





# SETTING THE STAGE

This road book is primarily focused on the 20th century. However, at a certain stage in assembling it, I felt compelled to tell the story of some of the settlers who came in the 19th century. I felt this compulsion partially because there were some interesting stories of capitalist activity, which were far different than the myth of the hard-working, subsistence homesteader. In fact, few, if any, people in the area of the road where I grew up benefited from the Homestead Act. I also wanted to tell about some of these settlers because they are ancestors of well-known families who have lived in the area. It has been fascinating to see the similarities as well as differences in their stories about moving to Iowa and establishing themselves in the area.

Before telling the story of the 19th-century settlers, it seems important to explain some of the factors that shaped the natural environment of Pocahontas County and the influences that allowed white, northern European-American families to find land here. However, never fear, I don't intend to write at length or with the detail that James Michener includes in his historical novels such as *Hawaii*, *The Source*, *Chesapeake*, or *Centennial*.

His book *Centennial* was published in 1974, and I read it in 1975 when I moved to Fargo to become the assistant sports information director at North Dakota State University. Because I hardly knew anyone in town and felt restless eating supper alone in my apartment, I often dined out and took the 909-page book with me to restaurants. I savored a few pages during each meal, and over the course of several months, the book became a cherished companion.

The novel focuses on the area around Centennial—a fictional town in Colorado, north and slightly east of Denver—to tell the story of the North American West from prehistory to 1974. The impression that stuck in my mind was that Michener began his book with a long scene filled with minutia about a rattlesnake lying on rocks atop a high butte and basking in the sun. However, when I recently checked the book out from the Ames Public Library and took a closer look, I realized that the author actually begins with a chapter about the land. He explains the structure and measurements of the planet earth. Then he describes how the earth's core is surrounded by a mantle of rock that at various times has succumbed to intense pressure with material from the mantle being forced toward the surface of the earth. En route, this stuff becomes a molten liquid called magma that can either solidify or emerge as lava. Michener describes the formation of the earth:

Three billion, six hundred million years ago the crust had formed, and the cooling earth lay exposed to the developing atmosphere. The surface as it then existed was not hospitable. Temperatures were too high to sustain life, and oxygen was only beginning to accumulate. What land had tentatively coagulated was insecure, and over it winds of unceasing fury were starting to blow. Vast floods began to sweep emerging areas and kept them swamplike, rising and falling in the agonies of a birth that had not yet materialized. There were no fish, no birds, no animals, and had there been, there would have been nothing for them to eat, for grass and trees and worms were unknown.

Michener then focuses on the formation of the Rocky Mountains, the movement of glaciers, the development of the plains, and the emergence of a river. It is pretty concentrated reading, but he is an eloquent writer, and his explanations of history are quite understandable.

Michener's second chapter is about the first inhabitants of northeast Colorado. He writes at length about the diplodocus who came to the area 160 million years ago. I had to look up diplodocus in the dictionary to learn it is "any of a genus of very large herbivorous dinosaurs from Colorado and Wyoming." Then Michener spends several pages talking about a furry little animal—a beaver—and its observations of the natural world. Then he introduces the rattlesnake lying on the butte in the sun. It is attacked by an eagle, and Michener takes six pages to tell of their battle and the snake's recovery.

The third chapter talks about the great land ridge between Asia and Alaska and suggests that the first recorded occupation of America by human beings happened between 10,000 and 13,000 years ago. The first human beings appear in the year 9,268 BC. They are an anonymous 27-year-old Native American and his apprentice at Rattlesnake Buttes who make projectile points out of flint for use in hunting mammoths. However, the first substantive character, Lame Beaver, and his tribe do not appear until 1756 when Michener shifts from setting the scene to telling the story of the people.

The novel then winds its way through Colorado history, including the controversy of out-of-whack priorities in college football as evidenced in the rivalry between the University of Colorado and University of Nebraska. As the book nears its conclusion, the key character is Paul Garrett—a respected rancher and ecologist. As the description from the book jacket says, "Garrett and other thoughtful men are trying to find ways to repair the damage done to their land by the headlong industriousness of their predecessors."

Although I felt little identity with the minutia of the early chapters, I did feel that I was part of the narrative by the time I finished reading the book.



