18. Iowa Settlement Fever

Now let's spend some time on what may have been another important reason why Heinrich and Maria left Cincinnati: Iowa settlement fever. The essay we will look at is very long, but very important to help us understand how our ancestors came to choose to move to Iowa. We will remember that settlement started in Iowa only about 20 years before my grandparents moved there. Before that it was just frontier. We also seldom think about the importance of lead mining in the development of Iowa, because we think of the state as only agricultural. And we have already briefly discussed the importance of the Black Hawk Purchase in 1832, 22 years before Heinrich and Maria moved to Iowa. But it is hard to believe the rapidity with which the state was settled once it opened up. If you do not want to read the entire essay, here are several pivotal and astonishing quotes:

- During the two years from 1854 to 1856 there was an increase of more than one hundred and ninety thousand in Iowa's population. That is, the number of settlers who came during those two years almost equaled the total population of the State in 1850. Our ancestors were among these new settlers.
- "The immigration into Iowa the present season is astonishing and unprecedented' ", writes Mr. Clark quoting from an account published in an eastern journal in June 1854. "For miles and miles, day after day, the prairies of Illinois are lined with cattle and wagons, pushing on toward this prosperous State. At a point beyond Peoria, during a single month, seventeen hundred and forty-three wagons had passed, and all for Iowa. During the fall and early winter of 1854 there was an almost uninterrupted procession of immigrants crossing the ferries at Prairie du Chien, McGregor, Dubuque, Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk. Sometimes they had to wait in camp two or three days for their turn to cross. This was, of course, the very year Heinrich and Maria moved, and they would have been in the vanguard of this emigration if they took their journey in very early spring.
- On June 29, 1839, it was reported in *Niles' Register* that one of the citizens of Cincinnati had just returned from a tour of Iowa and had stated that the prospects for an exceptional harvest were the best he had ever seen anywhere. There were many similar newspaper reports that Heinrich and Maria would have seen in the years leading up to their move.
- These inducements combined with a fatal epidemic of cholera in the middle States and a severe drought throughout the Ohio Valley during the summer of 1854 brought home seekers to Iowa by the thousands, particularly during the years 1854 to 1856.

The American Occupation of Iowa 1833 to 1860 in *Iowa Journal of History & Politics*.

The purpose of this paper is to summarize the settlement of Iowa between the years 1833 and 1860. An examination of the maps of settlement which accompany the census reports published by the United States government will show that by the latter year the territory included within the present boundaries of Iowa had been occupied with the exception of a portion, somewhat triangular in shape, in the northwest. Even here islands of settlements are shown in the uncolored area and a colored line extending up the Missouri indicates that the population had reached the southeastern corner of the present State of South Dakota. On the other hand there were comparatively few white settlers within the present boundaries of the State before 1833. It had been crossed by explorers, however, some of whom had declared it unfit for habitation, and a few French and American traders had built trading posts along its eastern border. These may be considered briefly before taking up the subject of actual settlement.

But the earliest white settlements were not made in that part of the State through which Kearny passed. The best known among the early French residents of the territory of Iowa and perhaps the first white man to settle within the present boundaries of the State was the French-Canadian, Julien Dubuque. He won favor with the chief of the Fox Indians, and in September 1788, received from his friendly leader a claim to about one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land extending along the western bank of the Mississippi and including the site where the present city of Dubuque is located. This is said to have been the "first conveyance of Iowa soil to the whites, by the Indians". Dubuque had already examined the country included in this cession and had concluded that lead mining could be profitably conducted. The actual work in the mines was done by Indian women and by old men of the Fox tribe whom Dubuque employed for the purpose, but he brought ten Canadians from Prairie du Chien to assist him in superintending and directing operations.

But Dubuque did not confine himself to mining. Farms were cleared and fenced, houses were erected and a mill opened. A smelting furnace was constructed on a point now known as Dubuque Bluff. He opened a store and exchanged goods with the Indians for furs. Twice each year his boats went to St. Louis loaded with ore, furs, and hides, and returned with goods, supplies, and money. These semi-annual trips became important events at St. Louis, and he was recognized as one of the largest traders in the Upper Mississippi Valley. For twenty-two years, until his death in 1810, Dubuque and his Canadian countrymen lived among the Indians, worked the mines and carried on trade, and his headquarters became widely known as the "Mines of Spain".

