

Francis Gehon (30a) and NN NN (31a)

Francis Gehon (30a) was probably the half-brother of George Gehon (30), and may have been born between 1790 and 1800,¹ possibly about 1797. According to some sources, he was born in Tennessee.

His wife, whose name is unknown, was probably born between 1790 and 1800. They may have been married between 1810 and 1820, probably between 1810 and 1815. They may have had a son born between 1810 and 1815.² He could have been Garland Gehon, one of the first settlers of Concord Township, Dubuque County, Iowa in 1834.³ The son may have been the male between 15 and 20 years old living with Francis Gehon in 1830 and therefore over age 21 in 1836.

Introduction:

In two manuscripts dated in 1946 and in 1956, Lou Hughes wrote:

“Syrene Gehon Ewing, Grandmother on mother’s side. English ... Syrene’s father was a Methodist preacher and came over from England to the Carolinas. His wife’s family name was Gehon. She had relatives whose family names were: Gehon, Rainnier, Barber and Wolfe.”

In 1946, Lou Hughes also wrote that “General Gehon” was a relative of Serena Gehon, and that Serena met her husband, John R. Ewing, in North Carolina, where they were married. According to Lou, after their wedding, they returned to Iowa, and Serena did not see “her parents or her three sisters again.” In her personal bible, Lou Hughes’ sister, Mary Elizabeth (Hughes) French, wrote “Syrena Gehon Ewing, grandmother” and “General Gehon, half-uncle.”

These recollections are not entirely accurate. For example, John R. Ewing and Serena Gehon were married 27 October 1836, in Morgan County, Missouri,⁴ not in North Carolina. The wedding was performed by George Gehon, minister of the gospel, who was probably Serena’s father. However, the Gehon-Ewing relationship is supported by some documentary records.

The Gehon-Ewing Connection:

Mary Elizabeth (Hughes) French was not alone in naming a “General Gehon.” Goodspeed’s 1911 history of Peru Township, Dubuque County, Iowa called General Francis Gehon an early resident of the town of Peru and an early county officer.⁵

Mary Elizabeth (Hughes) French’s and Goodspeed’s “General Francis Gehon” was undoubtedly the Francis Gehon who was a captain of a company of Iowa Militia in the Black Hawk War.⁶ Millie Conrad, a descendant of George Gehon (30), has the scabbard of a sword belt used by Francis Gehon in the Black Hawk War.⁷ The sword belt descended to her through Martin Van Buren Gehon, a son of George Gehon (30), indicating a relationship between Francis Gehon and George Gehon. If Mary Elizabeth (Hughes) French was correct, he may have been George Gehon’s half-brother.

Both Francis Gehon and John R. Ewing were living in the lead mining areas of the upper Mississippi River Valley by 1830. In that year, Francis Gehon was enumerated in the United States

¹ 1830 Census, Iowa Co., MI Terr., 8 Oct 1830, page 240.

² 1830 Census, Iowa Co., MI Terr., 8 Oct 1830, page 240.

³ Goodspeed, Weston A., ed., *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago, IL: Goodspeed Hist. Assn. 1911), “Concord Township”.

⁴ *Morgan Co., MO Marriage Book A*, 1833-61, p. 22.

⁵ Goodspeed’s *History of Dubuque County*, “Peru Township”.

⁶ U.S. National Archives & Records Administration personnel file.

⁷ Correspondence, Millie Conrad 2003.

Census for Iowa County, then part of Michigan Territory.⁸ Francis Gehon was probably living in the town of Peru in Peru Township,⁹ and John R. Ewing in the town of Dubuque also in Peru Township.¹⁰

Both men also fought in the Iowa Volunteer Militia under Colonel Henry Dodge during the Black Hawk War, and both men were stationed at Fort Jones on the Blue River in Illinois toward the end of the War.

In 1836, both Francis Gehon and John R. Ewing were enumerated in the Census of Iowa County, Michigan Territory. Francis Gehon was head of a household of four, two males over 21, one male under 21, and one female over 21.¹¹ In the same year, John R. Ewing married 27 October 1836, in Morgan County, Missouri,¹² *Serena GEHON (15)*. The wedding was performed by George Gehon, minister, who was probably Serena's father. Serena Gehon was born 31 August 1816,¹³ in Kentucky.¹⁴ She may have been Francis Gehon's half-niece.

