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HAMLIN GARLAND OF IOWA

by Thomas G. Schuppe

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Mr. Schuppe was born and raised in Bellwood, Illinois but chose to attend college in Iowa. He attended Iowa State University and received a B. S. in English in 1963. He then taught high school for two years at Marshalltown High, after which he and his family moved to Iowa City where he enrolled in graduate school, majoring in American Civilization. It was during this time that Mr. Schuppe began his concentrated study of Hamlin Garland and his first Master's thesis concerned Garland and his early writings.

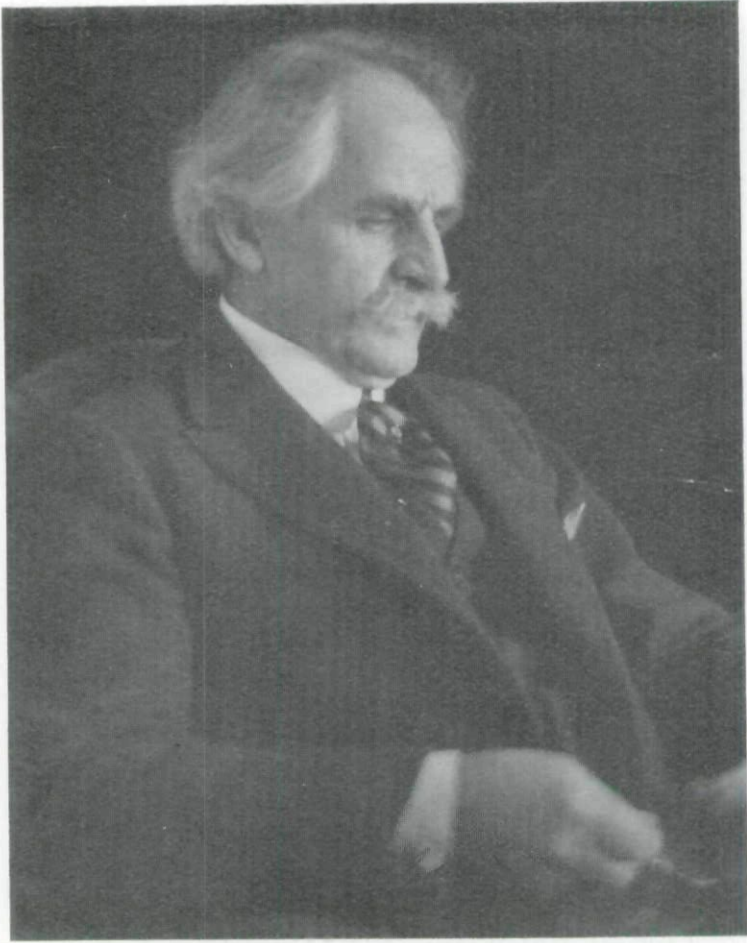
Mr. Schuppe went to Osage and Mitchell County in order to study the background environment of Garland's youth and it was here that the author discovered the multitude of items and aspects that were later seen in Garland's characters and his writings.

Presently, Mr. Schuppe has returned to teaching English at Manteca High School in California.

Garland, Hannibal Hamlin (1860-1940). American short story writer and novelist. Garland is best known for his realistic studies of the hardships and frustrations of farm-life in the Middle West. Born in Wisconsin, Garland went to Boston and became friends with William Dean Howells and others in the Boston literary circle. . . .¹

This excerpt suggests the typical view of reference books, but essentially the same perspective is seen in books devoted entirely to Hamlin Garland.² It is common to think of Garland as one who was born in Wisconsin and farmed in the Middle West before coming East to attend and teach school and to make important literary acquaintances. Garland's Eastern literary acquaintance, as this point of view has it, saw in him a native literary talent, coaxed such talent forward, nurtured, guided and developed it to the high quality apparent in *Main-Travelled Roads* and other Middle Border writings.

We have no quarrel with the geography or the established facts of this view, but we do suggest another perspective. Through an examination of local contemporary sources, especially those found in Mitchell County, Iowa, and through



Hamlin Garland

a careful review of Garland's autobiography, *A Son of the Middle Border*, his Middle Border writings and other sources, we will argue here that the years Garland lived in Iowa were the most influential in his personal development and in the highest achievements of his career.

From a perspective of Garland's years in Iowa, we can explore and obtain interesting, enlightening, significant, and perhaps essential information concerning the man and his work

that is nowhere else available. For instance, through Hamlin's Iowa experiences we can discover the evolution of his adult attitudes: those involving farm life in general; the farmer and his wife; the paradoxical nature of the Middle Border environment; the Grange, Populism, and escapes from the area; and many other attitudes which are highly visible in his writings. Or, the literary historian would observe the extensive duplications of people and places, situations and events from Garland's Iowa experiences reappearing in his fiction. The literary scholar, using this perspective, may wish to revise his judgments about Garland: looking first from Iowa, Garland seems to be less of a creative artist than what one may have thought, less of a colorist, but more of a thorough and accurate reporter.

We will make no attempt to fully examine, analyze, or answer all of the possible subjects, conditions, and questions arising from this perspective. But perhaps this paper—which will outline Garland's years in Iowa, probe sources of a couple of Garland's attitudes, and then reveal some duplications from Garland's life seen in his fiction—may suggest the usefulness, perhaps the scope and even the necessity of this perspective.

In outlining Garland's years in Iowa we are particularly concerned with accurately tracing the frequency and locations of the family moves within Iowa, the physical characteristics of the places in which they lived as well as the general flavor of the area, since these may have special bearing on Garland's attitudes. And we will establish the dates and places of the moves for another reason: it has never been done before.³ Unfortunately, even those few writers who consider Garland's stay in Iowa in some detail fail to give a full or accurate account. These writers have apparently used the autobiography as their sole source of information. Since Garland does not supply a complete chronological outline of these years and since there exists some coincidences in names and places, such failures can therefore be anticipated. And, finally, through the course of this paper, we can check and measure the historical verity of the corresponding chapters of *A Son of the Middle Border* against local contemporary sources and also recognize a few of the plentiful clues found within these chap-

ters as to the real life identities of characters, places, and so on, that reappear in Garland's fiction.

