

9-1-1977

The Granger Homestead Project

Dorothy Schwieder

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schwieder, Dorothy. "The Granger Homestead Project." *The Palimpsest* 58 (1977), 149-161.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol58/iss5/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

The Granger Homestead Project

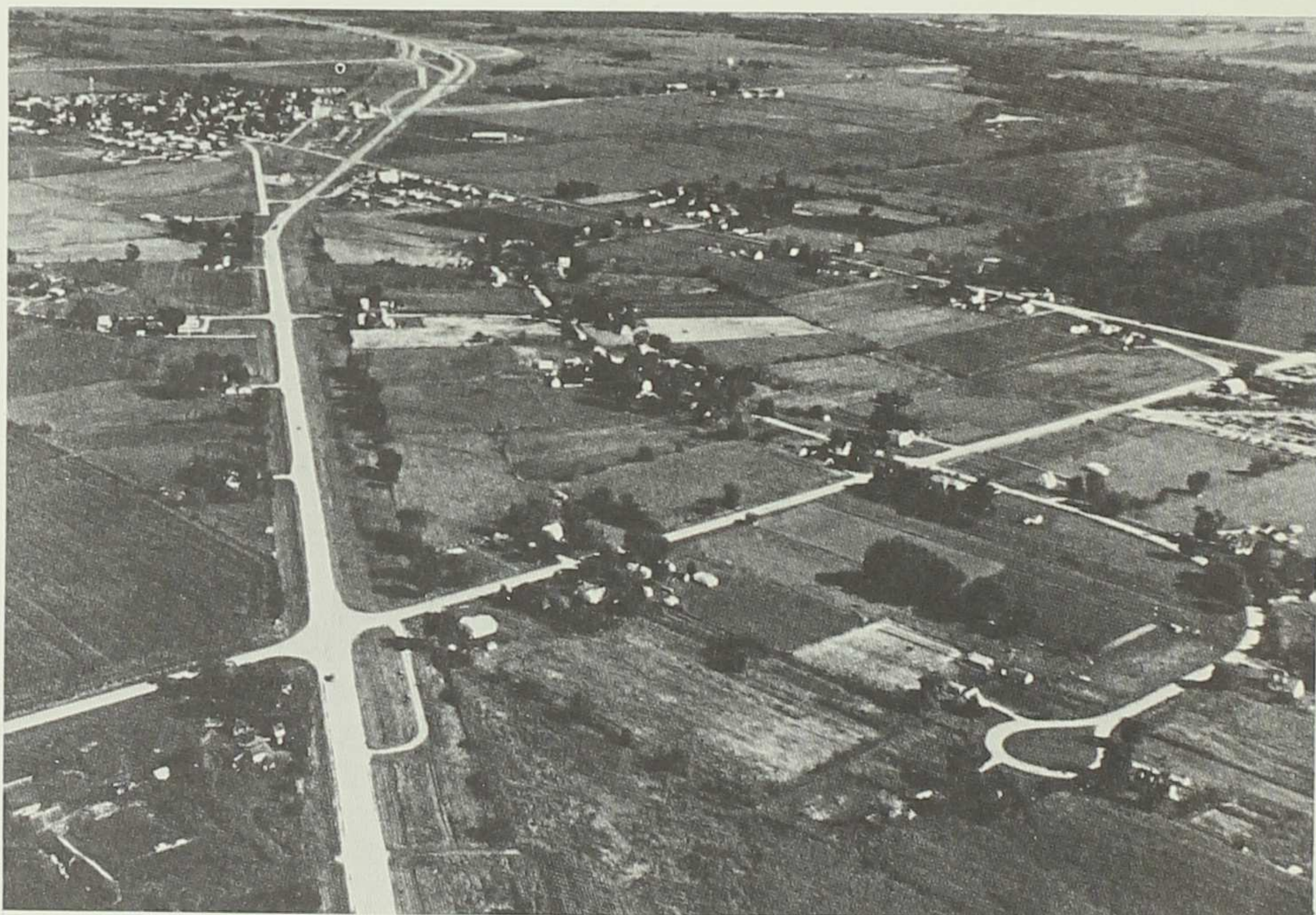
by Dorothy Schwieder

In March 1934, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes notified officials in Granger, Iowa that their community had been selected as a site for a New Deal subsistence homestead. The project was made possible by the National Industrial Recovery Act, passed in 1933, which allowed for assistance to low-income industrial workers living in depressed areas of the country. More specifically the Iowa project, initiated by Granger parish priest Luigi G. Ligutti, was intended to provide better housing for economically depressed families, especially families of coal miners, located in the Granger area. With its completion, Granger became one of approximately 100 New Deal communities established across the United States during the 1930s. The housing project soon attracted national attention as one of the more successful community efforts sponsored by the federal government.

