

## CARRIE NATION IN IOWA, 1901

By Louis Fitzgerald



*Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka*

**Carrie Nation**

In all its variegated history of the century since becoming a state, Iowa has been host to no more strange or unusual character than Mrs. Carrie A. Nation. The "Kansas Cyclone," noted foe of liquor, tobacco and secret fraternal organizations, passed through Iowa headed for Chicago early in February, 1901, on the first lecture tour she ever undertook outside her native Kansas.

She came, as the newspapers had it: "with hatchet rampant, but kept under control by the advice of friends." Although she visited many Iowa saloons, she left them as intact as she found them. In the state she gave two lectures, one at Des Moines where her coming was heralded by crimson hand bills, the other at Muscatine. Crowds of from 500 to 5,000 braved the bitter cold of an Iowa February to gather at every station her train passed through. But from a financial standpoint her lectures were disappointing. At Des Moines less than 600 paid the 25 cent admission fee and at Muscatine her audience was less than 300.

So unproductive of cash was the venture that the party with her on this first country-wide assault against rum and rye, disbanded at Muscatine. A. C. Rankin, who started out as tour manager, Miss Madeline Southard and three other women returned to Kansas. Mrs. Nation, accompanied by one other Kansas woman, went on to Chicago and other Illinois cities.

Some two weeks before her arrival, Mrs. Nation's visit to Iowa was given prominent newspaper publicity and immediately consternation reigned in the ranks of the state's saloon keepers. They greeted the announcement with a mixture of hope and bewilderment—hope that she would smash a saloon or two in Iowa, because wherever her hatchet had wrought havoc in Kansas extra bar tenders were required to serve the curious who flocked there and bought souvenirs at from 5 to 50 cents for each sliver of glass or splinter of wood, and bewilderment because they had no idea how to meet the situation.

In those days men, even saloon keepers, hesitated to use physical violence on a woman—in public, at least. As one Muscatine man put it, "If it was a man, I would know what to do, but with a woman I don't know how to begin."

Kansas liquor men had tried the experiment of hiring guards, but they proved ineffectual in most cases since Mrs. Nation made repeated assertions that she welcomed physical pain and believed it added to her well being to suffer in the "Lord's work." Where guards offered resistance men of the crowd, which always followed Mrs. Nation whenever she appeared in public, disarmed or fought them and that led to street fighting and near riots.

One Des Moines saloon keeper, E. Romarino, found a way out of the difficulty by procuring a cage of rats and mice which he placed on his bar room floor. He promised to release them if Mrs. Nation entered his place and, though she visited other saloons in Iowa's capitol, nothing could induce the Kansas visitor to enter Mr. Romarino's place.

Among the crowd which greeted Mrs. Nation at Des Moines were newsmen from as far away as Muscatine. The account of her arrival there is told by one of them in the *Muscatine Journal* who described the "fair sized" crowd awaiting on the station platform and then continued:

The crowd did not know just what train she was coming on and when our train puffed in they made a rush for it. Every elderly lady who appeared was taken for the smasher. One elderly lady, quite well dressed stepped from the door and hesitated a minute on the car steps evidently surprised at the crowd.

"There she is!" shouted some one. "There is Mrs. Nation!" The lady looked in astonishment a moment, then an angry flush overspread her face and she flounced down from the train in high dudgeon; evidently she did not appreciate being taken for the saloon smasher.

Finally Mrs. Nation did arrive and there was no mistaking her, although most published pictures of her are not at all true to life. When she saw the crowd she waved her hand gaily at the upturned faces and was greeted by laughing and cheering. Once off the train she was practically swallowed up by the push that resulted to get a close view of her. A crowd of 500 accompanied her to her hotel.

She, with her party, went to the Sabin House for dinner. They went to the Sabin House because all others had bars and of course, they could not eat at hotels which had bars in connection.

Mrs. Nation, the reporter continued, asked several men in the hotel's lobby to quit smoking as "she could not eat her dinner with all that nasty smoke in the air," and then went, with her party into the dining room.