I remember meeting James Michener in the late-1970s. I was a member of the First Presbyterian—a large, stately church built in the Gothic style in the central part of Fargo—and he was scheduled to give an evening lecture there. Not only had I finished reading *Centennial*, but I had begun his nonfiction book *Sports in America*, which was published in 1976. It was a critique of sports and provided a perspective that was helpful in my work in sports information.

I went to the lecture but recall being slightly bored with the talk. However, from where I was seated along the center aisle, I was able to sneak a photo of Michener. After the presentation, I noticed many people approaching him with books they wanted autographed. I had not brought either *Centennial* or *Sports in America* and told a woman standing nearby that I was disappointed in my lack of foresight. She suggested that I come early the next morning to the Town House Motel, where he was staying, and catch him for an autograph after breakfast. I took her advice, but by the time I got to the motel, he had already left for an excursion to western North Dakota. I was disheartened, but as I turned to leave, I saw a table where a woman was selling tickets for a progressive dinner. It was to be held that night at some historical homes in the south part of Fargo. Apparently, Michener's visit was part of a conference sponsored by the regional historic preservation organization, which was hosting the dinner as a fundraiser. He was scheduled to be back for it. In the process of signing up for the meal, I met two interesting women from the state historical society in Bismarck who were attending the conference. We agreed to meet at the motel prior to the dinner and that I would provide limousine service for them in my royal blue Ford pickup truck.

When we headed out on the progressive dinner, we heard that Michener had not returned from his excursion. We let go of the idea of meeting him, and went to the first two homes where we had drinks and appetizers as well as tours and fine conversation. Next we returned to the street where we had started the evening, passing the first home as we drove to the third home. I saw Michener getting out of his car at the first stop. My guests said they would save a place for me at the third home for the main meal. Then I walked to the first house, went in, and found Michener by himself in the library where he was sipping a wine and scanning the books on the shelf. He was a dignified looking man and wore a dark suit, white shirt, and tie. I simply meant to introduce myself and have him sign my copy of *Sports in America*. However, no one else joined us, and we ended up having a 15-minute conversation. Our conversation focused mainly on collegiate athletics and the way they warped university priorities. I was most impressed with the interest he showed in my work and ideas. He especially appreciated the insights I had into women's athletics and the inequitable ways they were treated even though the federal government had enacted Title IX of the 1972 educational amendments that said, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

I left and joined my friends at the third home. Fortunately no one was in a hurry, and there was plenty of time to enjoy the main course. I was ecstatic about having been able to connect with Michener. Little did I realize that later in the evening all 30 or so of us who were part of the progressive dinner would meet for dessert at a fourth home, then sit in the living room with Michener for a casual conversation to end the day. The group gathering was as intriguing as my earlier encounter with him but not as personal.

I don't recall that Michener and I talked about history or preservation. At that stage of my life, I had little interest in history or understanding of the importance of historical preservation. I knew that my mother, in her role as director of the Rolfe Public Library, had begun an oral history project at about the time of the nation's bicentennial. And in the late 1970s, I had begun searching for old photos in the Rolfe area. I was mainly interested in finding a good photo of an old threshing scene. One thing led to the next. In 1980, I incorporated many of the photographs that I had found into a slide show with a sound track for my high school's all-class reunion. Then in 1981, I headed for the San Francisco area to attend a Presbyterian seminary, and by the end of the 1980s, I was sowing the seeds for my road project. It has involved oral histories and photography.

One might have thought that I had Michener and his book *Centennial* in mind when I began focusing on my rural heritage, but actually, I had forgotten about my encounter with him. However, in the process of turning my collection of photographs over to the Special Collections Department at Iowa State University for preservation purposes, I saw the photo I had made of him. Later, when I was preparing to write this section about the formation of the land, I thumbed through it, then reread the introduction. In some ways, my meeting with Michener in the 1970s was prophetic and pointed to a latent interest in history and preservation that I would finally develop, albeit many years later. And it is interesting to think about how his work of telling the story of the people of *Centennial* relates to my work of telling the stories of people who have lived along my road. There are differences in the genres. One is a novel by a renowned author, aided by a research team, for a major publishing company. The other is a nonfiction documentary done by an unknown, entry-level writer, with no research team, to be published on a small scale. However, at the core, the stories are ones of the people, the land, a community, and the environment. One narrative is set in northeast Colorado, the other in northwest Iowa.