At the time of the homestead selection, the Granger area was an ideal site for an experiment in subsistence living. Although surrounded by fertile, productive farm land, the Granger area also included a significant portion of Iowa's deeply depressed coal mining industry. Beginning in the 1870s, several deep shaft coal

mines had been opened in Dallas and Boone counties; by the 1930s, nine mines were operating within a 15 mile radius of Granger with a combined work force of 2,500 men. Because most Iowa coal mines operated only during the fall and winter months the majority of miners averaged just 180 working days each year. Some men earned additional money during the off-season by hiring out to nearby farmers or working as section hands for the local railroad. Most, however, were unable to find additional work with the result that their yearly earnings averaged around \$900.

Of the many deprivations suffered by the miners, the most serious was housing. Because most coal mines were sunk a considerable distance from existing communities, company officials found it necessary to provide housing for the mining families. Previous experience had taught Iowa's coal operators that coal seams might end abruptly thus necessitating a quick abandonment of the mine. Because of the transitory nature of the industry, houses were constructed quickly and cheaply. In fact, the typical mining camp house built during the 1920s cost about \$250, contained four rooms and measured 24 feet square. The best that



An aerial view of the Granger homesteads.

could be said for company housing was that it rented cheap, with each unit costing between \$6 and \$8 per month.

While the transitory nature of the coal industry tended to perpetuate the dismal housing situation, an equally powerful influence was the attitude of mine owners and operators. After 1900, large numbers of southern and eastern Europeans emigrated to coal fields in the Middle West. Company officials frequently regarded these families as being "morally and mentally inferior" not only to native-born workers but also to emigrants from northern and western Europe. Given this attitude, plus the conviction that mining families did not take proper care of company housing, many operators felt justified in building only substandard housing as well as refusing to provide upkeep for the completed units.

Indeed, some company officials stated openly that eastern and southern Europeans were not entitled to a higher standard of living. At the same time, mine operators continually turned a deaf ear to the miners' pleas that they would gladly pay higher rents if better housing were available.

Because of their temporary nature, most camps also lacked adequate educational facilities. Only a few mining communities had schools that extended beyond the fourth grade, and those that did operated the additional grades for only four months during the year. Most children finished school by the time they were 12 years old while some finished as early as nine or ten. Because few parents had the resources to send their children to a neighboring town for further schooling, the young people's education essen-

tially ended before they entered their teens. For girls, the situation was less crucial as most remained at home under the supervision of their mothers where they helped with household chores and cared for younger family members. For boys, however, the situation was more difficult. Unable to work in the mines until they were 16 and lacking any opportunity for vocational training which would prepare them for types of work other than mining, most youths spent three or four years idling away their time, mostly in the local pool halls. By the time they reached 16, with limited education and no occupational skills, they had little choice but to follow in their father's occupational footsteps.

Going hand in hand with inadequate educational facilities were extremely meager social opportunities. Organized recreational facilities did not exist for the young people, and most mining camps were located too great a distance from larger communities for children to take advantage of activities there. Without automobiles, which few mining families had in the 1920s, it was difficult to get to town for any event. Most miners had large families; so with overcrowded four-roomed dwellings, there was little incentive for young people to stay at home. The result was that during the winter most children frequented the local pool halls while in the summer they loitered around the dirty, dusty streets. Every summer it was anticipated that at least two or three mining camp children would drown while swimming in the nearby Des Moines River.

