

The following description of these primitive homes was taken from the history of the "Pioneers of Marion County," written by Wm. M. Donnel:

"In order to afford as much room as possible within these necessarily small structures, a cellar-like excavation was first made in the earth, around which was built a sod wall of two or three feet in height, over which was spread the grass roof on a light frame of sticks. In some instances the walls were even less than two feet high and the roof reached nearly to the ground.

"Some of these huts were scattered around on what is now part of Pella, but the real 'Straw Town' was located on the present site of our beautiful Oakland cemetery, on the northwest border of Pella. Mr. Scholte and family occupied the cabin built by Thomas Tuttle in the present Garden Square, till his more substantial and comparatively princely residence was completed.

"In such houses as we have described, some of the Hollanders passed two winters. Though sufficiently close and deep to keep out the cold, it may be sup-



Straw Town in 1847

posed that they were not entirely proof against the damp of a wet season. The grass roofs would leak, the walls would crumble, and the water would rise up through the floors and make it necessary to bail out or move out. I am told that one family, on getting up in the morning, found their room half full of water.

"And another annoyance connected with these earthy habitations was the prevalence of snakes. Attracted by the heat, or by the smell of food, they would creep into the walls and roofs, and sometimes fall inside. Not infrequently one of these sneaking, hateful representatives of Satan, regardless of consequences, would drop himself down the sod chimney into the fireplace, and (as it happened in a few instances) into the soup that was being cooked to make the most, if not the only article, of food for the meal.

"We may here relate an anecdote connected with sod house life in the colony, which, though not a snake story, will be found of equally startling interest. One night some cattle happened to be grazing in the neighborhood of one of these houses, and it also happened that, as the grazing was not abundant, one of the oxen went prospecting about for something better. Seeing the house, he evidently mistook it for a small hay stack, and went for it. Not finding the coarse, dry grass very good, he got up on it with his fore feet in search of better food, when the weak structure gave way beneath his weight, and let him plunge headlong into the regions below. The family were asleep till the crash came and awakened them to a bewildered consciousness of some awful calamity befalling