I point to Michener and his book *Centennial* for a few reasons. On one hand, it represents the kinds of scientific and literary detail that I am not prepared to present in this book. On the other hand, it illustrates the huge length of time and the colossal factors that shaped the environment of Centennial. A discussion of rural Iowa would be incomplete without at least a modicum of discussion about similar factors and the importance of the land. After all, the land is the predominant feature that drew Euro-American settlers to this part of the new world.

There are many reasons why I am not prepared to present great amounts of detail about the natural history and early inhabitants of my road area. One, I am not the student of history that Michener is. Two, I do not have a research team like he did to do the legwork for his novels. Three, there is a tremendous span of time prior to the arrival of the European settlers in Iowa. Even the experts I have talked to or whose books I have read are not very clear and concise about history way back then. Four, I have tried to write this book as a personal or neighborhood memoir based on my experiences and the stories that various participants have shared with me. Five, I have a desire to get into the narrative part of this project.

My personal narrative does not start until 1945 when I was born. The narratives of the other participants reach back only as far as the 1920s. Nonetheless, I do feel a connection to some of the early settlers. For instance, two families who live on the highway at the east end of the road where I grew up are descendants of Diedrick and Anna Brinkman who came to Pocahontas County from Michigan in 1873. Kathy Dahl, who was two years behind me in high school, is one of Diedrick and Anna's great-granddaughters. She and her husband, Gary, have eight children. Robert Brinkman, who is about 20 years younger than I, is one of Diedrick and Anna's great-grandsons. He and his wife, Joanne, have three sons. I have enjoyed getting to know both families better through this project.

Hattie Brinkman Ives was the oldest of Diedrick and Anna's 12 children and was a year old when the family arrived in the area. When I was growing up, Hattie was a small septuagenarian. I remember that she sat properly, with a fine hat on her head, in a pew during worship services at the Rolfe Presbyterian Church. She also loved to garden. Hattie's grandson, Dallas, was in my graduating class. We continue to be friends. When Dallas tells about visiting Hattie and how he had resigned himself to simply listening to her spin tales of frontier life, because she was too hard of hearing to carry on a two-way conversation, I can envision what he means.

My great-grandfather and great-grandmother, Charles and Dena Gunderson, were also early settlers in the area. They both came from Wisconsin—he in 1881 and she in 1884. I was the apple of Great-Grandpa's eye when I was an infant in 1945 and he was in the last year of his life. I also have fond memories of Great-Grandma who died when I was five years old.



Some people, when they take a stance, insist that their position is the only correct one. They claim to be standing on firm ground. They assume certain things should be rock solid just as the earth is solid. Well, anyone who has experienced an earthquake or volcanic eruption knows that the earth is more fluid than solid. Also, the people who study natural history and land formations know that the planet is constantly changing.

Iowa's population is also fluid. There was migratory movement among the early Native Americans even before the white people pushed them off the land to marginal areas. Then



there was the influx of the Euro-American settlers who came to Pocahontas County, followed by the out-migration of many of their descendants. One wonders what will happen to the terrain of my road area and the characteristics of its population in another 10 years—or 100 or 1,000 years.

By learning about natural history, a person can understand that rural roads, such as the one in my project, are not really straight, flat, and rigid as suggested by the stereotype of the Iowa grid system. The grid system is like a giant template set upon the landscape, dividing the area into square miles. The result is an illusion of social order and an organized means of buying and selling land. Although the system is a construct of the human mind, its section line roads and the rectangular pattern of corn and bean fields have become an intrinsic part of the landscape. This squared-off pattern affects the mentality of the area's residents just as a mountain, desert, river, or ocean affects other people. However, having said all this, it is important to remember that what underlies this whole socialized system is the land. Without the land and its fertility, the area would never have been populated to the extent that it has been. The land is to be respected, not only for what it will produce but also for its complex history that defies the mold of a simple grid system.