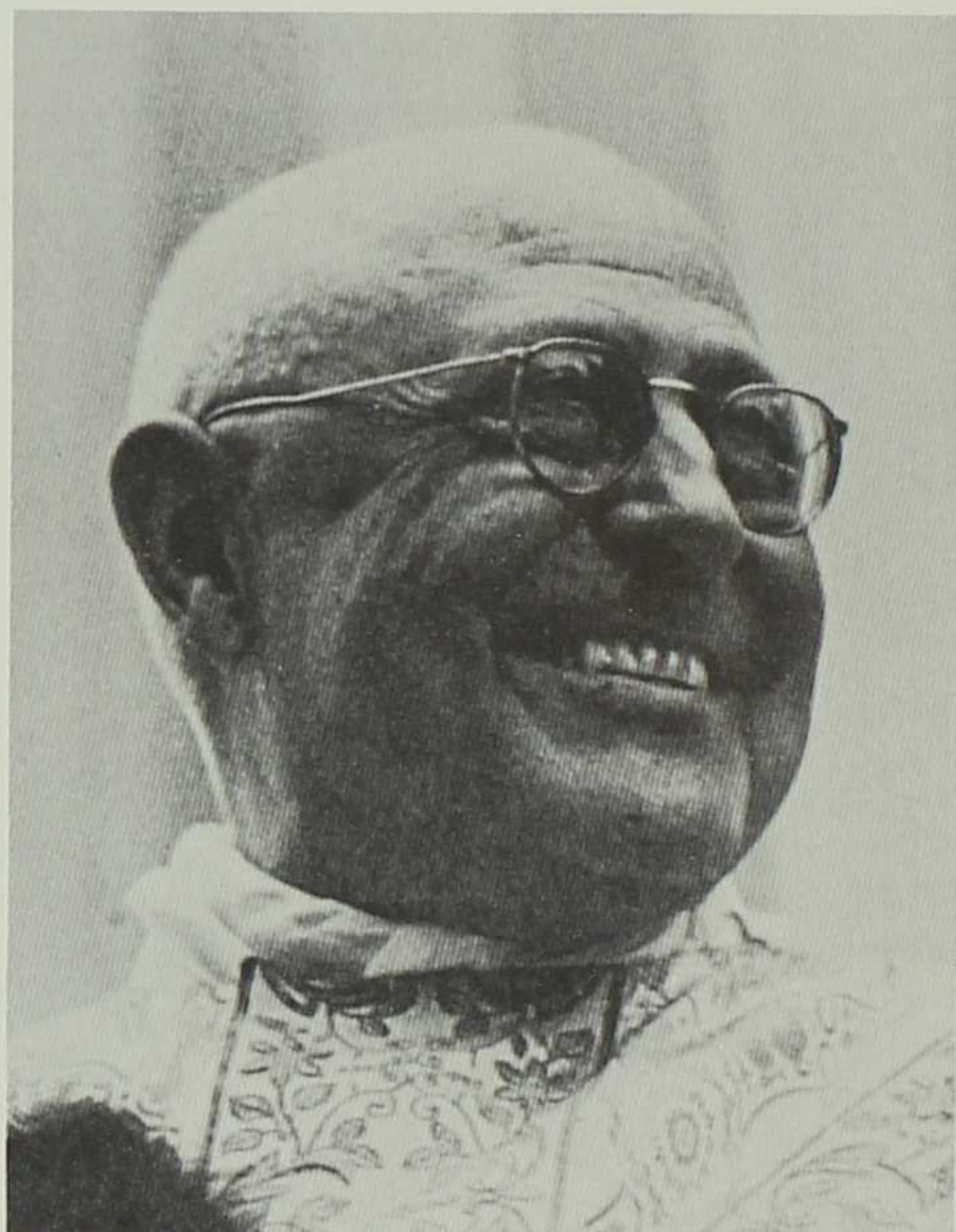
Yet, even as the 1920s wore on and the outlook appeared increasingly bleak and uncertain for mining families, a change

was in the making. In 1926, Father Luigi Ligutti was installed as a parish priest in Granger. Born in the Province of Udine, Italy in 1895, Ligutti had emigrated to Des Moines in 1912. He graduated from St. Ambrose College and then attended St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland. Ordained in 1917 at age 22, he taught for several years at the Des Moines Catholic High School (later Dowling High School) and then accepted a three-point charge in Harrison County. It was a propitious move as during his six years at Magnolia, Woodbine, and Logan, he became well acquainted with the problems of his rural parishioners. In 1926, Father Ligutti moved to Granger where his congregation contained not only rural families, but also residents from the nearby coal camps. As he became better acquainted with the mining camp families, he became increasingly distressed over their squalid living conditions and the total lack of opportunity for young people. Convinced that the camps were a totally-unfit environment for raising families, and in fact, were fertile fields for crime, he looked to the land as a remedy for the miners' problems. The young priest had brought from his native Italy a deep love of the land; his years in Iowa intensified that feeling as well as bringing out a deep humanitarian concern for needy, disadvantaged people. In Granger, Father Ligutti saw in the land a potential remedy for his parishioners' many economic and social problems. In 1932, he addressed a convention of Catholic Church officials in Omaha where he summed up his philosophy about the relationship between the family and rural living: "The farm is the ideal place to raise children; it furnishes ideal home surroundings for mutual love and help. It

avoids neighborhood quarrels. It affords opportunities for developing personal tastes in beautifying the surroundings of the home."

A year later, passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act presented the concerned priest with what seemed to be the ideal solution. The act included Title II, Section 208 which provided for the creation of the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation. The federal government then appropriated the agency \$25,000,000 to "provide for aiding the redistribution of the overbalance of population in industrial centers." Hearing about the federal subsistence program, Father Ligutti immediately went to work. Within six months he had organized a local sponsoring committee and had submitted a petition to the federal government for the Granger homesteads. The petition called for the building of 50 homes located on approximately 225 acres of land adjacent to the town of Granger. Each home site would include about four acres of land so the family could raise most, if not all, of their food supply. The homes, ranging in size from four to six rooms, were to be completely modern. The 50 homesteaders would be selected mostly from the families residing in the area's nine coal camps.

Not content to merely send in the petition, Father Ligutti hurried off to Washington to confer directly with government officials. He later observed that during his visit, "we left no one unseen who could have helped the cause in any way; high ecclesiastics, ambassadors, politicians, cabinet members, the National Catholic Welfare Conference and many others were enlisted in the hastening of the approval." Soon Father Ligutti's efforts bore fruit as he received



Fr. Luigi Ligutti

official word about Granger's selection on March 15, 1934.

