Working Hard and Living Out: Adolescence in Nineteenth-Century Dubuque

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ONE OF THE FEW and among the best-known autobiographies from nineteenth-century Dubuque is that of Josiah Conzett, a Swiss immigrant who arrived in Dubuque with his family in 1846. In 1855, fourteen-year-old Josiah left school to work at a general store in Dubuque, where the owner provided on-site lodging and served, to some extent, as a chaperone. At fifteen, Josiah became gravely ill, and his employer sent him back to his family. Upon his recovery over a month later, his parents enrolled him in the Presbyterian college. Uninterested in a career as a preacher, he dropped out after one term, and was subsequently expelled from his family's home for refusing to accede to their wishes. He returned to his former employer, who provided lodging for him at a boarding house. Conzett continued to contribute to his parents' household by furnishing them with goods from the shop. He was promoted to a clerkship at sixteen, and shortly after his twentieth birthday, enlisted in the Union Army over the objections of his employer and family. He married his sweetheart upon returning from the war, when he was twenty-four and she was twenty. They then lived with family for two years before establishing their own home.[1] Conzett's transition from childhood to adulthood was not

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a direct line but a complicated path, which at the time was typical for young men coming of age in the Midwest, far from the long-established communities on the East Coast.

To modern observers, childhood in the early days of the United States might appear contracted. Especially prior to the enactment of laws concerning compulsory school attendance and child labor, childhood may seem to have ended abruptly when boys and girls reached an age at which full-time work was both possible and expected. In western states like Iowa, where legislation did not mandate school attendance until 1902, it is easy to imagine youngsters springing straight from a brief childhood into full adulthood with all of its accompanying responsibilities and freedoms.[2] However, ample evidence suggests that teenagers in mid- to late nineteenth-century Iowa (1850–80) and—specific to this study—those in Dubuque, experienced an intermediary status for a period of time. While this adolescence bore little resemblance to the protracted, decade-long course of social and educational development of teens in the twenty-first century, it nevertheless provided young people with some increases in freedom and opportunities for gradual immersion in the adult world.

The opinions of the East Coast "Yankee Bourgeoisie," specifically, the upper- and middle-class reformers of the nineteenth century, dominate the historical record regarding American childhood and adolescence in the nineteenth century. Their publications set standards, which spread to the rest of the United States by the early 1900s.[3] The ideals set forth in these pamphlets and advice books did not necessarily reflect the reality of the

1. Josiah Conzett, "My Civil War, Before, During, and After," 1900, and "My Recollections of Dubuque 1846–1890," 1905, Captain Bowell River Library, Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, Dubuque, Iowa.

2. Carroll Engelhardt, "Compulsory Education in Iowa, 1872–1919," *Annals of Iowa* 49 (1987), 58–59. Though compulsory education was discussed in Iowa beginning in the 1860s, increasing urbanization made the issue a priority when the legislation finally passed in 1902.

3. Jane Eva Baxter, *The Archaeology of American Childhood and Adolescence* (Gainesville, FL, 2019), 22–24; Daniel T. Rogers, "Socializing Middle-Class Children: Institutions, Fables, and Work Values in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, eds. N.R. Hawes and J. Hiner (Bridgeport, CT, 1985), 7.

adolescent experience or the regional variations that existed. If, as proposed by Joseph Kett, the concept of adolescence that arose in the mid- to late nineteenth century originated in part from evangelical Protestant ideals regarding spirituality and free will, it follows that children in the majority-Catholic town of Dubuque would have experienced their teenage years a little differently.[4] Besides religious and cultural beliefs, population size and the maturity of the community also governed the spread and acceptance of new middle-class ideals.[5] For instance, in the 1840s, while middle-class adolescents in New England used their ample free time for activities such as publishing amateur newspapers, most boys and girls in Dubuque—a community founded only a decade earlier—were occupied with the chores that accompanied pioneer life.[6]

