

DAVENPORT, IOWA, 1906 - 1907

A GLIMPSE INTO A CITY'S PAST

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Americans are taught that the United States was born in the country and that its most cherished institutions and values were uniquely shaped by the rustic background. And, admittedly, there is much literary and statistical evidence to support such a belief. However, this agrarian view of society omits the highly significant role played by the city in the making of America, for in the city centered most of the social, political, and economic forces which characterize contemporary American civilization. Great accumulations of capital, giant factories, business activities, the white-collared middle class, the wage-earning masses, schools, churches, libraries, and galleries, theaters, newspapers, density of population, crime, vice, and opportunities to misuse political power were some of the important generating factors in the life of the city in the past as they are today. Likewise, then as now, many of the impulses and movements which have made for a more humane civilization—education, literature, invention, science, the fine arts, social reform, public hygiene, the use of leisure—were given lift and direction by those who lived in urban centers.

This study treats a small episode in that larger history of American urban development by examining the manifestations of some of these aspects of city life in Davenport, Iowa, during the years 1906-1907. A bustling and thriving municipality of nearly 50,000 people located on the northern bank of the Mississippi River at a place where it bends to the west, Davenport possessed a beautiful setting in which high bluffs surrounded the business district on three sides giving it an amphitheater effect while beyond the bluffs on a broad tableland the

neat residential area with its rows of large frame houses fanned out in three directions. There were in the city over 200 factories which produced a variety of products, about 174 business and financial institutions which employed over 4,000 persons, 41 churches and synagogues which supported active youth organizations and Sunday schools, 11 beautiful parks and squares, 16 schools including a new high school opened in 1907, large and impressive public buildings, stores, offices, theaters, street railways, miles of paved streets, police and fire protection, an energetic and civic-minded citizenry and other characteristics of a well-defined urban community.¹ Wages and salaries were good, creating a high standard of living and there was, on the whole, an atmosphere of contentment and satisfaction.² However, Davenport in 1906-1907 also had crime, both petty and major; an area known as "Bucktown" which was notorious for its immorality, unsolved health and sanitation problems; slum areas; political connivance; charges of corruption; and other seamier aspects of city existence.

THE ECONOMIC PICTURE

Economically, the city was prosperous. It was the second leading city in per capita wealth in the United States and of cities in Iowa it had the most invested capital, one of the highest assessed property valuations and the lowest per capita debt. Probably it was because of this debt that the city possessed such a fierce pride in its economic development and revelled in its competition with other cities. Certainly the constant "boosting" of Davenport as a wonderful place in which to live and do business was one of the most dominant themes

¹ The *Davenport Daily Times*, May 7, 1907, page 4, listed the 1907 population as 49,000. Other statistics are from *Atlas of Scott County, 1905* (Davenport: Iowa Publishing Company, 1905), 45-46; "Davenport, the Eastern Gateway," pamphlet by Davenport Commercial Club, October, 1906, 1-2, 22; Harry E. Downer, *History of Davenport and Scott County*, I (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1910), 937; various issues of the *Davenport Daily Times*, 1906-1907, and the *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 1906-1907. (Hereafter these newspapers will be cited as *Times* and *Democrat*, respectively.)

² *Census of Iowa, 1905* (Des Moines: State Printer, 1906), 706-707. The average salary for white-collared workers was about \$1,000 annually while that for wage-earners was about \$500.

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EXAMPLES OF DAVENPORT BUSINESS

during the two years of this study.³

The stated purpose of this boosting was to make a "Greater Davenport" and the organization in the forefront of the movement, the Commercial Club, was formed in 1905 with boosting Davenport as its chief expressed aim. It sought to carry out this purpose in several ways during the years 1906-1907: through brochures and other publicity it encouraged prospective businesses to locate in the city; it worked for better transportation rates for Davenport businesses; it formed a holding company to advance money to interested businesses if they would situate in Davenport; and it sponsored a series of trade excursions through the surrounding territory in Iowa and Illinois.⁴

Early in 1907 the Commercial Club established a special "boosting committee" as a regular part of its organization and during March the committee solicited subscriptions in order to advertise Davenport throughout the nation. By the end of the month it had collected nearly \$2,500 which it used to purchase advertising space in newspapers and magazines across the land and to buy "booster buttons" for all local businessmen to wear on their coat lapels. From the newspaper accounts it appeared that this project was entered into with amazing enthusiasm and optimism as to its successful outcome.⁵

As to the matter of better carrier rates, throughout 1906 and 1907 Charles Steel, commercial agent and secretary of the Commercial Club, worked diligently to secure better railroad rates for Davenport. In the fall of 1906 he appeared with

³ *Ibid.*, 700-701, 706-707, 824; "Davenport, the Eastern Gateway," 22. The *Times*, October 7, 1907, page 1, indicated other reasons for Davenport pride: home of the largest glucose and sugar refining plant in the world, home of the largest macaroni factory in the world, home plant of the largest broom manufacturer in the world, location of the only locomotive manufacturer west of Pittsburgh, home of the largest manufacturer of metal wheels for farm implements in the West, and its washing machine factories produced sixty percent of the entire U. S. output.