After Dubuque's death the Indians took possession of the mines, expelling the whites and evidently working them at intervals during the next twenty years. In the latter part of the third decade of the nineteenth century the lead mines in northern Illinois and in southwestern Wisconsin attracted settlers by the thousands. Among these enthusiasts was a New Englander by the name of James L. Langworthy. Having explored the old "Mines of Spain," he brought a company of operators to the west bank of the Mississippi in 1830, and again the white men began to smelt lead ore in the land once claimed by Dubuque. The new mining camp soon attracted settlers from the east bank of the Mississippi. The settlement of these squatters west of the river was in violation of the treaty compacts between the United States and the Indian tribes, and the government was soon requested to remove the intruders. Accordingly, troops were sent over in 1831, the settlers were driven back to the east bank of the river, and a detachment was left at the mines to protect the Indians against further intrusion.

In 1832 the Black Hawk Purchase was concluded. By this the United States secured from the Indians the cession of a strip of territory about fifty miles wide extending along the western bank of the Mississippi from the northern boundary of Missouri to the vicinity of a parallel running through Prairie du Chien. The acquisition of this territory marks the real beginning of white settlements in Iowa. Not until several years later, however, when land sales were held, were the occupants able to procure actual title to the soil, but the mere absence of a title was not enough to check the advance of the frontiersmen. They came in large numbers, selecting the most advantageous sites along the rivers which flowed into the Mississippi. Burlington, Sandusky, and Fort Madison were occupied by white settlers during 1833. Into the Indian village of "Puck-e-she-tuk" whites had come as early as 1830. A school had been established there by 1833, possibly three years earlier. In 1835 the name was changed to Keokuk. The strip included in the purchase had been divided into two counties. The territory north of the Iowa River was organized as Dubuque County, while the part of the purchase south of that stream was known as Des Moines County. At first these counties were attached to

Michigan for governmental purposes but when that Territory was admitted to Statehood they were annexed to Wisconsin.

By the spring of 1836 the frontier had been extended to Round Prairie in Jefferson County.[11] During that same year pioneers were exploring the valley of the Iowa River in the vicinity of Iowa City selecting claims and building cabins. During the following year they brought their families and induced others to migrate with them from Indiana into this most western country. In 1839 Iowa City was laid out and became the capital of the newly created Territory. To guide immigrants who were moving west and to encourage them to move into the village capital one Lyman Dillion was employed to plow a furrow between Iowa City and Dubuque, a distance of a hundred miles. By the beginning of 1840 twenty families had settled at the former place.

The population of Iowa in 1836 was estimated at 10,531 and the number had increased to 22,859 by 1838. By 1840, according to the census of that year, there were more than 43,000 people living in the Territory. This means that from 1836 to 1840 the population practically doubled every two years — in fact it more than doubled during the first two. A glance at the census map showing the population of the United States in 1840 indicates that the southern part of the Black Hawk Purchase had been pretty completely occupied, and that the frontier line of settlement approached the Mississippi as it extended northward from Missouri's northern boundary, finally touching that river in the vicinity of the forty-third parallel.

This rapid growth was due in part doubtless to the advertising which Iowa received in the press. In March 1839, a correspondent in the *Buffalo Journal* had declared "that taking into consideration the soil, the timber, the water, and the climate, Iowa territory may be considered the best part of the Mississippi Valley. The Indians so consider it, as appears from the name which they gave it. For it is said that the Sioux [Sac] and Fox Indians, on beholding the exceeding beauties of this region, held up their hands, and exclaimed in an ecstasy of delight and amazement, I-O-W-A, which in the Fox language means, 'this is the land.' On June 29, 1839, it was reported in *Niles' Register* that one of the citizens of Cincinnati had just returned from a tour of Iowa and had stated that the prospects for an exceptional harvest were the best he had ever seen anywhere. During the fall of this same year the public land sales in Iowa City alone were at the rate of about five thousand dollars a day. Those lots fronting the public square where the State House was to be erected brought from four to six hundred dollars each. In Burlington, the proceeds of the first four days of the sale in 1840 amounted to nearly seventy-six thousand dollars. The *Chillicothe Ohio Gazette* reported in May 1840, that between one and two hundred people were leaving that city to settle "near the centre of what will probably be the capital of Iowa, at the head of navigation on the Des Moines River." The *Burlington Gazette* in the fall of 1840 stated that "the health of Iowa territory is, thus far this season, universally good. The crops of wheat, rye and oats have been as abundant as usual, and the crop of corn will be very large."