Father Ligutti considered the Granger area to be an ideal site for the project. With good farm land, residents could enjoy the advantages of rural living. Yet, the project would be located only a short distance from a community where homesteaders could take advantage of existing religious and educational facilities. Moreover, the project was within commuting distance of the mines where most homesteaders would be employed. Another advantage was the close proximity to Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) at Ames. From the beginning of the program, federal officials had stressed the need for involvement of state and local organizations and had particularly singled out land grant colleges as potential collaborators. Early in the planning, a special committee of

ISC faculty members had been organized to act as consultants to project personnel.

An important part of Father Ligutti's thinking on the proposal was the concept of self-help. Through his influence, original plans called for all homesteaders to contribute labor to some phase of the project. Not only would that provide for cooperation among them but also would reduce the total cost of each unit. Plans called for families to aid in excavating, building roads, constructing homes, landscaping, and other phases of project development. The number of work days each homesteader contributed would be credited to his account, thus reducing the final cost of his homestead. The homesteaders had reacted enthusiastically to the proposal and on their applications had listed the number of hours they could work per week as well as the types of work they could do. Before this phase could begin, however, federal officials altered the program, declaring that all construction must be done by contract and all contracts would be handled in Washington. Father Ligutti was deeply disappointed over this change as he felt that the self-help concept should be a vital part of the program.

During the following winter, plans for the project moved along rapidly. In February 1935, officials signed contracts with the J. E. Lovejoy Company of Des Moines for the construction of 50 homes. Eight months later, the builders had completed their work, and by December, homestead families were moving in. Of the 50 homes, five had four rooms, 33 had five rooms, and 12 had six rooms; the five- and six-roomed houses were two storied. All homes contained full basements, bathrooms, central heating

units, and hot water tanks. Each family had the choice of either a combination garage and poultry house or a small barn. Water was provided on each home site by an individual well and electric pump.

The selection of homesteaders was perhaps the most crucial part of the social experiment. Obviously needy people would be considered, but officials did not consider this to be a relief project. Therefore, only people employed at least half-time would be considered as applicants; otherwise, officials feared they could not keep up the monthly payments. Announcements of the project were placed in newspapers in the Granger area. By April 1934, officials had received 65 applications. The local sponsoring committee had been made responsible for securing applications as well as the final selection of homesteaders. Federal guidelines suggested that the committee include the following information on each applicant: nationality of parents, personality and temperament, marital situation, stability and resourcefulness, moral habits, general conduct, and intelligence and realization of the significance of the project. A staff person from the Department of Economics and Sociology at Iowa State assisted the local interviewers.

In May, Granger officials received word that the Division of Subsistence Homesteads had changed the application policy. Local officials were to be relieved of the decision on applicants and instead were to forward pertinent interview data to Washington. Federal officials would then make the final decision.

The completed list of 252 homesteaders finally approved by the federal authorities reflected the social composition of the neighboring mining camps--a large

percentage of Italian and Croatian families along with a few families of Austrian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Slovakian, Dutch, and English descent--and represented a wide range of occupations from street car operator to bookkeeper, although most were miners. At first the introduction of a "foreign element" into the community caused long-time Granger residents to fear the area would soon look like a slum, and they expressed reservations about the project. They feared the construction of a mining camp in their midst, and when Father Ligutti first mentioned the idea of a homestead project, several local businessmen took him aside, reminded him he was a poor country priest who did not understand the depressed miners in his parish, and declared the reason miners lived in sordid housing was because they did not and never would know any better. "Give 'em bathtubs," local citizens said, "and they'll be storing coal in them. The houses will be wrecked in a year or two."

Other fears also surfaced concerning the homesteaders. Because the project was being initiated by a Catholic priest, a few residents feared that all homesteaders would be Catholic and other faiths would be excluded. Local farmers expressed concern that farm and garden produce raised at the project would mean increased competition for them. Because the homesteaders would be living on federal property, they could be exempt from taxes thus causing some Granger residents to assert that the public schools and other tax-supported facilities should be closed to them. The original objections quickly faded, however, and from the beginning, the project was something of a showplace. Homesteaders did a great deal of home beautification

in the form of sodding and planting of trees and shrubs. Reports written about the project rarely failed to comment on the pride of possession shown by the owners and reflected in the freshly-painted homes and carefully-tended yards.

With the celebration of the homesteaders' first anniversary in December 1936, it was apparent that the Granger project was rapidly becoming both a state and national attraction. A steady stream of visitors--ranging from Vatican officials to rural life leaders from Australia, Europe, and Latin America--all trooped to the small, Dallas County community to view the experiment firsthand. In 1936, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt visited the project and was the guest of the fourteen-member Joseph Biondi family. Mrs. Roosevelt's visit was particularly significant as she had earlier intervened on behalf of the homesteaders. In the initial planning some federal officials regarded the subsistence program as a relief measure and therefore advocated that houses should be small and inexpensive. Mrs. Roosevelt, vitally interested in the program from its inception, finally convinced these people, among them her husband, that the homes should be modern, spacious, and well-constructed.

