

The Pioneers of Clear Lake

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Howe's Annals of Iowa, 2(3) (Jul. 1883): 70-72

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J. Everett and others, who erected the first cabins there in the spring of 1848. The first cabin built was destroyed by fire. The first school taught in Glenwood was in one of these primitive cabins, and D. H. Solomon, afterward a prominent lawyer of the "slope," was the teacher. The first child born in the place was William Coolidge, in December, 1849. The first death was that of the wife of Silas Hillman, in the summer of 1849. The first flouring mill in the county was erected by J. W. Coolidge during the summer of the same year.

Glenwood being some six miles west of the center of the county, once had a rival for county-seat honors in a place located near the center, then called London. For a time the latter place was a promising village, but nearly all its buildings were removed many years ago. The place was afterward known by the name of Mt. Olive. It was on the prairie "divide" between Silver and Keg Creeks, and near the head of Wauboncey Creek.

THE PIONEERS OF CLEAR LAKE.

BY A. R. FULTON.

PREVIOUS to 1851, a few adventurous hunters had penetrated Northern Iowa westward as far as Clear Lake and the upper branches of the Des Moines River. They carried back to the sparse settlements in the eastern counties reports of the fertility of the soil, the beautiful lakes filled with fishes, and the abundance of buffalo, elk, deer, and fur-bearing animals which were to be found in that magnificent region now constituting Northern Iowa. Among others whom these reports reached were Joseph Hewitt and James Dickirson, then residing at Strawberry Point, Clayton county. They were especially delighted with the accounts which they heard of a beautiful lake which shone as a gem in the prairie, and to which had

been given the name of Clear Lake. The groves about the lake were still the hunting and camping grounds of the savage and war-like Sioux, and so far their right of occupancy had only been disputed by the Winnebago tribe, as it was within the "neutral ground." On the 20th of May, 1851, Hewitt and Dickirson started with their teams and families to find the lake of which they had heard. The last settlement on their route was that of four families in Chickasaw county, about where the town of Bradford is now located. From there to the lake, a distance of fifty miles, no wagon or other vehicle had ever tracked the vast and unbroken prairie. The two families were accompanied by two young men named John Alloway and Henry Robinson. The party reached the shores of Clear Lake, July 14th, 1851, having spent 56 days to make a journey that now requires less than half a day.

Hewitt and Dickirson each had a wife and one child, so that the settlement, including Alloway and Robinson, consisted of eight persons. In less than a year, however, the two young men returned to the eastern part of the State, and Hewitt and Dickirson, with their families, remained entirely cut off from communication with the outside world, except to be visited by an occasional hunter or straggling Indian.

All the old settlers of Iowa will remember 1851 as the "rainy season," and it may well be imagined that the isolated pioneers of Clear Lake had but little opportunity to learn what was going on, even in the eastern counties of the State. Their journey to the lake had been prolonged by reason of the swollen streams, and after their arrival the continued rains had proved an obstacle to the success of the purpose of their coming. It may here be stated that their original purpose had not been permanent settlement, but to capture elk and buffalo calves, and then return to Clayton county. For nearly two years their principal occupation was trapping, hunting and fishing. They lived a wild, adventurous, backwoods life. As Clear Lake was within the limits of the "neutral ground," but few Indians came to disturb them.

Impressed, after a year's sojourn, with the beauty and fertility of the country, Hewitt and Dickirson determined to make

Clear Lake their permanent home. They erected cabins in the timber. Dickirson claimed the land on which the town of Clear Lake is now located. In the spring of 1852 he cleared and plowed a piece of brush land, where he raised a crop of corn, which was the first grain raised by a white man in Cerro Gordo county. No other settlers located in the county until the Wrights settled on Lime Creek, near where Mason City is now located, in July, 1853. During the fall of this year several other families located on Lime Creek and at Clear Lake.

Joseph Hewitt was known to the early settlers of Northern Iowa as Captain Hewitt. He had been a trader among the Winnebago Indians, and could speak their language readily. His presence at the lake was the inducement for several bands of Winnebagoes to visit that region, and led to some trouble with the Sioux in 1854, which Captain Hewitt was instrumental in quelling. It was during the winter of 1853-54 that several Winnebago families came to the lake to visit their old friend. The Sioux, learning of this, determined to exterminate them. Several hundred of them came down from Minnesota in the summer of 1854 and announced their intention. In the meantime, however, the Winnebagoes had returned to their reservation, under the advice of Captain Hewitt. The presence of the Sioux gave the white settlers some uneasiness, especially as the Indians had committed some slight depredations against the whites. Previous to the departure of the Winnebagoes, a couple of skulking Sioux had killed a Winnebago boy.

Captain Hewitt remained at Clear Lake some five or six years, when he removed to Algona, Kossuth county, where he lived several years. He then returned to the lake and lived there until his death, in May, 1865. He was a native of Ohio, and at the time of his death was about 63 years of age. Few men were better known among the early settlers of Northern Iowa.

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