⁴ *Times*, June 25, 1906, 8-9, 12; June 26, 1906, 1, 14; June 28, 1906, 1; August 23, 1906, 1, 8; August 25, 1906, 4; September 12, 1906, 6; January 10, 1907, 14; March 22, 1907, 6; March 29, 1907, 6; May 13, 1907, 11; July 31, 1907, 6; October 7, 1907, 26-27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, March 22, 1907, 6; March 29, 1907, 6.

other representatives from the tri-cities before the Central Freight Association to plead for lower rates, at which time the group pointed out to the Association that rates were cheaper from New York to St. Louis than from New York to Davenport although the distance was greater to St. Louis.⁶ The following January, Steel and several others circulated among Davenport businessmen a petition asking the Iowa House of Representatives to regulate rates. In particular, the petition singled out the grievance of Iowa businessmen against the railroads in the state for not using joint rates, thus giving shippers outside the state an advantage since they received through rates from the point of shipment to a place in Iowa which were cheaper than rates from one point to another within the state.⁷ Significantly, the Iowa Railroad Commission ruled during the following summer that henceforth steam railroads in Iowa should make joint rates with interurban lines which meant that Davenport shippers could then send freight to many points at a twenty per cent reduction in costs.⁸

In July, 1907, the Commercial Club planned the formation of a holding company to advance funds to businesses to get established in Davenport. Little more was reported concerning the matter, but as the year ended subscriptions still were coming in and businessmen were optimistic about the impending success of the venture.⁹

The trade excursions made during 1906-1907 were to allow Davenport businessmen to meet their customers firsthand, learn from actual observation of the conditions with which they must cope in supplying orders, and exchange ideas with other businessmen along the way.¹⁰ Generally, the group went by rail stopping at most of the towns along the route and being welcomed oftentimes by demonstrations with bands and parades.¹¹ For the first excursion in June, 1906, one of the

⁶ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1906, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1907, 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, August 1, 1907, 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1907, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, June 25, 1906, 8-9, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, June 26, 1906, 1; June 28, 1906, 1; August 23, 1906, 1, 8; August 25, 1906, 4; May 13, 1907, 11; October 7, 1907, 26-27.

businessmen, Arthur E. Kelly, composed an official song which expressed the goals of the trips, but surely left little doubt that its author had not missed his calling as a poet or song lyricist:

Everybody be a booster, we boost all day long.
 Trying to get your business, trying to make ours pay;
 It's no idle joshing, boost boys all you can.
 Everybody boosting Davenport is our whole plan.
 You look awfully good to our town,
 You look good to others, too,
 But you have treated us like princes,
 You can bet we won't forget you.
 You look good to everyone of us,
 As for trade, now Old Sport,
 We are not so tight and will treat you right,
 Why not come to Davenport?

The first verse of this was sung to the tune, "Everybody Works But Father" while the second and third were to the tune of "You Look Awfully Good to Father."¹²

Since Davenport was a river city it would seem natural for it to be concerned about river improvement, and yet not a great deal respecting the matter was reported in the newspapers for the period. There were from time to time references to meetings of the Upper Mississippi River Improvement Association attended by representatives from Davenport but these statements usually were not very informative as to what was discussed and what action, if any, was taken. Captain Lon Bryson represented Davenport at most of these meetings and in April, 1907, he was quoted as stating that the Association was having all the harbors in the cities along the upper Mississippi put into shape for an inspection by representatives of the Inland Waterways Commission. Bryson also spoke out periodically concerning Davenport's use of the river as a dump, saying that if the practice was to continue the dumping area ought to be diked off. However, there was no evidence that any action was taken on the recommendation.¹³

Another transportation concern during these years was the matter of good roads which was a topic of discussion not only in Davenport but also throughout the country. In Davenport

¹² *Ibid.*, June 26, 1906, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1906, 7; August 30, 1906, 4; April 27, 1907, 6.

the chief agitation seemed to come from rural mail carriers and farmers, two of the chief users of the rural roads. The mail carriers in particular were very active and during the fall and early winter of 1907 they started a concentrated effort to mount a serious "good roads" effort in the Davenport area. Petitions and public statements calling for frequent use of road drags, more money spent on roads, permanent bridges, accounting of road funds, compulsory use of wide tires on vehicles and use of gravel, cinders, or stone on roads were the chief manifestations of this in the newspapers.¹⁴

An economic development of considerable importance to Davenport in 1906 was the purchase by three New York banking firms of all the interurban lines in the tri-cities. These firms then organized a holding company, the Tri-City Railway and Light Company, which consolidated the property into four companies to promote greater efficiency in the operation of the interurban lines and in the production of electrical power and gas. One of the three banking institutions, J. G. White and Company, was also an engineering firm and it put the railroads into first-class physical condition as the initial stage of a projected program which was to see nearly two million dollars spent on improvements by 1910. During 1907 the Davenport city council worked out an agreement with Tri-City Railway and Light on gas and electricity rates and had them install a magnetite system of street lighting which was put into operation for the first time on September 3, 1907.¹⁵

Because Davenport was a highly industrialized city with numerous workingmen's organizations, labor disputes were not uncommon. Most of these were minor disagreements over wages and hours but a number were concerned with more serious matters such as the demand that employers enforce a union or closed shop. Although the reporting of these incidents in the news media was not always clear, it appeared that the labor unions were not very successful in securing

¹⁴ *Times*, February 1, 1906, 2; September 5, 1907, 7; December 21, 1907, 10; *Democrat*, August 25, 1907, 14; August 28, 1907, 12.