It was also apparent by December 1936 that the project was off to a successful start under the watchful, loving eye of Father Ligutti. The young priest's presence permeated all phases of the project: on Sunday morning, he preached to the homestead families; on week-days, he taught homestead children at the local Catholic high school; throughout the week, he visited the families in their project homes. As well as

guiding his parishioners in spiritual and educational matters, Father Ligutti also gave them a great deal of practical advice. He advised them continually to use their acreages to the fullest advantage and to experiment with new products whenever possible. In keeping with his philosophy some families were urged to raise peanuts while others were told to try raising Angora rabbits.

By the end of the first summer, Father Ligutti believed that the project was progressing satisfactorily. He proudly pointed out to a visiting newsman that despite the drought, the average value of each resident's garden and grain had been \$100. Father Ligutti calculated that with an average yearly total of \$176 for house payments, and considering that families had saved \$100 on their food through home production, homesteaders were left with a balance of \$76 for a full year's house payments, or \$6.50 per month. The priest estimated that in a good year, the average value of produce raised at the project would be \$500. Success with the raising of food reaffirmed Ligutti's basic belief in the subsistence approach, a belief that he expressed many times in the following manner: "People should have one foot in industry and the other on the land. Then if industry goes kerplunk, the families will still have their homes." Father Ligutti's thinking proved only too accurate as during the latter 1930s, working days in the mines became fewer and fewer. Yet, because of the subsistence project, the miners lived comfortably and raised their children in a stable, healthy environment.

A major complaint that Father Ligutti could not resolve, however, concerned the final disposition of homestead property. At the time of occupancy the fed-

eral government informed the homesteaders that they had 30 years in which to pay for their holdings at an interest rate of three percent. The federal government had originally appropriated \$100,000 for the Granger homestead, but several months later added an additional \$25,000 when the local sponsors insisted that the homes should have full basements. Still another \$50,000 was added a short time later, raising the average cost of each homestead to \$3,500. Although the homesteaders had been making monthly payments since December 1935--with payments ranging from \$14 to \$18-- the government had given them no guarantee of eventual ownership. In December 1938, Father Ligutti described the financial arrangement as "little more than a rent agreement," adding, "we want something more permanent." By late 1941, with 36 of the original families still in the project, the homesteaders had paid back about \$50,000 of the original cost. Yet, increasingly, the feeling among them was one of vulnerability over the uncertainty of the arrangement. Adding to the homesteaders' uneasiness was the fact that the project had been shifted several times from one federal agency to another. At the project's inception, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads directed the program. A short time later, in fact even before the homesteaders occupied their houses, President Roosevelt transferred all property and assets of the Division to the Resettlement Administration. Then, in 1937, the Farm Security Administration was founded and took over the subsistence programs.

During the following year, however, two significant events took place for homestead residents. In January 1940, Father Ligutti left the community to

become executive secretary of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, a loss keenly felt by homesteaders and Granger residents alike. Appointed to take his place was Father John J. Gorman, Father Ligutti's assistant. The second event concerned the long-awaited final disposition of project housing. For several years before 1942, the Farm Security Administration had been under heavy pressure from both government officials and farm leaders to liquidate all community projects. In 1942, the FSA moved to phase out the Granger project as well as other subsistence projects. Following that move, homestead families formed the Granger Homestead Association, Inc. with Father Gorman as manager. The local homestead association then assumed title to the project housing--purchasing the holdings from the federal government for just under \$100,000--and made purchase contracts with the homesteaders. The Granger homesteads then came under the control of the Federal Public Housing Authority which collected payments on the purchase contracts. At the time, it was estimated that the Granger homesteads had cost the government \$216,189.87 or about \$4,324 per unit.

The Homestead Association, anticipating further changes in ownership and hoping to maintain stability within the community, set down rules for the sale and transfer of property. When an occupant of the project completed his final payment, he received a "restricted deed," with restrictions on the order of a zoning ordinance. Included were restrictions on the construction of commercial buildings on any plot. Moreover, a home owner had to secure the Association's approval before he could make

an addition or improvement to his property. Also, before an owner could sell, the Association had to approve the new buyer, thus controlling membership in the Association.

Better housing was only one goal envisioned by Father Ligutti, however, at the inception of the Granger project. Homestead families were not only to live together, but were also to work together, thereby enriching their lives socially as well as improving their economic status. One major way residents hoped to achieve these mutual goals was by organizing three co-operatives. The largest, the Granger Homestead and Community Co-operative Association, was a buying, selling, manufacturing, and recreational co-operative. The charter stated that the enterprise could "engage in any activity which contributes to the general welfare of the people in the homestead." As a result the co-operative bought and sold a wide assortment of products, ranging from seeds to canned goods. Co-operative officials sponsored recreational activities including classes in English, piano, and weaving as well as planning community social events. The two smaller co-operatives had more specific functions: one owned a tractor, plow, disk, harrow, and mower that it rented to individual members; the other co-operative operated a credit union.