"The party sat down to eat and after asking grace entered into a lively discussion of the morning's experiences," the article continued. "Mr. Rankin praised Mrs. Nation highly for some of her speeches of the morning, all which seemed to greatly please the smasher. The party was alone, or considered themselves so, and Mr. Rankin continued by advising Mrs. Nation against any particular demonstration on the streets of Des Moines."

"Mother," as Mr. Rankin addressed her, listened a minute and then turned on him with flashing eyes and said:

"Brother, you hush up. I never saw anyone so afraid of the devil as you are. Don't you think that the devil is going to interfere with God's work. I want you to understand that I don't like these discussions and suggestions. (And here she straightened herself, partly rising from her chair and stretching forth her hands and arms.) I feel like an experienced coachman driving a six-horse team across a bridge. I must watch them closely; I cannot have this one and that one calling my attention to different horses and distracting me from the whole." Mr. Rankin meekly acquiesced.

Later discussions turned to charges that the party were in the thing for the money in it.

"I have no conscience on that matter," said Mrs. Nation. "We deal out spiritual treasures to these people, why should they not deal out temporal treasures to us?" "Amen," said some of the sisters.

Mr. Rankin tackled another subject. "Mrs. Nation," he said, "I never saw such a triumphal journey as you had this morning. I have seen many presidential campaigns and tours and of the different candidates, but I never saw anything to equal your reception today."

Mrs. Nation's face lighted up with a look of gladness. "Do you really think so?" she said. "Well, I think it was pretty nice myself."

When Mrs. Nation had finished her meal she stepped into the parlor which was full of W.C.T.U. ladies waiting to see her. She did not remain with them long but soon sallied forth in the company of four immense policemen to make a tour of Des Moines saloons. She was followed by an immense crowd. She made visits to many saloons, but attempted no smashings. She remonstrated with them instead. She shook hands with all the saloon keepers and as a rule they greeted her pleasantly and took her upbraiding good naturedly, though some were inclined to get mad. Her opening remarks were always "What excuse have you to be in this murdering business?"

Mrs. Nation attempted no smashings of Iowa saloons in either Des Moines or Muscatine, the only two towns in the state where she left her train. But she did visit many, her sharp, agile tongue lashing out at saloon keepers and in several places in Muscatine uttering vehement condemnation of pictures which were on display.

"Why are you in this murdering business?" she asked a Muscatine bartender and was told the place was being operated to "make money."

"Yes," she shrilled, "to make money! Why do you not murder or commit robbery to get money? It is far better to do that than run such a criminal-making shop as this. You should have another motive besides making money. There is a motive in every line of business except the saloon. The clothier and dry goods merchants give value received, but you not only take away money but character and good name. I say get out of this business. But, God bless you—you were honest when you said you had no other motive except making money. Love is what brought us here."

Before coming to Iowa Mrs. Nation had organized the Barber County, Kansas, chapter of the W.C.T.U., and served as its president but it was several years later the Temperance Union, as a national body, gave even its tacit approval of her methods. Effective as they might have been in Kansas, H. H. Abrams, then president of the Iowa anti-saloon league, was extremely cautious in the statement he issued for publication anent Mrs. Nation's visit to Iowa. He said:

I can not say I approve of the course she has taken. I do not believe in the use of violence to attain an end and do not believe that it is necessary. Still, I believe it will have its effect on the fight we are waging in Iowa against the saloon power and in fact the nation.

It is another John Brown case over again. John Brown trampled law under his feet when he undertook his famous raid into the slave states, but though he suffered the consequences it had its effect in the years that followed. Just as will the work Mrs. Nation is doing.

I am convinced Mrs. Nation will not try her smashing tactics in Des Moines. The conditions in Iowa and Kansas are different. In Kansas they have prohibition in their constitution, and liquors, bar fixtures, etc., are not property in a legal sense,

so that the laws pertaining to malicious destruction of property cannot be made to reach persons destroying this class of property. In Iowa the legislature has provided means for carrying on liquor traffic and liquor, etc., are recognized property.

What we need in Iowa just at this time is a commission charged with the enforcement of prohibitory laws in sections of the state where petitions have been secured.