¹⁵ Downer, *History of Davenport*, I, 705; *Times*, February 21, 1907, 12; September 4, 1907, 4.

their demands.¹⁶

THE POLITICAL SCENE

Politics in Davenport during 1906-1907 centered primarily upon the control of the municipal government. Attitudes were highly partisan with support of issues and candidates determined largely by party affiliation¹⁷—even the city's newspapers entered actively into the political fray and did not hesitate to show their party loyalties in strong language and with little subtlety.¹⁸ However, within the parties there was serious factionalism which in 1906 caused Davenport Republicans to split at the precinct level over support of a gubernatorial candidate and the Democrats to divide into pro-Hearst and anti-Hearst elements.¹⁹ This is not meant to imply that the independent voter was non-existent or even of no consequence, for there was evidence that he still asserted some influence and even occasionally upset the assumed outcome of an election. In other words, Davenport politics during this period bear a great similarity to present-day local politics in Iowa, despite the changes caused by the removal of the major parties from the municipal scene and the introduction of the direct primary.

The Democrat Party controlled Davenport's municipal government in 1906-1907 and was undoubtedly the strongest political force in the city in terms of its showing in the election of 1906 when all Democrat office-seekers except one were elected. As noted (*supra*, footnote 17) their greatest support came from the first and second wards and the first precinct of

¹⁶ *Democrat*, April 3, 1906, 8; July 8, 1907, 11; *Times*, May 16, 1907, 6; July 22, 1907, 6.

¹⁷ A survey in the 1906 election results showed that the first and second wards consistently voted for Democrat candidates, the third and fourth wards divided their support, the fifth ward split the vote with the first precinct uniformly Democrat and the second precinct Republican, and the sixth ward voted Republican throughout. This meant that the Democrats could count heavily on five precincts of the city's twelve, the Republicans could depend upon three, and four would be in contention. *Democrat*, April 9, 1906, 10; *Times*, November 14, 1906, 6.

¹⁸ The *Times* was decidedly Republican-leaning while, appropriately, the *Democrat* was a Democratic Party organ.

¹⁹ The latter reference is to William Randolph Hearst, chain-newspaper publisher and challenger to William Jennings Bryan's leadership of the Democratic Party in 1906.

the fifth ward and from data relative to the socio-economic and religio-ethnic backgrounds of people living there; it can be conjectured reasonably that many of the people who supported the party in Davenport were wage-earners, of German and Irish extraction and Catholic in their religion.²⁰ Davenport's large German-American population was politically significant and lined up overwhelmingly in Democrat ranks largely because of the party's opposition to prohibition and the strict enforcement of Sunday saloon closing and other so-called "blue-laws."²¹

Since the Democrats had been out of office during the two years preceding 1906 they waged a vigorous campaign in which they assailed the Republican administration for alleged collusion with big corporations in the city,²² for an inefficiently-managed police force which the mayor, who was unqualified, controlled rather than the police chief,²³ and for creating a "city-hall gang" or "machine" made up chiefly of the mayor, the city attorney and the police judge. Democrats also charged that the incumbent mayor, Harry Phillips, had used his office as headquarters for the contracting firm in which he was a partner and that he wrongfully claimed credit for the midnight closing of saloons and the elimination of slot machines

²⁰ *Atlas of Scott County, 1905*, 45-46; *Davenport City Directory, 1905*; Hildegard Binder Johnson, "German Forty-Eighters in Davenport," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, XLIV (January, 1946), 3-60.

²¹ *Times*, October 24, 1906, 14; October 31, 1906, 14.

²² Democrat charges were given some substantiation when Republican W. W. Lunger of the fifth ward was defeated for re-nomination and asserted that C. C. Smith who won the nomination ran the caucus unfairly. According to Lunger, Smith and his supporters originally had fair ballots but duplicated his white ones to confuse the voters; they stood by the ballot box telling voters to open their ballots so that representatives of Tri-City Railway could spot those who voted for Lunger; they scoured hotel lobbies for peddlars and transients to vote illegally for Smith; and, they brought in voters from the fourth and sixth wards. If Lunger's allegations were true they are strong evidence of both political connivance and corporate influence in Davenport politics. *Democrat*, March 26, 1906, 8.

²³ The *Democrat*, April 5, 1906, page 5, stated that the police force had captured only one burglar during the past two years and that man actually was taken in Kansas and returned to Davenport. It added somewhat ruefully that had the burglar stayed in Davenport probably he would not have been captured at all!

from the city, both of which were attributable to Democrat Waldo Becker who preceded him as mayor.²⁴ Thus, party strategy consisted primarily of attacking the Republicans for the "mess" in city government which they had made, while promising little more than to clean up things if put into office. In 1906 the strategy seemed to work amazingly well.



VARIOUS BUILDINGS IN DAVENPORT

Shortly after the Scott County Democrats held their convention in October, 1906, reports and rumors of division within the party's ranks began to appear. Specifically, the *Times* stated that supporters of William Randolph Hearst had wrested

²⁴ *Democrat*, April 3, 1906, 6. Becker was elected mayor again in 1906.

control of the party from the "Old Guard" and had shoved aside anti-Hearst elements at the recent convention to install their own men as candidates. And, a rumor circulated that since Hearst had recently won the nomination for Governor of New York and seemed to have presidential aspirations, there would be a Hearst Independence League formed in Scott County to give him support. Finally, the *Times* hinted darkly of other factional and personal strife within the party but it did not elaborate.²⁵ The *Democrat*, ordinarily the voice of Democrat activities in Davenport and Scott County, was silent and printed not a word on the matter. But whatever truth there may have been in reports of Democratic internal disharmony, outwardly the party and its election returns in Davenport during these years gave a distinct impression of unity and strength.