Hamlin Garland was born on September 14, 1860, in West Salem, Wisconsin. This is the "coolee" country of the southwestern part of the state, and the distance to Iowa is not great. When Hamlin was still eight years old,⁴ in February of 1869, the Garlands moved to a farm approximately two miles west of the town of Hesper, in Hesper Township, Winneshiek County, Iowa, or in his words, to the "Middle Border."⁵ Winneshiek County borders Minnesota on the north and is only some twenty-five miles from the Mississippi River and Wisconsin. But after only thirteen months on the Hesper Township farm, the Garlands moved to a farm on the eastern edge of Burr Oak Township, also in Winneshiek County. Hamlin correctly locates this farm as being only six miles west of the Hesper Township place, and both farms are less than two miles from the Iowa-Minnesota state border.⁶ Since these farms fall within the limits of the Wisconsin drift or the area of the terminal moraine of the Kansan glacier, the topography is hilly.⁷

It seems as if Richard Garland, Hamlin's father, decided to move entirely out of the area of the Hesper Township farm, for not only did he choose to rent rather than to buy areas in adjoining Burr Oak Township, but he moved the family once again in August of 1870. The new location was fifty miles to the west-southwest of Burr Oak Township, Winneshiek County, to Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County, Iowa.

In summarizing these early moves in Iowa, we find that the Garlands lived on a farm in Hesper Township, Winneshiek County, from February, 1869, to March, 1870; they then lived for the brief period of March to August, 1870, on a farm in Burr Oak Township, also in Winneshiek County. In August of 1870 they made the more substantial move to a farm in Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County, Iowa.

Hamlin quotes his father with respect to the reasons for their departure from Wisconsin, but he seldom gives reasons for the several moves within Iowa. Yet, it is likely that these frequent re-locations would have a psychological impact on the mind of a boy, and, consequently, the reasons for them

are noteworthy. Particularly since these frequent moves may have had significant influence on Hamlin's attitudes towards his father, farm life, and life on the Middle Border, we shall take extra space in this biographical sketch to recognize observable reasons.

Why did Richard leave Winneshiek and move to Mitchell County? Was Richard unsuccessful farming, was he in debt, was he forced to leave Winneshiek County? Evidence suggests that he was not. However, we do observe that the number of farms in each of the Winneshiek townships was twice as great and the number of improved areas four times as large than in Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County. And, in addition to the relatively established, crowded nature of Winneshiek, if Richard pictured himself as primarily a wheat farmer, the fourteen hundred wooded acres, plus the hilly topography of Winneshiek County, as compared to only fifty wooded acres in the sparsely settled "Looking Glass Prairie" of Mitchell County was reason enough to move. But, also, the dominate Norwegian influence in Winneshiek may have been a major factor. Well over twice as many heads of households and spouses in Hesper Township were born in Norway than in any other place, and two of the three leading places of birth of these people in Burr Oak Township, Winneshiek County, were also foreign countries. But in Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County, more heads of households and spouses were born in New York than anywhere else, with Vermont and Wisconsin a distant second and third respectively. Since Richard Garland was born in Maine and his wife, Isabel, in Ohio, it would seem that the familiar language, customs and manners, no doubt evident in the Mitchell County township, would be more attractive to them than the foreign dominance apparent in these Winneshiek County townships.⁸

Hamlin says that Richard bought land and the family moved to Mitchell County in August of 1870.⁹ The purchase is confirmed in the *Mitchell County Press*, Osage, Iowa, July 14, 1870, under "Real Estate Transfers," as follows.¹⁰

—Michael Clark to R. H. Garland
sw 30 99 16 \$1700.00

This farm is located in the southwest quadrant of section 30, township 99, range 16 (or, S.W. 30-99-16), located in the far

northwest corner of Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County. A section, such as section 30, is a square mile which, in Iowa, is normally bordered on all sides by roads.

Garland's descriptions of the area around S.W. 30-99-16 are quite accurate. Of central importance in these accounts is his depiction of the area as a prairie. A soil survey calls the topography of the county "a gently undulating plain," and it reports that two glaciers deposited some three feet of top soil which is, with the exception of the land adjoining such as Dry Run Creek, which runs through a corner of S.W. 30-99-16, very conducive to the growth of grasses and grains.¹¹ This farm is located some fifteen to twenty miles west of the limits of the Wisconsin drift, and it is twelve miles from the Minnesota border. To the west and north to the border, as Garland says, there was very little settlement at this time.¹² One of Garland's closest neighbors in these directions was a fiddler, Daddy Fairbanks, whose farm was only a mile to the north-northeast. But an inaccuracy appears when Garland states that he attended school "about a mile to the southwest." He means Burr Oak School number one, then called "Bucknam school" but later "Button school," which was approximately a mile and one-half to the southeast.¹³

Soon the Garlands moved again. This time they did not follow the directions to the unsettled areas to the west or even to the north, but, rather, they located on the still virgin acres only a mile and one-half to the southeast, very close to Burr Oak School number one. This farm is in the southeast quadrant of section 6, township 98, range 16 (or, S.E. 6-98-16), also in Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County.

What reasons there were for this move to the fourth Iowa farm in less than three years we are not told. But we can observe that perhaps S.W. 30-99-16 did not include as many productive acres as Richard may have wished. Dry Run Creek, with its adjoining soils unconducive to the growth of grains, may have taken many acres of this farm. And this quarter section, S.W. 30-99-16, as described in the tax lists, consisted of only 132.70 acres. The lists of this time also placed the average value of this farm as only \$6.10 per acre, compared to an average value of \$20.12 per acre for all other Burr Oak Township farms.¹⁴ This may suggest the lack of substantial

improvement of S.W. 30-99-16, but it may also suggest a poorer quality of acres. Although, as the autobiography says, Hamlin, his father and his Uncle David plowed up many of the virgin acres of S.E. 6-98-16 in May of 1872, after first planting S.W. 30-99-16, the Garlands did not actually move to their newly constructed farmhouse until September of that year, when Hamlin had his twelfth birthday.¹⁵ This proved to be Garland's most permanent Iowa home.