We have a commission to enforce the railroad laws, another to enforce the medical laws, still another to enforce the fish and game laws, one for the dairy interests and so on through the statutes. But here is the important liquor law with no one especially delegated to look after its enforcement. It is a case of what's everyone's business is no one's business, and no one knows it better than I do.

Mrs. Nation left Des Moines on the morning of February 11, 1901, her next stop being Muscatine. When she reached there the Scripps-McRae news association sent the following:

Carrie Nation, with hatchet rampant, but kept under control by the advice of friends, left Des Moines early this evening for Muscatine and received an ovation along the entire line. On arrival here the reception was the fiercest of the whole lot. Five thousand men and women crowded the station at noon and it was with difficulty the entire police force of the town cleared away. All along the route the crowd grew in dimensions and at Iowa City the record was reached.

At West Liberty she shouted, "Women, get to smashing saloons. Make a reputation." At Wilton the college boys gave the yell.

Other press dispatches say the crowd which greeted Mrs. Nation at Muscatine lined the railroad right of way for two solid blocks. At Iowa City she addressed the waiting populace from the rear platform of her coach and after saying in effect, "go thou and do likewise if you intend to defend yourselves, and do it now," she continued:

"This is a college town and I advise you, young men to defend your precious lives by fighting the saloon."

Tobacco was another bane of Mrs. Nation's life and in England, later, she was arrested and fined for damaging a cigarette advertisement. But in this country she confined herself to words or jerking a cigarette from a man's mouth and

possibly slapping his face. At Iowa City she pointed to a young man who was smoking a cigar and cried:

"Throw that cigar away. God bless you! You wouldn't walk down the street with a girl who was puffing one of the vile things and she has as much to expect from you."

The train she was riding paused again at West Liberty, and standing on the rear platform, Mrs. Nation urged, "Young men, go to smashing at once and get a reputation. You are only little pigs, but can easily save some of the many big hogs who are killing themselves with liquor." She gave praise to the Lord when someone shouted there hadn't been a saloon in West Liberty for 40 years.

Between West Liberty and Wilton she engaged in an argument with a liquor salesman who asked if it was in accordance with the law to break up saloons. Mrs. Nation replied:

"We can smash saloons anywhere, for the constitution of almost every state forbids their running. There is nothing so dangerous as the saloon. It destroys peace and prosperity and makes men incapable of enjoying happiness. I would just as leave smash a saloon as not for I know it is right to do so. The saloon is like a snake and we begin chopping its tail and keep striking until we sever its head."

At Wilton, where Mrs. Nation changed cars for Muscatine, she was met by the president and students from the old German College and urged to make a talk. She declared saloons oppressed people and as oppression creates revolution the liquor men "will have to look out." She also urged voters to elect "good" officials who would enforce the laws and thereby make it unnecessary for women to use their hatchets.

Iowa newspapers, most of which did not completely approve Mrs. Nation's activities, nevertheless gave her much space during her visit. Many of them commented editorially on her methods, some condemning and others commending her. The same was true of newspapers in Kansas and, in fact

everyone had some opinion of the far famed "smasher." One Iowa newspaper printed several poems of which the following is a fair sample:

SONG OF A NATION

(Tune: Yankee Doodle)

'Way out in Kansas there is a woman  
 Who has a little hatchet;  
 She walks into a big saloon  
 And with her hatchet does smash it.  
 Chorus:  
 Mrs. Nation keep it up,  
 Carrie, you're a dandy;  
 Smash them all, both right and left,  
 And with your hatchet be handy.  
 She smashed and smashed them big saloons  
 With her bright little hatchet.  
 You bet the business closed right soon;  
 Can you find anything to match it?

Among Mrs. Nation's staunch supporters was one Mrs. M. C. Gillette of Hutchinson, Kan., who wrote many letters to newspapers along the route taken by Mrs. Nation. One, published in the *Muscatine Journal* began with the statement that the writer thought the editor might like a personal letter from the scene of the Kansas "Joint War," and continued:

I have known Mrs. Carrie Nation about seven years, have entertained her at my home several times and had the honor again as she was on her way to Topeka this trip. She is a sweet and lovely Christian lady and a most remarkably bright one. I believe she would allow her head to be severed from her body rather than do what she thought was wrong. She thinks God is leading her in the joint wrecking and I know of no one who even claims to know he is not.