The Republicans, although out of office during the period of this study, gave vigorous opposition to the Democrats. Republican voting strength was concentrated in the eastern end of the city in contrast to Democratic preponderance on the west side. Unfortunately, the data used to determine the background of the people who supported the party is less conclusive than that for the Democrats. However, newspaper references and other bits of information suggest that many business and professional people were members. Likewise, the party's relationship to the business community was revealed rather clearly by the platform in 1906 which boasted that the incumbent Republican administration had created an atmosphere conducive to business and industrial progress and that Republicans would continue matters as they were for the past two years if re-elected.²⁶

Factionalism within the party was not a matter of rumor; it actually existed as a "grass roots" manifestation of the emerging state and national "progressive-standpat" struggle. Iowa Republicans in 1906 had to choose between incumbent Governor Albert B. Cummins, the "Progressive," and George Perkins,

²⁵ *Times*, October 6, 1906, 11; October 13, 1906, 15.

²⁶ Various issues of the *Times* during March, 1906. See especially the issue for March 23 where backgrounds of candidates were given.

Sioux City newspaperman, who was the "Standpat" candidate for the nomination. In Davenport, warm fights occurred in the second, fourth and fifth wards. In the fourth ward the Perkins element held a "rump caucus" which chose a contesting delegation to the county convention, and in the fifth, dubbed "the bloody fifth" because of the rough and tumble affair that took place there, two slates were drawn up. When the county convention met there was more excitement for Perkins men attempted to control the meeting and when they failed they called a "rump convention" which in five minutes transacted business and disbanded. The regular convention then met, seated all the Cummins delegates except those from the second ward, and proceeded to nominate Cummins.²⁷

Anti-Cummins newspapers throughout the state printed stories that the Perkins faction was clearly in the majority and had won out at the Scott County Republican Convention. However, on June 23 the *Times* printed a story relating that Judge Solomon F. Prouty of Des Moines, a Cummins supporter, had called Davenport about the time that the county convention was to start, was told about the "rump convention," and then went out on the street where he discovered that the *Des Moines Capital* had already printed the story!

"What does this mean?" Prouty asked rhetorically:

Merely that the resolutions, list of delegates, committees, etc., were prepared in the office of Ed Hunter [staunch Perkins supporter and one of the organizers of Perkins' bid for the nomination] here and carried to Davenport . . . and by a miscue they were printed in Des Moines before the rump caucus passed them. . . . If the standpatters, Perkins people, and railroads expect to stand on the Scott County showing it is surprising that they go to the trouble of participating in the conventions and caucuses at all. It would be just as valid for them to organize in the railroad lawyer's office and come to Des Moines to the state convention trying to show that they represent the people as to get up such a farce as that at Davenport.²⁸

A third political party in Davenport during these years was the Socialist Party. Admittedly small but well-organized, the party had a platform and ran candidates for all municipal and

²⁷ *Times*, June 15, 1906, 8; June 16, 1906, 1; June 18, 1906, 4, 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1906, 2.

school elections in Davenport during 1906-1907. While their main premise was that the capitalist system and its attendant evils were the source of most of the problems of government in the United States, they did support such worthwhile reforms as the adoption of the kindergarten idea by the public schools, night classes for those who were forced to leave school before finishing, abolition of child labor, better wages, employer's liability laws, and old-age assistance.²⁹ The party's greatest strength in Davenport was in the first and second wards where many wage-earners lived and where the party's special appeals to workers for support were most effective. Perhaps significantly, the party occasionally gained in the "blue-stocking" sixth ward where there was a corresponding decrease in the Republican vote, allowing for a conclusion that dissatisfied Republicans voted for Socialist candidates rather than Democrats.

Other groups which were not organized with political intentions sometimes championed or opposed certain issues and candidates and probably the German-American societies were foremost among such groups. During 1906-1907 they were the chief political spokesmen of the German-Americans living in Davenport and were active particularly in opposing stricter enforcement of prohibition and so-called "blue laws."³⁰ Since Davenport had the dubious distinction of having more saloons than any other city in Iowa and also a large German population with the drinking customs peculiar to them, it is not surprising that the liquor question above all other issues stirred

²⁹ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1906, 4; July 5, 1906, 12; February 23, 1907, 5. Nationally-prominent Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs spoke in Davenport on March 2, 1906, and strongly attacked the use of child labor.

³⁰ During 1906 the Davenport German societies banded together to form a local branch of the German-American National Association so as to be able to exert more influence on politics. One of their first actions after the incorporation was to call upon Scott County representatives in the Iowa General Assembly to work for repeal of the existing liquor laws and for the substitution of a local option law. The threat posed for failure to do so was loss of the German-American vote in the upcoming election. Because of the importance of the German-American vote in Scott County, all of the representatives predictably said they would work toward such ends. *Democrat*, April 16, 1906, 5; *Times*, September 19, 1906, 5; September 27, 1906, 7.

