

On reaching manhood Mr. Cray was married June 26, 1845, to Miss Matilda Coombes, who was born at Graytown, near Frome, November 25, 1825. They had previously planned to leave their native land and make a home for themselves in America. Accordingly on the 7th of July, 1845, they bade adieu to their home and friends and embarked on a sailing vessel at Southampton bound for the new world. On the whole the voyage was a very pleasant one, as they encountered but little rough weather and at the end of six weeks landed at Quebec, Canada. They proceeded up the St. Lawrence river by boat to western Canada and located thirty miles from London, in South Zora township, where they made their home nearly twelve years. For some time Mr. Cray was in the employ of a wealthy landowner from England as gardener, working with the flowers and plants out-of-doors in the summer time and in the greenhouse during the winter. He and his wife were both very ambitious and industrious and she, being an excellent seamstress, found plenty of work to occupy all her spare time from her household duties. They saved their earnings for future investment. While residing in that locality five children were born to them, namely: Frances Matilda, Rhoda Ann, Mary Jane, George and John Austin. The first named died in January, 1850, at the age of three years and two months, but the others reached years of maturity.

During his residence in Canada, Mr. Cray made several trips to the United States and worked for one season at Ogdensburg, New York. In the spring of 1851 his youngest brother, John, came from the "homeland" and lived with him for several years, working at different points near-by. Finally the western fever gripped them both and in 1856 John made his way to Michigan and brought back favorable reports of that state and also of the prairie lands of Iowa. During the winter of 1856-7 he again, came west and settled in Chester township, Howard county, Iowa, his plan being to take up homesteads for both himself and brother. On the 1st of April, 1857, Joseph Cray, accompanied by his wife and four children, started for Iowa, traveling by train to McGregor and by team in a lumber wagon to Howard county, reaching their destination in Chester township on Sunday afternoon late in April. On passing through Lime Springs they found only one log house to mark the site of that town, this being the store of A. D. C. Knowlton, and a buffalo robe was hanging on a rail fence outside to dry.

The two brothers filed on adjoining claims in Chester township and held the same throughout the remainder of their lives. In the summer of 1857 this land was placed upon the market and they bought it for the government price of one dollar and a quarter per acre. The family found shelter in the home of an early settler, William Munger, who had come to the district with his family from Illinois in 1856. After staking off their claims Joseph Cray and his brother would start out every morning with an axe in hand to cut down the poplar trees, which were the only kind of any size that grew near-by, to build a house in which to live. These logs were cut the desired length and then hewed down to equal size. At the end of two weeks the house was ready to occupy and the family moved in. During those early days they endured many hardships and privations but without complaint. Their humble cabin was scantily furnished, containing only three chairs made of young saplings cut from an adjoining grove by a young man named Thomas Lewis, who lived on a claim a half mile away. Several crude benches were made from poplar slabs, and besides these the house contained a table bought from a family named Bovee, and a stove with a high elevated oven common in those days. The winter of 1856-7 was very severe and the only means of bringing wood from the groves was the home-constructed hand sled drawn by man-No water was obtainable except melted snow and the principal food was corn meal, which some of the early settlers ground in coffee mills. By economy and industry a few comforts were gradually added to the home of Mr. Cray and the amount of cultivated land was increased. He and his wife were instrumental in starting a school in the settlement, it being opened in the spring of 1858 in a log house on the bank of Beaver creek and taught by Mrs. A. A. Sage, the wife of one of the early settlers. For years this was known as the Beaver Creek school. Mr. and Mrs. Cray also helped to organize and maintain religious services, which were held in the homes of the settlers, some having to travel many miles in order to enjoy the privilege of attending church. At different times Mr. Cray filled nearly all of the various offices connected with the schools