

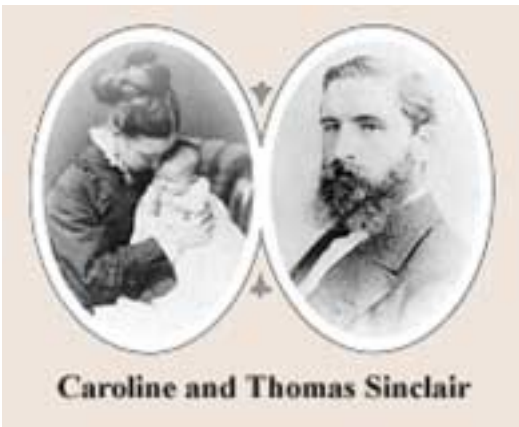
# The Story of Brucemore



## The Sinclairs

The story of Brucemore began more than 100 years ago. The late 1800s was a period of change in technology and growth of industry. Business owners could create a fortune by taking advantage of new developments. One such businessman was Thomas Sinclair. He opened his Cedar Rapids meatpacking plant in 1871. At that time, railroads were being built across the United States. They made it possible for Mr. Sinclair to send his product to larger cities. The railroad brought immigrant workers to Cedar Rapids. Mr. Sinclair hired immigrants to work in his plant. Many of them were from the area known today as the Czech Republic.

In 1881, an accident in the plant took Mr. Sinclair's life. His young wife Caroline was left with six children to raise. She hired architects to design a new home for her family. The mansion was built between 1884 and 1886 and sat on 10-acres of land. Most of the year, the Sinclairs lived in



Philadelphia while the children attended school. They returned to Cedar Rapids each summer. Once the children were grown, Caroline lived in Cedar Rapids year round. In 1906, she traded her house for the downtown home of George and Irene Douglas. The Douglasses became the new owners of the estate they would call "Brucemore."

## **The Douglasses**

George Bruce Douglas played an important role in the development of industry in Cedar Rapids. He worked first in his father's cereal business, which became The Quaker Oats Company. Later, George and his brother Walter founded Douglas & Company, which turned corn into animal feed, cornstarch, corn oil, and soap stock. It became the largest industry in Cedar Rapids and one of the largest starch works in the world.



When George and Irene moved to Brucemore, they had two daughters, Margaret and Ellen. Another daughter, Barbara, was born two years later. The Douglasses added more land to their estate. They created a small farm and had lots of space to walk and play. The name “Brucemore” came from George’s middle name and the moors of Scotland, his family’s “homeland.” The Douglasses turned their home into a country estate and increased its size from ten to thirty-three acres.

The family added many buildings: the Garden House for guests, duplex for servant housing, greenhouse, carriage house, and bookbindery/squash court. The Douglasses also enjoyed a new formal garden, duck pond, pool, and tennis court. They put their own touch on the mansion by building porches and terraces, changing the entrance, placing a pipe organ in the Great Hall, adding a hand-painted mural, and having Grant Wood decorate the sleeping porch.



Others also called Bruce more “home.” The Douglasses hired people to work on the grounds, in the house, and to drive the cars. Most of their employees also lived on the estate. Some, like the head gardener and his family, lived in the servants’ duplex. The butler, cook, and maids lived in two rooms on the mansion’s third floor. The nanny lived on the second floor with the family. Nanny Ella McDannel had a very close relationship with them. She was known to the girls as “Danny” and was a Douglas employee for twenty years. With people to clean the house, care for the children, cook the meals, do the laundry, drive the car, and maintain the grounds, the Douglasses had time for their other activities.

George and Irene took an active part in shaping their community. George Douglas helped found the Cedar Rapids National Bank and served on the boards of St. Luke’s Hospital and the First Presbyterian Church. Irene Douglas was president of the Cedar Rapids Art Association and helped start the local Junior League. Both were trustees of Coe College.

In 1937, fourteen years after the death of her husband, Irene Douglas died. She left Bruce more to her eldest daughter, Margaret Douglas Hall.



**Bruce more Mansion c. 1915**

## The Halls



**Margaret Douglas Hall**

In 1924, Margaret Douglas married Howard Hall, a young businessman. The Halls lived in Brucemore's Garden House before moving into the mansion in 1937. Howard founded two companies—Iowa Steel and Iron Works and Iowa Manufacturing Company. Howard Hall made his fortune through manufacturing rock-crushing and road-paving equipment. At the time, more people wanted to own cars, and cars needed roads.

Howard and Margaret had a less formal lifestyle. They simplified the design of the gardens and the

interior decoration of the mansion. The most dramatic change the Halls made to the mansion was the addition of two recreation rooms in the basement.

The couple had many interests. Howard especially enjoyed making home movies and had the chance to go “behind the scenes” to meet movie stars. He filmed scenes from the set of *Gone with the Wind*. The Halls owned many pets. Their German Shepherd dogs were an important part of their

lives. The Hall's most famous pet was Leo the lion. The couple continued the Sinclair and Douglas traditions of community leadership and giving. They supported many community causes and created the Hall Foundation.



**Howard Hall and Leo**

Margaret continued to live at Brucemore after Howard died in 1971. Following Margaret's death in 1981, Brucemore became a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Today, thanks to Margaret, thousands of people enjoy her home every year. The estate is alive with festivals, concerts, theater performances, events for children, and other activities.