Birth Date and Place:

In 1830, Francis Gehon stated he was between 30 and 40 years old, indicating he was born between 1790 and 1800. George Gehon was born 31 December 1789,¹⁵ probably in Kentucky.¹⁶ If Mary Elizabeth (Hughes) French was correct in calling Francis Gehon a "half-uncle," it is possible that he was a son of the second wife of George Gehon's father.

According to one history of the Black Hawk War, Francis Gehon was born in 1797 in Tennessee, and lived in Kentucky, Illinois, and Arkansas [sic] before settling at Dodgeville, Michigan Territory (later Wisconsin Territory).¹⁷ A history of African Americans in Iowa also states that he was from Tennessee:

"The next day Tennessee-born Francis Gehon expressed his exasperation at the persistency of the troublesome question by offering a resolution ...¹⁸

The earliest record of the Gehon name in Tennessee appears to be 3 October 1791, when John Gehon became one of the original 64 purchasers of lots in Knoxville, Knox County, Tennessee. He purchased Lot 16.¹⁹ Knox County is located in East Tennessee, and was organized in 1792 from Greene and Hawkins Counties.

Charles C. Herring, who was born September 1850 in Tipton County, Tennessee, was a son of William Herring and Cordelia Gehon. William was born in North Carolina in 1826 and Cordelia in Kentucky in 1827. William had been taken to Tennessee by his parents when he was a child.²⁰

"The father was taken to Tennessee by his parents, when a child and there he was reared and married, and afterward worked at the mechanic's trade, but died at Swan Lake, Ark., in 1875, still

⁸ 1830 Census, Iowa Co., MI Terr., 8 Oct 1830, page 240.

⁹ Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

¹⁰ Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

¹¹ 1836 Territorial Census, Dubuque County, Wisconsin Territory.

¹² *Morgan Co., MO Marriage Book A*, 1833-61, p. 22.

¹³ Durango-Ewing Private Cemetery.

¹⁴ 1850 Census (age 30 yrs); 1860 Census (age 44 yrs).

¹⁵ Correspondence, Millie Conrad 2003.

¹⁶ 1880 U.S. Census, North, Dade, MO, FHL Film 1254684, NA Film T9-0684, p. 211D, "Martin Gehon."

¹⁷ Correspondence, Millie Conrad 2003.

¹⁸ Bergmann, Leola Nelson, *The Negro in Iowa* (Iowa City, IA: State Histl. Soc. of IA, 1969), Studies in the History of Iowa.

¹⁹ Rules, William, *Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Chicago, IL: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1900), Ch. 4.

²⁰ Goodspeed, *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas* (Chicago, IL, Nashville, TN & St. Louis, MO: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890) 758.

survived by his widow, who makes her home with her son Charles C., the immediate subject of this biography.”

The area that became Tipton County in 1823 was originally part of Shelby County, formed in 1819, one year after West Tennessee was ceded by the Chickasaw nation to the United States.

The Black Hawk War:

Francis Gehon enrolled in Iowa County, Wisconsin Territory, on 19 May 1832 for 90 days.²¹ He was appointed the Captain of Gehon's Company, Iowa Militia (1832).²² John R. Ewing enlisted probably at the same time May 1832,²³ or shortly before the Battle of Pecatonica, which took place on 16 June 1832.²⁴ Francis Gehon was mustered out on 20 August 1832.²⁵ John R. Ewing was discharged on 7 October 1832.²⁶

The only record of any interest in Francis Gehon's personnel file is a receipt from James H. Gentry, Captain, dated 9 October 1832: ²⁷

“Mineral Point 9th Oct. 1832

I hereby certify that Francis Gehon turned into the servis [sic] of the United States, one Brown horse on the 11th May 1832 also Sorrel horse on the 25th of July “ and is Justly intitled [sic] to such pay as may be allowed for horses per day for two hundred and twenty two days.

Given under my hand at Mineral Point this day and date above written. James H. Gentry, Capt.