Throughout the 1930s, homestead families held yearly celebrations. In December 1938, the members hosted a banquet in honor of their third anniversary. They proudly pointed out that they had imported only coffee for the meal; otherwise, all food served had been grown on the homesteads. It was also reported that the homesteaders had cut their purchases at the local grocery store by 50

percent since moving into their homes. Each August the residents held a fair, the most important social event of the year, at which they displayed their handicrafts and farm products. Members also staged athletic events and performed folk dances.

In 1939, the Farm Security Administration contributed funds for the construction of a community building which quickly became the center of social life at the project. One activity made possible by the new center was weaving. The Association purchased four large looms which it installed in the community house. The group then hired a trained technician to visit the project for two weeks, helping the women assemble the looms and instructing them in proper use of the equipment. Soon the women were designing, weaving, and dying their own cloth for dress material as well as rugs and drapes.

Other social outlets were also available to homesteaders. A young men's baseball club was organized in Granger with a local coal company furnishing uniforms and Granger businessmen supplying funds for equipment. Most members of the team came from homestead families. In the fall of 1936, homestead residents organized a community band under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration. At the same time a Boy Scout troop was organized for homestead youths with similar groups set up for girls. Sometimes the residents sponsored community events. In October 1936, the homestead women served a spaghetti dinner in the Catholic church hall in Granger; approximately 300 people attended. The local schools attended by homestead children were also involved, offering many family activities.

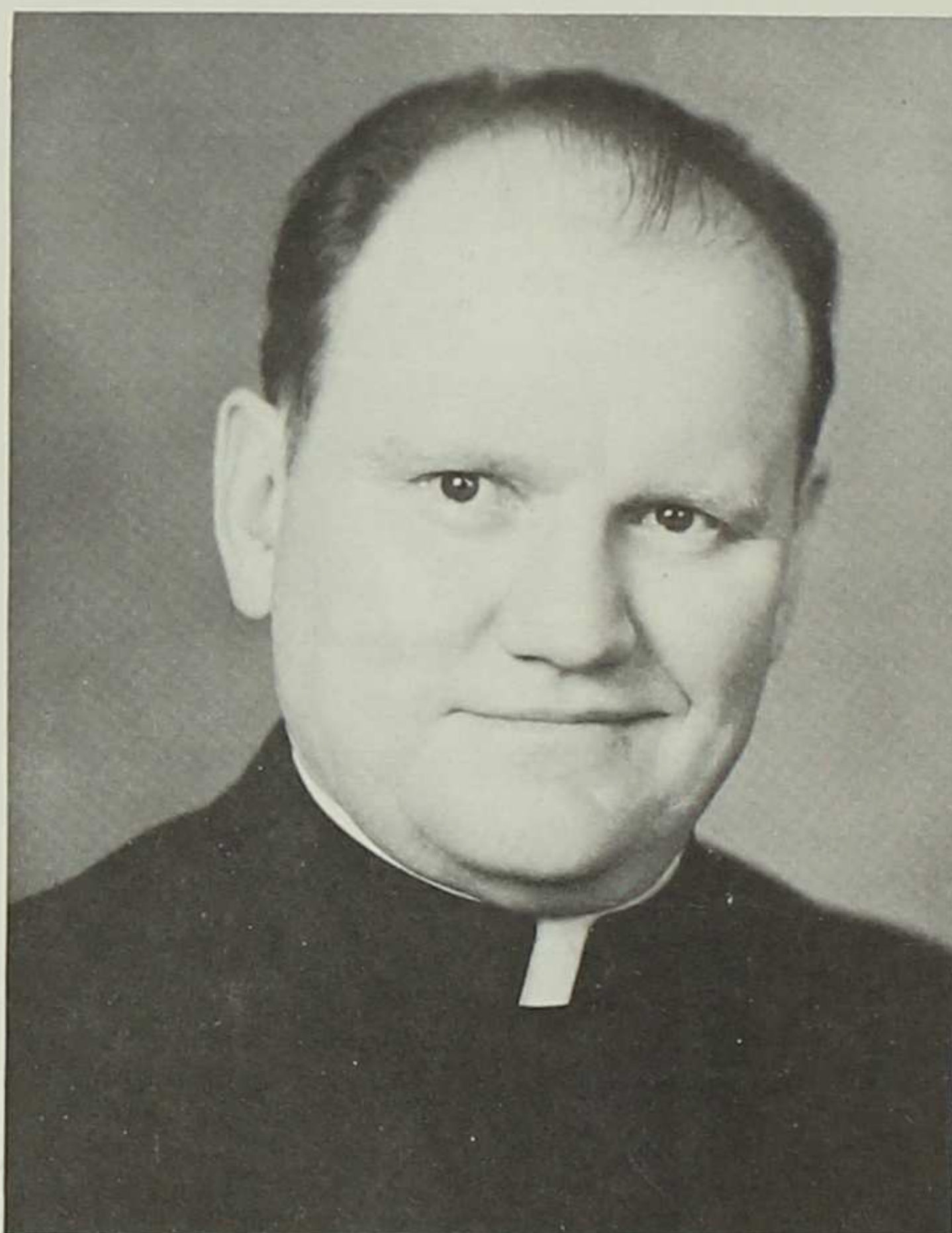
These increased social opportunities not only greatly enriched the lives of the homesteaders, but also brought them together to share community problems and interests.

