
Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is Distinguished Professor of History at Iowa State University. She has written numerous books including *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005) and *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America since 1865* (2014).

*The Orphans of Davenport: Eugenics, the Great Depression, and the War Over Children's Intelligence* is a book of three different intertwined parts: the story of the orphaned children warehoused at Iowa’s state orphanage at Davenport, that of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station and its earth-shattering research, and that of a psychological profession that had such an investment in eugenics and the importance of nature, rather than nurture, that it refused to listen to the researchers in Iowa. In bringing together these three threads, Marilyn Brookwood provides her readers with a story that is, all at once, heartbreaking, inspiring, and frustrating. It’s a story of how things could have been different, if people had accepted sooner the remarkable findings of the researchers at the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station.

In the early twentieth century United States, intelligence testing and eugenics were two sides of a single coin. Louis Terman, a psychology professor at Stanford University, had imported French psychologist Alfred Binet’s model for intelligence testing, the IQ test, as it is known today. Binet’s model allowed for the influence of environmental factors, but Terman’s did not. Terman believed that intelligence was a fixed point, determined even before birth by the intelligence of a person’s parents. In his view, IQ could not change across the lifespan and was entirely the result of a person’s origins. On the basis of such beliefs, states would commit thousands upon thousands of children to institutions and would sterilize their mothers as unfit. Committed to substandard institutional care, children’s circumstances would create self-fulfilling prophecies since their deprived situations would not allow them to flourish. In this era, the state of Iowa would not allow the adoption of children who tested as having below normal intelligence. The state went so far as to allow babies too young to be evaluated to go home with couples, on the condition that they would be given intelligence tests at eighteen months. Those found to be below the state’s threshold would be taken away and sent to an institution.

As the title would suggest, the book has its roots in the deplorable conditions that existed in the Iowa Soldiers’ Orphans’ Home in Davenport in the opening years of the Great Depression. The state intended it
to house "normal" children. The orphanage transferred children with disabilities to other state institutions. Hard times meant that children had flooded into the orphanage, and there was far too little in the way of space and care. Babies, in particular, suffered from their time in the institution. Without staff available to provide affectionate, hands-on care, staff propped bottles in cribs. Additionally, as a disease prevention measure, curtains enclosed the cribs, depriving babies of visual stimulation. They failed to thrive and even seemed to lose intelligence as their stays lengthened. The state transferred many of them to institutions for the developmentally disabled.

In the context of this situation, the orphanage, seemingly accidentally, sent two toddler girls to the state facility at Woodward, which at that time largely housed adults who needed permanent, long-term care. The little girls were in bad shape both physically and mentally. Both had deteriorated badly at the orphanage, and between the two of them, they had a combined IQ of 81. A bit over a year later, Harold Skeels and Marie Skoda, researchers from the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, came to Woodward to do intelligence testing. They were astonished to find two little girls there who appeared to be completely normal. They were healthy, clean, toilet trained, and verbal. The developmentally disabled women on the wards where they lived had "adopted" them, providing them basic care, small gifts, and lots of love. The girls had thrived. In fact, much to the researchers' astonishment, their IQs had increased markedly. This was not supposed to happen. IQ was supposed to be fixed, and these women were supposedly incapable of raising healthy, happy children. In fact, some of them had been sterilized to prevent them having any, or more, children. Both of the girls were so improved that they became eligible for adoption.

This revelation prompted a further experiment, this time planned, where children from Davenport who were deemed unadoptable went to live at both Woodward and Glenwood, also a state home for the developmentally disabled. Compared with a control group that remained at Davenport, the children who went to Woodward and Glenwood and received loving care from disabled adults thrived and for the most part met the state's adoption thresholds. Years later, they were healthy, functioning adults, while those who had remained at the orphanage had been much less fortunate.

Had the psychological profession been accepting of these findings, many thousands of lives could have been altered for the better. Louis Terman and his supporters, however, ridiculed and belittled the Iowa researchers, their findings left for the most part unread, waiting to be
discovered by psychologists a generation later. Terman was so convinced of IQ as a fixed and immovable point that he was entirely unwilling to consider the possibility that he might be wrong. Fortunately, others who later read the Iowa studies understood their import, and translated them into action, such as the creation of the Head Start program, part of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty.

*The Orphans of Davenport* is well worth reading, although different readers will find different strands of the book the most useful. The discussions of the orphanage at Davenport, the system of care in Iowa, and the functioning of the Iowa research station will probably be of most interest to those concerned with the history of the state. The very long discussion of the prejudices of the psychologists and the professional fight in which the Iowans found themselves embroiled is perhaps less interesting, unless one is a student of the history of psychology. The work, however, is an eye opener and an exceptional view into conditions that once plagued orphanages in the U.S. Should anyone wish to continue their reading with related works, they should look to Megan Birk’s 2005 *Annals* article, “Playing House: Training Modern Mothers at Iowa State College Home Management Houses.” Birk’s article describes an alternate path available to a few of Iowa’s children in need “adopted” by Iowa State College. Also of interest may be Hamilton Crawen’s work detailing the development and achievements of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, *Before Head Start: The Iowa Station and America’s Children* (University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Undoubtedly, *The Orphans of Davenport* will leave readers wanting to know more.


Reviewer Ginette Aley is visiting assistant professor of history at Kansas State University and associate managing editor of *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*.

Structured as a compendium of entries, this volume represents a trove of general, historical, and anecdotal information about 102 now-closed Iowa high schools. A brief overview of the essential importance of education in the state’s history precedes the entries, which are numbered and alphabetized by school name. They also contain school details including the closing date, mascot, and a photo. Entries are organized by (somewhat inconsistent) headings denoting topics such as Early History, Teachers, Sports, School Paper, Notable Graduates, as well as occasional references to Organizations, Pranks, Killed in Action, and National