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In This Issue

JERRY HARRINGTON, an independent historian, narrates the effort by Harold E. Hughes – in his campaign for governor in 1962 and during his first year in office – to legalize liquor by the drink in Iowa. Harrington situates the debate as the culmination of more than a century of political conflict in Iowa over access to alcohol. This “last liquor battle” in Iowa also marked the rising influence of Iowa’s urban interests after the longtime dominance of the state’s political life by rural interests.

KEITH OREJEL, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Missouri, describes the origins of the Iowa Development Commission (IDC) during and after World War II. He shows how the IDC, the first permanent state agency dedicated primarily to promoting industrialization in the state, marked an important institutional breakthrough in the history of government sponsorship of rural industrialization, and he argues that the emergence of the IDC was directly linked to the agricultural transformation occurring in the state during those years.

WILSON J. WARREN, professor and chair of the Department of History at Western Michigan University, shows how, as Local 1 of the United Packinghouse Workers of America in Ottumwa moved beyond plant bargaining into a larger political struggle for greater power in local and state politics after World War II, it helped spur a transformation of Iowa’s political culture from solid Republicanism to competitive two-party status.

Front Cover

Iowa Governor Harold Hughes spurred the movement to legalize liquor by the drink in Iowa. Photo from State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. For Hughes’s campaign, both before and after his election, to legalize liquor by the drink, see Jerry Harrington’s article in this issue.

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Editor's Perspective

HISTORY has a number of uses. The one I cite most often is its ability to tell us, or remind us, who we are and how we got to be the way we are. Just as, individually, we often tell others our personal history as a way of telling them who we are, our state's historians recount the history of the state to tell others – and, perhaps even more importantly, ourselves – who we are as a state. History often calls us to recognize that aspects of the present that we take for granted as given were actually the product of conscious and even controversial choices in the (sometimes not-so-distant) past.

The three related articles in this issue do this particularly effectively. All three are set during the three decades from the beginning of World War II to 1970. Many features of Iowa's present political culture were shaped by transformations that occurred during that time.

For a century or more, the question of access to alcoholic beverages was probably the most contested issue in Iowa politics. As a result, Iowa's official policy on liquor access vacillated regularly, even as alcohol remained accessible, often extralegally, in many locales. Following Governor Harold Hughes's successful campaign – both before and after his election – to legalize liquor by the drink, however, that policy has held firm. It's now a policy most of us take for granted. In his article below, Jerry Harrington relates compellingly how that came to be.

Similarly, many of us take for granted Iowa's status as a competitive two-party state. For much of Iowa's history, however, the Republican Party dominated the political scene. As the nineteenth-century politician Jonathan Dolliver once said, "Iowa will go Democratic when Hell goes Methodist." Indeed, between the Civil War and the Great Depression, Iowa had exactly one Democratic governor. Between World War II and 1970, however, Iowa became a competitive two-party state, thanks in large part, as Wilson Warren argues, to a labor movement that moved out of the union halls and away from the bargaining table

into the larger world of local and state politics. It is perhaps worth noting that Wapello County, which is at the heart of Warren's story, flipped from 55–43 percent for Barack Obama in 2012 to 58–37 percent for Donald Trump in 2016.

Finally, many of us take for granted the role of state government in attracting industry to Iowa. But that, too, as Keith Orejel shows, is a product of choices made during and just after World War II. The Iowa Development Commission, the first permanent state agency dedicated primarily to promoting industrialization in the state, marked an important institutional breakthrough in the history of government sponsorship of rural industrialization, and, Orejel argues, its emergence was directly linked to the agricultural transformation occurring in the state during those years.

One final note about the contemporary relevance of this period in Iowa history. At the conclusion of "Iowa's last liquor battle"—and an intense battle it was—Governor Hughes commented, "It is the peculiar genius of democracy that persons with diverse points of view can get together and work out solutions to complex problems that are in the public interest. In my opinion, this is exactly what happened with this liquor bill. . . . Those who followed the development of this legislation were amazed at the way wets and dries, Republicans and Democrats, worked together patiently, subordinating their individual interests to the interest of the state as a whole." That's a valuable political lesson for any time and place.

—Marvin Bergman, editor