Educationally, the young people also benefited from the project. In 1936, Father Gorman introduced a series of vocational courses at Assumption High School, the Catholic school in Granger. Raised on a farm near Perry, Father Gorman, like his predecessor, had experienced first-hand the educational deficiencies of the mining communities. Set up to remedy these shortcomings as well as to provide a fuller, richer life for all rural young people, the vocational curriculum attracted wide attention in the Catholic press as an innovative experiment in Catholic rural education. Under the program, boys could take courses in animal husbandry (specializing in poultry production management, dairying, hogs, or other animals); crops and soils; vegetable production and management; landscaping and floriculture; fruit growing; and bee culture. Girls had the opportunity to take courses in homemaking, home management, nutrition, preparation and cooking of food, child care, and care of the sick. The school schedule stated that the "chief aim of the course was to prepare young women to conduct a home in the country as it should be conducted."

Although local and federal officials voiced concern from time to time over the problems of molding diverse ethnic groups into a socially-integrated community, the task did not appear too difficult. Both Fathers Ligutti and Gorman played crucial roles in helping to bring the homesteaders together as a fairly cohesive social unit. The many

adult classes and lectures presented by the Extension Service at Iowa State College were also influential in bringing homesteaders together for a common purpose. From the project's inception, the Extension Service sent speakers to present programs on such diverse topics as landscaping, consumers' co-operatives, vegetable crops and small fruits, bee culture, and food and nutrition. Moreover, local institutions made an impact as homesteaders and their children attended the local churches and schools. Also important, although less obvious, was the community-mindedness that mining camp residents themselves brought to the project. Because life in the camps had been difficult, mining families had always displayed a strong tradition of mutual aid. Whenever tragedy struck, everyone came to the aid of the unfortunate family. Moreover, the traditional banding together in the face of deprivation and adversity had produced a strong sense of unity and loyalty among mining families.

Still, a few practices did exist that reflected ethnic separateness. Some homesteaders spoke little English and thus were not able to take part in all community events. A few families made no attempt to become involved. An unusual aspect of homestead living, usually associated with the European backgrounds of the homesteaders, was the practice of using basements for living purposes, rather than the first floors of the homes. All project houses had full, well-finished basements, complete with tiled walls and cement floors. A large number of families had moved the kitchen stove to the basement, along with floor lamps, tables, radios, and other furniture, and the lower area then be-



Fr. John Gorman

came kitchen, dining room, and living room. Families not only ate in the basement, but also spent their evenings there. Frequently housewives decorated the empty living rooms with needlework, photographs, and bric-a-brac. When asked about the unusual living arrangement, some homesteaders replied that they were fearful they would not be able to maintain the house payments and so used the basement to prevent any deterioration of the main part of the house. Also, they pointed out that in the winter-time, heat from the furnace kept the family comfortable in the basement, and the rest of the house did not have to be heated. Throughout this period, however, the bedrooms were used for sleeping. Father Gorman, associated with project families for 33 years, believed that the desire for sociability accounted for the practice. Mining families had been accustomed to getting together in

large numbers for meals and other social occasions but quickly discovered that the kitchens and dining rooms of the project homes were too small to accommodate large numbers. Thus, a move to the basement not only prevented wear on the homes, but also enabled families to keep their social groups intact.

Following World War II, the homestead project experienced its greatest change. In 1946, the last major coal mine in the Granger area, the Dallas Mine, closed down. The closing did not force any families to relocate, however. All miners continued to live in the project but looked to surrounding communities for employment; a few men went to work in the Shuler Mine at Waukeo, but most found work in the nearby communities of Des Moines, Perry, and Ames. With full employment rather than seasonal mine work, many families sold their poultry and livestock and rented out their acreages. By 1946, the Association owed the federal government only \$24,594.62, and that sum was dwindling every month as payments continued to be made on the 13 unsold homes.

On January 1951, the Granger Homestead families celebrated a long-awaited event. By then, only eight members had not paid for their homes in full, and as each of the eight families had arranged for a private loan, there remained no further need for the Association. Members thus voted to dissolve it, and with that step, each householder became an independent home owner. At the time, project officials estimated that homestead families had invested between \$3,000 and \$3,500 each in their homes. Overall, that was about 30 percent less than the holdings had cost the federal government in 1935. By 1951,

32 of the original families remained; four male householders had died, and a few families had moved away. Several householders had retired. During the homestead's entire history no one had defaulted on his loan. Occasionally because of ill health or job loss, some families had been forced to delay payments; eventually, however, all were paid.

