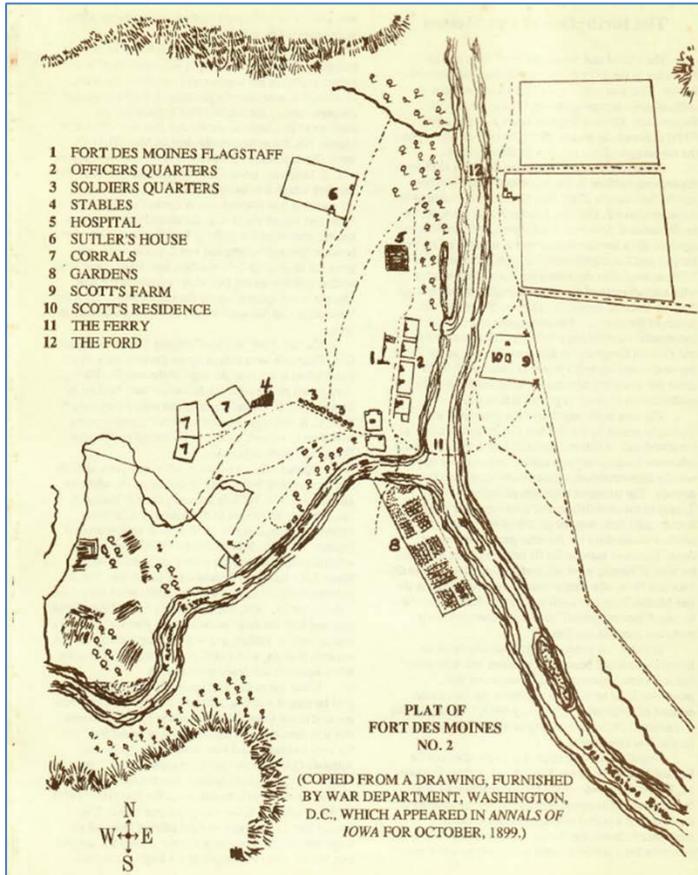


*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of State government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## The Scott family and the grounds of the Iowa Capitol



Map from *Cabin to Capital City* by Leroy Pratt

James L. Scott and Willson Alexander Scott were brothers. John B. Scott was their cousin. All three Scotts came to Iowa before it was a state.

They settled first in Jefferson County. Then, Willson Alexander or Alex or Aleck, as he was known, and his cousin, John, came north to Fort Des Moines No. 2 with a company of dragoons in 1843.

John and Alex signed a contract to be farmers for the fort, and the agreement called for them to provide food for soldiers and horses. The contract also allowed the pair to choose an area to farm, as long as it was a mile away from the fort.

When the soldiers moved the native tribes to Kansas, Alex moved with them. But in 1846, when Polk County opened land for settlement, he returned and purchased land in the same area he farmed for the federal government.

Alex bought 500 acres on the east side of the river. In fact, he and Harrison Lyon donated the land where the Capitol stands today.

But that wasn't the only way Alex made money. John and Alex owned ferry services that traveled across the Des Moines and Racoon rivers. James, Alex's brother, eventually moved to Des Moines and went to work for Alex.