Again Garland is generally accurate in his descriptions of the physical setting of the site and the area surrounding S.E. 6-98-16. The Cedar River is just over four miles to the west, and Dry Run Creek meanders as close as two sections east of S.E. 6-98-16. Burr Oak Grove—a stand of trees that probably then measured about a mile in diameter—is often mentioned in the autobiography.¹⁶ It would seem probable that Hamlin could see this grove, as he says,¹⁷ after the February blizzard of 1873, since this sizeable stand was only two to two and one-half miles to the southeast across the prairie from his farm. The local post office, called the 'Cardiff' post office, was located on the northeast edge of the grove, and the Burr Oak (Grove) School number three was within it. This schoolhouse, which Hamlin describes as being better constructed than the schoolhouse he attended,¹⁸ was the meeting place for the local, 'Cardiff,' Grange and where regular church services, revivals, spelling bees, and the like, were held in the township.

Hamlin continued to attend Burr Oak School number one which he now correctly locates at the northeast corner of his farm.¹⁹ The school was perhaps slightly north of the midway point, near the road, on the eastern side of section six. The location of a school near the midway point rather than on a corner of a section was not unusual. What was rather unusual is the fact that a road began across from the schoolhouse, a branch road that ran east through the middle of sections five and four.²⁰

In Garland's autobiography we read a great deal about the town of Osage, in Osage Township. The center of Osage—including the Cedar Valley Seminary which was only one block north of the main commercial thoroughfare²¹—is five miles to the south-southwest of S.E. 6-98-16. Hamlin estimates

the population of Osage at twelve-hundred in late 1871, but it was actually fourteen-hundred in 1870.²² When Garland refers to "going to town," however, he means going to Osage; it was the general economic, cultural, and social center for the Garlands as well as for the other rural residents of Burr Oak throughout the 1870's.

Prosperity was evidently common during the first half of the decade. In addition to whatever livestock Burr Oak farmers possessed, a comparative examination of the tax lists of 1870 and 1871 with the lists of 1874 reveals that most farmers, who lived in the township during those years, owned more land by the latter date. Hamlin mentions that his family, too, was becoming more affluent: "We were now farming, over three hundred acres of land and caring for a herd of cattle and many swine."²³ The tax lists indicated that the Garlands owned the most land in 1873—Richard Garland then owning both S.W. 30-99-16 and S.E. 6-98-16, or 290.70 acres.

Major evidences of the events and movements of the Garlands between the years of 1875 and 1877 are unavailable. The *Catalogue of the Cedar Valley Seminary* does list Harriet Garland, Hamlin's elder sister, as having attended prior to the 1875-1876 school year.²⁴ Therefore, the assumption the readers of *A Son of the Middle Border* would make—that she died in early May, 1875—is seemingly correct. From there, we take Hamlin's word to the effect that his father took a job as a wheat buyer at the Grange elevator in Osage shortly thereafter—in June, 1875—but that the family did not move to Osage until the following March, 1876.²⁵ Hamlin, then attended Burr Oak district school number one, well into his fifteenth year; when he began his studies at the Cedar Valley Seminary in late September or October of 1876, he was sixteen.²⁶ Hamlin attended the Seminary in Osage during the winter months for five years, the autumn of 1876 to June of 1881, through his formative ages, sixteen through twenty.

The Osage public school reports published in the *Mitchell County Press* list Frank, Hamlin's younger brother, as being in attendance on June 4, 1876, and again on February 1, 1877, but not after. And Garland does tell us that the family returned to S.E. 6-98-16 on March 21, 1877, but that his "father re-

tained his position as grain buyer, and . . . drove back and forth daily.²⁷ The only shred of evidence we have to support this latter statement is an item in the October 11th, 1877, issue of the *Press* which thanks subscribers for payments. Richard Garland is named here and the location given for the deliveries is Osage.

Apparently Richard Garland planned to move again as early as 1880, for after the wheat harvest there appeared in the October 14, 1880, issue of the *Press*, under the heading "Real Estate Transfers," the following notification of sale:

—Richard H. Garland to Johnson & Allis
se 6 98 16 \$3200.

According to Hamlin, his father went to Dakota and bought land there, but not until May of 1881.²⁸ Richard did attend Hamlin's graduation in late June of 1881, and, although Richard and brother Frank went to Dakota to farm for the following months, his father was back in Mitchell County for the joint going away and wedding anniversary party held on September 1.²⁹ The *Agricultural Census* tells us that Richard owned two-hundred forty acres in 1880, so after the sale of the one-hundred sixty acres of S.E. 6-98-16 he still held eighty acres. Since we are not told otherwise and can find no contrary evidence, we assume that the land that Hamlin says he farmed during the summer of 1881, without the help of his father or brother, were these eighty acres.

Why Richard decided to move again, especially from what seems to have been the type of farm he wanted, continues to be a relevant question. An article appeared in the October 28, 1880, issue of the *Press*, just two weeks after notification of Richard's sale, which states that several families of the North Burr Oak Township area have or are planning to move to Dakota, where cheap land was still available.

. . . not from choice but necessity, their land and other property being ascribed by the too sharp agricultural implement and money dealers.

Was this the reason for the move? Was Richard in debt to these people? Perhaps. But this article also states that the harvest of wheat "averaged about fifteen bushels" per acre in the Burr Oak area. This is not accurate. However, Hamlin's comments suggests another problem and the background reason for the move.

For two years the crop had been almost wholly destroyed by chinch bugs. . . . The harvest of '80 had been a season of disgust and disappointment for us for not only had the pestiferous mites devoured the grain, they had filled our stables, graineries, and even our kitchens with their ill-smelling bodies. . . .³⁰

And later, when the decision to move to Dakota had been made final, he says:

I confess I sympathized in some degree with my father's new design. There was something large and fine in the business of wheat-growing, and to have a plague of insects arise just as our harvesting machinery was reaching such perfection that we could handle our entire crop without hired help was a tragic, abominable injustice. I could not blame him [Richard Garland] for his resentment and dismay.³¹

We certainly do not wish to give Richard Garland any excuses for the near-transient life to which he subjected Isabel and raised his family, but we have no real evidence to accuse him of incapable farming. But on the other hand, we recall that Richard did increase his land holdings earlier in the decade, and we note that whereas the average size of the 121 farms in Burr Oak in 1880 was 149.1 acres, Richard owned the two-hundred forty.³² Further, we recognize that among these 121 farmers, only thirty-nine had permanently hired hands, and Richard was one of these.³³

Rather than the fifteen bushels of wheat per acre average claimed in the article, only ten of the one-hundred three farmers in Burr Oak, who planted fifty percent or more of their land to wheat, harvested fifteen bushels or more. The average of all of these computes to be ten point five, and Richard harvested around ten point two bushels per acre. Many of the local farmers harvested much less.³⁴ This indicates that rather than the "too sharp agricultural implement and money dealers" or rather than gross financial mismanagement on Richard's part, the primary reason for leaving, this otherwise desirable Iowa farm, was the presence of the irresistible chinch bug.