Before proceeding to the narrative of this book, a primer about the ancient history of the area seems important to establish the context for the people who would eventually live there.

Relatively speaking, the distance between Pocahontas County and the fictional town of Centennial, Colorado, is not great when one considers the size of our nation, the entire world, or the galaxy. However, a person does not have to be very astute to realize the huge role the Rocky Mountains have played in Colorado, while the evolution of the rich soils in Iowa is a key to its history from the mid-1800s until today.

I have found it helpful to turn to the elementary school history book *Iowa Past to Present: The People and the Prairie* written by Tom Morain, Dorothy Schwieder, and Lynn Nielsen. Tom was director of research and interpretation for Living History Farms, then director of the State Historical Society of Iowa, before becoming a professor at Graceland College in Lamoni. Dorothy is retired after teaching in the Iowa State University history department for over 30 years, where one of her special interest areas was Iowa history. Lynn is a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Northern Iowa.

The authors say, “Geologists think that Iowa once lay south of the equator, where it had a warm, tropical climate. From clues in its oldest rocks, they suspect that Iowa was once a mountain area, before water, winds, and ice wore it down.” Then there was a phase when the continents drifted apart followed by another phase around 500 million years ago when “Iowa was at the bottom of a warm shallow sea.”

Eventually the area became dry again but between two and three million years ago, the climate grew colder. Scientists are not sure why. There was an accumulation of snow in Canada that turned into huge sheets of ice, then those sheets began to push out at the edges, and about one million years ago, completely covered the central United States. In places the glacier, as this moving ice is called, was over a mile deep. The authors also explain the progression from the Ice Age to a warmer climate:

During the Ice Age the climate cooled at least four times. Each time, a new glacier scraped across the Iowa area, flattening it. Then the climate would warm up again and the ice would melt, dropping yet another layer of drift to deepen the soils of the Midwest. The last glaciation, called the Wisconsinan after the area where it has been best studied, covered only north central Iowa, moving south as far as Des Moines. When it melted, about twelve thousand years ago, it left behind flat land that would become some of the most fertile farm land in the world.

After the Wisconsinan ice retreated, the climate was cool and moist. Forests of spruce and pine trees covered most of the state. As the climate became warmer and drier, however, hardwood trees like oak, hickory, and walnut began to replace the evergreens.

As the climate continued to grow warmer and less rain fell, grass appeared in patches between forests and began to spread. Summer dry spells killed many plants but not grass. When rain fell again, the roots of the grass sent up new green shoots. Gradually, areas that had once been thick forests became open grasslands. These grasslands, called prairies, spread across the northern United States, from western New York to the Rocky Mountains.

According to Jean Prior in her book *Landforms of Iowa*, “The icy grip of continental glaciers was one of the most significant geologic processes to affect the Iowa landscape. Most of the deposits underlying today’s land surface are composed of materials known as drift that were moved here by glaciers.” Regarding north central Iowa, including Pocahontas County, she says, “This region, known as the Des Moines Lobe, is the part of the state last touched by the huge sheets of frozen water that invaded Iowa in the past. This last glacial episode occurred only 12,000 to 14,000 years ago.”

After looking through various books to piece together the natural history, I decided to talk with a friend, Carl Kurtz. He is a photographer and wildlife specialist who lives on his family’s homeplace farm near St. Anthony in central Iowa where he has converted agricultural land back into prairie. When a segment of his reconstructed prairie matures sufficiently, perhaps after three to five years of development, he annually harvests the seed to sell to such agencies as the Iowa Department of Transportation and individuals such as me who are interested in reconstructing prairie on our own land. Through his seed sales, Carl nets more profit than if he were still growing soybeans and corn on his farm.

Carl hazarded a guess that the ancient forests had not covered the entire state after the glaciers receded but that there had been pockets of grasslands in the forests. As the climate warmed over the centuries, the grasslands would have increased—in part as a result of the Native Americans burning the grasslands for agricultural and hunting purposes.

