

## History Here and There...

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

"History Here and There...." *The Annals of Iowa* 31 (1951), 72-76.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7225>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

## *History Here and There . . .*

---

### McDonald's Farm Has Electricity

If Old MacDonald still has a farm, and it's in Iowa, you may safely bet that on that farm he has electricity. When the power companies last counted their rural Iowa customers, they found there were more customers than farms. This, the Iowa Development Commission comments, is a far cry from the situation ten years ago, when only 41 per cent of Iowa's farms had the benefits of electricity. Five years ago, 62 per cent had electric service.

Iowa's present contradiction of 201,527 electrified farm homes on 200,679 farms is really no contradiction at all. Those 848 extra homes merely prove that both the old folks and the young folks on the "home place" have electricity in their separate houses, or that both the owner's and the hired man's house have electric light and power.

These figures also prove that electricity has moved onto the Iowa farm at an impressive rate in the last ten years. In 1940, Iowa had 29,455 miles of power lines in the country, taking electricity to 68,509 farm homes. Now, there are three times as many rural customers, on 2.5 times as many miles of power lines. Iowa now has 73,880 miles of rural power lines.

Of Iowa's rural power users, 63.8 percent are R.E.A. customers, 34.3 percent buy their power from private companies, and 2 percent buy from municipal power plants. R.E.A. owns 70 percent of the rural power lines; private utilities, 28.2 percent, and city-owned companies, 1.5 percent. More than half the R.E.A. power (53.8%) is provided by private utility companies.

---

### Mitchell's Early Settlement

Polk county's first sheriff, Uncle Tom Mitchell, as everyone knew him, was intimately associated with the early days of eastern townships of the county. In a communi-

cation to J. M. Dixon, the editor of the *Centennial History* of the county in 1876, Mitchell told of incidents connected with the beginnings of Beaver township. In the data supplied for the history he stated that Henry Mitchell and himself commenced the settlement of Beaver township in 1844, the former erecting the first house, the site of which was near the later residence of Green Wheeler. At that time the nearest settlers to these pioneers were living at Fort Des Moines on the west, and at Monroe on the east. This state of seclusion from the busy world lasted two years.

Henry B. and Thomas Mitchell first reached the township in February, 1844; and in the following April the latter brought his family, consisting of his wife and two children, from Jefferson county, Iowa, and established them in the new settlement. For three months after this removal Mrs. Mitchell did not see a white woman, except the girl who came with the family. The most accessible trading point at the time was at Fairfield, a hundred miles distant. It is manifest, therefore, that Mrs. Mitchell did not have the shopping privileges which are conferred upon the ladies in later times. Visiting was an infrequent luxury, and the style of dress was simple and inexpensive among the whites, albeit the native women, of whom there were many specimens, tricked themselves out in fantastic costume, embellished with flashy colors, the red predominating.

The Indians were removed in October, 1845, after which the county was open to settlement. In the eastern part a few families settled in the autumn of that year, but Beaver township received no further accessions until the spring of 1846. In July, 1846, George Barlow, of Indiana, bought the claim and improvements of Mr. Mitchell, and in company with his brother, Blenford, settled on this purchase. George was accidentally shot and killed in 1847, while Blenford remained on the farm four or five years. In 1851, Green Wheeler located on the Barlow farm, and about the same time William Sweeney and a Mr. Nettleton pitched their tents in the vicinity of Apple Grove, the residence of Mr. Mitchell.

For the most part Beaver township was backward in settlement, caused by the great preponderance of prairie over forest and grove. In 1854, the farm on which Mr. Mitchell had been living, was purchased and occupied by M. C. Keith, of western New York, who in 1856, transferred by sale this property to Lambert Sternburg. This purchase, as well as that of Mr. Keith, included the hotel, which, under the management of Mr. Mitchell and his wife, became exceedingly popular as a place of entertainment during the years of emigration. . . .