Hamlin made his break at this time. True, he rejoined his family for a time in South Dakota and also for a time held a claim in North Dakota (apparently for investment purposes) before he went East, but his departure from his family, from farming, and from Iowa in September of 1881, around his twenty-first birthday, signals a new, adult phase in Hamlin Garland's life.

Although to surmise what hopes and desires Hamlin had when he departed in 1881 would be highly speculative, we can ascertain his attitudes towards what he had left with some certainty. Garland visited Iowa later in the 1880's in an effort to gather material concerning the farmers' plight and their Populist revolt, and these later visits did provide topics apparent in some of his fiction. However, it is argued here that Garland already knew the basis of the farmers' conditions through his experiences in Iowa and had previously established attitudes toward them. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe the negative tone in respect to farm life on the Middle Border in some of the fiction written before he returned as well as in his work between and after these visits.

Why did Hamlin leave his family? Why did he dislike farming? Why did he generally disfavor life on the Middle Border, particularly in light of all the complimentary things he says in his writings about the natural environment of the area? In consideration of these large but important questions, a good many conditions exist. Although space precludes a thorough analysis of all of them, we can sketch a few conditions contributing to the formulation of Hamlin's attitudes and, thereby, suggest the usefulness of this perspective.

It is the opinion held by many, from Garland scholars to present-day residents of Osage and Burr Oak Township, that Hamlin's negative attitudes were drawn exclusively from his lack of appreciation of his stern, soldier-like father. After all, it was Richard Garland, they point out, who dominated Hamlin's life, who was responsible for inflicting distasteful experiences upon Hamlin such as doing man's farmwork as a boy, and who led the many moves of the family, including those away from the places Hamlin found more pleasant, such as the hills and the trees of Winneshiek County, and the books and other outlets of Osage. This point of view may certainly be true, but one questions the exclusiveness of it; other conditions existed which appear to be equally responsible for Hamlin's attitudes, if not more so.

We have taken extra space in the biographical sketch to suggest that Richard was not, because of his own doings, forced off any farm or out of an area. And nowhere can we find that Richard drank too much, was lazy, abused his wife

or children, or had similar traits which would influence the feelings of a sensitive son. Rather, he apparently made the frequent moves because of his desire to find what he thought would be a better life for himself and his family. And it seems that he found it on S.E. 6-98-16. He owned this attractive land and prospered; he rented it soon after the death of his eldest child and took the position in Osage, but he returned to S.E. 6-98-16, according to Hamlin, because the renter was not properly managing it.³⁵ And it seems that Richard finally sold S.E. 6-98-16 because of the existence of the chinch bug locally, and he took up land in the Dakota Territory because of its wheat growing potential and inexpensiveness.

We may further absolve Richard from sole responsibility for Hamlin's negative attitudes by recognizing that Garland often addresses himself to the predicament of the Middle Border farmer in his fiction. Almost exclusively we see the farmer, such as Richard, forcing his son to do man's work on the farm, not because the father lacks feeling for the boy, but because the conditions of farm life on the Middle Border leave him no choice. Garland often reveals this predicament—even when it has little or nothing to do with the story—perhaps because Garland knew this sad situation of the Middle Border area all too well. Such an indirect, nonessential portrayal of this predicament is seen in Garland's most famous story, "Under the Lion's Paw."³⁶

This story tells of the return of a Middle Border farmer, Haskins, to Iowa after grasshoppers had ruined him in Kansas. Friendly Iowa farmer, Steve Council (and the Councils were a large family in Burr Oak Township; Steve Council died in 1900³⁷), aids Haskins in obtaining a farm and helps him get started on it. Haskins tries very hard to succeed on this farm, and in this part of the story we read:

The eldest boy, now nine years old, drove a team all through the spring, plowing and seeding, milked the cows, and did chores innumerable, in most ways taking the place of a man; an infinitely pathetic but common figure—this boy—on the American farm, where there is no law against child labor. To see him in his coarse clothing, his huge boots, and his ragged cap, as he staggered with a pail of water from the well, or trudged in the cold and cheerless dawn out into the frosty field behind his team, gave the city-bred visitor a sharp pang of

sympathetic pain. Yet Haskins loved his boy, and would have saved him from this if he could, but he could not.³⁸

This description, and many others like it, suggests that Hamlin understood completely his father's predicament and had sympathy for him.

We also recall the legend surrounding Richard at the Populist Convention in Omaha in 1892. Richard had never thought highly of Hamlin's literary career, but in the Convention audience which heard Hamlin read aloud "Under the Lion's Paw," Richard wept in pride. The warmth of this incident does not suggest antagonism between Richard and Hamlin.

These and a multitude of other little indicators convince us that Hamlin's dislike of farm life and life on the Middle Border was not exclusively due to the lack of appreciation of his father.

Although not directly related to our questions, we should take note of Hamlin's emotional response to his mother and to the Middle Border farm wife. From the autobiography, it is obvious Hamlin loved his mother, but his dominate emotion was sympathy for her, and this feeling is also apparent, to a greater or lesser degree, in much of Garland's fiction. To illustrate this, we need only refer to Garland's very fine short story, "A Day's Pleasure" in which the plight of the Middle Border farm wife is the central theme.³⁹

In this story we see the endeavors of Mrs. Markham, the Middle Border, the Iowa farm wife, to achieve temporary relief from her constant routine of taxing farm duties by a pleasurable day in town. She convinces her husband the previous evening that she and her pre-school child should accompany him to town, to Osage, as he brings in some sacks of wheat; she has not been "out o' this house for six months."⁴⁰ Because she will be occupied the next morning in preparation for the day, she must toil long into that night holding up and open sacks to be filled with wheat. It is the detailed descriptions of Mrs. Markham's chores the next morning, the day of pleasure, that indicate that Garland is reporting what he had seen so often of his own mother in their Iowa farmhouse. But even more pathetic is Garland's following descriptions:

She was weak with the worry of it all when she had sent the

older children away to school, and the kitchen work was finished. She went into the cold bedroom off the little sitting room and put on her best dress. It never had been a good fit, and now she was getting so thin it hung in wrinkled folds everywhere about the shoulders and waist. She lay down on the bed a moment to ease that dull pain in her back. She had a moment's distaste for going out at all. The thought of sleep was more alluring. Then the thought of the long, long day, and the sickening sameness of her life, swept over her again, and she rose and prepared the baby for the journey.⁴¹

After all the sacrifice, all the preparation for the day's pleasure, it is the irony of the story that Mrs. Markham's day is not much of an escape or relief, not much of a pleasure after all. In town, her husband leaves her to sell the wheat and converse with the men while she spends most of the day aimlessly, lonesomely wondering about the small town—which can really provide her little entertainment—until she must sit down, exhausted from carrying her child. Although she is finally taken in for a brief period of visiting by an unknown but sympathetic lady, this latter incident only serves to emphasize the bleakness of Mrs. Markham's life and the sadness of her day's pleasure. She then returns to the farm.

In the light of local contemporary sources, when we consider the question of Garland's negative attitudes towards farm life and the life on the Middle Border it becomes clear that, rather than exclusively accusing his parents, it was the social conditions of the area which were mainly responsible for Garland's attitudes. Since the assets and liabilities of life on a farm are well-known, let us only add to these a brief recognition of a few of the conditions Garland witnessed in Mitchell County.

Since Garland was intelligent and obviously sensitive to his surroundings, we deduce that the rigors of farm life would not entirely satisfy him and, hence, we look at what the area could afford him in terms of at least temporary relief. First, for everyone, there were fairs in the autumn, such as the County Fair; picnics, such as the annual June 12th Grange picnic; and the circus came to Mitchell County every summer.⁴²

Then, too, for the men there were several more frequent means of escape. For instance, there were two factions of the dominate Republican Party—the 'regular' town Republicans and the rurally based Republicans, whom the Press calls the

“clique”—plus a small Democratic Party organization.⁴³ However, there is no record of Richard’s activity in any of these, nor in the Grange, although Hamlin tells us his father was an active member.⁴⁴ Richard is mentioned in the *Press* in association with the Society for the Protection from Horse Thiefs and, although Hamlin does not mention it in the autobiography, with the Mitchell County Stock & Produce Association.⁴⁵

These and a few other such organizations are to be included in the social conditions of the area. But it must also be realized that, first, they generally met in a town—Osage or Mitchell—and in some cases, in places like the Burr Oak Grove schoolhouse. When we recall the energy and time-consuming requirements of farmwork, the distance required to attend meetings, the type of transportation available, the extremes of weather and the likely conditions of the roads, we become more aware of the limited appeal of these organizations to rural residents. Also, we note that these outlets were primarily for men. A few organizations for women existed locally, such as Ladies Aid societies affiliated with a church, but these too met in town, often in the evenings and, therefore, imposed even greater limitations on the farm women.

This county, even in 1880, was not fully settled nor established; it still qualifies to be called part of the Middle Border. Osage, with its two-thousand twelve residents, was by far the largest town, but as Mrs. Markham’s day reveals, a town of this size can offer little entertainment to its visitors.⁴⁶ Also, the 121 farms did not fill the township. The relative sparsity of the population, plus the constant comings and goings of many of these inhabitants suggests instability of institutions, the unimproved conditions of roads, inadequacy of bridges, infrequency of neighborhood visiting, and so on.

Along with the observations of social conditions, we would be remiss if we did not reckon with the degree of provincialism versus sophistication of the time and place. This can be done by a brief look at the *Mitchell County Press* of the 1870’s, the chief communications organ of the area.

First, we see that rarely, only in instances of the magnitude of presidential elections or the Chicago fire, does this

newspaper provide any international or national news. It does include some state news in a column devoted to that purpose, but the contents of it are generally restricted to extremes in weather, crop conditions, roving bands of thieves, and other related subjects. The *Press* does publish some regular features—columns concerning tips to housewives, religion, and so on—but by far the greatest column space is given to local news and features. These local items range from minutes of meetings, announcements and notices, to descriptions of accidents, losses by fire, and such facts as: Representative N. C. Deering has built an attractive fence around his Burr Oak Township farm.⁴⁷ Also, better than one-third of the *Press* is given over to advertisements. Except for a couple of ads for farm insurance available in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and tonics and remedies available through mail order, all of these ads are for local concerns.

When we include other factors, such as the usage of language, vocabulary, and the intellectual level of the items, we can readily judge the *Press* to be a very local, a very provincial publication. Of course, people of a Middle Border area had few, if any, other means of contact with the outside world except through a newspaper. In our case, even if some of the residents would have liked contact—in terms of information, ideas, developments, and so on—with the world outside Mitchell County, the *Press* provided very little.

Since we are concerned here only with illustrating the possibilities of viewing Hamlin Garland from an Iowa perspective, we will confine ourselves to these few aspects of the local social conditions in our efforts to answer the questions about Garland's attitudes. Certainly many more aspects could be included, but they would only lead us to the same conclusion. As much or more than any other factor, Hamlin Garland disliked farm life and life on the Middle Border because of the social conditions that existed during his adolescent years in Iowa.

Again, let us assume that Hamlin could emotionally and physically accept the hard work of the farm; the semi-isolation; the high risks of purchasing new machinery, the variations in the price of land (which rose in the area about one-third through the course of the decade),⁴⁸ and the fluctuations in

the grain market; plus the quirks of nature, Garland could still not accept farm life on the Middle Border. When we recall the contrast in Hamlin's life through the formative years of young manhood—town, school, cultural outlets and books versus S.E. 6-98-16, hard work, boredoms and many risks—and then add to these the social conditions of the area, characterized by restrictions and limitations, narrowness and provincialism, we can see how a life on the Middle Border farm could be thoroughly disliked by such an intelligent and sensitive young man.

