

Iowa State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Hawkeye State

Iowa History

From 1671 through 1689 the Iowa region was claimed for France by Sieur Saint-Lusson, Daniel de Greysolon Sieur de Luth (Du Luth), Robert Cavalier Sieur de la Salle, and Nicolas Perrot. Several jurisdictional changes occurred in Iowa's early history. France ceded Iowa to Spain in 1762, although it was returned in 1800 preceding the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which made it United States territory. As part of the United States, Iowa was first included in the Illinois Territory (1808) and then the Missouri Territory (1812). Migrating groups from the states began the first settlements in 1832. Before statehood was established in 1846, these settlements were included in the Michigan Territory (1834), Wisconsin Territory (1836), and finally its own territory in 1838.



State Capitol, Des Moines, Iowa, from *U.S., Historical Postcards*.

Prior to 1800, the only residents of the Iowa Territory were Native Americans and French. Julien DuBuque, a French Canadian, began mining lead in 1788 near present-day Dubuque, employing some of the normally unfriendly Fox tribal members in his mines. In 1796 DuBuque received a grant of land, including the lead mines, from the Spanish governor of Louisiana; the Spanish government gave additional grants. Louis Honore Tesson obtained 6,000 acres in 1799 in the present Lee County, and Basil Giard acquired land a year later in Clayton County. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark spent time near the Missouri River in Iowa in 1804. On 23 August 1805, the explorer Zebulon Pike raised the first American flag in Iowa, flying the stars and stripes from an area now on the southern edge of Burlington. A U.S. Army detachment from St. Louis built Fort Madison in 1808. Five years later, the fort was abandoned and burned by the departing troops whose exodus was caused by Chief Black Hawk and the War of 1812.

The year 1816 included the establishment of Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. Settlers from the East arrived as early as 1820. Danish immigrants settled in Lee County in 1832. A year later settlements were established by pioneers from Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, and Indiana.

With the creation of the Iowa Territory in 1838 came a great influx of settlers. The first territorial capital was established at Burlington. The new Iowans in the 1840s included Scandinavians, Dutch, Germans, Irish, Scots, and Welsh. New Englanders arrived in 1840, Quakers in 1841, and Mormons migrated across Iowa in 1846, the year Iowa became a state. The following year immigrants from the Netherlands settled at Pella. A large number of families migrated from Ohio to Iowa in 1854. From 1850 through 1880, there was a mass migration of Germans to the state. Migration from Iowa also occurred during this period, with a large exodus to California as a result of the gold rush, beginning in 1849.

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The steamboat industry peaked from 1850 to 1877, while the first railroad in the state was completed in 1855. Both had significant influence on the settlement of the state. By 1860 the state population was 674,913. Ten years later it was 1,194,020.

Most of the immigrants settling in Iowa during the latter part of the nineteenth century were from northwestern Europe. They could purchase land cheaply but found the thick prairie sod difficult to improve for farming. Because of the need for heavy equipment and cooperative drainage plans, farming was much more commercial than family-oriented. The commercial aspect necessitated an extensive railroad network, resulting in high freight prices and a response in the form of the Grange Movement rebelling against the railroads. Financial depressions in 1873, 1893, and the 1930s greatly affected Iowa. As the twentieth century brought more efficient farming methods for mass production, many of the families who had owned farms moved to the cities. Today, farming continues to be an important aspect of the economy and exists with a sizable number of urban industries as well as the still rural ones like the community-owned Amana Colonies.

The above section is from *History of Iowa* in the *Ancestry.com Wiki*, and was originally published in *Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, ed. by Alice Eichholz, CG, Ph.D., chapter by Carol L. Maki and Michael John Neill.

Population	
1840	43,112
1850	192,214
1860	674,913
1870	1,194,020
1880	1,624,615
1890	1,912,297
1900	2,231,853
1910	2,224,771
1920	2,404,021
1930	2,470,939
1940	2,538,268
1950	2,621,073

Iowa Census Records

Federal censuses in Iowa began in 1850. Before 1850, Iowa was included in several territorial censuses of the area. The 1836 Wisconsin territorial census includes the original Iowa counties of Dubuque and Des Moines. Numerous censuses were conducted on the county level while under territorial and state status, with a variety still in existence for 1838-1897.

The Iowa state censuses which were taken in 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, and 1925 are some of the most informative censuses ever taken in this country. While the censuses from 1885-1895 provide much the same information as federal censuses, they also asked Iowa-born natives for their county of birth and asked about military service. The 1905 and 1915 censuses also asked for parents' birth places. The 1925 added parents' names. The following census collections are available on Ancestry:

- [Iowa, State Census Collection, 1836-1925](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census Mortality Schedules, 1850-1885](#)
- [U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940](#)
- [Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#)
- [U.S. Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)
- [U.S. Special Census on Deaf Family Marriages and Hearing Relatives, 1888-1895](#)
- [U.S. Federal Census - 1880 Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes](#)

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Iowa Vital Records

- [Iowa Department of Public Health – Bureau of Health Statistics](#): Holds birth and marriage records after 1 July 1880, and death records after 1891. Some earlier records may be available from the clerk of the county where the event was recorded.