In 1844, Mr. Mitchell was compelled to travel more than a hundred miles to Bonaparte to reach a mill. Ten years later there were several mills in the county. In 1849, Mr. Mitchell accompanied to Fairfield a corps of engineers, who under the lead of Col. Samuel R. Curtis, were surveying the Des Moines river. In December of that year the party was blockaded by a fearful snow storm, the snow lying two feet deep on a level. On returning, Mr. Mitchell states that the road had to be broken for a hundred miles, and the mail matter addressed to Fort Des Moines, which he brought with him, was delayed two weeks by the stress of the weather. . . . The postoffice at Apple Grove, of which Mr. Mitchell was postmaster, was the only place for several years at which mail matter was received by the citizens of Beaver and surrounding townships.

---

## The Specter of Food Shortage.

It was James Madison, later president of the United States, who was first in America to discern that growth in population might outstrip food production and cause famine. As a newspaper columnist in 1791 and 1792, contributing unsigned essays to Freneau's *National Gazette*, he wrote a treatise on "Population and Emigration," pointing out that man, like other animals, had a reproductive capacity far beyond what was needed to preserve the species. But, unlike others, he had no enemies in nature sufficient to dispose of the surplus of human beings. What would be its disposition? Madison said:

"It is either, (1) destroyed by infaticide, as among the Chinese and Lacedemonians; or (2) it is stifled or starved, as among other nations whose population is commensurate to its food; or (3) it is consumed by war and epidemic diseases; or (4) it overflows, by emigration, to places where a surplus of food is attainable."

He foretold that the existance of a means of escape was likely to insure the continuous breeding of a surplus, with inescapable misery attending over population.

---

### "New Dress" for the Annals

With this number of the ANNALS a complete new type face is used in every line, giving the publication a fresh new look, the first change in ten years. But the same general appearance and format is retained, although the style of headings has been modernized. As the magazine is historical in character and contents, it is edited and arranged for binding and permanent filing in the libraries of the state and elsewhere, being available for research and reference. Accurate and authentic data relating to Iowa events and individuals of earlier years is thus made accessible.

History is a continuous performance. What is currently commonplace knowledge, becomes unknown tomorrow, unless someone gathers it together and writes it down. Then, when it is printed, it becomes much more easily found and used than buried in the files of manuscript vaults sometimes to be taken out and never returned, after reaching private hands. Very little is known by the average citizen of how the people came to Iowa a hundred years ago; how they lived and created a Hawkeye state civilization which year by year has improved; when they stopped walking and riding horseback and took to carriages; when the horseless carriage first came into use, and when the more venturesome took to the air.

All these events have been narrated in pages of the ANNALS of other years, and become authoritative recorded history. That is why it is worthwhile to write down what

is happening now for the people of the future, and, moreover, presenting it in magazine pages legibly printed and indexed for quick reference. Thus in years to come, the historian and student of American history can be informed of the history of his county and state.

---

## What's In It For Me?

The payoff question that many people apply today to any proposal is: "What's in it for me?" says *Harvester Today*.

They take their stand for certain things when they believe there is something in it for them, either in money or some other type of benefit. They take their stand against other things when they believe there is nothing in it for them.

Many other people deplore this attitude. They describe this as an "era of the 'gimmies.'" They believe too many people today decide all problems of public and economic welfare from the standpoint of utter short-range selfishness—"What's in it for me?"

They remind us that few people seem to consider the other fellow any more. They turn to the pages of history and recount how civilizations of the past, like Greece and Rome, finally fell apart because so many people demanded so many special favors from government and society. These civilizations simply crashed under the load.

There is ground for their alarm, and there is strong warning in history for recognition of the dangers of unreasoned selfishness.

But deploring is not likely to do much good. Selfishness is a stubborn, ingrained human trait. Nothing has yet succeeded in eliminating it. Socialism and communism can't remove it any more than capitalism can. In the final analysis, only the individual can keep it within bounds. No single group can enjoy a never-ending ride on the "gravy train" while other groups provide the power to keep the train moving.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.