From a perspective of Hamlin Garland in Iowa we may also learn a great deal about his writings. The subjects of his works, his treatment of them and his attitude toward them, as well as many other significant factors can be derived from Garland's experiences in Iowa. But for the sake of brevity, let us consider only the subject of direct duplications, and, rather than attempting to list these through all his Middle Border writings (which would be a very long list indeed), let us consider some duplication in only one of Garland's stories, the lead story of *Main-Travelled Roads*, "A Branch Road."⁴⁹

This is a story of a young man, Will Hanman, who has fallen in love with Agnes Dingman. Will, who is in his early twenties, lives on a farm with his older brother, his wife and their children. The story opens as Will is going to help harvest wheat at the Dingman's farm. He meets up with his good friend Milton Jennings, and together they join other young men who are 'changing hands' at the Dingman's; that is, helping Dingman harvest for his return of the favor. During the course of the day, the other young men, suspecting the secret feelings Will and Agnes have for each other, begin to tease him. Will becomes embarrassed then irate with his young companions, and imagining that Agnes is responsible for giving away their secret, he becomes angry with her also. Will and Agnes do have a pre-established date for the County Fair to be held a couple of days later, and although they have no communication between times, Will borrows his brother's nice rig to go pick her up for the day's outing. However, on the way the rig breaks. By the time Will arrives at the Dingman's, he discovers that although Agnes did wait for him, she eventually went to the fair with his rival.

This occurrence crushes Will, to the degree that he leaves the area entirely, goes West and does not return for seven years. Upon his return he learns that Agnes has married his old rival, that she has a child and that she is living with them and her in-laws on a local farm. However, it is not until he sees and speaks with her that he discovers how mentally abusive her husband and, especially, her in-laws are, how much she has physically deteriorated and how miserable her existence is. Their old love is rekindled, and, after some time and persuasion, Agnes, with her child in her arms, consents to escape from her present conditions and run away with Will. Where? Garland does not name a destination; he only says:

But the sun shone on the dazzling, rustling wheat, the fathomless sky blue, as a sea, bent above them—and the world lay before them.⁵⁰

The possibility of coincidence in regard to the setting of "A Branch Road" is present, but in light of the other exact duplications in the story, such a possibility seems unlikely. Therefore, when Garland begins "A Branch Road" with the line, "Keep the main travelled road till you come to a branch leading off—keep to the right," he is recalling the route and direction from S.E. 6-98-16 to the branch road.⁵¹ From his farm, Garland or Will would travel north to the schoolhouse corner and turn to the right; then, as the story describes, the traveller would be proceeding east. In this direction, considering the flatness of "Looking Glass Prairie," it is altogether possible that Garland or Will could see, as described, the hills and the "belt of timber" of the limits of the Wisconsin drift or the terminal moraine of the Kansan glacier behind which the sun is rising. More generally, such things as the types of birds and trees described, and the late September frost also fit this area. Other physical descriptions given later in the story—Will's walk "along the dusty road from Rock River [i.e., Osage] toward 'The Corners' [perhaps the schoolhouse];" the corn, barley, and wheat mentioned as the crops, and the popple trees; and the crossing of the streams [meandering Dry Run Creek] while again travelling the branch road—all fit the location, directions, and physical characteristics of Burr Oak Township, of S.E. 6-98-16 and its relation to the branch road. And the dates of the story—1880, and Will's return in

1887—exactly duplicate a mature year of Garland's own life in Burr Oak Township and his first return visit in 1887.

The characters of "A Branch Road" also seem to be duplications of those people Garland knew in Burr Oak Township. The glaring exception is Will's family. But a cast of characters, including Garland, who often closely resembles the major characters of his stories, and an older brother, substituting for his father, are not unfamiliar to the readers of Garland's fiction. The name Milton Jennings is rather unusual because Garland rarely gives both the first and surname to a character, which is exactly that, including the same spelling, of a Burr Oak neighbor. The "seminary chaps like Will Hannan and Milton Jennings" are, of course, Garland and Burt Babcock, Hamlin's boyhood friend and fellow student.⁵²

Agnes Dingman of "A Branch Road" is something of a mystery. She could be Agnes Davis—Garland using the first name and first initial of the last name for Agnes Dingman of the story. Agnes Davis was a year or so younger than Hamlin, but although her family lived almost directly east of the Garlands, it is likely that Hamlin or Will would take the main road south of S.E. 6-98-16 to get it. Agnes Davis did not attend the Seminary as did the Agnes of the story, but she did marry another young man of Burr Oak at about the time of Hamlin's departure from Iowa. Another possibility of a living model of Agnes Dingman is none other than Alice Babcock, Burt's elder sister. Briefly, her qualifications include the fact that she was probably the Alice described as Garland's girlfriend in *A Son of the Middle Border*. After their affections became known, Garland tells us that he was teased by his friends—"the outcry of my friends so intimidated me that I dared not look Alice in the face"—which, of course, is the first plot motivation of the story.⁵³ Alice Babcock did attend the Seminary—her name is listed in the Catalogue—but if she is the Alice of the autobiography, she was some four or five years older than Hamlin. However, the Babcocks did live along the branch road, and Garland (or Will) would have taken the route described to get to the Babcock farm. For these reasons, and others too lengthy to give here, it seems clear that Agnes Dingman of "A Branch Road" is either Agnes

Davis or Alice Babcock or a combination of them.

Will Hannan is Hamlin Garland himself. Everything about Will seems to fit Hamlin of 1880 except his age. Will's is given as "about twenty-two or -three," whereas Hamlin was nineteen to twenty-one during 1880 and 1881. We can speculate as to the reasons for this, and as to the identity of the minor characters in the story, but evidence and arguments pertaining to these subjects would require even more space, to uncertain ends.

Of course, Garland in real life did not lead a wife away from her home as Will does in "A Branch Road." But considering the attention given to women in the *Press*, especially the several articles and items which concern a local wife leaving home, it is likely that Garland knew of approximate situations.⁵⁴ The jealousy of the other young men helping Dingman is quite probably another duplication. Of the twenty-eight young men in Burr Oak Township, eighteen through twenty-two years of age in 1880, only seven, including Hamlin and Burt, attended school, and some of the other seven probably still attended local township schools.⁵⁵ Also, in the story the fact that Agnes' in-laws live in her household does not necessarily contradict the typical household membership in Burr Oak Township. In 1880 better than one-third of the households included relatives and boarders.⁵⁶ And, of course, the name and vicinity of the Seminary are matched in the story.