Examined & Countersigned
H. Dodge Late Col. of Muster
Iowa County, W.T.”

However, during his period of service, Francis Gehon wrote the following, often quoted, letter (corrected for spelling and punctuation):

“Francis Gehon [Gehan], Fort Union to John Sherman, Blue Mounds, dated June 17, 1832:
Capt. Sherman,

Sir, the following facts stated in a letter addressed to Capt. Hord & More by Genl. Dodge Dated 16th Inst Viz, Genl., the 5 men killed at Spafford's farm was buried by our men yesterday. This morning the Sacks killed one of our men within one quarter of a mile of this point. We immediately pursued on the trail with 29 men in number. Was fortunate in overtaking & killed ten of them which we consider composed the whole party. Our men charged them and received their first fire. Wells and Morris are mortally wounded. Samuel Black is severely wounded but not mortal. Thomas Jenkins fell wounded not mortal. 21 of our men charged on the Indians on foot. The rest ware taking care of our horses and guarding the swamp in which we found them. The men behaved with great gallantry and bravery on this occasion. They deserve the confidence of there country.

Respectfully Yours in Haste,
Francis Gehon
Capt. Commanding”²⁸

²¹ Wisconsin Historical Collections, V: 285-86

²² U.S. National Archives & Records Administration personnel file.

²³ National Archives, Pension File, Claim No. 20,150.

²⁴ National Archives, Pension File, Claim No. 20,150, declaration 31 May 1880.

²⁵ Wisconsin Historical Collections, V: 285-86

²⁶ National Archives, Pension File, Claim No. 20,150.

²⁷ U.S. National Archives & Records Administration personnel file.

²⁸ Correspondence, Millie Conrad 2003.

Michigan Territory:

In the Treaty of Friendship, Limits, and Navigation, signed at San Lorenzo el Real 27 October 1795, between Spain and the United States, the western border of the United States was set at the middle of the Mississippi River from the thirty-first degree of latitude to its source. In a treaty with France dated 30 April 1803, the United States purchased the French Louisiana territories, including the French claim to the lands ceded in the 1795 treaty, for \$15,000,000.00.

Until 1812, the land that was to become Iowa was an unorganized part of the Louisiana Territory. From 1812 to 1821, it was included in the Missouri Territory, and when Missouri became a state in 1821, it was part of the unorganized territories of the United States.

On 8 October 1830, Francis Gehon was enumerated in the United States Census for Iowa County, Michigan Territory. Francis Gehon was between 30 and 40 years old (born 1790 to 1800), and living with one male between 15 and 20 years old, and one female between 30 and 40 years old.²⁹ The female was probably his wife and the male their son, but their identities have not been confirmed. The male may have been Garland Gehon, an early settler of Concord Township, Dubuque County, Iowa:

“Concord Township (township go north, range I west) was early settled. In 1834 it was attached to the Camp election precinct ... In 1843 it was created and named Concord for the first time and then embraced parts of Jefferson, Concord, Iowa and Center. In 1849 it was given its present limits. Among the first settlers were Thomas Cook, John H. Floyd, N. Montgomery, Joseph Glew, Garland W. Gehon, D. R. Anderson, N. Van Meter, W. J. Anderson, William Rooney, John Sweeney, Richard Nichols, John McQuillen, the Henrys, Cooneys and John Floyd.”³⁰

As a settler in 1834, Garland Gehon would have been over 21. In 1830, he would have been at least 17, and could have been the male between 15 and 20 years old living with Francis Gehon. The family was probably living in the village of Peru in Peru Township in 1830.³¹

White settlement was not permitted on the western bank of the Mississippi White until 1 June 1833, following the Black Hawk Purchase. On 28 June 1834, the land of the future state of Iowa was attached to the Michigan Territory (organized by Act of Congress on 11 January 1805). However, Francis Gehon was probably already living in the village of Peru from as early as 1830:

“Peru Township ... was among the first to be settled. The village of Peru was founded in 1833; in fact, earlier than that year, notwithstanding the occupancy by the Indians. Elections were ordered held at the house of General Gehon in Peru village in 1834, at the time Michigan territory was formed. General Gehon was one of the first county supervisors, in 1836. The village was at first thought to be a rival of Dubuque ... The Peru township created by act of February, 1843, embraced all of the present Peru and parts of the present Jefferson, Center and Dubuque (see elsewhere). The township, as it is at present, was cut down in February, 1849. ... Among the first settlers were Francis Gehon, ... Gen. Francis Gehon conducted a large general store at Peru -- sold hardware, dry goods, clothing, boots, shoes, hats, caps, groceries, queensware, etc. ... Presley Samuels located at Durango (sometimes called ‘Timber Diggings’) in 1834 and about the same time ... John R. Ewing ... located near him. When Wisconsin territory was created in 1836, Francis Gehon was appointed marshal. ... Francis Gehon assisted in taking the territorial census in 1840 and was paid \$350 at the time and \$150 at another for his services.”³²

²⁹ 1830 Census, Iowa Co., MI Terr., 8 Oct 1830, page 240.

³⁰ Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

³¹ Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

³² Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

Wisconsin Territory:

On 20 April 1836, effective 3 July 1836, the territory of the future states of Wisconsin and Iowa, as well as parts of Minnesota and the Dakotas, was organized as Wisconsin Territory. On 6 May 1836, Francis Gehon was appointed a United States Marshal for the Wisconsin Territory.³³ He served until his appointment as marshal of Iowa Territory in 1838. On 4 February 1840, a resolution was introduced in the United States Senate to settle his accounts as the Wisconsin Marshal:

“Mr. Young submitted the following motion, which was considered, by unanimous consent, and agreed to: Resolved, That the Committee of Claims be instructed to inquire into the expediency of settling the accounts of Francis Gehon, late marshal of Wisconsin, and now marshal of Iowa Territory, on just and equitable principles. He also submitted a document in relation to the claim of Francis Gehon; which was referred to the Committee of Claims.”

An “act to authorize the accounting officers of the Treasury to Settle the accounts of Francis Gehon, late marshal of Wisconsin,” was passed by the Senate on 13 January 1841.³⁴

Francis Gehon was also elected to the first board of county supervisors for Dubuque County, Wisconsin Territory, which met on 30 May 1836.³⁵ He was enumerated in the 1836 Census of Iowa County, Wisconsin Territory. In his household were two males over 21, one male under 21 and one female over 21.³⁶ The second male over 21 could have been Garland Gehon. The identity of the male under 21 is unknown. The female over 21 may have been his wife, whose name is not known.

At the County Supervisors’ board meeting on 1 April 1837, Francis Gehon was paid \$4 for his service as County Treasurer for the prior year.³⁷

Iowa Territory:

On 12 June 1838, President Martin Van Buren signed the act organizing Iowa as a separate territory, to take effect on 4 July 1838. On 13 June 1838, the President nominated “Francis Gehon, of Iowa, to be the marshal of the United States for the Territory of Iowa, from and after the third day of July next.”³⁸ Along with other nominations to the chief judicial positions of the Territory, the nomination was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. The Senate gave its advice and consent to the nomination on 25 June 1838.

In 1839, Francis Gehon was elected as a congressional delegate from Iowa Territory to the Twenty-Fifth and Twenty-Sixth United States Congresses. However, he never served.³⁹ On 3 March 1839, Congress passed an act providing that the delegate from Iowa, William W. Chapman, should hold his seat until 11 October 1840, and that the next representative after the expiration his term should only hold his seat until 4 March 1841, after which the term should be two years.⁴⁰ A ballot for Francis Gehon’s election, however, still exists.

³³ Tuttle, Charles R., *An Illustrated History of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: B. B. Russell & Co., 1875), p. 190; Andreas, A. T., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, IL: 1875).

³⁴ Journal of the executive proceedings of the Senate of the United States of America, 1837-1841 (“Senate Executive Journal”), p. 178, Act No. 139.

³⁵ Andreas, A. T., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, IL: 1875); Goodspeed, Weston A., ed., *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago, IL: Goodspeed Hist. Assn. 1911), “Peru Township”.