These comments with scores of others like them played no small part in directing the attention of home seekers to Iowa. As the number of immigrants increased in the Black Hawk Purchase and as the pressure of white settlers against the Indian Territory along the western border of this strip became greater, it proved necessary to draw up additional treaties with the Indians in order to open more territory to the covetous frontiersmen. In 1837 and again in 1842 treaties were concluded with the Sac and Fox Indians by which the entire central and south-central parts of Iowa were thrown open to white settlers, except a strip about sixty-five or seventy miles wide along the western border of the territory.[22] By the terms of the latter treaty the Indians were given until the first of May, 1843, to yield possession of the eastern half of the cession, and three years in which to surrender the western half.

This condition did not prevent the Americans from exploring the country during the interval, but army officers patrolled the territory to check any attempt which the former might make to run lines or to mark off claims. The new acquisition was well known to the frontiersmen therefore when on April 30, 1843, men who had gathered along the border of the unoccupied Indian country waited and listened for the discharge of firearms which would announce the hour of midnight and the time that formally opened the land to settlers. Between midnight of April 30th and sundown of May 1st, it is said that at least a thousand settlers staked their claims within the boundaries of Wapello County alone. Ottumwa on the Des Moines was surveyed at once, and about four hundred lots were laid out. Eddyville, Agency City, and Dahlonega also sprang up overnight as it were. Not only was the land along the rivers taken up by these immigrants, but they began to occupy the intervening spaces between the streams. Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Missouri furnished most of the population, but there were settlers who came from Wisconsin, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.

In order to protect the occupants from Indian depredations and to prevent the encroachment of the whites on Indian lands, Fort Des Moines was built in 1843 near the frontier. The rapid influx of settlers produced increasing dissatisfaction among the red men along the border as a result of which, six years later, Fort Clark was erected farther west on the Des Moines River. The name was later changed to Fort Dodge, and in 1853 the troops were moved from Fort Dodge still farther north to Fort Ridgely on the Minnesota River. During the following year the town of Fort Dodge was laid out and became the distributing center for northwestern Iowa.

The United States census reports show that nearly one hundred and fifty thousand people moved into Iowa during the decade ending in 1850. These immigrants, as shown by the maps accompanying the reports, had occupied the eastern and southern parts of the State, with the exception of a very small area in the extreme northeastern corner and a circle around the present town of Quincy near the center of Adams County in the southwest. The entire north and northwestern parts of the State were still unoccupied. The decade beginning in 1850 was to witness a migrating tide which was to sweep over the waste places of the State and to inundate the valleys and hills with more than sufficient human energy to build up a Commonwealth of the first rank.

There were several things which encouraged migration during this period. Railroad lines had been completed to the Mississippi, and so the eastern border of Iowa was easily reached. It was during this decade also that the railroads began advertising western lands. Land speculators and land companies offered inducements which appeared most alluring to the land hungry men of the more densely populated areas farther east. Guides for emigrants were published in great quantities, and articles "containing glowing accounts of the beauty, advantages, and fertility of the Iowa country appeared in hundreds of Eastern newspapers until the name 'Iowa' became a household word; and those who were so fortunate as already to own a home in that far-famed State wrote enthusiastic letters to their relatives and former neighbors urging them to come and share in their prosperity."

These inducements combined with a fatal epidemic of cholera in the middle States and a severe drought throughout the Ohio Valley during the summer of 1854 brought home seekers to Iowa by the thousands, particularly during the years 1854 to 1856. "The immigration into Iowa the present season is astonishing and unprecedented' ", writes Mr. Clark quoting from an account published in an eastern journal in June 1854. "For miles and miles, day after day, the prairies of Illinois are lined with cattle and wagons, pushing on toward this prosperous State. At a point beyond Peoria, during a single month, seventeen hundred and forty-three wagons had passed, and all for Iowa. Allowing five persons to a wagon, which is a fair average, would give 8715 souls to the population.'" "Commenting

on this statement," continues Mr. Clark, "an Iowa City editor added: 'This being but the immigration of the month, and upon one route out of many, it would not be an unreasonable assertion to say that 50,000 men, women, and children will have come into this State by the first of December, reckoning from the 1st of September.'

