

Africa, and South America. And, despite Iowa's Muslim community dating back to the 1890s, very little has been written about it.

Iowa's religious history has much to offer not only historians of Iowa but also American religious historians. New opportunities to study the religious history of non-Christian communities, non-English speaking communities, and to draw on the thousands of primary sources squirrelled away in local churches, meeting halls, and libraries gesture toward the riches that await historians who are willing to take up the challenge. It is also long past time for a rigorous monograph on Iowa's complex religious history. Iowa's religious history is everywhere, and there are signs that with renewed attention, it will be easier to find.

Iowa's History of Gender at 175: A Brief Survey

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CHARLOTTA GORDON PYLES lived a remarkable life. Born in Kentucky in 1804 to an enslaved father of German and African descent and a Seminole mother, Pyles eventually married Harry MacHenry Pyles, an enslaved man trained to repair harnesses and horseshoes. When the man who enslaved Charlotta died, he made his daughter promise to free his slaves. She fulfilled her promise, moving most of Pyles's family from Kentucky to Keokuk, Iowa. Two of Charlotta's sons-in-law remained in bondage, however, so in 1853 she raised \$3,000 to secure their freedom by completing a speaking tour, befriending people like abolitionist Frederick Douglass and suffragist Susan B. Anthony.¹

Histories about people like Charlotta Pyles complicate assumptions about how Iowans understood gender as a marker of identity and a system built on negotiations of power. Since the 1980s, most scholarship on gender in Iowa has explored the topic within existing historiographical narratives, such as European and American settlement, agricultural development, and the growth of small towns. On the one hand, this scholarship challenged narratives that had largely left out gendered analyses, criticizing narrow assumptions that heteropatriarchal

1. Terry Altheide, "Charlotta Pyles," *Daily Gate City*, 1/29/2016; Ray Garrison, *Goodbye, My Keokuk Lady* (n. p., 1962).

structures dominated notions and experiences of gender in Iowa. On the other hand, these studies often privileged whiteness, a one-dimensional definition of the farm family, and an assumed political and social conservatism that deemphasized radical views.

Some of the earliest scholarship on gender sought to account for the experiences of women in Iowa. Ruth Gallaher and Louise Noun focused on legal and political issues like woman suffrage.² Others challenged historiographical assumptions. Glenda Riley assessed how white women experienced the frontier. Before the settler-colonial paradigm emerged, she disputed scholarship that portrayed "trail women" as "forlorn" and "beleaguered," forced to "leave her comfortable home by a dominant husband blind with wanderlust."³ Riley found that women were thoughtful and clear-headed about leaving their homes, working cooperatively with their families to weather travel conditions. White female settlers experienced the same conditions as their male counterparts, figuring out how to camp, cook, and care for animals and children along the way. Riley critiqued the tired narrative that assumed that weak and emotionally unstable women only suffered on the trail. Her insights dovetailed with other emerging scholarship on rural white Iowans that gender complimentary, not unchecked patriarchal dominance, better characterized familial relationships.⁴

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, historians studying gender in Iowa were offering important counterpoints to histories of women and agriculture and also challenging gender theories. Scholars like Deborah Fink, Kathleen Jellison, Mary Neth, and Lisa Ossian examined shifting labor structures within the farm economy, noting that gender roles were fluid and transformed as productive technologies and markets changed. They also found that while white Iowans might have ascribed to the notion of separate spheres—a private, in-the-home one for women and a public, outside-the-home one for men—the binary failed to capture the centrality of white women's work on the family farm or, after World War II, when they increasingly took off-farm work.⁵

2. Jennie McCowen, "Women in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 3 (1884), 97–113; Ruth A. Gallaher, "The History of the Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1918); Louise Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames, 1969).

3. Glenda Riley, "The Frontier in Process: Iowa's Trail Women as a Paradigm," *Annals of Iowa* 46 (1982), 167–69.

4. Riley, "The Frontier in Process," 167–97.

5. Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* (Albany, NY, 1986); Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913–*

Investigations of Iowa's small towns and rural communities also augmented understandings of gender.⁶ When Thomas Morain traced the history of Jefferson, Iowa, from 1900 to 1930, he noted how the community changed as farm economies shifted when the Great Depression, bookended by two world wars, reconfigured domestic and international markets. During that time, white women banded together in civic clubs to create public institutions, like libraries and schools. For Morain, gender was a primary organizer of community life. When tensions emerged around the prospect of female enfranchisement, the debates were more than just partisan bickering. The vote for women challenged deeply held beliefs about the natural order, an order informed by mainly Protestant religious convictions, familial relations, and ethnic customs. However, Morain also argued that there was little opposition to woman suffrage in Jefferson, and a 1916 proposal to grant women in the state the vote passed by 70 percent in the town's precincts.⁷