I am curious about what Native American life was like in the area where I grew up. I wish that I could develop a character for my book similar to the way Michener created Lame Beaver, his tribe, and subsequent Native Americans who lived in the area of Centennial. But I know little or nothing about the Native Americans who inhabited the land that would become Pocahontas County. I suspect that their tribes lived mostly in the wooded areas along the Des Moines River and traveled to the prairies and marshlands in the vicinity of my road, but I don’t know that for a fact. There is a sign on a huge boulder east of Rolfe not far from the Des Moines River, some seven miles from my road, that commemorates the last battle among

Indian tribes in Iowa. There is another sign north of Rolfe that commemorates the last Native American buffalo chase in the county. (Both of these commemorative signs have been put up by the white population.)

I was a camper and counselor for several years at the Camp Foster YMCA on East Lake Okoboji. There we got the typical white man's version of the 1850s event that has been called the Spirit Lake Massacre. In it Chief Inkpaduta and a small band of Sioux are labeled as the villains. In the pasture next to the camp, there was a marker that commemorated the cabin where one of the Euro-American families was killed. During each session of camp, we had an evening program that involved going to the site, revisiting the story of the massacre, then holding a powwow at a nearby ravine. The ravine made a natural amphitheater. The campers and their counselor escorts sat at the top of the near bank while the focal point of the powwow was a council ring and teepee in the wide, flat bottom of the ravine.

I was often part of the group of staff members who staged the powwow. It was more of a skit than a reenactment of any legitimate Native American ritual. The coolest part of the drama was the invocation of fire from the gods to light our campfire. Amazingly, a bolt of fire would strike the wood stacked in the fire pit, and our ceremonies took on new dazzle. We weren't supposed to tell the campers that there was a wire strung from the center of the wood to a branch of a tree up high on the far side of the ravine. Upon the words of invocation from our chief, a counselor hidden near the tree would light a match to a roll of toilet paper soaked in flammable liquid (who knows what kind of fuel). Poof, the ball of flame would shoot down the wire, like a strike of lightning, and ignite the bonfire. I suspect the logs had also been soaked in fuel.

Those of us who staged the event had awful chants. We made up language using phrases such as Bromo Seltzer and hoped none of the campers recognized the stupidity of what we were doing. I am embarrassed about our immature behavior and how sacrilegious such an event might appear to Native Americans or others sensitive about history.

Of course, I cannot forget that my home county and the county seat town are both named after the Indian princess Pocahontas. However, I have never associated her story with the history of the area. She was from a Virginia tribe that, as the story goes, provided hospitality to Captain John Smith and his crew at Jamestown. Pocahontas married John Rolfe, who took her back to England. She died there, supposedly of a disease she had contracted in America that had been brought to this continent by the Euro-Americans. I guess it's OK that the county and county seat town are named after her. It's not much different than the Nebraska capital calling itself Lincoln in memory of Abraham Lincoln.

Then again, I often disdain the fact that the county and county seat town have assumed the name of Pocahontas. I recall being at a graduation party at a farm near Pocahontas in 2001 where I was a lone voice in an argument about the Princess statue. Two women, who were a few years younger than me, adamantly pointed out that the statue is a fine work of art and represents a popular style from the 1950s that is valuable to retain. Carol and Cheryl also contended that the statue was made to honor the Princess and her people. I responded that I understood their arguments, but I also called the statue garish and said that if white people wanted a statue representing a race they had oppressed, then the statue should be designed with dignity. I even suggested that if the Shaw family who owns the statue ever stopped maintaining it, the city should not put money into it. Instead, I proposed that the town could build a new statue near the digital kiosk at the intersection of Highway 3 and Main Street where there is already a beautiful grassy area bounded by field rocks. The space seems much more the gateway of the town than the current, shabby location of the statue.

I went on to suggest that the city could seek input from representatives of Native American tribes in order to select an image that would indeed honor their people who have been pushed



out of the areas they once inhabited. I also suggested that the statue be one of elegance and not kitsch. Still, I did not feel understood, and when I think about the town of Pocahontas and the statue (which I deem to be ugly), it's easy to stereotype all the citizens of the community as being blinded to the issues associated with the current statue.

There have been magazine and newspaper articles about such works of art. Often the Princess statue is featured. There always seems to be a sentence in these articles, saying something to the effect that the people of the town are very proud of their statue. Irene Shaw, the octogenarian who owns the monument, has been very quick to point out that it is she, and not the town, who owns the statue.