Perhaps one of the clearest indications that life was different for children in Iowa is the fifty-year gap between the first compulsory schooling law in the United States—passed in Massachusetts in 1852—and the passage of such legislation in Iowa. Compulsory education in New England led to the creation of graded public schools, as education reformers believed the development of moral restraint and character required engineered environments. High school enrollment kept older children occupied and living at home during these "dangerous" years of weak judgment and strong impulses. By the end of the nineteenth century, longer school attendance began to afford better job prospects.[7] However, these changes would not fully affect Iowans until the 1900s. Persistent Catholic opposition to interference in

4. Joseph F. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2 (1971), 283–98; Robin M. Lillie and Jennifer E. Mack, *Bioarchaeology and History of Dubuque's Third Street Cemetery, 13DB476, Dubuque County, Iowa,* OSA Research Papers Vol. 37, No. 1 (Iowa City, 2013), 63–64.

5. Baxter, *The Archaeology of American Childhood and Adolescence,* 39–55.

6. Paula Petrik, "The Youngest Fourth Estate: The Novelty Toy Printing Press and Adolescence, 1870–1886," in *Small Worlds: Children & Adolescents in American, 1850–1950,* eds. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence, KS, 1992), 125–27.

7. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 112, 127, 152–53.

parental rights, which constituted a significant roadblock to the passage of compulsory education legislation in Iowa, provides some insight into the differences in family dynamics between towns in the Midwest and those in New England.[8]

This article examines the lives of adolescents in nineteenth-century Dubuque through official records, biographical sketches, and memoirs, and it identifies the key differences between these teens and their contemporary eastern counterparts, who enjoyed longer school attendance, but fewer job opportunities as the century progressed. Shorter, sometimes episodic school attendance, followed by (or alternating with) farm or wage work, and the primacy of parental authority characterized adolescence in Dubuque. Despite the emphasis on adolescent contributions to family economies, these teenagers still found time for entertainment and peer interaction, and gradually inched towards adult independence, the achievement of which did not always coincide with the legal age of majority.

WHILE BIOLOGICAL adolescence has been recognized for centuries as the period during which the body grows and changes rapidly, eventually attaining adult size and form, the extent to which societies have regarded these developing individuals as a distinct social group has varied widely.[9] Mary Lewis described adolescence as the transitional stage between childhood dependency and adult independence, a definition that corresponds well with legal requirements in both colonial and nineteenth-century America.[10] As early as the 1600s, sixteen-year-old males were subject to a poll tax and militia service, but the head of the household bore the responsibility for tax payments and training equipment.[11]

8. Engelhardt, "Compulsory Education in Iowa, 1872–1919," 58–59, 64–69.

9. Mary E. Lewis, Fiona Shapland, and Rebecca Watts, "On the Threshold of Adulthood: A New Approach for the Use of Maturation Indicators to Assess Puberty in Adolescents from Medieval England," *American Journal of Human Biology* 28 (2016), 48.

10. Lewis, Shapland, and Watts, "On the Threshold of Adulthood," 48.

11. Corinne T. Field, "'If You Have the Right to Vote at 21 Years, Then I Have': Age and Equal Citizenship in the Nineteenth-Century United States" in *Age in*

Through the nineteenth century, males under the age of majority (twenty-one years old) could not legally control their own property.[12] Adolescence was often a period of training, but it was also viewed as the maturation of an investment by the family, in which the long-supported child became a significant contributor to the family economy for a period of time before separating to establish a new family.[13]

Though the word "adolescence" was rarely used in America prior to the early twentieth century, an awareness of the crucial formative period between childhood and adulthood began to emerge in the U.S. in the early 1800s. This new concept is observable in the literature of the time, as biographies began to include episodes from the early lives of subjects and publication of "advice to youths" books flourished.[14] Factors which contributed to the shift in perceptions included a greater understanding of human anatomy and growth and the urbanization of the eastern United States. In a rural environment, where the family was the working unit, divisions between age groups were less critical than they were in an urban setting where the work environment was separated from the home and family.[15] Joseph Kett also credited

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America: The Colonial Era to the Present, eds. Corinne T. Field and Nicholas Syrett (New York, 2015), 74.