Sharon Wood and Hope Mitchell built on work by Morain and other scholars when they assessed the lives of Gilded Age women in Davenport and East Des Moines, respectively, outlining how people struggled to contend with changing urban climates. Like Morain's white clubwomen in Jefferson, well-to-do activists in Wood's Davenport coordinated efforts to provide relief to growing numbers of prostitutes and impoverished working-class women. Mitchell also found that prostitution was the central problem for neighborhood leaders in East Des Moines, the site of the state capitol and a flourishing red-light district. Pursuing collective reform produced clashes between elite white men and women and exposed what Iowans knew but rarely discussed. Clinging desperately to traditional gender values confirmed their fragility. The truth was that Iowans flouted gender expectations frequently and publicly. The political work of white activists who called for radical

1963 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993); Katherine Jellison, "'Let Your Corn Stalks Buy a Maytag': Prescriptive Literature and Domestic Consumerism in Rural Iowa, 1929-1939," *Palimpsest* 69 (1988), 132-39; Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore, 1995); Lisa Ossian, *The Home Fronts of Iowa, 1939-1945* (Columbia, MO, 2009); Lisa Ossian, *The Depression Dilemmas of Rural Iowa, 1929-1933* (Columbia, MO, 2011).

6. Thomas Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century* (Ames, 1988). For a look at how gender shaped Amish communities, see Elmer Schwieder and Dorothy Schwieder, *A Peculiar People: Iowa's Old Order Amish* (Ames, 1975).

7. Morain, *Prairie Grass Roots*, 85-96.

economic restructuring through policy and legislation was as much evidence as the preponderance of the prostitutes they sought to uplift.⁸

Other scholars took up where Morain, Mitchell, and Wood left off, interrogating questions about the extent to which gender roles within families and communities in Iowa signaled an ideological adherence to gender equality. In this historiographical strand, questions emerged about gender's centrality to Iowa's political culture. Early scholarship found that while Iowans largely embraced the political causes of farms and rural communities, many initially hesitated to engage with reforms perceived as controversial, including woman suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment. Studies by Jenny Barker-Devine, Sara Egge, and others demonstrated that Iowans did not reject these issues, instead embracing them as people organized collectively.⁹ Activism expressed within federated women's clubs, ladies' aid societies, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Farm Bureau, the Farmers Union, the National Farm Organization, and the Porkettes demonstrated extensive grassroots support among Iowans for issues that promoted gender equality.¹⁰

Iowa's historiography about gender also includes intersectional approaches, which uncover how other identities overlapped and informed gendered ones. As Linda Clemmons argued, after the US–Dakota War of 1862, mostly male Dakota exiles from Minnesota came to Davenport as prisoners while the federal government exiled their families to the Crow Creek Reservation in Dakota Territory. While the Dakota suffered violence, humiliation, and mistreatment, they also demonstrated resilience,

8. Sharon Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005); Hope Mitchell, *East Village Des Moines: A Brief History* (Charleston, SC, 2016).

9. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*; Sara Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870–1920* (Iowa City, 2018); Jenny Barker-Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism Since 1945* (Iowa City, 2013); Sara Egge, "The Emergence of Midwestern Political Culture in Northwest Iowa," in *The Making of the Midwest: Essays on the Formation of Midwestern Identity, 1787–1900*, ed. Jon K. Lauck (Hastings, NE, 2020), 199–214; Lisa Ossian, "The 'I Too' Temperance Movement: A Reevaluation of Midwestern Women's Political Action at the Turn of the Last Century," *Making of the Midwest*, 215–30.