The 25-foot-tall statue was conceived of in the 1950s by Pocahontas attorney Albert J. Shaw; however, he died before the project was erected, and his son Frank Shaw (also an attorney and husband of Irene) saw that it was completed. Irene, a widow for a number of years and well known as a Poky matriarch and patron of the arts, continued maintenance of the statue. She died in February 2004. Her son Bill Shaw is an attorney in the Hollywood, California, area. Her daughter Rosemary Shaw Sackett is the chief judge of the Iowa Court of Appeals. Who knows what the family's future stake in the statue will be.

Bless her heart, Irene believed the statue to be a thing of virtue. In some ways, in my mind, it is not as bad for an individual or family to have such a distasteful statue because this is a nation that values freedom of speech. But it does not seem appropriate for a community to invest public funds in insensitive artwork. And I wonder if the citizens of the area are really all that proud of the statue.

I have occasionally wondered about alternative approaches I could have used in the argument with the two women at the graduation party. It is often easier to know what to say in hindsight than in the moment of frustrating debate.

Here's what I would have wanted to ask. Do you see beauty in the current statue? Do you see courage? Faithfulness? Wisdom, intelligence, or resourcefulness? Does it elicit feelings such as compassion or grief? Do you see any connection to her people and their plight at the hands of European immigrants? Do you get a sense that the young woman loves to commune with nature and considers the creatures of the earth to be her friends? Do you see playfulness? Do you see any human qualities?

I think most people would say "no" to all those questions. Then I would go on to say that when a dominant culture, such as our white culture, which has committed its own form of genocide against the Native Americans, builds a statue to honor one of their people, that culture should do so in a way that exudes at least a few of the qualities listed above. Otherwise, the statue portrays no sense of the Native American woman's humanity and is not an honor but a debasement.

Cheryl and Carol said the Princess Pocahontas statue was in the same genre as the statue of Paul Bunyan near Bemidji, Minnesota, and of Albert the Bull in Audubon, Iowa. They asked why I was more critical of the portrayal of Pocahontas than that of Paul or Albert. First, I would say that neither Paul nor Albert represents an oppressed culture being interpreted by a dominant culture. Second, I would say that the statues of both Paul and Albert have more redeeming qualities than that of the Princess statue.

Another of my pet peeves has to do with the Pocahontas Area Community High School naming its boys' sports teams the Indians and the girls' teams the Maidens. Why aren't both the boys' and girls' teams called the Indians? Or why aren't the boys called the Braves or Warriors in order to parallel the Maidens nickname? Or for that matter, how about the Boys and the Maidens? That would be parallel. The school also prints an icon of a chieftain's bonnet on its official letterhead and other publications. It is wrong for a school district, which consists predominately of Caucasian students and faculty, to use Native American names and symbols for its athletic teams or vehicles of communication. But if the Pocahontas school district does appropriate Native American imagery, then at least it should do so in a proper way. The school is named after a princess, so use her name and a well-designed image of her. And while



Statue of Princess Pocahontas at Pocahontas, Iowa. 1994.

doing that, come up with one name for the boys' and girls' teams or two names that are equal in stature.

If I were to name the athletic teams, I would call them the Poky Prairie Dogs or Sodbusters or something more modern such as the Bean Walkers, Corn Pickers, or Tractor Jockeys. If I had named the county based on its natural landscape, I would have called it Slough Land or Prairie Land. Of course, the county could have taken its name from one of the Native American tribes who actually resided in the area. However, the state already has Sioux County and towns with similar names—Sioux City, Sioux Center, and Sioux Rapids.



On Earth Day 2000, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources published a thin book of beautiful photography and text, titled *Iowa—Portrait of the Land* to tell the story of this land we call Iowa and our place in it. The book speaks about the first inhabitants of the state:

From Siberia, nomadic people crossed into North America perhaps 15,000 years ago, no doubt following herds of caribou, musk oxen,

and mammoths. They traversed a land bridge exposed when expanses of glacial ice had captured enough seawater to lower the ocean level. By 13,000 years ago, those Paleo-Indian people had found their way to Iowa, where they lived in what must have been harsh conditions alongside the remnants of glaciers. The warming climate eventually halted the glacial advances, however, and plants and animals quickly reoccupied the damp, dark, stony soils that formed on top of and at the edges of the decaying ice.