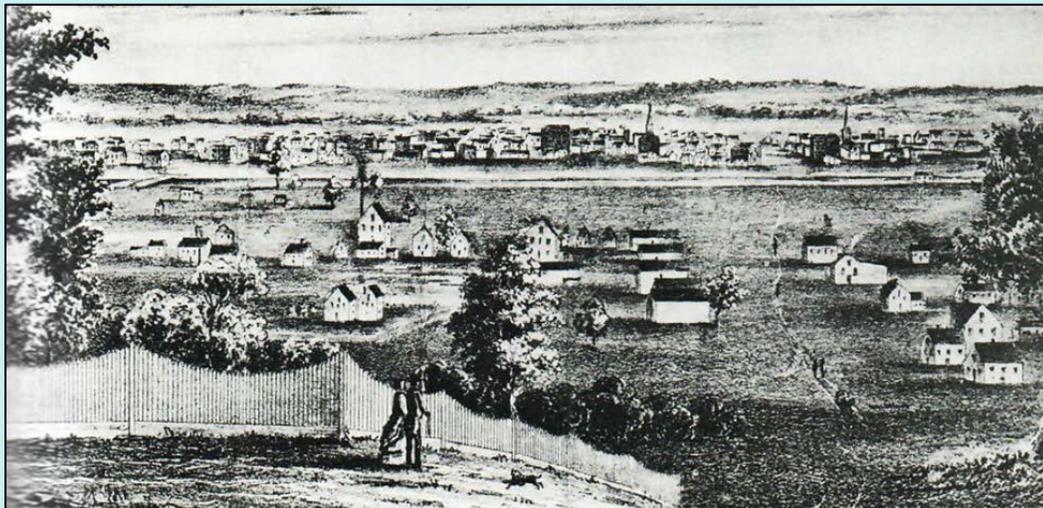
## ANNALS OF IOWA

VOL. XIII, No. 4 DES MOINES, APRIL, 1922 THIRD SERIES

WILLSON ALEXANDER SCOTT

By IDA M. HUNTINGTON

Capitol Hill, the scene of his greatest labors and greatest successes, was always very dear to Mr. Scott. Standing one day at the summit of the hill, looking across the valley southward and westward, he had expressed a desire to be buried at that place. His friends recollected this wish, and some months after his death had his remains brought back to Des Moines, and on November 1, 1859, they were interred with due honors at the spot he had designated.



This 1857 sketch of Des Moines looking west from Capitol Hill, taken from an April 1922 edition of the Annals of Iowa, shows the view from near where Scott's original log cabin stood.

Alex made a great deal of money selling land and running his ferry service. He even kept legislative members as boarders when economic times worsened.

And those troubling economic times eventually did Alex in, as well. In 1857 and 1858, Alex lost most of his wealth. He left Des Moines in 1859 for the gold mines at Pikes Peak, Colorado, but he died en route.

His friends returned his body to the hill on the east side of Des Moines near a log cabin he had built a decade before.



W.A. Scott's grave site is the only burial plot on the Iowa Capitol grounds. In 1925, the present marker was installed.

Excerpt from the [Annals of Iowa](#)

Very little is known of his movements until he settled in Fort Des Moines. Captain James Allen of Company I, First U. S. Dragoons, came up the Des Moines River from Fort Sandford in a little steamer and landed some of his men with their baggage and stores on the 9th day of May, 1843. On the 20th day of May his entire company of dragoons landed and went into camp at the chosen site, and were joined the next day by Captain J. R. B. Gardenier with Company F of the First Infantry. Here they were to erect a fort and other buildings necessary to establish themselves. Their purpose was the protection of the Sac and Fox Indians against the incursions of the white settlers until the expiration of the time granted the Indians by the treaty of 1842 for the use of these lands as hunting grounds. Of necessity food for the men and provender for the horses must be raised or traded for, and a few white men were allowed within the limits of the Fort and to settle near by in the capacity of artisans, farmers and traders. Willson Alexander Scott and John B. Scott of Jefferson County, his cousin, were among those who obtained these special permits, were granted claims, and contracted to raise corn, hay and other farm products for the garrison. A copy of the contract made with John B. Scott gives the terms and conditions under which they worked:

The said J. B. Scott shall be permitted to open and cultivate a farm in the Indian country to embrace at least one section of land of 640 acres, the said farm to be selected by the said Scott at any place not nearer than one mile of the said military post from any single body of land not appropriated to the purposes of the said military post, or for the Indian villages or the licensed trading houses in the country. The said Scott to enjoy the use and the benefit of the said farm until the time that the Indians shall have left the country agreeably to their late treaty with the United States to remove south of the Missouri River; provided that the said Scott shall from time to time faithfully execute all his agreements of this contract and provided further that he shall not violate any law of the United States regulating trade and intercourse in the Indian country nor any proper regulation of the said military post or order of the commanding officer.<sup>5</sup>