12. Nicholas L. Syrett, "Statutory Marriage Ages and the Gendered Construction of Adulthood in the Nineteenth Century" in *Age in America*, 112.

13. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "Helping Ma and Helping Pa: Iowa's Turn of the Century Farm Children," *Annals of Iowa* 59, No. 2 (2000), 116–17.

14. See, for example, Joel Hawes, *Lectures to Young Men, on the Formation of Character, & c.*, 5th edition (Hartford, CT, 1831). Hawes focused on the ages of fourteen to twenty-one years old, which he claimed "pre-eminently, is the forming, fixing period; the spring season of disposition and habit," 27.

15. Joseph F. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America;" John Demos and Virginia Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 31, no. 4 (1969), 632–38. Many recent works have touched on adolescence in early America, including a re-examination of G. Stanley Hall's work and studies of childhood, age consciousness, juvenile penal systems, and family structure. See, for instance, Jeffrey Jensen, "Brilliance and Nonsense" *History of Psychology* 9, No. 3 (2006), 186–97; However, the research most directly focused on the emergence of adolescence as a social age class is that of Kett and Demos and Demos published in the 1960s and 1970s.

the evangelical movement and the Second Great Awakening, which strongly encouraged youthful religious conversions, with the establishment of American adolescence as a distinct social stage characterized by both freedom of choice and emotional instability.[16] In their exploration of the subject, John and Virginia Demos demonstrate that the rise of modern adolescence was a response to fundamental changes in urban American families, including a new age-group discontinuity and the decline of the economic role of young people in an industrial society.[17] By the mid-nineteenth century, age-graded schooling began to spread from the industrialized Northeast to the rest of the country, and the increased scheduling of life transitions at particular ages led to greater age consciousness among Americans altogether.[18]

Despite these gradual developments, through most of the nineteenth century in America male social identity continued to be defined by particular activities, such as school attendance, apprenticeship, and wage work rather than chronological age. For boys, therefore, adolescence did not start or end at prescribed ages. Adolescence in girls, on the other hand, was directly tied to the onset of puberty.[19] Thus, the beginning of adolescence for males was recognizable by changes in their daily responsibilities and for females by changes in their physical appearance.

The end of adolescence—or beginning of adulthood—was legally defined for both males and females. The age of majority throughout the United States was fixed at twenty-one, though several states, including Iowa, reduced the age to eighteen for

16. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America." For further discussions of the perceived emotional instability of "youths" and freedoms granted to them by religious conversion, see Charles W. Burr, "The Insanity of Pubescence," *The American Journal of Insanity* 43 (1887), 328–39; Demos and Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," 634–35; G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education, Volume II* (New York, 1904); Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 54–57, 62–85; and Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 88.

17. Demos and Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," 637–38.

18. Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 1989).

19. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," 294–96.

females.[20] Yet as early as the 1840s, health reformers advocated against marriage before both the bride and groom reached twenty-five years old, as puberty was considered a time of physical and psychological development that must not be interrupted for fear of permanent damage.[21] Such sentiments demonstrate differing perspectives on legal adulthood and the attainment of true adult status.

Whether in the West or East, certain activities, such as school attendance, were reserved for immature persons, and some belonged exclusively to adults, such as voting and marriage.[22] High school or college enrollment and formal apprenticeships signaled adolescence, but were not universal; many Americans passed through adolescence without experiencing them. Work outside the home could be undertaken as early as childhood but was understood to signify a transition *towards* adulthood. Residence outside the family home was understood the same way.[23] Though it was common for adults, including married couples, to continue residing in their parental homes, the establishment of one's own household, regardless of marital status, conferred full adulthood.[24] The question, then, is whether or not youths in Dubuque reached these transitions within particular age brackets prior to the rise of age-scheduling at the end of the nineteenth century.

Relatively few extant memoirs, journals, and autobiographies address adolescent life in Dubuque in the nineteenth century; however, one of the most popular first-hand accounts of early Dubuque was that of Josiah Conzett. In 1855, at fourteen years

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20. Syrett, "Statutory Marriage Ages," 112–14; *Revised Statues of the Territory of Iowa, 1843*, 304.

