

Summary of Early Exploration and Settlement

Indigenous History of the Land

The first people to live in what we now call Iowa may have arrived some 8,000-10,000 years ago. They lived along the edges of the receding glaciers and hunted large game animals. Gradually, groups began to plant and harvest gardens of corn, beans, pumpkins and squash and gather nuts, berries and fruits to supplement their meat supply. By around 1,200 C.E., corn had migrated along the Gulf Coast and up the Mississippi to tribes in the Upper Midwest who became known as the Oneota culture. They established villages to which they returned for many years after seasonal deer and buffalo hunts.

Blood Run National Historic Landmark is a large village and ceremonial site of the Oneota people, who were the ancestors of the Omaha, Ponca, Iowa and Oto-Missouria tribes. The Oneota were attracted to the site because of the Big Sioux River, abundant game, fertile soil and access to pipestone. The land was inhabited from 900 A.D. to 1720 A.D. and was a major trading site from about 1500 to 1700. Many other American Indian tribes would make the land that is now Iowa their ancestral home, including the Otoe-Missouria, Meskwaki, Sauk, Dakota, Ho-Chunk, Omaha-Ponca and Potawatomi, as well as other tribes that passed through at various times. The language used to identify many of Iowa's lakes, rivers, cities, counties, schools, buildings and sites reflects the inherent imprint of Indigenous peoples.

European Arrival

The arrival of Europeans on the continent had an impact on the Midwest long before permanent settlers came. French and English colonies along the Atlantic Coast displaced eastern American Indian tribes who were forced west to compete with existing tribes. The earliest French and English these tribes encountered were not settlers competing for lands fur trappers and traders. They brought with them manufactured goods — blankets, cookware, knives, guns — to exchange for beaver, deer and other skins that sold for high prices in Europe.

Internal competition among both American Indian and European sides of the trading partnership led to conflicts. As the French and English battled for control along the Atlantic Coast and in Canada, they made allegiances with tribes. The French clashed with the Meskwaki (sometimes mistakenly called the Fox) and their Sac allies who were forced south from their homelands in Wisconsin and Michigan into eastern Iowa. These tribes became allies of the British against the French and later against the former British colonists, the Americans.

The other major tribe, the Sioux, applied pressure on fledgling American settlements, including the northern regions that would become Iowa, in the 19th century. In 1832, the U.S. government tried to enforce the terms of a treaty that demanded removal of the Sac from their major village Saukenuk on the Illinois side of the river. Chief Black Hawk resisted and returned in the spring with a portion of the tribe in defiance of the government order. In the Black Hawk "War" that ensued, U.S. troops and the Illinois state militia quickly routed American Indian resistance and forced Sac families to flee. The treaty that followed opened eastern Iowa to American settlement and pushed the Sac and their Meskwaki allies into central Iowa. Treaties between the tribes and the U.S. government eventually provided for relocation of the tribes to western lands and the removal of American Indian claim to the land. The Sioux were the last to relocate out of the state in 1851.

Conflict and Consequences of "Western Expansion"

From the earliest days of European settlement on the Atlantic Coast, pioneers began moving West not just to trade but to live and raise families. This is known as "Westward Expansion," and ultimately, was a form of colonialism and led to the forced – and violent – removal of American Indian from their ancestral homes. American Indian tribes were already occupying those western lands, setting up conflict situations. In 1832, when the U.S. government tried to enforce the terms of a treaty that demanded removal of the Sac from their major village Saukenuk on the Illinois side of the river. Chief Black Hawk resisted and returned in the spring with a portion of the tribe in defiance of the government order. In the Black Hawk "War" that ensued, U.S. troops and the Illinois state militia quickly

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Iowa currently has no Indian reservations, land owned by the U.S. government but occupied by recognized Indian tribes. In the 1850s, Meskwaki tribal members pooled their government annuity payments and, with the consent of the state government, purchased land in Tama County that became known as the Meskwaki Settlement. The tribe, not the government, owns the land. Many members of the tribe began to return to Iowa where they have lived ever since. The modern Meskwaki Settlement in Tama County maintains tribal schools, courts, and police and a public works department. Their annual powwow attracts thousands every year who watch traditional dances and learn about Meskwaki history and culture. Because they are not subject to state laws, the tribe opened a very successful casino that has brought a new prosperity to the Meskwaki. Sioux City is home to another sizable group of American Indians who sponsor a day care that promotes community activities and services to members of several tribes in the area. American Indians have a significant story in Iowa history and are a vibrant part of the Iowa of today.

