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# A Short History of Immigration in Iowa

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# Important Early Dates

- 1833: The territory that became Iowa opened
- 1846: Native Americans had been forced from their land by 1845, and Iowa became a State
- 1850s: Iowa resisted the Know-Nothing Party and welcomed immigrants
- 1870s: Iowa State Board of Immigrants established to recruit people to Iowa


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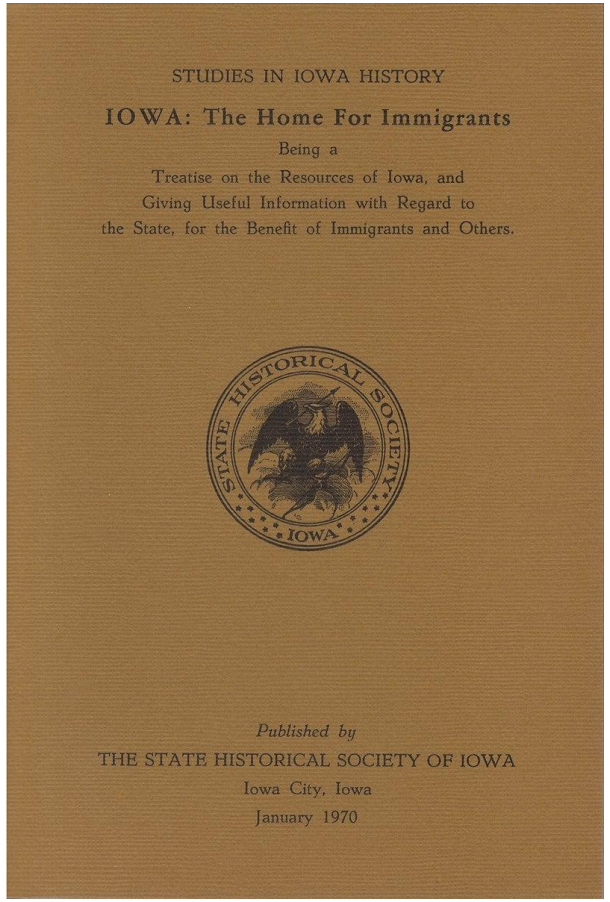
# *Iowa: The Home for Immigrants*

Pamphlet published by the State of Iowa

"Being a Treatise on the Resources of Iowa, and Giving Useful Information with Regard to the State, for the Benefit of Immigrants and Others"



# 1830s – 1840s

## Territory Settlement

- French and French Canadians were the first to the new territory
- Most settlers following were moving from other parts of the U.S.
- Germans began arriving in the 1830s
- Swedish and Dutch began arriving in the mid-1840s.

# German Immigration to Iowa

Many left Germany to avoid military service and unrest that eventually led to a failed revolution in 1848.

Germans supported the Union in the Civil War and were among the first to enlist.

Germans became the largest foreign-born population in Iowa by 1895 (132,000)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# The Amana Colonies

## A tourist destination!

In 1855, a German religious group bought 26,000 acres of land in Iowa so that could be isolated and self-sufficient.  They built 6 villages and lived a communal life-style.

# Dutch Immigration to Iowa

Many left Holland because of agricultural failures. They sought land and access to navigable rivers.

Founded Pella. By 1860, 2,600 Dutch were settled there.

Many went to NW Iowa after the Civil War to find less expensive land.


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# Pella, Iowa

## Tulip Time!

In 1847, 800 Dutch immigrants founded Pella, named after the city where Christians found refuge during the Roman-Jewish War of 70, because they were seeking religious freedom.

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# 1850s – 1920s

# Expansion

- Norwegians settled Story City, Elkhader, Huxley and Decorah: *Lack of farmland in Norway*
- Irish came in the 1850s and became one of the largest groups: *Fleeing the potato famine.*
- Italians arrived in the late 1800s-early 1900s. They worked in the coal mines in Central Iowa, even boys as young as 14: *Fleeing economic problems in Italy.*
- Jews from Russia settled in Keokuk. More Jews were living there than in Chicago before the Civil War: *Fleeing religious persecution.*
- Mexicans came starting in 1910 and worked the toughest jobs – meat packing, brick making, other ag – because they could not become U.S. citizens. Experienced discrimination and poor living conditions: *Fleeing the Mexico Revolution.*

# Immigrant Heritage in Iowa

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# 1920 - 1970

# Contraction

- The 1920s were a time of contraction of immigration in the U.S. Restrictive laws were passed to prevent primarily Catholic immigration by limiting new immigration to the population percentage of those already here.
- The Great Depression further reduced immigration.
- Little immigration – and tragic restrictions – during the World Wars.
- The immigration law was changed in the late 1960s as part of the Civil Rights movement. Although less strict, it still limited immigration mostly to close family members. That restriction did not work as planned.

