

The Annals of Iowa

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SPECIAL ISSUE: HISTORIANS REMEMBER IOWA

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In This Issue

FIVE HISTORIANS—H. Roger Grant, John D. Buenker, Rebecca Conard, George McJimsey, and Franklin D. Mitchell, all native Iowans except for one “Naturalized Iowan” — describe their experiences as Iowans and analyze how those experiences shaped their perspectives as historians.

KATHLEEN M. SCOTT introduces the Iowa Polio Stories Oral History Project, a new collection housed at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, that captures the voices of the people who were most affected by polio: polio survivors as well as physicians, pediatricians, and nurses. Their words reveal how they felt, how they coped, how their communities responded, and how they survived the anguish of the “dreaded” disease.

PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG reviews three new books with complementary portraits of family farming in Iowa and the Midwest in the early twentieth century.

Front Cover

Youngsters participate in a scrap metal drive in Hampton during World War II. In this issue, five historians reflect on how such experiences shaped their perspectives as historians.

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New on the Shelves

Historians Remember Iowa: An Introduction

BY GUEST EDITOR WILLIAM B. FRIEDRICKS

I AM NOT A NATIVE IOWAN, so it might seem strange that I had a hand in this special issue, which considers the Iowa experience and its impact. Let me explain. I was born and raised in southern California and came to Iowa in 1988 when I joined the history department at Simpson College in Indianola. Serendipity, you might say, led me to Iowa history. Shortly after I started at Simpson, a college trustee suggested that I write a history of the *Des Moines Register*. I took up the recommendation and have been researching and writing on Iowa topics ever since. Those pursuits brought me into contact with *Annals of Iowa* editor Marvin Bergman, and in the fall of 2006, he invited me to serve as the guest editor for an upcoming issue of the *Annals*.

Part of the job entailed developing a topic for the special issue. At the time, I was reading a number of memoirs, including Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Wait Til Next Year*. In that book, Goodwin turned her critical skills as a historian on herself, recounting her childhood in New York in the 1940s and 1950s. Rather than taking a nostalgic trip into her past, Goodwin entwined her story with the many complexities of American life at mid-century.

Goodwin's memoir gave me an idea. Why not ask prominent historians with significant ties to Iowa to consider their own years in the state? After several discussions with Marv, we decided to do just that. We asked five historians – four are

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native Iowans, the fifth moved here as a child—to focus on themselves and analyze their experience in Iowa. We also wondered how their Iowa years might have shaped their perspective as historians. Finally, instead of using the standard process of having submitted articles assessed by anonymous reviewers, we had our five contributors comment on their peers' essays and then engage each other in their final drafts.

The assignment was difficult on several levels, largely because historians generally think and write about others, not themselves. Nonetheless, Roger Grant, John Buenker, Rebecca Conard, George McJimsey, and Frank Mitchell undertook the challenge. As you will see, they've written revealing, personal accounts of periods and places in Iowa, sometimes poignant, sometimes humorous, but always with the broader currents of American life and thought in mind. Their stories are at once similar and different; elements of a common Iowa culture emerge, but variations due to time, location, and gender are also evident. Taken together, these essays tell us much about what it means to be an Iowan. I found the essays stimulating and interesting. I hope you do as well. My thanks go to Marv for giving me this opportunity and to our five contributors who carried out the task with grace and aplomb.