American Revolutionary War and Its Impact on the West

George Rogers Clark was an American general in the Revolutionary War whose military successes against American Indians and the British in the Ohio River Valley are credited as a major factor in treaty negotiations that established the original boundaries of the United States. By a treaty between the French and British that ended the French and Indian War in 1763, the British agreed to prohibit American settlers from crossing the Allegheny Mountains to settle in the Ohio River Valley. It had little impact on settlers, however, as colonists began arriving to stake claims to live there or hold them as speculators.

George Rogers Clark

Born in 1752, George Rogers Clark was the second of 10 children, including his younger brother William, who was a leader of the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Missouri River in 1804. In his late teens, George learned surveying from his grandfather. At age 20, Clark led a survey expedition into Kentucky, relocated his family there and became a local leader as a guide for fellow Virginia arrivals. American Indians who lived in the region resented and resisted the intrusion into their hunting lands. Frontier conflicts occurred when Shawnee, Mingo and Delaware tribes pushed back against growing numbers of settlers. Governor Dunsmore of Virginia raised a force against the Shawnee and drove them into central Ohio.

When the American Revolution began in 1776, Clark secured a commission from Virginia to raise an army and march against British forts and their American Indian allies. He routed the British from several small forts and earned a reputation as a successful American Indian fighter. The British launched a counter campaign later in the war and temporarily reclaimed some outposts, but Clark countered with an offensive that captured the British commander. Clark also continued to engage American Indians in battle and drive them westward in combat in order to make the territory safe for American settlers.

Clark's Impact on the West

His successes established an American military presence in the region. When the Treaty of Paris in 1783 officially ended the Revolution, the United States successfully claimed the territory from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi River in part pointing to Clark's successful "occupation." American Indians were never included in those treaty discussions. In recognition of his military achievements, Clark was named as a principal surveyor of the region and was consulted on American Indian affairs, because he had shown an ability to fight and kill American Indians and colonize their land.

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Early European Explorers

In the late 1600s, European explorers began paddling up and down the Mississippi River, passing along Iowa's eastern border. The first two major expeditions were by Frenchmen. In 1673, Louis Joliet led a crew down the Fox River from Lake Michigan. They crossed over to the Wisconsin River and sailed southwest into uncharted territory. Father Marquette, a Catholic priest who accompanied the expedition, kept a diary. On June 17, he recorded that the group reached the mouth of the Wisconsin River where it flows into the Mississippi. Across the river were high bluffs covered with heavy forests. Today, that site includes Pike's Peak State Park near the town of McGregor.

Marquette and Joliet in Iowa

The Marquette and Joliet expedition were the first Europeans to visit what is now Iowa. They came ashore on the west bank of the Mississippi farther downstream and met some Illinois American Indians. The men continued down the Mississippi until they were certain that the river flowed into the Gulf of Mexico and not the Pacific Ocean. Fearing conflicts with the Spanish, the expedition turned around and returned to Canada to report their findings.

In the 1700s, Britain and France fought with each other as they attempted to establish worldwide empires. The British established colonies along the east coast of North America while the French settled along the St. Lawrence River in Canada. Both nations wanted to control the fur trade around the Great Lakes. In 1756, a war broke out between these two rivals. Fearing the loss of the entire region, France secretly transferred its claim to the lands west of the Mississippi (including Iowa) to Spain. With a final British victory in 1763, France gave up claim to lands in North America, but it prevented Britain from extending its empire across the continent.