Garland provides many hints as to the sources of his writings in his autobiography—which, as this study indicates, is historically quite accurate—and we can go to those chapters describing his years in Iowa for background information relating to "A Branch Road." The most important of these—the teasing of Garland by his friends and his reactions when his feelings for Alice became known—has been mentioned. Garland also tells us that he often started school at the Seminary late because farm duties required his time until around the second week of October, and Will is under the same situation in the story.⁵⁷ The 'changing hands,' the borrowing of a good rig, the significance of a fair to rural inhabitants, and other such details mentioned in the autobiography reappear

in the story. And the major motivation of the story that results from the plight of the farm wife is a topic often considered in the autobiography.

We have endeavored to illustrate that, along with the appropriate chapters of *A Son of the Middle Border* and the Middle Border writings, a great deal of useful, perhaps essential information about Garland and his work can be obtained from contemporary sources in Iowa. Certainly there is relevant information to be found elsewhere. But we are convinced that no study of Garland is complete nor fully accurate without a thorough examination and analysis of his twelve formative years on the Middle Border—an adoption of the perspective of Hamlin Garland of Iowa.

NOTES

Any credit this paper may warrant should be given to Professor Robert Dykstra of the State University of Iowa, to the staff of the State Historical Society, and especially to the friendly, helpful people of Osage and Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County, Iowa.

¹Benet, William Rose, *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1965, p. 382.

²The two major books devoted to Garland are: Jean Holloway, *Hamlin Garland: A Biography*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960, and Donald Pizer, *Hamlin Garland's Early Works and Career*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960. Both books—but especially the biography—strongly emphasize the importance of Garland's literary acquaintances in Boston to the development of the man and his work.

³Holloway's biography of Garland gives only the briefest recognition to these years, and, while Pizer's book does give them more attention, his still abbreviated account is plagued with errors. Other lesser books, such as that of Lora Crouch, *Hamlin Garland: Dakota Homesteader*, Sioux Falls, S. D.: O'Connor Commercial Printers, 1961, likewise either generally ignore Garland's years in Iowa or provide brief but frequently erroneous accounts.

⁴An error appears in: Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1962, p. 64, when Garland says he was nine years old when he patrolled the plantings with a shotgun this first spring in Iowa. Since this is a description of the spring of 1869, Garland was still eight years old, not nine. This little mistake may have initially contributed to erroneous biographical accounts of those who have leaned too heavily on the autobiography.

⁵In a letter to the editors published in: *Twentieth Century American Authors*, S. J. Kunitz and H. Haycraft editors, New York: The H. W. Wilson Co., 1942, p. 516, Garland indicates his notion that Iowa was part of the Middle Border, but Wisconsin was not: "In 1869 my people moved to Iowa and I spent twelve years on a 'Middle Border' farm."

⁶Hamlin correctly locates these farms: Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 61 (the first farm "which was situated two miles west of

the village of Hesper") & p. 67 (the second farm "some six miles directly west, in the township of Burr Oak").

⁷Edwin Raisz, *Landforms of the United States*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960. "Hilly" is, of course, relative. Compared to the Wisconsin coolee country, Richard Garland is justified in claiming to his father-in-law that Winneshiek County is flat. (Richard's claim: *Ibid.*, Garland, p. 51). But in comparison to "Looking Glass Prairie" which Winneshief borders on the east, it is hilly.

⁸Computations made from: *Iowa Agricultural Census, 1870*; *Iowa Population Census, 1870*; *Platt Book of Winneshiek County, Iowa*, Minneapolis, Minn.: Warner and Foote, 1886. We note the references to the Norwegian influence in: *ibid.*, Garland, pp. 62, 63 and on p. 65 he says, "a bitter feud arose (or existed) between the 'Yankees,' as they called us, and 'the Norskies,' as we called them."

⁹*Ibid.*, Garland, pp. 67, 68. But later in the autobiography Garland mistakenly alludes to this first Mitchell County farm, S.W. 30-99-16, as being rented, pp. 78, 88.

¹⁰It may be noted that in the following week's issues of the *Press*, July 21, 1870, under "Real Estate Transfers," is listed Garland's purchase of a town lot in Osage from his brother-in-law, Hugh (David) McClintock:

—H. McClintock to R. H. Garland
lot 7 blk. 135 Osage \$1500.00

However, we do not know whatever happened to this lot. It is not mentioned in the autobiography, and we can not find any tax records of it, a notification of the resale, nor recognition of it in any other source.

¹¹*Soil Survey of Iowa, "Mitchell County,"* Ames, Iowa: Iowa State College, 1919, p. 16.

¹²This is indicated by: *Tax Lists of Mitchell County, Iowa, 1871*; A. T. Andreas' *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, Chicago: Andreas' Atlas Co., 1875, p. 40. These confirm: Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 72, and on p. 79 reference is made to the fiddler, Daddy Fairbanks.

¹³The inaccuracy: *ibid.*, Garland, p. 80. An unsigned, undated letter to a local Hamlin Garland club by a female who claims to have been a resident of Burr Oak Township and an acquaintance of Garland states that when this schoolhouse was to be rebuilt in 1894 it was suggested that the name of it be changed to "Hamlin Garland School." But since O. Button, who lived just north of the schoolhouse and in 1872 would be a direct neighbor of the Garlands, offered the rock and labor for the construction of the cellar, it was voted instead to name the new school after Button. First reference to Button in the autobiography is on p. 76.

¹⁴Computed from: *Tax Lists of Mitchell County, Iowa, 1871*, and *Iowa Agricultural Census, 1870*.

¹⁵Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, pp. 88-90. *Iowa Population Census*, like the *Press*, lists a "Hugh" McClintock but no "David." Perhaps David was a middle name used to distinguish this Hugh from his father, Hamlin's maternal grandfather, Hugh McClintock. Also, local residents as well as the current inhabitants of the farmhouse on S.E. 6-98-16, Mr. Avery Wood and family, claim that it is the house in which

Garland lived. It is described on p. 89 of the autobiography as being built "on a little rise of ground near the road." The present site fits this description, but if it is the same house it has undergone drastic remodeling.

¹⁶Locations, directions and estimates from: *A. T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas*, p. 40; *Soil Survey of Iowa* (map), pp. 20-21; *Standard Historical Atlas of Mitchell County, Iowa*, Chicago: Anderson Publishing Co., 1911, p. 27.

¹⁷Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 93.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁰*A. T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas*, p. 40.

