

## **Excerpts from the 1914 Sac County History**

The following excerpt from the 1914 Sac County History Illustrated by William H. Hart explains the origins of the prairies and why fires caused a lack of trees, describes the grasshopper plagues and the average weather. Advertising by the Iowa Railroad Land Company did much to encourage settlement and calm fears. The land turned out to be what some think is the best farm land in the world. Beginning corn yields were recorded at an average of 31 bushels/acre which was considered high for the time. The Sac County 10 year average corn yield from 1999 to 2008 was 163 bushels per acre with the highest yield being 186 in 2005 and the lowest of 128 in the year 2000. Land originally sold for \$4 to \$5 in Sac County. In 2009, an acre now averages \$5405/acre.

### **Recorded Weather Data for Sac County**

Years 1879 to 1909 First Frost usually in September; Killer Frost in October

1870 to 1913 Highest Temperature 108 F.; Lowest Temperature -35 F.

1869 to 1913 Rain with melted snow averaged 30" per year

Highest recorded in 1912 of 56"; Lowest was in 1902 at 21"

### **Origin of the Prairies**

From all that has been written concerning the origin of the prairie lands of this stat, it appears to be quite well settled in the minds of up-to-date scientists, that the annual prairie fires account for the lack of timber in this section of the Mississippi and Missouri valleys. It is estimated that seven-eighths of the entire surface of the state of Iowa was prairie when first known to white men. These prairies are not confined to any particular variety of soil, within the state they rest upon all formations, from those of the Azoic to those of the Cretaceous age inclusive. Whatever may have been their origin, their present existence in Iowa is not due to the influence of climate, nor the soil, nor any of the underlying formations. The real cause is the prevalence of the annual fires. If these had been prevented fifty and a hundred years ago, Iowa would not doubtless have been a timbered country. The encroaching habits of forest trees are well known to farmers of this state, and they have from time to time observed this encroachment going on as soon as the adjoining woodland has been well protected from the fires. As it is today, and has been for forty years, ninety-five percent of the land in Iowa is tillable land of great value.

**(Excerpt from History of Buena Vista County 1909 by C.H. Wegersley and Thomas Walpole)**

### **The Blizzards**

The word "blizzard" was coined by a newspaper man at Estherville to portray the fury of the great winter storms that once swept over the prairies of northwest Iowa. What old settler does not remember them? There was nothing to impede the whirling, driving snow and nothing more terrible could be imagined, unless it might be the tornado that came during the summer months.

A blizzard of the old kind usually lasted three days. A fall of snow would come on the first day, accompanied by high wind, and drifts would begin to mount high. On the second day the temperature would fall and the wind would rise still higher. The snow, by continued blowing and cold weather, would become as fine as flour and would penetrate every crevice of the unprotected houses and outbuildings, seeking sheltered places, and drifting, drifting, everywhere. Unhappy is the fate of a man caught in this hurricane of flying snow and icy wind, as he would soon lose his way and succumb to the cold. Since that time winters have not been so severe, but that blizzard conditions are yet possible was shown this past winter when real, old fashioned blizzard weather came in January. But the sweep of the wind and the speed of the flying snow can never attain their old time velocity because of the many groves and hedges that are now to be found in this country.