Julien Dubuque's Lead Mines

In the 1780s a young Frenchman named Julien Dubuque learned that there were rich deposits of lead ore on the west side of the Mississippi near Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin. Lead was valuable because it was used to make ammunition for guns and cannons. The Meskwaki people owned the land. In exchange for gifts, the Meskwaki allowed Dubuque to live among them and to mine the ore. Dubuque set up lead mines near the location of the city that bears his name. Women and old men from the Meskwaki tribe dug the lead ore from the ground. Dubuque and his French assistants melted the ore and poured it into metal bars called "pigs." The pigs were floated down the Mississippi and sold in St. Louis, along with furs. When Dubuque died, he was buried near his Iowa home.

The American colonies revolted against Britain in 1776. With their victory in 1781, the United States emerged. Its original boundaries extended west to the Mississippi River. In 1803, the U.S. nearly doubled its size with the purchase of the land from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains. France, who had reclaimed the land from Spain, sold this huge tract for \$15 million.

Expedition of Lewis and Clark

To learn more about the area, President Thomas Jefferson commissioned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to sail up the Missouri River and on to the Pacific Ocean. They set out from St. Louis in the spring of 1804 with 29 men and Captain Lewis's dog, Seaman. Their orders were to record information about Indian tribes living in the area, the best places for forts and trading posts, native plants and animals, and the land. By summer they were traveling along the river's twists and turns on Iowa's western border. Charles Floyd was a sergeant in the expedition. Near the site of present-day Sioux City, Charles became very sick. On August 20 he died and was buried in a gravesite overlooking the river. He was the only man to die on the expedition. This site what eventually become a National Historic Landmark.

Lewis and Clark pushed up to the mouth of the Missouri in present-day Montana. There they portaged their supplies to the headwaters of a river flowing west to the Pacific. On November 7, 1805, they got their first glimpse of the Pacific. Clark wrote in his diary: "Ocean in view! O! The joy!"

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Zebulon Pike

In 1805, while Lewis and Clark were still out west, another American military officer set out to visit the northern stretches of the Mississippi. Zebulon Pike left St. Louis and explored both sides of the great river, past Iowa and into central Minnesota. He too identified key points for forts and trading posts.

In the early summer of 1835, a small group of soldiers on horseback explored the valley of the Des Moines River as far as present-day Des Moines and then up to Ft. Dodge. Modern highway signs mark their route as the Dragoon Trail. They took along a cow to provide milk and cream as they traveled. One day, their horses rode through beds of ripe wild strawberries so thick that their hooves were stained bright red at the end of the day. That night the soldiers picked heaps of berries for supper and feasted on strawberries and fresh cream. To some Iowa was a land of milk and honey. To those early soldiers it was the land of strawberries and cream!

European-American Pioneers, Settlers

In Iowa and northern Illinois, early settlers faced a landscape different than any they had ever experienced. They encountered the American prairies, vast stretches of treeless grasslands. The woodlands had provided wood for homes, barns, fencing and fuel; but the prairies had few trees. Iowa pioneers needed to adapt to a new environment that did not provide easy access to wood.

Eastern Iowa's Landscape

Iowa has three different landscapes. In eastern Iowa and along the rivers there are hardwood forests: oak, walnut, maple, elm. Trees not only supplied the wood pioneers needed; the very presence of trees was taken as a sign that the land was fertile. Sawmills to cut the trunks into lumber were some of the first industries on the frontier. They split large pieces into vertical lengths to make fence and sliced shingles for the cabin roof from logs. When other chores were finished, cutting wood for the fireplace or the stove was a never-ending task.

Northern and Western Iowa's Landscape

When settlers emerged onto the tall grass prairies in northern and western Iowa, however, they needed to learn new skills. Grasses around small ponds or marshes could grow as high as seven to eight feet. Some diaries report that cattle could get lost in the tall grass and one had to stand on the back of a horse to try to find them. Prairie fires were a constant danger from spring through fall. Lightning could ignite the dead stems and soon a wall of fire, fanned by the winds, could race up a hill burning everything in its path. Pioneers learned to plow broad fire strips around their cabins and barns to protect buildings from the flames.