Miss Madeline Southard graduated a year ago last June at Southwest Kansas College at Winfield. She is one of the brightest girls I ever met and I know her well, have entertained her also in my home. These two good women are as brave as John Brown and most good people here think they are doing as great work as he did.

The papers of other states, and a few of them here, have condemned and commended the W.C.T.U. for its endorsement of the Nation raids, or for its failure to do as they see fit. The fact is, the W.C.T.U. of this state does not endorse joint wrecking, but it does stand by the president of Barber County W.C.T.U. because she is a good and noble woman, and the state

Union will see that in the courts she has justice, and will also stand by Miss Southard whom we all know to be one of the Lord's own.

Miss Southard is an Evangelist and does good work wherever she goes. Mrs. Nation is not a lecturer or great public speaker, but she tells her story in an interesting way and holds her audience spellbound.

Preston Gillette is the district judge who will decide the case in Harper County where one Osborne, who rented a building for a joint and gambling house, has sued Mrs. Sheriff who demolished or ruined his building because her sons spent all their time and money there. This is a test case and Mrs. Sheriff is a well-to-do widow, and failing to get the officers to abolish the nuisance near her home, went and did it herself with her little hatchet, then went to Anthony and led the raid that wrecked all the joints there. The trial will be at Anthony and many W.C.T.U. women will attend from all over the state. Judge Preston Gillette is a nephew of my late husband.

It was in the late summer of 1899 that Mrs. Nation began her career of wrecking saloons, grog shops and blind pigs, or as they were then known—"joints." Although street prayers and religious songs offered before locked doors of suspected places has sufficed to close the seven liquor dispensaries in her home town of Medicine Lodge, Kan., the neighboring town of Kiowa proved a tougher nut to crack. It was there she launched upon her smashing career using, however, rocks and bricks in place of her hatchet, which, with George Washington, she was destined to make famous in American History.

Two years is a long time in such a hectic existence as she lived and, when Mrs. Nation made her first journey across Iowa, she was a new sensation, a novel news source and a celebrity. Already she constantly carried a satchel of small pewter hatchets which she sold for 25 cents each, appeared always in the attire which might have been a uniform and was comprised of a black alpaca dress fastened by a row of dark pearl buttons extending up the left side from hem to yoke, a bow of white ribbon at her throat, heavy square toed shoes, black cotton stockings, ribbed and reinforced at heel, toe and knee, a black poke bonnet with a silk ribbon tied under her chin and a heavy cape of navy blue cloth, replaced in warm weather by a linen duster or long crash coat.

**THE FAMOUS AND ORIGINAL**  
**BAR ROOM SMASHER**



**CARRIE NATION**  
MANAGEMENT JAMES E. FURLONG

**CARRIE NATION**  
MANAGEMENT  
**JAS. E. FURLONG**

*Courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka*

All her life, up to the time she began her saloon smashing career in her 54th year, she had done physical labor, so her shoulders and hips were exceptionally broad. This gave her, at first glance, a squat, almost dumpy appearance; but, she was nearly six feet tall and weighed between 175 and 180 pounds.

Her hair was iron gray and her eyes small, black and piercing, guarded by heavy brows; her nose was thick, flat and almost negroid, while her lips were thin and, when she was not talking held tightly together as though she controlled the ever-ready flow of words by physical effort.

Carrie Nation was a product of the times in which she lived as well as her own physical and mental make up, for in those days liquor interests were bigger—or thought they were—than the legislature which enacted laws for their control. Kansas was dry but intoxicants were openly sold in ornate saloons while bootleggers made house to house canvasses with all the unadulterated nerve of a present day book agent or magazine salesman.