During the fall and early winter of 1854 there was an almost uninterrupted procession of immigrants crossing the ferries at Prairie du Chien, McGregor, Dubuque, Burlington, Davenport, and Keokuk. Sometimes they had to wait in camp two or three days for their turn to cross. It was estimated that twenty thousand people crossed the ferry at Burlington in thirty days, and at the end of that period the number increased to six or seven hundred a day. About one wagon in a hundred was marked Nebraska, the others were to halt in Iowa. And even at Keokuk such large numbers of settlers came in by boat that a journalist was led to say that 'by the side of this exodus, that of the Israelites becomes an insignificant item, and the greater migrations of later times are scarcely to be mentioned.' It was said that one thousand people from Richland County, Ohio, alone, came to Iowa that fall; while long double-header trains brought into Chicago thousands of home seekers every week.

In 1855 the number of people seeking homes in Iowa apparently increased. The report of the land office for the year ending June 30, 1855, shows that more than three and a quarter million acres of public lands had been occupied. With the exception of Missouri this was more than double the amount sold in any other State in the Upper Mississippi Valley during the year indicated. The land offices within the State found it impossible to keep up with their work. p99 At the Decorah land office in northeastern Iowa " 'the rush was so great that the crowd would fill up the passageway to the office at night and stand on their feet till morning, in order to be first in. Some froze their toes and some their feet waiting for the office to open.' Finally, the scheme of drawing numbers for turns was hit upon, and since the land office could attend to only a certain number of purchases per day, those who drew large numbers betook themselves to their homes and returned a month or two later in time to take their turns.

During the two years from 1854 to 1856 there was an increase of more than one hundred and ninety thousand in Iowa's population. That is, the number of settlers who came during those two years almost equaled the total population of the State in 1850. "Seek whatever thoroughfare you may and you will find it lined with emigrant wagons. In many instances large droves of stock of a superior quality are met with. On our last days drive . . . . we met 69 covered wagons seeking a home in the valley of the Des Moines." "The Immigration to Iowa this season [1855] is immense far exceeding the unprecedented immigration of last year, and only to be appreciated by one who travels through the country as we are doing, and finds the roads everywhere lined with movers." The steam ferry at Rock Island running one hundred trips a day was not able to accommodate the traffic.

A brief summary of the growth of the population of Iowa and of the rapid shifting of her frontier line during the period covered will make a suitable conclusion to this cursory study of the settlement of the State. We have seen that the population in 1836 was estimated at 10,531, and that this number had increased to 22,859 in 1838. The census of 1840 gives the Territory a population of 43,112. Ten years later there were 192,214 inhabitants in Iowa. In 1860 the total population was 674,913. This gives the average annual number of immigrants during the period from 1840 to 1850 at a little less than 15,000, but this figure increased to more than 48,000 for the decade ending in 1860. Such rapid growth in the Territory's population during these twenty years produced an almost constant shifting of the frontier line. In 1840 the frontier followed approximately a line running through Ottumwa and

Iowa City, finally touching the Mississippi in the vicinity of the present town of Guttenberg. By 1850 it had moved out toward the center of the State. If a line were drawn from the southwest to the northeast corner there would be tongues of settlement west and north of that line in the Missouri and Des Moines valleys, and there would be unsettled areas east and south of the line in the vicinity of modern Quincy, Marshalltown, and Oelwein. But the settled area west and north of such a line would hardly fill the unsettled parts east and south of it. By 1860, however, this line marking the settled from the unsettled area had been pushed into the northwestern corner of the State, and even there the white space on the map contains splashes of color indicating that settlers had occupied a part of this section. An additional illustration of the rapid growth of the State is indicated in the organization of the counties. In 1840 the Territory had contained but eighteen counties; in 1850 the State had forty-nine. The number had increased to ninety-seven in 1860 — only two less than were found in the State in 1880.

Thus by 1860 Iowa had completely emerged from the oblivion to which Kearny and others had consigned it forty years earlier and had become one of the prosperous States of the Union.