21. Charles E. Rosenberg, "Sexuality, Class, and Role in 19th-century America," *American Quarterly* 25, No. 2 (1973), 131–53.

22. Joseph F. Kett, "Discovery and Invention in the History of Adolescence," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 14 (1993), 607.

23. Kett, "Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America," 294–95.

24. John Modell, Theodore Hershberg, and Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., "Social Change and Transitions to Adulthood in Historical Perspective" in *Philadelphia, Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century: Essays Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York, 1981), 314.

old, he left school and went to work. Then, he spent the next decade bouncing between employment, seminary, and the army before he eventually settled down into married life.

At twenty-four and twenty years old, respectively, both Josiah and his bride were well above the threshold of legal adulthood when they married, which fits with the findings of historical marriage studies. A demographic study of Texas in the mid-nineteenth century found that most offspring did not marry until their mid-twenties, while in Missouri the average marriage age for women was nineteen and for men it was twenty-four.[25] In her exploration of the lives of pioneer women, Glenda Riley suggested that teen marriages were uncommon, as frontier families were reluctant to part with children just when they began to make adult-level contributions to the household.[26] She admitted, however, the need to research further the question of the typical marriage age in Iowa, an issue explored in this project.[27]

As marriage marked one of the most decisive transitions from adolescence to adulthood in the mid-nineteenth century, determining the average age at nuptials is crucial for understanding this shift in status. Marriage licenses and returns from Dubuque County provided data on first marriage ages for men and women during Dubuque's pioneer (1833–55) and early urban (1856–80) periods.[28] Unfortunately, licenses only occasionally

25. Blaine T. Williams, "The Frontier Family: Demographic Fact and Historical Myth," in *Essays on the American West,* ed. Harold M. Hollingsworth (Austin, TX, 1969), 40–65; Michael J. O'Brien, *Grassland, Forest, and Historical Settlement: An Analysis of Dynamics in Northeast Missouri* (Lincoln, NE, 1984), 283.

26. Glenda Riley, *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (Ames, 1981), 84–85; Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence, KS, 1988), 49; Riney-Kehrberg, "Helping Ma and Helping Pa," 116–117.

27. Riley, *Frontierswomen,* 85.

28. Dubuque genealogist Tom Schlarman transcribed records from 1835 to 1861 and generously shared them with the authors. Women forty-five years old and older and men over fifty years old were eliminated during the present research project because these records likely represent second marriages. Lillie and Mack, *Bioarchaeology and History of Dubuque's Third Street Cemetery,* 23–26.

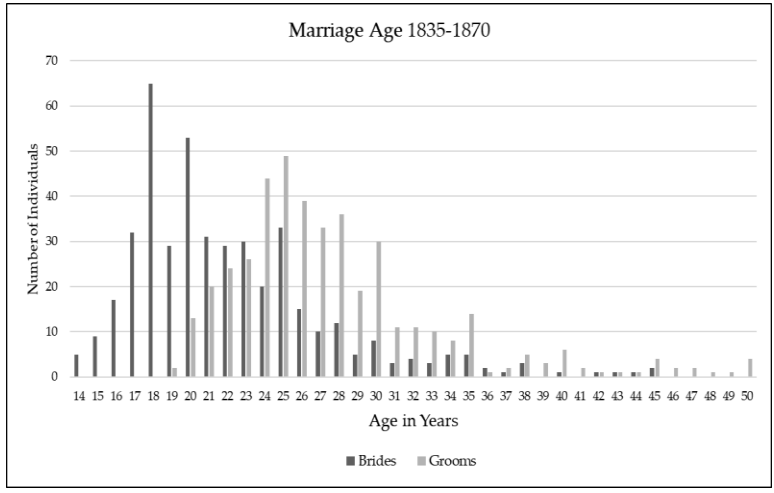

Figure 1: Graph showing the numbers of brides and grooms of each age married in Dubuque County from 1835–70.

recorded ages from 1835 to 1851 and ceased to include age information at all after the 1850s. As a supplement, this study used federal census records to determine ages for persons married in the year leading up to the June 1 enumerations in 1860 and 1870.[29] Figure 1 illustrates the numbers of brides and grooms of each age.