Those early Iowans moved about in cool, moist, spruce and fir forests interspersed with open meadows and wetlands. Hunters pursued mastodons, giant bison, and other big game, often working together to drive the animals over cliffs or into boggy mires where the prey could be attacked more easily. The Indians killed and butchered their quarry with effective stone spears and sharp tools painstakingly crafted from flint. People's lives were short, and populations were sparse—perhaps never reaching more than a few hundred at any one time.

As the climate continued to warm about 10,000 to 8,000 years ago, more hardwood forests grew up, with prairies gradually pushing in from the south and west. Ancient Iowans followed the resources, camping near rivers to gather wild plants and hunt small game and often traveling to hunt bison. But the innovative native people also began using the atlatl, or spear thrower, to increase their hunting efficiency. They learned to grind and chip stone into tools, such as axes, knives, scrapers, and plant-milling devices. Evidence at numerous archaeological sites suggest that populations were growing, perhaps into the thousands.

Dorothy Schwieder has also written an excellent book, *Iowa: The Middle Land*. In it she says that Iowa's first inhabitants consisted of some 17 tribes. She tells of the Ioway, Sauk, Meskwaki, Santee Sioux, Winnebago, Potawatomi, Missouri, and Oto tribes that were part of the prairie-plains culture. People commonly associate other Native American tribes with the state, but the story of their migration into and out of Iowa is a complex one. Some of the early ones came across the land ridge between Asia and Alaska, then south and east. Other tribes, though, who lived in the eastern part of the United States, would be forced west and eventually arrive in Iowa. Then, as with other tribes, they would be pushed even further west and south to reservations in other states. Schwieder describes this forced migration:

Pressure from two sources would result in the eventual relocation of northeastern tribes to areas in the central and western regions of the country. In the 1600s the Iroquois in the colony of New York worked to increase their trading activities with various European powers. As they did so, they expanded their influence over a larger territory, thus displacing other tribes and forcing them west. Later, in 1830, the federal government responded to growing demands for land from white settlers by passing the Indian Removal Act. The act determined that tribes east of the Mississippi would be moved west of the river. A few years later officials amended the act, whereby the Missouri River rather than the Mississippi served as the demarcation line between Indians and whites.



Tribes residing in Iowa would be affected by many of the same influences as those operating on eastern tribes. The Ioway would be forced to give up some land in the Iowa region as a result of pressure from the Sauk and Meskwaki. All tribes, including the Ioway, would eventually be affected by the government's removal policy, being resettled elsewhere. Tribes in the Iowa region would also deal extensively with Indian traders, thus incorporating more and more of the Europeans' manufactured goods into their lives.

Schwieder concludes her chapter about Native Americans in Iowa:

By 1851 all lands in Iowa had passed from the hands of Native Americans to those of the federal government. Reminders of the Indians' presence here would be limited mostly to the naming of some Iowa counties after Indian tribes and chiefs. The exception would be the presence of the Meskwaki Indian Settlement in Tama County. Life would be difficult for many Meskwaki, with poverty and hardship a way of life. Today travelers can visit the settlement in August when the tribe celebrates its heritage during an annual powwow. In 1985 tribal members constructed a gambling casino there. Because of the pressure of white settlement and the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, Iowa contains no Indian reservations, as do neighboring states to the north and to the west. In effect, Indians in Iowa were relocated southward or westward during the mid-1800s. The name Iowa would remain, but little else to give visible evidence of the long, long habitation of Native Americans in the middle land.

Robert Bunge has written an excellent chapter about the Native Americans of Iowa in a book of essays entitled *Take This Exit* and edited by Robert Sayre. Bunge was a professor of the Lakota (Sioux) language at the University of South Dakota and a professor of the Dakota language, culture, and psychology at Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. Bunge writes about the first tribes in Iowa:

The first "white eyes" to gaze upon the land now known as Iowa were two Frenchmen—Father Marquette and his companion in exploration, Joliet. With the French came writing. And so Iowa left prehistory to enter the pages of history. This was in the year 1673.

