

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).

trouble is, few know about it and no school teaches it.”¹ Harlan, who served as curator for nearly thirty years from 1908 until 1937, believed students would fall in love with Iowa history if they could only find a way to help teachers teach it.

Eighty-five years later, in the fall of 1997, Janet Wills was assigned to teach sixth, seventh, and eighth grade social studies at Southeast Webster in Dayton, Iowa. She arrived at her district just three years after graduating from Northwestern College, received a three-ring binder bursting with “a bunch of stuff in it I didn’t understand,” and was told to use the binder to frame her eighth grade instruction. But everything in it was irrelevant—it was entirely based on a textbook that the district no longer used. And there was no curriculum outlined for sixth grade.²

Wills still teaches social studies at Southeast Webster-Grand, but her approach to instruction and integration of Iowa-specific history education has made massive strides. Her students are “less passive and more locally focused.” Like many Iowa teachers, changes to her teaching style were influenced by a number of things—statewide standards, improved instruction frameworks, and new technology. This essay looks at these changes over time, how they have affected Iowa history education, and the challenges K–12 educators still face today.

Standards & Curriculum

When Susan McDanel started teaching social studies at Centerville High School in 1976, history curricula varied widely throughout Iowa. Her district rolled out new “goals and standards” every six years or so—though she said they were typically the same broad standards with different labels. The district’s social studies teachers then met and reviewed what they all would collectively cover over the next school year. Each year, they tweaked their plans slightly and started again.³

The introduction of Iowa history education also varied widely by district. For Wills, students were taught introductory Iowa history content (such as state symbols) in sixth grade. For McDanel, it was in fourth, fifth and sixth grades. In Mason City, it was fifth grade, and in Washington, Iowa, it was seventh grade. The inclusion of Iowa history at this time was district and teacher dependent.

In 1989, a Blue Ribbon Task Force examined the teaching of Iowa history at all levels of the educational system and found it to be

1. Edgar Harlan quoted in *Keosauqua Republican*, 5/16/ 1912.

2. Janet Wills, interview with the author, 7/20/2021.

3. Susan McDanel, interview with the author, 7/19/2021.

woefully inadequate.⁴ The task force found that although a large quantity of historical materials on Iowa history existed, the materials were uneven in both quality and accessibility, and teacher training on Iowa history also was insufficient. Schools were teaching Iowa history. There was just no consistency throughout the state.

Federal guidelines in the early twenty-first century continued to deprioritize history by placing a strong emphasis on reading, mathematics and science.⁵ The 1980s and 1990s marked the rise of the standards-based education (SBE) reform movement. Standards-based reform was enacted in federal law with the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and carried forward with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Critics argue that SBE led educators away from important but non-tested subjects, such as social studies.⁶

After a legislative effort to set consistent expectations for K–12 schools in Iowa, the first statewide social studies standards were developed in 2008. These standards did not emphasize Iowa history, even though the Iowa code called for it. A final draft of these standards was issued in June 2010, and they were widely seen as broad, vague, and difficult for teachers.

In "Social Studies: A Call to Action," a report released by the Iowa Department of Education in 2015, over 1,500 Iowa teachers and administrators were surveyed to gather a comprehensive picture of the state of social studies instruction in Iowa.⁷ Some of the statistics were alarming. For example, elementary teachers reported that they were only spending about 5 percent of their week teaching social studies. In 2016, the Iowa History Advisory Council reported that since the inception of NCLB, the focus on social studies had diminished and "any new initiatives to advance Iowa history in K–12 classrooms must recognize some formidable obstacles."⁸

4. For details about Blue Ribbon Task Force, see "Recommendations to Create a Systemic Approach to Improving the Teaching and Learning of Iowa History in Iowa's K–12 Schools," Iowa History Advisory Council (2016), 11.

5. Alyson Klein, "No Child Left Behind: An Overview," *Education Week* (2015).

6. Thomas S. Dee and Brian A. Jacob, "The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Students, Teachers, and Schools," *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (2010), 150–51; "Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects," Center on Education Policy (2008).

7. "Social Studies: A Call to Action," Iowa Department of Education (2015).

8. "Recommendations to Create a Systemic Approach to Improving the Teaching and Learning of Iowa History in Iowa's K–12," Iowa History Advisory Council (2016). In this report, both teachers and superintendents believed there was a need to make social studies a greater priority and many noted that until

In response to these reports, revisions were made to the Iowa Core Social Studies Standards. The updated standards were “much more user-friendly” and required that Iowa history be taught at every grade.⁹ These revised standards are more inquiry-driven, support the use of primary and secondary sources, and their three-year implementation included professional development. While the state sets expectations for what students learn about Iowa history, individual districts decide what and how students are taught, and teachers are empowered to implement the curriculum.

