literature, letters from successful settlers and financial inducements from relatives and friends also helped.

During the first half of the nineteenth century several efforts were made to point out the advantages of Iowa as a new homeland. These

included "A Description of the United States Lands in Iowa," by Jesse Williams, published in 1840, and "A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846; or The Emigrant's Guide," by J. B. Newhall.

Bishop Loras of Dubuque was still another who did much to bring new citizens to Iowa. Whenever he found a group coming to the United States that he thought would be useful to Iowa, he ardently encouraged their immigration. To do this he repeatedly wrote letters to the Boston *Pilot* and other journals in which he invited people of the eastern states and European countries "to come west and make their homes in Iowa."

After the Civil War many Iowans felt that greater efforts should be made to encourage immigration to the state. It was said that Iowa was "not advertised enough." Emigrant guidebooks and pamphlets, emigrant agents and a board of immigration were badly needed in order to compete with other midwestern states. "How much longer," queried one, "are we going to sleep on in our shiftlessness?"

In urging the appointment of an immigration bureau, the preparation of publicity and the taking of other actions, the editor of the Des Moines *Iowa State Register* asked, "How long shall we continue to whistle away our opportunities?"

In another editorial in 1860 he wrote, "The plain fact of the business is, Iowa is not trying to lead immigrants to her borders. . . . It is about

time for us to open wide our gates and advertise our superiorities the world over. . . . Can't we wake up a little?"

Articles about the natural resources, early establishment, industrial opportunities, transportation facilities and other aspects of the various counties appeared frequently in the newspapers. Iowans were urged: "Support your home papers liberally, subscribe for extra copies, send them broadcast through the East and into the Old World . . . and you will find that Iowa, before another ten years . . . will . . . wear the proud chaplet of the richest agricultural State in the Union."

In 1870 the General Assembly responded to the many appeals. A Board of Immigration, consisting of the Governor and one member from each of the six Congressional districts, was created. The Board was authorized to send agents to the eastern states and to Europe to aid immigration to Iowa.

This was a short-lived activity, however. Before long, information about the opportunities in Iowa had to come again from other sources — unofficial spokesmen who encouraged the migration of others from their native lands, non-official guidebooks, the various publications of the United States government and the other means that had been effective in the past.

For instance, American Consuls throughout

Europe had much to do with encouraging emigration and answering questions of would-be emigrants. In 1870 Benjamin Moran at the London Consulate wrote to many inquirers that Iowa, among other Midwest states, would be excellent for anyone who wished to pursue farming in the United States. This section of the country offered the "greatest inducements" to agricultural laborers.

The Consul in Switzerland asked for a map of the United States to hang on the wall. Then he could point out their future homes to intending emigrants. Most Consuls distributed reports of the Land Office, the monthly reports of the Department of Agriculture and other government and non-government publications which would provide information about various sections of the United States.

The effectiveness of the appeals to emigrate is best illustrated by the fact that very few returned to their native countries to live and then usually because of health or other special reasons. They often revisited their homelands in the winter when there was little work on the farms. And almost as often, they came back to the United States with another group of new settlers.