The first tribe encountered by this duo representing Church and State, was the Illini, camped on the west bank of the Mississippi. The name Illini means "men," or "we are men." This people is now extinct as a tribe. Marquette and Joliet also knew of the Mascoutin, or "Meadow Indian"—these people, too, are extinct, but their name is perpetuated in the name Muscatine, Iowa.

Many of the tribes were transient or resided in Iowa for only short periods of time. Others were native to the region or were to become long-term residents. The tribe from whom the state derives its name is one of the latter.

Iowa is one mystery after another. Probably no state name is more shrouded in linguistic fog than the word "Iowa." The tribe's name, Pahoja or Pahuja, is variously translated by authorities as "Gray Snow" or "Dusty Noses" or "Dusty Faces." There is a traditional tale in support of the name "Dusty Noses," which relates that this tribe camped near the Mississippi in the vicinity of some bare and wind-swept sandbars from whence the winds filled their nostrils and eyes with stinging mud.

Bunge then tells about some of the tribes in Iowa and reminds the reader of the reconstructed Ioway farm site at Living History Farms, a "600-acre open-air agricultural museum" near Des Moines. It is a museum worth visiting. Then he describes the importance of Iowa's land:

The fertility of the rich soil of Iowa enabled the native populations to settle in permanent or semipermanent villages, to farm and thereby become more independent by not having to rely so heavily on hunting as a source of food. Thus the Ioway combined the farming skills of the woodlands to the east with the hunting skills of the plains to the west.

Fortunately, Bunge also discusses some of the issues of the modern-day Native American:

One of the difficult concepts for white people to understand is that unlike all other groups, many, perhaps even most Indians, do not desire to assimilate, acculturate, or become part of mainstream America. White people, especially if they are the children or grandchildren of immigrants, recall how those new "Americans" wanted to discard their languages and European clothes and become "Yankees" as quickly as possible. Most Indians do not want to do this, and while practically all modern Native Americans realize that certain skills are necessary to cope with the larger society, they wish to remain Indian and are reluctant to give up their values for what are perceived as the Coca Cola and juke box values of the dominant people.

The Indians learned the skills of the white man to help their own people and, yet, they retain Indian values and participate in traditional life. They guarantee that Indians will remain a presence in Iowa as long as the earth, nourished by the sun and rain, endures. For these are the descendants of the "First Nations" of Iowa—a people who were neither "noble savages" nor "skulking redskins," but rather a people who time and again made successful adjustments to their natural environment, and continue to do so.

The removal of the Native Americans opened Iowa to the influx of Euro-Americans. The land was a primary reason why the white settlers chose the area to build their farms, homes, and communities. But one must not forget that these new Iowans benefited considerably from the intervention of government and big business. Examples are the federal purchase of the Louisiana Territory; the removal of the Native Americans to the Southwest; the U.S. Land Office survey of the region; land grants to railroad companies to build lines; the establishment of territorial, state, and county governments; and an advertising campaign by the Iowa Board of Immigration, which sent a handbook to people in Europe and Scandinavia about the availability of cheap but fertile land in the state.

The book, *Iowa Past to Present*, talks about the development of Iowa's land:

The prairies are important because they helped to produce the fertile soil for which the state is famous. For thousands of years, season after season, the grasses grew. Their roots filled every square inch beneath the soil surface. When the plants died, their roots decayed and gradually built up a rich black dirt. Soil scientists say that it takes four hundred years to produce one inch of new soil. It was this rich soil that attracted the American pioneers. They plowed up the prairies and planted corn, wheat, and oats where wild flowers and big bluestem had once grown. Corn grows well in Iowa because it too is a giant grass plant.

The settlers thought that the Iowa soil was so deep and fertile that it would last forever. But plowing it up destroyed the plants that had covered the land like a blanket. Without this cover, the land began to wash away. Rains carried dirt down the sides of hills, and rivers became muddy with topsoil.

There is much that transpired between the removal of the Native Americans and arrival of the Euro-American settlers and subsequent tillage of the land. However, it seems it is time to skip ahead to the stories of those families who came to Pocahontas County in the latter part of the 19th century and settled in the area of the road where I grew up.