Instruction

After thirty-one years as an elementary educator in Iowa, Kim Heckart knows that instruction methods are always evolving. When she began teaching elementary-level history in 1990, the content was mostly fact-based and leaned heavily on holidays and themes. A shift in instruction for Heckart came when her Washington Community School District shifted to inquiry-based instruction in 2001.¹⁰ This change was fostered by a Teaching American History grant from the U.S. Department of Education that allowed the district to pilot a curriculum and professional development project called Bringing History Home. The district’s agreement to participate led other local school districts to join the professional learning and emphasized historical thinking processes with students. She said it was a shift for elementary teachers in the state. With this new approach, now, for example, Heckart not only teaches her third graders at Prairie Ridge Elementary in Cedar Rapids how to read maps, but through inquiry, she also leads them to evaluate the variety of information that different types of maps provide.

She also began to make more local connections, including introducing her students in Washington to a nearby community in Kalona that includes the Old Order Amish. Heckart led students in inquiry about the Amish, who students were used to seeing around town. This is a notable example of how a larger emphasis on Iowa history encouraged

there are accountability measures in place for the teaching and learning of social studies, it will not become a priority.

9. Wills, interview.

10. Kim Heckart, interview with the author, 7/20/2021. Inquiry-based learning emphasizes the student’s role in the learning process. Rather than the educator telling students what they need to know, students are encouraged to explore the material, share ideas, and ask questions.

partnerships between local cultural communities to provide access to Iowa-specific resources.

When Joe Judge began teaching at Albia High School in 2004, he heavily relied on textbook objectives. Judge, who helped revise the Iowa social studies standards, implemented elements of the widely used C3 framework in his classes after it was developed in 2013. This approach emphasizes the acquisition and application of knowledge to prepare students for college, career, and civic life and builds the critical thinking, problem solving, and participatory skills vital to engaged citizenship. Over twenty states, including Iowa, and fifteen national social studies organizations worked together to voluntarily develop the C3 framework to establish clearer and higher standards for the instruction of history, geography, civics, and economics.¹¹

McDanel spent thirty-eight years teaching U.S. history and American government at Centerville High School. She used the textbook as her "grounding source," yet as her instruction became more skills-based, she began to take advantage of local history courses provided by her nearby Area Education Agency (AEA). These courses encouraged her to transition her instruction to hands-on activities that incorporated more of the community. In an architectural unit, for instance, McDanel and her class walked around their community and took pictures of elements that were unique to Centerville. She also facilitated trips to a local cemetery so students could explore the stories of Iowans and build historical connections to past residents of their town.¹²

Another important instructional development is that educators are more often teaching the narratives of Iowa history within national and international contexts. For example, school desegregation is not just a southern topic. Educators are encouraged to address not only the Little Rock Nine but also Iowan Alexander Clark's fight to allow his daughter Susan to attend her local primary school in Muscatine in 1867–68.¹³ This new direction challenges the myth that Iowa's past is historically insignificant, monocultural, and boring. This simply is not true, and developments in instructional methods have helped students engage with local and state history in creative, inquiry-based, and innovative ways.

11. Joe Judge, interview with the author, 7/16/2021; "Fact Sheet College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework For Social Studies State Standards," National Council for the Social Studies (2013), 2.

12. McDanel, interview.

13. For details about school desegregation in Iowa, see Primary Source Sets, "School Desegregation," State Historical Society of Iowa (2017).

Technology

The influence of technology has had massive impacts on K–12 learning in the past thirty years. For Wills, her style of instruction has evolved to integrate new technology and software. When she began teaching in 1994, “students would read the text, answer questions, listen to my lecture and take notes.” But she said this style of instruction was ultimately boring. Kids, she said, want to talk to each other. She was already integrating more technology with her middle schoolers when the COVID-19 pandemic began, but as she dealt with classrooms that were both in-person and virtual, she discovered new options to facilitate learning. With one such program—Actively Learn—students can read a text, annotate it, and respond to each other. She said discussion groups through this program, which included a mix of in-person and virtual students, were arguably better as students had more time to process and edit their thoughts online.¹⁴

The influence of the Internet and less reliance on printed textbooks has affected how Iowa educators teach Iowa history. What makes the impact of the Internet particularly helpful for history teachers in Iowa is access to digital primary sources. Today, teachers have thousands of Iowa-specific primary sources at their fingertips through projects like the State Historical Society of Iowa’s Primary Source Sets.¹⁵ This project includes more than sixty text sets created for K–12 educators that align to the Iowa Core Content Anchor Standards for Social Studies and address national, international, and Iowa history. Created in partnership with the Iowa Department of Education and framed with historical inquiry at the forefront, these sets include compelling and supporting questions, source-dependent questions and background essays written by local historians. A teacher introducing students to the Great Depression can now quickly pull up a 1931 handwritten letter from Martha Fast to First Lady Lou Henry Hoover. In it, the young girl describes to Hoover, a native Iowan, the challenges her family is facing during the Great Depression, such as her need to wear the same dress every day.¹⁶

14. Wills, interview.

15. Primary Source Sets, State Historical Society of Iowa (website), 2017, <https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets>.