State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Iowa, Select Marriages, 1809-1992](#) (Extracts)
- [Iowa, Births and Christenings Index, 1857-1947](#)
- [Iowa, Select Deaths and Burials, 1850-1990](#)
- [Web: Iowa Gravestones Index](#)
- [Iowa, Cemetery Records, 1662-1999](#)
- [Iowa, Marriage Records, 1923-1937](#)
- [Iowa, Marriages, 1851-1900](#)
- [Iowa Marriages to 1850](#)

Other Collections

- [Iowa, World War II Bonus Case Files, 1947-1954](#)
- [Iowa Civil War Soldier Burial Records](#)
- [Iowa Biographical Dictionary, 1878](#)
- [Iowa History Up To the 20th Century](#)
- [U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898](#)
- [U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918](#)
- [U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990](#)
- [Historic Land Ownership and Reference Atlases, 1507-2000](#)
- [U.S. IRS Tax Assessment Lists, 1862-1918](#)
- [U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681-1935](#)
- [U.S. School Yearbooks, 1880-2012](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)



[Mississippi River, Keokuk, Iowa, 1907](#), from [U.S. Panoramic Photos, 1851-1991](#)

Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Iowa history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

- [Iowa State Historical Society and Libraries](#): The [Libraries](#) in Des Moines and Iowa City hold federal and state censuses; newspapers; books; church records; local government records, including labor and business records; and much more.
- [Iowa State Archives](#): The Archives' collections include military records, including Civil War and Spanish-American War service records; World Wars I and II casualty files; and Grand Army of the Republic post minutes.
- [Iowa Genealogical Society](#)
- [Iowa GenWeb](#): Links to county pages, message boards, maps, and more. A list of special projects includes a page on Iowa orphan trains, a survey of gravesites by county, and a link to Iowa biographies.
- [Iowa Digital Heritage Collections](#)
- [The National Archives at Kansas City, Missouri](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Iowa, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Iowa, and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals. Use the Land Patent Search to locate land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.

Help and Advice

- [Map of Iowa](#)
- [Iowa Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Iowa](#)

[Stone school house built around 1874](#), 5 miles northwest of Winterset, Madison Co., Iowa, from *U.S. Historical Postcards*.



Significant Dates (through 1930)

Native American tribes inhabiting present-day Illinois include the Chippewa, Dakota Sioux, Fox, Illinois, Iowa (Ioway), Missouri (Missouria), Omaha, Oto (Otoe), Ottawa, Peoria, Ponca, Pottawamie, Sauk, and Winnebago.

1673 - Upper Louisiana, which included most of what is now Iowa, was explored by Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet.

1782 – France ceded control of the colony of Louisiana to Spain, but it was not formally announced until 1784.

1783 - Julien Dubuque arrived in the present-day Dubuque, Iowa, area to mine lead deposits. He is regarded as the first European settler in what is now Iowa.

1803 – Iowa became part of the United States when it was acquired through the Louisiana Purchase.

1808 - Fort Madison was built, the first permanent military fort on the Upper Mississippi.

1812 - Louisiana Territory, with the exception of the newly-formed state of Louisiana, was renamed Missouri Territory.

1821 – With the admission of Missouri as a state, the portion of Missouri Territory in which present-day Iowa was included, became unorganized territory.

1832 – The Black Hawk Purchase opened a strip of present-day eastern Iowa along the Mississippi River to settlement, with the treaty that ended the Black Hawk War.

1834 – The area that is now Iowa became part of Michigan Territory.

1836 – The area that is now Iowa became part of Wisconsin Territory.

1838 – Iowa Territory was split off Wisconsin Territory and included present-day Iowa and parts of the Dakotas and Minnesota.

1846 – Iowa was admitted as the 29th state. The state's first capital was at Iowa City.

1847 – Dutch immigrants seeking religious freedom settled at Pella, Iowa.

1857 – Dakota Sioux natives under the leadership of Inkapaduta began a series of raids on Iowa frontier settlements in the Spirit Lake area.

1857 – The state capital was moved to Des Moines.

1861-1865 – Iowa sent more than 76,000 men to fight for the Union in the American Civil War (roughly 11% of the state's 1860 population).

1867 – A grasshopper invasion destroyed crops in western Iowa.