Davenport German-Americans during these years.

The chief aspect of the problem in Davenport was the enforcement of the so-called "mulct law" of 1894 which permitted the prohibition statute of 1890 to be circumvented upon payment of a tax of \$600 by saloonkeepers and the consent of a majority of the voters in cities of 5,000 or more and sixty-five percent of the voters in communities of less than 5,000 people.³¹ To enforce or not to enforce the mulct law seemed to be the question, and during the summer and fall of 1907 the forces representing the two sides of the issue met in open confrontation.

The initial encounter came in early August when C. W. Neal, an attorney, and T. H. Kemmerer, a businessman, instituted over twenty injunctions against saloons under the mulct law and demanded that the saloons in "Bucktown" be closed, the practice of serving free lunches in saloons be stopped, women and children be kept out of saloons, the practice of selling beer in buckets to women and children who came for it by the back door be stopped, and saloons be closed on Sundays.³² On August 12, the German-American societies held a mass meeting to protest the strict enforcement, although the matter of Sunday closing seemed to be their chief grievance. That same day the *Democrat* carried an article stating that Davenport businessmen also opposed the Sunday closing on the grounds that it was detrimental to the business and moral welfare of the city.³³ Several days later the *Times* expressed the same thought in more dramatic terms when it stated that the sentiment of businessmen and citizens alike was that the enforcement of the mulct law would affect business in the city, cause property values to decline, and would set Davenport ten years backward in time!³⁴ In the newspapers, at least, there seemed to be a closing of ranks on this issue.

Next, a great protest parade and mass meeting were sched-

³¹ Dan E. Clark, "The History of Liquor Legislation in Iowa, 1846-1898," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, VI (January, July, October, 1908), 579-582; 598-599.

³² *Times*, August 3, 1907, 4; August 9, 1907, 6.

³³ *Ibid.*, August 12, 1907, 4; *Democrat*, August 12, 1907, 8.

³⁴ *Times*, August 15, 1907, 4.

uled for the evening of August 15. The emotionalism being engendered by the dispute was apparent in the melodramatic closing line of the notice sent to all members of the German Turner Society urging them to attend, for in terms reminiscent of Marx and Engels' manifesto in 1848 the announcement exhorted: "Arise, Turners, for freedom and right!"³⁵ When the meeting was held there were banners bearing slogans of protest, shouting, bands playing, and speech-making in which the Sunday closing section of the mulct law was the chief object of abuse. W. R. Maines, a justice of the peace, made an ingenious constitutional case when he argued that the First Amendment to the Constitution which gave one the right to go to church or not on Sunday likewise gave one the right to go to a saloon or not on Sunday! Gustav Donald, a prominent leader of the German-American Association, appealed to history for vindication when he said the fight was a matter of principle and compared it to the American colonists struggling with Great Britain over the Stamp Tax, not because of the few cents tax, but because of the principle involved. Others stressed that how one spent Sunday was an individual matter and that the section of the mulct law providing for Sunday closing was a bad section because public opinion did not demand it nor want it. Several of the speakers blamed the trouble on the two men, Neal and Kemmerer, rather than on any concerted prohibition movement, an idea voiced earlier by Mayor Waldo Becker when he stated that the police were doing a good job keeping the peace in Davenport so that the attack on the saloons came as a great surprise to him and he felt it was not made in good faith. Further, he said he had yet to find anyone who endorsed it.³⁶

But such people did exist, for the *Times* reported that the American Patriots Olive Lodge No. 42 supported the strict enforcement of the law, although it did compromise on the matter of Sunday closing by suggesting that saloons be permitted to open in the afternoon on Sunday.³⁷ In addition, Rev.

³⁵ *Democrat*, August 14, 1907, 10.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1907, 10; August 16, 1907, 7; *Times*, August 16, 1907, 4.

³⁷ *Times*, August 19, 1907, 6.

Mott R. Sawyers of the Second Presbyterian Church lashed out at the opponents of enforcement who argued that the law was against the German people, when in fact there were Germans on both sides of the question.³⁸ Finally, one of the speakers at the mass meeting on August 15 admitted there were supporters when he stated that people in Scott County fell into three categories on the issue: Those who wanted the mulct law strictly enforced; those who wanted everything wide open; and those who wanted "reasonable regulation."³⁹ (Incidentally, the speechmaker placed himself in the last group.)

About one week after the mass demonstration a compromise was reached whereby the mulct law was to be enforced except for the Sunday closing requirement which was modified to permit saloons to open in the afternoon on Sunday.⁴⁰ Immediate compliance with the new procedures was demanded under penalty of a \$200 to \$1,000 fine, but there was evidence that obedience to the law was neither complete nor prompt for in September the *Times* reported that saloons still were selling liquor and beer to youngsters who came for it with buckets and waited at the back door.⁴¹

On the surface, however, the tense and emotional atmosphere of August had subsided. But it was only superficial, for in mid-October one of the principals in the controversy, C. W. Neal, was nearly mobbed and his life threatened. Neal, who was at the city hall to represent Kemmerer in a litigation growing out of an incident in August in which Dr. A. P. Richter, editor of the German-language newspaper, *Der Demokrat*, broke his cane over Kemmerer's head, was leaving the building when a large and noisy crowd menacingly pursued him so that he was forced to take refuge in the office of John Berwald, a real estate broker. Berwald told him to leave and as Neal left he drew a gun which he pointed at the crowd while he made his way to his office. Almost immediately some members of the mob raced to the city hall to swear out a warrant