Plowing itself was a new venture on the prairies. So strong and tangled were the tough roots of the grasses and other prairie plants that it took three or four teams of oxen to plow it the first time. They used a huge plowshare with a sharp edge that could cut through the soil and turn over a strip of virgin prairie sod. Once the roots had broken up, the pioneer could use a regular plow, but even here, new ways were better. The rich Iowa topsoil clung to the cast iron plowshares; they wouldn't scour (fall off the metal blade) and soon the plow was stuck in the mud in the field. A blacksmith in Illinois, John Deere, invented a steel plowshare smooth enough so that the soil didn't stick to it. It made plowing much easier, and it made John Deere a richer man.

Northwest Iowa's Landscape

In the far northwest corner of the state settlers arrived before the railroads. The climate is drier than in central and southern Iowa and the grass is shorter. Few trees were native to the area when pioneers arrived. Lumber was very expensive because it had to be transported overland. Pioneer families in the northwest part of the state learned to make do with very little wood. Rather than log cabins, they built sod houses. They dug a hole in a hillside, perhaps lined it with boards from the wagon, and then made a roof with branches or limbs from smaller trees from along the river. They may have used the tarp that covered the wagon to lay over the limbs. Then they cut strips of sod

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from the prairie. The tangled roots held the dirt together. They piled strips on top of each other to form the sides of the cabin. Across the top the strips formed the roof. The sod strips were good insulation, warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Sod houses were never intended as permanent homes, however. They were temporary structures until the settlers could build frame houses.

Women on the Trail and on the Farm

Iowa pioneer women played an important part in the early settlement of the state. The rural Midwest was settled in a different way than many other areas of the United States where the first new arrivals were fur trappers or cowboys or miners and where men far outnumbered women in the early population. In Iowa, most people came to farm the rich soil and they came as families. Wives and daughters were an essential part of the farming operation. As a result there were many children among Iowa's first settlers. On the eve of the Civil War, one out of every three Iowans was under the age of 10. Once on the trail women faced new challenges. Some traditional tasks continued. Women cooked meals over a campfire. They also had to care for the children in new and unknown places. If the family had a milk cow the women often milked and churned on the trail just as she did at home. The women washed clothes when the family camped by a stream and mended clothing torn along the way. She sometimes drove the ox team that pulled the wagon.

When the family reached their new home, women worked hard to care for the family. Their biggest task was helping to feed the family. In addition to preparing meals and cleaning up after them, they planted large gardens. Vegetables like potatoes, carrots and turnips were stored in root cellars. Cabbage was made into sauerkraut and stored in large crocks. Some vegetables like cucumbers were pickled in vinegar. Apples and sometimes pumpkins and squash were cut into small slices and dried. In the winter they could be soaked in water and cooked. When canning jars became available, they preserved corn, green beans and tomatoes. Farm women also raised large flocks of chickens. The hens supplied eggs which were an important part of the diet. Chickens, geese, ducks and turkeys also provided a year-round source of meat. While men normally butchered the large animals like hogs and cattle, women helped cut up the meat. To preserve it, they sometimes smoked it for many hours in a smokehouse and then wrapped it in clean cloth. They also packed it in large crocks to prevent the air from reaching it. They also canned it or made sausage. The animal fat would be cooked down (rendered) for lard and to make soap.

Women also sewed and mended clothing for the family. Keeping clothes clean was a hard job before automatic washing machines. Monday was wash day. Children often hauled buckets of water to the stove where it was heated. Then each piece was scrubbed on a wash board, rinsed in boiling water, wrung out and hung up to dry on the clothesline. On Tuesday the clean clothes were brought in and the shirts and dresses were pressed with heavy irons heated on the stove.