

# Greeley's advice led pioneer to Lakes

By VINTON C. ARNOLD

Spirit Lake

MILFORD—An old stone house continues to "guard the prairie" from a lonely spot 4½ miles east of Milford, after more than a century.

The only building of its kind in the entire area, it occupies a gentle rise north of a county blacktop highway with which it is connected by a narrow road reminiscent of the turn of the century. Architecture and construction of the old house are of the Dutch Colonial period still evident in New York and New Jersey areas.

Gerome P. Clark was a native New Yorker. Although well situated in "York State," he became enthralled with stories of the opportunities offered by the frontier and acted upon Horace Greeley's famous advice, "Go west, young man!"

He purchased a good team of horses and covered wagon, which he filled with family possessions, as many as it would hold, sold the rest, gathered his family together and began the long trek westward.

They crossed the Mississippi from Rock Island to Davenport and arrived here in the early summer of 1867 or '68. So impressed was he by the lakes and the endless stretches of virgin prairie covered with a lush growth of "blue-joint" (grass) that he decided, this would be the family home. He staked out a claim—the quarter section on which the stone house stands, and walked the 100 miles to Sioux City to register his claim at the "land office."

An early report states that he learned on arrival that the legal description of his homestead was not correct. Undaunted, he walked the 100



## Guarding the prairie

This century-old stone house has guarded the prairie four and a half miles east of Milford since it was built by G. P. Clark on land he homesteaded. Shown in the foreground is Hal Clark, 84, grandson of the original builder.—Photo by Vinton C. Arnold, Spirit Lake.

miles back home, made the ready for habitation. corrections, and walked a second time to Sioux City where his claim was registered in proper form.

Summer was passing rapidly and housing for the approaching winter had to receive top priority. Two of his grandsons, who still reside here, Hal, 84 and Art, 77, say their grandfather dug a cave back into the hillside and erected a sod house in which the family passed the first winter.

Later, a large building for grain storage was erected, and it provided housing for the family until better accommodations could be completed.

Rocks left by the last glacier had to be removed before the land could be cultivated adequately. Clark regarded them as a valuable asset. He had learned well the skill of the Dutch in using them for building structures so substantial that they stand as monuments to the ingenuity and workmanship of the builders for generations. He determined to build a house which would rival the quality of those with which he was so familiar back east.

As his sons cultivated the land he gathered the rocks and began the arduous task of house building. His grandson, Art, said that he started construction the year after his arrival, using lime to seal the rocks together. He worked alone, and after two or three years, the first small part was

ready for habitation.

Information concerning the years is fragmentary. They resided at several locations, but retained ownership of the home farm. At some point the Clarks returned to the house. Clark's wife died and a son was critically injured in a fall, which left the youth with some mental retardation. The wedding of at least one member of the family took place there.

Construction of the building progressed intermittently and was not completed until 1888. That date, scrawled in the

rock at the north-east corner of the house, indicates its completion.

Structurally it is as solid as the day it was completed. The rock walls range in thickness from 20 to 24 inches. Windows and doors are recessed from eight inches to one foot. Interior partitions have been changed from time to time, but basically, the house stands unaltered, and there is no structural deterioration.

A number of families have resided there in recent years. Beryl Coleman, Terril, retired business woman, reported that she had roomed there while

teaching country school in the vicinity. There were fireplaces adequate to warm the place, she said, but when she lived there, the owner failed to provide adequate fuel, and on cold, winter mornings, a thick coat of frost covered the interior walls. "It was cold!" she stated flatly.

The house is not occupied now. Doors have been locked tightly and windows boarded up. Vandals have broken out window glass, but were unable to damage the structure.

The farm was sold to the late J. L. Williams Sr., of Milford and is now owned by his heirs.