²¹One of the three buildings of the Seminary has been torn down in favor of a new elementary school, and one of the others supplements this new school. The third building serves as a museum commemorating the Seminary, which was closed in 1922.

²²Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 77. Populations of Mitchell and Osage compiled from: *Iowa Population Census, 1870*.

²³*Ibid.*, Garland, p. 124.

²⁴*Catalogue of the Cedar Valley Seminary, Osage, Iowa, 1876*, p. 12.

²⁵Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, pp. 147, 154.

²⁶Reference made to this starting date: *ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 194-5, 198.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 193.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 197.

³²Noted and computed from: *Iowa Agricultural Census, 1880*.

³³*Iowa Population Census, 1880*.

³⁴Noted and computed from: *Iowa Agricultural Census, 1880*.

³⁵Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 171.

³⁶Hamlin Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, New York: The New American Library, 1962, pp. 141-55.

³⁷There are many Counsel tombstones in a cemetery in the village of Brownsville, Burr Oak Township, Mitchell County, Iowa, including Steve Counsel's stone and those of several other people mentioned in the autobiography or characterized in Garland's fiction.

³⁸Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, p. 150.

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 173-81.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁴²The *Press* annually gives substantial advertising space to these events: the County Fair in late September or October; the circus in June; and the Fourth of July festivities—all of which were held in Osage. The *Press* gives abbreviated notice of the annual Grange picnics (and the annual June 12th date of it confirms Garland's statement: Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 140), but the newspaper says nothing about other affairs of the Grange referred to on the same page by Garland, such as: "In the winter 'oyster suppers,' with debates, songs and essays, drew us all to the Burr Oak Grove schoolhouse."

⁴³The Republican Party dominated the county: in every election during the decade (and into the twentieth century) the majority of

the county's vote, including those of Burr Oak Township, went to every Republican candidate so labelled. *History of Mitchell and Worth Counties, Iowa*, two volumes, J. F. Clyde and H. A. Dwelle editors, Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1918, pp. 128-131. As Garland says (*ibid.*, Garland, p. 190), actually two newspapers existed during most of the decade: the *Press*, which supported the "regulars"; and the *Osage News*, which supported the rurally supported Republican faction. The *News* came from West Mitchell to Osage in August of 1870 (about the time the Garlands came from Winneshiek County), but it apparently never succeeded well in competition with the established *Press*. The *News* folded, and most past issues of it are lost.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, Garland, p. 140.

⁴⁵Garland calls the former organization of which he claims his father was a member, "Horse Thief Protection Association" (*ibid.*, pp. 124-5), but the *Press* consistently uses the name given here.

⁴⁶Population compiled from: *Iowa Population Census*, 1880.

⁴⁷The name Deering, along with the name fiddler, Daddy Fairbanks, suggests the composite character name of Garland's famous fictional fiddler, Daddy Deering. Many other character names and names seen in the autobiography appear in the *Press*, such as Avery Brush, William Petty, and Peter Lohr, father of the law student, Fred Lohr. Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, pp. 173 (Deering, Brush, Petty), 191-2 (Lohr).

⁴⁸This approximate average is calculated from advertisements made in the *Press* early in the decade as compared to those made for the same land late in the 1870's. The grain market, both locally and in Chicago, did fluctuate yearly as well as seasonally, but the prices paid in 1880 approximate those paid in the early part of the decade.

⁴⁹Garland, *Main-Travelled Roads*, pp. 13-53.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵¹Garland's quotations and other descriptions of the setting recognized in this paragraph are found on: *ibid.*, pp. 13-15, 31-34.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 16 (Milton Jennings), 26-28 (Will's family).

⁵³Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 189.

⁵⁴There is a good deal of attention given to women in the *Press*, from humorous items to serious notices. As an example of a semi-humorous item, we have randomly picked this, of the June 24, 1875, issue of the *Press*:

—An Osage woman will, it is said, apply for a divorce, her complaint being; 'I've been married thirty-one years, have worked like a slave, and have never had a new style bonnet or hat, never been to a circus, or lived in a house that had parlor folding doors.'

And an example of a serious notice are these opening lines published in the *Press* of March 22, 1871, written by Joseph Hart, a rural resident of Mitchell Township:

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my wife, Sarah E. Hart, has left my bed and board without cause or provocation, and I hereby warn all persons from trusting or harboring her. . . .

⁵⁵*Iowa Population Census, 1880.* Although the census does have a column in which school attendance for individuals is marked, we have no way of knowing what school was attended. Consequently, some of the seven, especially the three of these who were only eighteen years old in July of 1880, may well have been attending district township schools. For instance, Burt Babcock, who was twenty-one years old in July of 1880—therefore, eighteen in July of 1877—is listed by the *Press* of December 27, 1877, as still attending Burr Oak Township district school number one.

⁵⁶Computed from: *Iowa Population Census, 1880.*

⁵⁷Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*, p. 182.

AN 1885 EXCURSION FROM KEOSAUQUA TO STORM LAKE

George C. Duffield was born in Steubenville, Ohio on May 13, 1824. In 1835 he went to Illinois with his father's family in search of a permanent home. Their search eventually brought them to Iowa where in April of 1837 they made their homestead claim on Chequest Creek in Van Buren County, a couple of miles above the town of Keosauqua. The Duffield family composed the first family circle within the present limits of the State of Iowa, west of the great bend of the Des Moines River, save one, that of Samuel Clayton. In 1852, George Duffield erected a house on the adjoining section of his father's original claim and "Linwood Farm" was his home from that time until his death fifty-five years later in September 1908.

Duffield was a noted pioneer resident of Keosauqua and his delightful memories of early pioneer life in Iowa have been preserved in numerous articles written by him for the *ANNALS*.^{*} He was a delegate to the first Republican State Convention held in Iowa City in 1856, and was one of the

^{*}Game in Jefferson County, Vol. 17, No. 6 (Oct. 1930), 415.

"Rifle & Telephone," Vol. 7, No. 7 (Oct. 1930), 552.

"Coming into Iowa in 1837," Vol. 6, No. 1 (April 1903), 1.

"Frontier Church Going 1837," Vol. 6, No. 4 (Jan. 1904), 266;

"Frontier Mills," Vol. 6, No. 6, (July 1904), 425.

"Iowa Settler's Homestead," Vol. 6, No. 3 (Oct. 1903), 206; *Recollections of Steamboating on the Des Moines*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (April 1900), 364.

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