Iowa saloons were supposed to operate under the "mulct" law but it was only a scant seven years before Mrs. Nation's visit to Iowa that three houses in Muscatine had been dynamited in the dead of night. That crime was supposedly committed because the householders objected to the then prevailing custom followed by law enforcement officers of both Kansas and Iowa of periodically hauling saloon keepers before a magistrate who imposed a fine of from \$25 to \$100 for violation of existing laws. After the saloon keeper paid his fine he was released to keep on ignoring regulation as long as he was willing to be fined a like amount on an average of once a month.

Mrs. Nation was twice married. Her first husband, Dr. Charles Gloyd, whom she wed in 1867, drank himself into an early grave, leaving her a widow with one child. Thus was born a frenzied hatred of the saloon. He also used tobacco and belonged to a secret fraternal organization, and his lodge

brothers imbibed with him and then hid him in their hall to which no woman was allowed. So she included tobacco and secret societies in her list marked for destruction.

Some people of her time considered Mrs. Nation nothing less than insane; others painted her a seeker after publicity and wealth. There were some who hailed her as another John Brown rescuing slaves of whisky from John Barleycorn, while still others declared she was a second Moses leading her people out of liquor bondage and the wilderness of rum soaked degradation. She herself inclined to the latter and all her biographical material contains repeated reference to her belief she was chosen of God to rid not only Kansas, not only America, but the entire world of intoxicating liquor.

She came to Iowa fresh from the scene of battle where her 98 cent hatchet, her vitrolic tongue, her total disregard for physical suffering which approached masochinism, had wrecked more saloons than Kansas legislation ever did; where she had been the indirect cause of armed forces meeting in pitched battle at the college town of Winfield, Kan.; where she had incited what virtually amounted to riots in the streets of Topeka, the Kansas capitol, at Wichita and other cities; had badgered state, county and city officials into some semblance of legal action; had welded together anti-liquor interests and organized the Barber County chapter of the W.C.T.U. During all these activities she found time to constantly visit the jails—when she was not incarcerated in them herself—scold every officer she met from the humblest constable to Governor Stanley, for not doing their duty as she saw it and closing the saloons, and to soliciting provisions and other aid for needy residents in her home town of Medicine Lodge, until she was known far and wide as “Mother” Nation.

The effects of her smashing activities were immediate and far reaching. Even while she was in Iowa, saloons of Topeka and the wholesale supply houses of Wichita closed their doors. A bill was introduced into the Kansas legislature making the “joints” public nuisances and the smashing of them perfectly legal under a nuisance abatement clause. A similar

one was introduced before Indiana legislators. The Kansas bill died a natural death, but the fact that law makers even considered such legislation caused "jointists" to close their doors and even bootleggers were hard to find.

During all her career, Mrs. Nation made it plain that she wished to harm no individual. Once, when she received \$100 for serving as editor of the *Peoria (Ill.) Journal* for a day, she donated the entire amount to a fund being raised to purchase equipment of a Chicago saloon keeper who wanted to quit the liquor business for some other line of endeavor.

On several occasions she made public a letter to wives of saloon keepers which was as follows:

To Wives of Saloon Keepers: My Darling Sisters:

My heart goes out to you and I intend to help you and your precious lambs. I freely give you a share of the money I take in so that you need not fear that you will suffer. I shall devote myself to seeing that you have good homes and no longer have the vicious enemy within that destroys the love of home and you. If there is a wife of any saloonkeeper who is in want because the business of selling rum is smashed, write me and I will see, so far as is possible, that you are instantly relieved. No longer will you eat the bread of the hungry and wear the clothes of the naked. No longer will you live by killing others. Let me hear from you and accept the devotion of a sister.

Although she might have become wealthy, she never attained affluence. She took in a lot of money but she gave it away almost as fast as she received it.

Mrs. Nation died June 2, 1911, at a hospital in Leavenworth, Kan. The beginning of the end was doubtless as she would have wished; it came while she was delivering a temperance lecture on a chautauqua platform.

Today a hatchet which police had taken and her portrait are in the Kansas State Historical Museum at Topeka, and a memorial fountain stands on the spot in Wichita, where she was first arrested.

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