³⁸ *Ibid.*, August 26, 1907, 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, August 16, 1907, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1907, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, August 24, 1907, 6; September 15, 1907, 6.

against him for carrying concealed weapons and when the police arrived he was taken before a judge and arraigned. During the night a group hanged him in effigy in Washington Park which was in a heavily German-populated section of the city, while at his home his wife collapsed and was taken to the hospital suffering from nervous prostration. As for Neal himself, he paid his fine the next day and went to Des Moines "for a rest."⁴²

Nor was this the end of the controversy for it came to the surface again in November when a mass meeting of people on the other side of the issue passed resolutions asking the County Attorney to enforce the mulct law in Davenport and Scott County⁴³ and in December both Governor Cummins and Attorney-General H. W. Byers came to the city to warn that the mulct law was to be upheld or the state would intervene.⁴⁴ Once more the German-American societies in Davenport were placed on the defensive, but the odds were becoming more and more insurmountable for as the year ended it appeared that a wave of public sentiment for enforcement of the mulct law was sweeping the state and Davenport and Scott County could not escape it.⁴⁵

While the liquor question dwarfed all other concerns of the German-American societies during these years, they nonetheless did involve themselves in other matters. For example, in March, 1906, the Turner Society lodged a protest with Governor Cummins respecting proposed legislation to outlaw Sunday theater performances which they argued was unconstitutional because it restricted religious freedom, their argument being much akin to that used by some to protest the Sunday closing of saloons, namely, that guarantees of religious freedom allowed one to do what he pleased on Sunday.⁴⁶ And, in February, 1907, the German-American Association passed reso-

⁴² *Ibid.*, October 17, 1907, 1; October 18, 1907, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, November 18, 1907, 4. The make-up of this group was not made clear although several of the speakers were ministers, one was a Socialist leader, and one was a lawyer.

⁴⁴ *Times*, December 2, 1907, 12; December 12, 1907, 4; December 30, 1907, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, December 12, 1907, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1906, 4.

lutions favoring certain changes in the public school system in Davenport. Specifically, they declared that the school board arrangement was autocratic and inconsistent with democratic institutions and in the future Association members would not support a candidate for school director unless he was willing to give a complete explanation upon demand of any citizen of the reasons which decided the actions of the board in any given instance.⁴⁷

The political activities of other essentially non-political groups such as the Ministerial Association, labor unions, and various social organizations, usually took the form of pleas to the city administration to do or not to do something, and generally their activity did not go beyond that stage. For example, the Ministerial Association took a strong prohibitionist stand on the liquor question and were particularly anxious to have liquor removed from dance halls frequented by young people, while the Tuesday Club, a women's organization, urged the city council to clean up the city for there was too much filth and too many unsanitary conditions.⁴⁸ From time to time, groups of irate citizens would present petitions to the city fathers urging them to do something about the factories which dumped waste into the river; to do something about the slough on the inside of City Island where the current carried much of the city's garbage which was dumped from the end of Harrison Street; and to enforce the ordinance against spitting in streetcars.⁴⁹ Usually, little came of their efforts.

Toward the close of 1907, Davenporters were becoming interested in the so-called "Des Moines Plan" of commission government. It was explained to a mass meeting in early November and met with much favor, as registered by a straw vote taken after the presentation, chiefly because the plan provided for the referendum, recall, initiative, civil service, and had a corrupt practices clause. However, opposition to the plan became apparent when the Commercial Club campaigned for a citywide vote on it, but as one news writer sug-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, February 12, 1907, 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, December 18, 1906, 6; June 6, 1907, 6; November 20, 1907, 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, May 16, 1906, 2; November 29, 1906, 5; October 5, 1907, 4.

gested, it was logical that corporations, lobbyists, city hall ringleaders and contractors would oppose the plan because of its many safeguards which would thwart their present activities. Still, the Commercial Club's task was not too difficult for the state law authorizing cities of certain populations to adopt the plan provided that a petition to have a city election on the matter required only twenty-five per cent of the eligible voters at the last election, and this they succeeded in getting rather easily. As the year ended the special election was set to take place early in 1908.⁵⁰

SOME SOCIAL AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Public health and sanitation were serious social problems in Davenport in 1906-1907 as they are today in any large urban center. One problem peculiar to Davenport's location was the dumping of garbage into the river. Many other problems, however, were common to urban existence the world over, and during the period numerous petitions relating to a variety of unhealthy conditions were submitted to the Board of Health. Since the Board lacked power to deal directly with most of these problems, it generally turned away the wrath of the petitioners by telling them it would attempt to get an ordinance passed concerning the particular situation.

During the summer of 1906, and probably due to the publicity given the national and state pure food and drug legislation, there was a movement in Davenport to have that meat inspected which was sold in the city by farmers from the surrounding countryside. Dr. W. A. Stoecks, Chairman of the Board of Health, suggested that farmers be required to bring for inspection the head, lungs, and liver of the slaughtered animals whose carcasses they intended to sell in the city. The Board indicated that it would seek an ordinance to require this but no evidence was uncovered to show that such a regulation ever was passed.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, November 4, 1907, 6; November 8, 1907, 1, 14; November 11, 1907, 6; November 22, 1907, 9; November 25, 1907, 12; December 18, 1907, 14. The Commission Plan was defeated at the special election on January 11, 1908, 3,111 votes against to 2,713 votes for. Downer, *History of Davenport, I.*, 1,002.