1867 – The Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska Railroad was the first railroad to span the state from the Mississippi River to the Missouri River at Council Bluffs.

1870 - A convention in support of Women's Suffrage was held in Mount Pleasant, drawing 1,200 attendees to the southeast Iowa town.

1888 – A January blizzard known as the "Children's Blizzard" struck parts of western Iowa. Iowa fared better than neighboring states because it struck there later in the day at around 4:30 when children were home from school and work for the day was largely done.

1893 – A tornado tore a 55-mile long path through Iowa from the bluffs of the Little Sioux River to a few miles past the town of Pomeroy. The Pomeroy tornado destroyed 80% of the town and brought devastation to Cherokee, Storm Lake, and Calhoun Counties. 71 people were killed and many more injured.

1904 – A fire damaged the state House and Supreme Court chambers in the Capitol.

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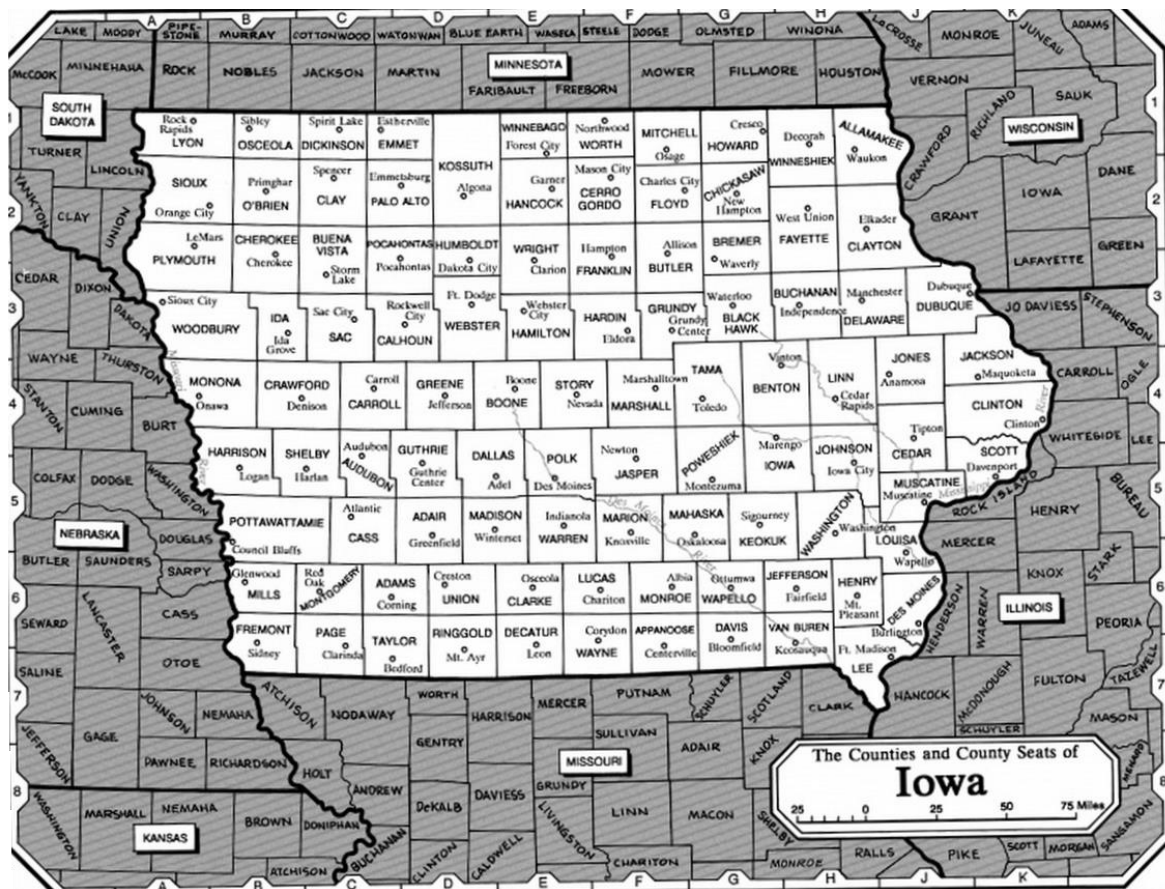


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1913 – The Keokuk Lock and Dam No. 19 was completed, creating the largest hydroelectric plant in the world at that time.

1916 – Statewide Prohibition began in Iowa, four years ahead of the rest of the country.

1920s – Following record farm production during World War I, prices for farm goods fell off sharply. Faced with a glut of produce on the market and lower prices, many farmers struggled to make ends meet.



[C. & N.W. R.R., women wipers employed at the roundhouse cleaning one of the giant "H" class locomotives, Clinton, Iowa, from the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1850-2000](#)

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