10. Jenny Barker-Devine, "'Hop to the Top with the Iowa Chop': The Iowa Porkettes and Cultivating Agrarian Feminisms in the Midwest, 1964–1992," *Agricultural History* 83 (Fall 2009), 477–502; Jenny Barker-Devine, "'Quite a Ripple but No Revolution': The Changing Roles of Women in the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, 1921–1951," *Annals of Iowa* 64 (2005), 1–36; Jenny Barker-Devine, "The Secret to a Successful Farm Organization: Township Farm Bureau Women's Clubs in Iowa, 1945–1970," *Annals of Iowa* 69 (2010), 418–48; Nancy Berlage, *Farmers Helping Farmers: The Rise of the Farm and Home Bureaus, 1914–1935* (Baton Rouge, 2016).

resistance, and survival.¹¹ Leslie Schwalm revealed how formerly enslaved Black migrants built institutions and sought full citizenship while navigating white ridicule. By upholding gender norms and demonstrating civic respectability, Black Iowans claimed their right to live and prosper in the state.¹² Dorothy Schwieder examined how coal mining, second only to agriculture in Iowa's economy at the turn of the twentieth century, brought Italian and Croatian immigrants, as well as Black Americans, to the state. Mining families relied on income from a variety of jobs, including livestock raising, gardening, boarding fellow miners, and midwifery, sometimes confusing gender roles around labor.¹³ Sara Egge demonstrated how racializing immigrant groups was a key strategy pursued by native-born suffrage activists, especially during World War I, when vilifying German and German-American men as "ignorant" domestic enemies positioned white women as loyal citizens.¹⁴ Noah Lawrence identified the earliest demands for civil rights protections with Edna Griffin's campaign to desegregate Katz Drug Store in Des Moines.¹⁵

While historical understandings of gender in Iowa, especially about women in rural contexts, have grown remarkably within a field that engages an extensive chronology, significant gaps remain.¹⁶ Iowa's veneer of homogeneity has masked the contradictions that abounded when people frequently reconstituted and reconfigured gender identities, relations, and hierarchies throughout much of Iowa's history. That LGBTQ Iowans secured marriage equality in 2009 was no accident, and scholars must explore Iowa's LGBTQ histories to better explain why. They can start by researching at the LGBTQ Iowa Archives and Library, opened recently in Iowa City, or in the LGBT oral history collection created by students

11. Linda Clemmons, *Dakota in Exile: The Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the US–Dakota War* (Iowa City, 2019).

12. Leslie Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009).

13. Dorothy Schwieder, *Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895–1925* (Ames, 1983).

14. Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest*.

15. Noah Lawrence, "'Since it is my right, I would like to have it': Edna Griffin and the Katz Drug Store Desegregation Movement," *Annals of Iowa*, 67 (2008), 298–330.

16. While analyses of gender appear across Iowa's historical timeline, some periods, like the post-World War II era, deserve more attention, although scholars like William Friedrichs have produced recent works. See William Friedrichs, *Unstoppable: The Nine Lives of Roxanne Barton Conlin* (Des Moines, 2020).

and faculty at Grinnell College.¹⁷ Future studies promise to continue the work of scholars whose contributions of the past four decades have continued to rewrite historical narratives.

As historians increasingly account for how gender overlapped with sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, religion, industrial labor, and other factors, their scholarship promises to reshape understandings not only of gender itself but also of the history of Iowa. In particular, these scholars can challenge Iowa's status as the "middle land." As Dorothy Schwieder explained, "middle" was not just a geographic designation but a label that celebrated Iowa's political, social, and religious values as "average" or even "dull."¹⁸ Analyzing histories of gender in Iowa reveals that the state was no "middle land" in which residents largely eschewed political or social radicality for conformity and politeness. By exploring the lives of the many Iowans like Charlotta Pyles—people who routinely upset the status quo—historians can tell a more nuanced story that accounts for all the contradictions and complexities in the state's history.

"No School Teaches It": Revitalizing Iowa History Education in K–12 Classrooms

MEGAN CARD

IN 1912, IOWA HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT curator Edgar R. Harlan offered a bleak assessment of how Iowa history was being taught to school children. "[Iowa] has been made to suffer through neglect of its history," he complained. "Every schoolboy learns to love New England through the fact that he studies its pioneer history in school books. Iowa has just a proud history and there is just as much romance, of sturdy effort, of victory over adverse conditions, as has New England. The

17. Marissa Payne, "State's LGBTQ History Coming Out in Iowa City-Based Library and Archive," *The Gazette*, 3/6/2021; LGBTQ Oral Histories of Central Iowa: Preserving LGBTQ Histories, Digital Exhibit, <https://lgbtoralhistories.sites.grinnell.edu/>.

18. Dorothy Schwieder, "Iowa: The Middle Land," in *Iowa History Reader*, ed. Marvin Bergman (Iowa City, 2008), 1–18; Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City, 1996).