With the dissolution of the Granger Homestead Association, Inc. in 1951 and the securing of the property deeds by most residents, the major goal of the homesteaders had been realized. By this time, however, their lives had changed dramatically. Since the male homesteaders were no longer employed as seasonal coal miners, the dual foundation of "one foot on the land and the other in industry" was unnecessary. With their economic wants satisfied and their co-operative enterprises ended, the homesteaders had become fully integrated into the economic and social life of the surrounding community.

Although the story of the Granger project is only a small part of the total history of the federal subsistence homestead program, a brief comparison is instructive for several reasons. First of all, the planning and development of the Iowa project proceeded rapidly, much in contrast to other New Deal communities. Some communities were still in the building stage as late as 1941. In fact, the Granger homesteads, in terms of size and cost, had come remarkably close to fitting the model community envisioned by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. Yet, the Iowa project was by any standard a modest endeavor compared to most other community undertakings. The

most publicized, Arthurdale, West Virginia included 165 homes and cost the federal government 2.7 million dollars. Also well publicized was the Penderlea project in North Carolina which contained 192 homes at a cost of 2.2 million dollars. Perhaps the most crucial difference between Granger and the other homesteads was that the Iowa site had been located near the residents' work, precluding the need to create new industries to support them. At Arthurdale and Penderlea, efforts to attract industry had proven exceedingly difficult. Overall, although the Granger project had been modest in scope, it had been manageable in practice.

While the Granger project succeeded in providing better housing for low-income families, improved housing was only one goal of the New Deal planners in 1933 and 1934. Although never defined in a precise way, federal officials clearly hoped that their model communities would usher in a new age of community living. Milburn L. Wilson, Director of

Division of Subsistence Homesteads, viewed the experimental communities as "a new frontier, as the locale for a new way of life . . ." which would produce a "new, improved man, with new attitudes, and values." Moreover, Wilson believed a new type of community life would result with "handicrafts, community activities, closer family relationships, and cooperative enterprises." He referred to it as the "community idea." Apparently this goal was never realized in any of the projects; nor did the communities succeed in producing any imitators. Indeed, by the end of the 1930s, the federal government had abandoned the community idea all together.

Still, aside from the dreams of the New Deal planners and the changing policies of the Washington bureaucrats, the Granger experiment had a significance all its own. If the program is viewed at the local level, which indeed it was intended to affect, an important goal was realized. The project homes did lift the coal miner out of the squalid environment of the mining camp, making him a new man with "new attitudes, and new values." Because of that opportunity, he was able to raise his children in an acceptable social environment. For the first time, miners and their families became full-fledged members of society, taking advantage of educational, political, and social institutions that had previously been beyond their reach. Children in the project were no longer relegated to the same dreary existence that their parents had known before 1934. Perhaps in the

Notes on Sources

The author wishes to thank Paul Taff, Ames, for his insights on the initial planning of the community and Father John J. Gorman, Elkhart, for providing information on all phases of the project. Father Gorman lived in Granger for thirty-three years. The major written sources included Raymond P. Duggan, "A Federal Resettlement Project: Granger Homesteads," (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1937); Iowa State Board of Health's report, "Housing Conditions, Iowa Coal Mining Camps," 1919; and the following secondary sources: Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow A New World: The New Deal Community Program* (Ithaca, 1959); Luigi G. Ligutti and John C. Rawe, *Rural Roads to Security: America's Third Struggle for Freedom* (Milwaukee, 1940); and Vincent A. Yzermans, *The People I Love: A Biography of Luigi G. Ligutti* (Collegeville, 1976). The Des Moines Register proved an invaluable source in covering Granger homestead events between 1935 and 1951.

final assessment, the most perceptive view was expressed by Father Gorman, director of the project from 1940 to 1951. In response to homesteaders' concerns that their sons and daughters were leaving the project because no opportunity existed for them there, Father Gorman observed that the project had been

geared to the "emergency demands of a particular situation involving a single generation." It was not, he believed, geared to solve the problems of the succeeding generations. Viewed in this way, the Granger project proved a successful social venture. □

CONTRIBUTORS

B. J. ZENOR is a native of Ft. Dodge, a reading teacher in the Prairie Community schools at Callender, Iowa, and a graduate of Iowa Central Community College and Buena Vista College. Zenor's writing credits include articles in *True West* and *American West* magazines.

DOROTHY SCHWIEDER teaches history at Iowa State University in Ames and is Chairman of the Iowa State Historical Board. A native of South Dakota, she has published several articles and books (most recently in collaboration with her husband) on Iowa topics.

The Division of the State Historical Society and the editor are not responsible for statements of fact or opinion made by contributors.