⁵¹ *Times*, June 20, 1906, 2.

Later in the summer George Ellman, the city's Humane Officer, recommended that \$2,000 be collected to increase the efficiency of the Humane Society. He urged, too, that there be a special fund established in the city treasury from which the Society could draw in its work of helping the poor and hungry, for the Society's concern was not restricted merely to the treatment accorded to dumb animals. However, the nature of its efforts toward the end of more humane treatment of animals was indicated to some extent by an article in August, 1906, which described plans to buy 500 hats for horses to be distributed to poor teamsters the following summer.⁵²

Early in 1907, Dr. Stoecks made several recommendations which revealed a great deal respecting the character and dimensions of the city's health and sanitation problems. First, he urged that there be more rigid quarantine enforcement, for during the last months of 1906 there had been virtually a diphtheria epidemic with new cases reported at the rate of two per day and eleven people had died of the disease.⁵³ Furthermore, he recommended that the sloughs and low places be filled, particularly the slough at the west end of the city and the low places on Gaines Street; that the practice of dumping garbage into the river be stopped immediately and instead garbage should be burned until a disposal plant is built; that the smoke nuisance in the city be remedied; that an ordinance regulating spitting on sidewalks be enacted because the practice spread contagious diseases; that schools be required to boil the drinking cups used by pupils; that bank vaults be fumigated at stated intervals to kill germs on the money there; and that a municipal laboratory be provided.⁵⁴

One of the more serious problems during these years as far as the general public was concerned was that involving the steel girders supporting the Rock Island tracks where they

⁵² *Ibid.*, August 14, 1906, 7; August 18, 1906, 4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, November 19, 1906, 7; January 16, 1907, 4. At the height of the epidemic the Board of Health condemned the streetcar companies' practice of sweeping out the cars while people were in them and demanded that it be stopped since it spread disease. *Times*, November 21, 1906, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1907, 4.

passed over Main Street on one side of the depot and over Harrison Street on the other side. The supports extended above the level of the tracks and stood too close to them to allow people to stand on the car steps as trains left the depot and unsuspecting travelers rushing to get on a train as it started to move were swept into the girders which pulled them from the side of the train where they either were killed by mangling or were injured horribly. Between 1903 and 1907 the death-trap girders claimed fourteen victims—five deaths and nine injured—and beginning in March, 1907, there was a concerted effort to have them replaced before another death occurred.⁵⁵ In April the city council voted to have the supports removed and called in an engineer to advise how best to do it. After examining the bridges, the engineer suggested four possible plans: widen the bridge elevations so as to allow six feet of clearance on each side of the trains passing between the girders; lower Main and Harrison streets so the supports could go underneath the bridges; elevate the tracks so that the girders might go under them; or, put posts in the middle of the two streets to support the bridges.⁵⁶ The alternatives seemed clear and the next step should have been to choose one and begin removing the awful threat to life and limb, but nothing was done and so during the summer there were three more injured and in early September, another death. Public opinion was outraged, for on June 19 the city council had told the Rock Island Railroad to remove the girders immediately, and they had not complied.⁵⁷ Now the city fathers issued an ultimatum to the company: either build temporary gates around the death-trap area or quit operating. The Rock Island's answer was to hire guards to protect the traveling public from the girders both day and night. Finally, during the closing days of 1907, removal of the girders got underway and Davenporters could breathe more easily as the elim-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, various issues during March, 1907. See especially issues for March 21, page 7, and March 22, page 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, April 8, 1907, 4, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1907, 5.

ination of the killer-supports seemed about to become reality.⁵⁸

Sentiment in respect to the treatment of juvenile lawbreakers was gaining strength throughout the country at the beginning of the century and in Davenport in 1906-1907 there were those who shared such feelings, especially the growing revulsion to having youthful offenders placed in prison in association with hardened criminals. And while juvenile crime did not get as much publicity in the newspapers as it gets today, there was evidence that it was a serious problem and one demanding conscientious attention both in respect to preventing it and dealing with juvenile lawbreakers once they were apprehended.⁵⁹ Judge Henry Vollmer, respected Davenport jurist, voiced the opinion of many penal reformers of the period when he described the practice of putting young people in prisons as "the most brutal survival of barbarism today."⁶⁰ Rather, he felt, young law violators ought to be put on probation whenever possible and they definitely should be segregated from adult criminals when imprisoned.⁶¹ However, little seems to have been accomplished in changing the situation in Davenport during these years although some young people were put in orphans' homes as an alternative to jail and late in 1907 the Scott County Supervisors indicated they were considering the purchase of a small farm to use for juvenile offenders.⁶²

Child labor was another subject which agitated Progressive era reformers and in 1906 the Iowa General Assembly established a state legislative landmark when it passed an act outlawing employment of children under age fourteen. Davenport newspapers indicated that during the summer of 1907

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, September 5, 1907, 4, 12; December 23, 1907, 8.