³⁶ 1836 Census, Iowa Co., WI Terr., page 24.

³⁷ Andreas, A. T., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, IL: 1875).

³⁸ Senate Executive Journal, p. 134; XLIII *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 261n.

³⁹ Iowa Official Register.

⁴⁰ Andreas, A. T., *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, IL: 1875).

In 1840, Francis Gehon was paid some \$500 for taking the federal census in Dubuque County.⁴¹ He was enumerated in the 1840 census, age 40 to 49 (born 1791 to 1800), in the First District, Dubuque County, with two males age between 20 and 29, one female under age 5, one female between age 5 and 9, one female between age 40 and 49, and one free black female age 10 to 24. One of the males age 20 to 29 may have been Garland Gehon of Concord Township. The other male is unidentified. The two females appear to be too young to be Francis' daughters. They would have been born between 1831 and 1840, when Francis would have been in his 40s. It is possible that one or more of these could have been his possibly nieces, daughters of George Gehon of Morgan County, Missouri.

Francis Gehon served as a United States Marshal for Iowa Territory until 17 June 1841: "Thomas B. Johnson to be marshal of the United States for the district of Iowa, in the place of Francis Gehon, removed."⁴²

On 6 December 1842, Francis Gehon represented the counties of Dubuque, Jackson, Delaware, Clayton, "etc." in the Territorial Council during the Fifth Legislative Assembly in Iowa City, and again in December 1843, for the Sixth Legislative Assembly.⁴³

Iowa Constitutional Convention:

From 7 October 1844 to 1 November 1844, Francis Gehon, Edward Langworthy, Theophilus Crawford, Stephen Hempstead, Samuel B. Olmstead and Michael O'Brien were the delegates to the First Iowa State Constitutional Convention for Dubuque, Delaware, Black Hawk and Fayette counties. ⁴⁴ The constitution adopted by this Convention was rejected at an election held on 4 August 1845.

Five days after the commencement of the First Constitutional Convention, the question of the rights of African American rights in the new state arose. On 12 October 1844, Representative George Hobson of Henry County introduced a petition asking the convention "to secure to people of color all such rights and privileges, civil, social, moral and educational, under the same circumstances and upon the same conditions as are secured to others." The petition was referred to committee and later tabled. A second petition on the same issue was also tabled as was one introduced by Francis Gehon:

"The next day Tennessee-born Francis Gehon expressed his exasperation at the persistency of the troublesome question by offering a resolution 'That the Legislature of the State of Iowa, never shall entertain petitions in regard to negro suffrage,' remarking that such petitioning was an evil that should be choked off. He was not disposed to recognize Negroes as equals and he 'did not want the State he lived in agitated with petitions to give negroes the right of voting.' His resolution, too, was laid on the table."⁴⁵

The final draft of the state constitution did deny the vote to Negroes, and barred them from both office and service in the Iowa militia.

The State of Iowa:

Iowa was admitted to the Union as the twenty-ninth state on 28 December 1846.

⁴¹ Goodspeed's *History of Dubuque County*.

⁴² Senate Executive Journal, p. 387.

⁴³ Iowa History Project, Directory of Public Officials.

⁴⁴ Iowa History Project, Directory of Public Officials.

⁴⁵ Bergmann, Leola Nelson, *The Negro in Iowa*, Iowa City, IA: State Histl. Soc. of IA, 1969), Studies in the History of Iowa.

Francis Gehon is said to have died in 1849.⁴⁶ A biography of Lawrence Maloney in Goodspeed's 1911 history mentioned Francis Gehon in passing:

"Lawrence Moloney was a prominent figure among the pioneer settlers of Dubuque. He was born in Ireland, about the year 1819, and when about ten years old his parents immigrated to the United States, arriving in Dubuque shortly after the Black Hawk Purchase. ... In the meantime *General Gehon* bequeathed him considerable land, and a smaller bequest was made by a Mr. Slater. These bequests were made in testimony of the high esteem in which those gentlemen held Mr. Moloney. In 1849 he married Miss Maria Quigley. ..."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Correspondence, Millie Conrad 2003.

⁴⁷ Goodspeed, *History of Dubuque county*.