# The First Southeastern Asia Refugee Resettlement

1975

- President Ford asked governors to assist in resettling people fleeing the Communist take over in South Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos.
- He offered $500 per person as assistance.
- Gov. Bob Ray agreed to take almost 1500 people, mostly Tai Dam.
- An exception to the federal rule was required to settle so many in one place.

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# The Second Southeastern Asia Refugee Resettlement

## 1979

- Mass exodus from Viet Nam had followed the end of the war.
- Gov. Ray traveled to a refugee camp in Thailand holding Cambodian refugees and decided to help resettle another 1500 people.
- No federal aid was available. He asked churches and other community groups to help support the newcomers.
- The decision was controversial, with fear over job competition, diversion of resources for native-born people, and racial mixing.
- The Iowa Refugee Resettlement Office was opened.

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# Refugee Resettlement since 1980

Federal Refugee Resettlement started in 1980 – providing some federal funding. The U.S. works with the United Nations to take a share of world refugees

Iowa has resettled more than 30,000 refugees since 1975

Beside the State Bureau, several organizations, including Catholic Charities, help with resettlement.

- Recent developments have limited this work, including Covid and lower refugee admission numbers, which are set by the President

# Other recent immigration to Iowa

Foreign students at our colleges and universities

Professional workers in various occupations, such as technology, health, engineering, education.

Entrepreneurs; international business branch offices

Priests, religious and religious workers



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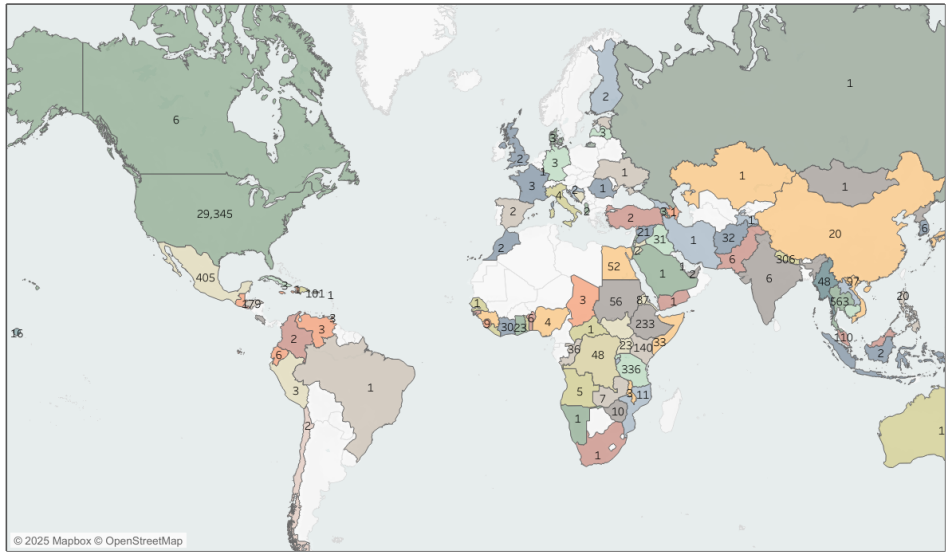
# Iowa includes people from all over the world

**Birth Countries of DMPS Stude..**

2019-20 Certifed Enrollment




| Country | Percent | Students |
|---|---|---|
| United States of America (the) | 87.23% | 29,345 |
| Thailand | 1.67% | 563 |
| Mexico | 1.20% | 405 |
| Null | 1.18% | 396 |
| Tanzania, United Republic Of | 1.00% | 336 |
| Nepal | 0.91% | 306 |
| El Salvador | 0.82% | 276 |
| Ethiopia | 0.69% | 233 |
| Honduras | 0.53% | 179 |
| Guatemala | 0.43% | 143 |
| Kenya | 0.42% | 140 |

- Students from more than 80 countries attend Des Moines Public Schools
- More than 100 languages are spoken by these students

# Thank you!

Lori Chesser, Dentons Davis Brown PC