16. Martha Fast, “Letter from Martha Fast to First Lady Lou Henry Hoover,” 1/2/1931, Lou Henry Hoover Collection, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, West Branch, IA.

Challenges and Moving Forward

Harlan's lament that "no school teaches [Iowa history]" is certainly not true today, and over the past three decades, Iowa history education has increased; however, opportunities for improvement remain. A big part of the puzzle is increasing accountability for social studies education. Despite statewide standards, there are no checks on how or if a district is implementing them. Local historical societies, cultural organizations, and Iowa history professionals can be a part of advocating for and sharing resources with districts to help prioritize Iowa history education.

In a 2021 report, Fordham Institute recommended a complete revision to Iowa's K–12 Civics and U.S. History standards.¹⁷ The report concluded, "Vagueness and overbreadth lead to a dearth of specific content in both disciplines." In particular, the report dinged Iowa for missed opportunities to integrate Iowa history.¹⁸ Again, local partners can work with educators to develop digital or physical resources, professional development opportunities, and in-person or virtual experiences.

Iowa educators teaching state and local history also need content knowledge. Learning facts, concepts, theories, and principles that are taught and learned in specific academic courses is vitally important to teaching Iowa history, so taking away professional requirements to gain that knowledge puts the work at risk.¹⁹ Local historical societies and professionals, again, can help to partner with local educators. Digitization projects, professional development workshops, or working to create in-person and virtual field trips would help to equip teachers to engage in the rich history of their communities and our state.

17. "The State of State Standards for Civics and U.S. History in 2021," Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2021).

18. An example from the Fordham study is that the requirement for fifth grade students to "analyze Iowa's role in Civil Rights history" (SS.5.26) does not direct the reader to Iowa's history on interracial marriage, universal suffrage, Native American property rights, school desegregation, admission of women to higher education, ties to the Niagara Movement, acceptance of mosques, and case law on student speech rights with decisions like *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

19. In 2020, the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) proposed a rule change to reduce all social studies endorsements from fifty-one credits to twenty-four for "increased flexibility." For example, the proposed change only required three semester hours to receive a World History endorsement instead of nine. This means a teacher could take a course offered at an Iowa institution titled, "The History of the Second World War," and be licensed to teach sixth grade World Regions and Cultures, seventh grade Contemporary Global Issues, or high school Early or Modern World History. This proposal failed.

The past thirty years alone have witnessed important and impactful improvements. Statewide standards, improved access to Iowa history resources and professional development, as well as new teaching strategies are important steps forward. Ultimately, local historical societies, cultural organizations, school districts and history professionals around the state want the same thing—for Iowa students to learn more about their local history, to understand and assess its complexities and to feel ownership and investment in their community. This effort to promote Iowa history education is not new. It reflects over a century of work here in the state and that work continues.

Iowa's Political Heritage: A Quarter Century of Historical Publications and Research Possibilities

TIMOTHY WALCH

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, Iowa celebrated the 150th anniversary of its entry into the Union, and, not surprisingly, authors and publishers took note of the anniversary. Among the titles released that year was a highly anticipated volume by Dorothy Schwieder, a professor at Iowa State University and doyen of Iowa history. That book, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, was published to great acclaim. In fact, as Marvin Bergman noted in this journal, reviewers hailed it as “a landmark event for Iowa history.”

It was also true that the book was not definitive. As Schwieder herself noted, the book generally ignored politics and government. Those topics, she noted, had been “amply covered” in previous histories. That is not to say that political and governmental issues have been ignored over the past quarter century.

Any review of recent scholarship on Iowa's political history should begin with *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, edited by David Hudson, Marvin Bergman, and Loren Hutton (Iowa City, IA, 2008). This substantive volume includes over four hundred entries for Iowans who contributed to Iowa's life and culture and nearly a quarter of these entries are on politicians or government officials.

There are also publications that expand our understanding of Iowa's political leadership. On presidential politics, see Robert Mitchell's *Skirmisher: The Life, Times, and Political Career of James B. Weaver*