⁵⁹ Juvenile delinquency was implied in articles concerning slot machines and the access to them by minors, the use of liquor at dance halls frequented by minors, and the selling of liquor and beer to children who came for it with buckets on the pretense of getting it for the home. *Democrat*, April 30, 1906, 9; *Times*, December 18, 1906, 6; August 9, 1907, 6; September 15, 1907, 6.

⁶⁰ *Times*, March 14, 1906, 2, 8.

⁶¹ Judge Vollmer stated that Davenport needed a juvenile court and that Iowa law provided for such, but not for a probation officer without which the court was rather useless. *Times*, March 14, 1906, 2, 8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, December 7, 1907, 11.

some twenty warrants charging violation of the new law were issued, mostly against parents, but several were against Davenport businesses. Since almost all of the defendants pleaded ignorance of the newly-enacted law, the judge, arguing that there was no evidence of criminal intent, fined them one dollar each.⁶³

The Davenport school system during these years was looked upon as one of the best in the state for it possessed a fine curriculum, excellent physical facilities, good teachers' salaries, and its high school graduates were accepted by colleges throughout the country. However, little concerning the schools was reported in the news media of the day although the elections of members of the school board were covered, as was the opening in 1907 of the new high school which cost the city \$347,000 and was built to accommodate 1,600 students.⁶⁴ The *Times* announced in 1907 that Miss Margaret L. D. LeClair, a teacher in the primary grades and a native of Davenport, had written a learning-to-read book which the school directors planned to adopt since it presented a better method for teaching reading than the phonetic system then being used.⁶⁵

Davenport teachers had reasons to be satisfied, as intimated above, but nonetheless two issues agitated them during 1906-1907. One of these involved the failure of the school board to re-hire three teachers in 1906. Reasons for their dismissal were not offered and two of the three requested and received a public hearing, but even at the open meeting an explanation was not given, although there was a heated discussion. The press accounts give not the slightest hint as to the cause for the release of the three teachers and the whole episode is shrouded in mystery. The second issue was the state school law requiring all who renewed teaching certificates to take an examination, which the teachers charged was an unjust requirement. Not only did they feel that renewal should not involve a test, but they also believed that teachers holding college degrees should be granted certificates on that basis alone—certainly a different premise than that held today by

⁶³ *Ibid.*, August 13, 1907, 7.

⁶⁴ Downer, *History of Davenport*, I, 937; *Times*, January 19, 1907, 8-9.

⁶⁵ *Times*, June 11, 1907, 16.

teacher training institutions and state boards of certification!⁶⁶

Prize fighting had been an issue in Davenport earlier but it became an issue again during 1906-1907. The state law prohibiting prize fighting, like the mulct law, apparently was not well enforced in the city and during the winter of 1906-1907 sentiment grew to have such fights stopped.⁶⁷ On June 1, 1907, Mayor Becker said there would be no more of them, but in the fall the question came up again when a fight between two Chicago boxers, Packy McFarland and Kid Hermann, was scheduled. Somehow word that the fight was to take place reached all



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the way to Des Moines where Governor Cummins sent instructions to Sheriff Louis Eckhardt in Scott County to look into the situation and to halt the affair if it was to be a prize fight. The sheriff investigated and reported that it would be only a sparring match with no money going to either boxer. However, this evidently did not satisfy the Governor, for on the night of the fight he instructed Captain O. W. Kulp of the state militia in Davenport to stop it because he was convinced it was a prize fight. Kulp did not halt the fight, was arrested the next day on charges of interpreting orders from his superiors, was court-martialed, found guilty, and made to forfeit one month's pay amounting to \$150.⁶⁸ At his trial, Kulp main-

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1906, 12; December 12, 1906, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, December 19, 1906, 6; January 10, 1907, 6. Business and professional people did not object to prize fighting itself but only to the undesirable elements it attracted to the city—bums, tin horn gamblers, and fakes of all descriptions.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, June 1, 1907, 6; November 21, 1907, 10; November 22, 1907, 1; November 23, 1907, 1; December 28, 1907, 4.

tained that he received a telegram telling him to see only if there were a violation of the law and thirty-one years later Ralph D. Cram, a reporter for the *Times* in 1907, substantiated his story and revealed a willful circumvention of law enforcement on the night of the fight when he stated in an article that the telegraph operator purposely did not deliver a later telegram which gave Kulp a specific order to stop the fight. Cram also gave support to Governor Cummins' suspicion that the fight was for prize money when he wrote that Kid Hermann was reported to have said afterward that he received \$3,750 for the fight.⁶⁹

Surely a two-year period in the life of a city must be like a fleeting moment in the life of an individual — and yet, it would seem time enough to observe something of the important aspects of urban development, for in the case of Davenport, Iowa, during the years 1906-1907 it was seen that the city was prospering and growing economically, that its citizens were aroused by corruption in municipal government, and that groups and agencies were concerned with various matters of public health and welfare. In addition, issues peculiar to the time were observed—for example, the prohibition issue which convulsed the community and the “progressive-standpat” rift within the political parties. But hopefully, this glimpse into Davenport's past did more than briefly examine—hopefully, it conveyed something of the dynamism associated with urban existence, for while time and technology undoubtedly change the face of a city, the generating forces of city life remain essentially the same.

⁶⁹ *Democrat*, June 12, 1938.

If only we are faithful to our past, we shall not have to fear our future. The cause of peace, justice and liberty need not fail and must not fail.

—John Foster Dulles.

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