In contrast with the findings of previous researchers, Dubuque's records reveal some particularly young brides, including five fourteen-year-olds and nine fifteen-year-olds. These youthful matches occurred during the early years of Dubuque's settlement, when the documented scarcity of women likely contributed to the necessity of abbreviated adolescence.[30] By the time Iowa's population increased sufficiently to achieve statehood in 1846, fourteen-year-olds disappeared from Dubuque's marriage records, and licenses for fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds decreased. By 1870, the youngest bride was seventeen. Though two nineteen-

29. Some individuals recorded in these years may have been one year older than their age at marriage because they may have had a birthday between nuptials and enumeration.

30. Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: Volume I* (New York, 1903) and Franklin T. Oldt, *History of Dubuque: Being a General Survey of Dubuque County History* [. . .] (Chicago, 1911).

year-old grooms appeared on the 1860 census, the remainder recorded were all twenty years old or older.

Despite the outliers seen in Figure 1—the barely pubescent brides from Dubuque's early days and the older gentlemen perhaps taking second wives—most marriages occurred between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five for women and between twenty-one and thirty for men. These records demonstrate that though some men married before the age of majority (twenty-one) those under twenty were not regarded as adults capable of the responsibilities of wedlock. Though mid-teen brides were not unheard of, records indicate that most families agreed with the conventional thinking that eighteen was the youngest appropriate age for women to be married. Generally speaking, the end of adolescence (and beginning of adulthood) did not occur for men and women before the ages of twenty and eighteen, respectively, with some exceptions.

Additional information from the 1860 federal census of the city of Dubuque—including school attendance, occupation, and residential situation—helps to illuminate how young individuals were regarded by the families who reported them.[31] This enumeration year both postdates the mid-nineteenth century development of youth culture in New England and predates the Civil War, which altered the population composition of Iowa. A page-by-page review of census returns identified 1,066 girls and 789 boys between the ages of twelve and nineteen, composing a total of 1,855 out of the city's 12,998 residents.[32]

As school enrollment, whether in childhood or teenage years, was strongly associated with dependent status, age-related attendance and non-attendance patterns can illustrate the beginnings of

31. The current study collected the same data as Modell, Hershberg, and Furstenberg, "Social Change and Transitions to Adulthood."

32. The disparity in the size of the female and male adolescent populations in the city's census records was likely due to young men being sent away for apprenticeship, work, or school, thus leaving the Dubuque census with a deceptively low number of male teenagers. The 1860 census totals for Iowa report nearly equal numbers of males and females aged ten to twenty years old, indicating no net loss at the state level from the movement of teenage boys. See Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860, Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1864), 134.

transitions toward adulthood. Of the 1,855 adolescents listed in the Dubuque census, 594 reportedly attended school during that year. Twelve-year-olds attended school in the highest proportions, with around 55 percent of females and 76 percent of males enrolled. The trend of substantially lower attendance rates for females continued into the older teens, with a dramatic drop for girls after the age of fourteen and a more gradual decline among boys. Only 3 percent of females between the ages of seventeen and nineteen continued their education, and attendance by males in this range, presumably enrolled in high school or one of Dubuque's small colleges, declined steadily from 17 percent to 6 percent.[33] School provided a venue where teenagers could explore interaction with the opposite sex, but such opportunities evidently declined with increasing age.[34] The numbers suggest that girls in Dubuque left childhood and began preparations for adult life earlier than boys did. Census records from the city show little evidence of overlapping activities, as just seven boys and no girls were recorded with both an occupation and school attendance in the same year.

The pattern of attendance in rural Dubuque County starkly contrasted that of the city. Out of the 1,481 teenage girls and 1,508 teenage boys recorded in the rural township pages of the 1860 census, 1,551 young people had attended school within the last year. At the ages of twelve and thirteen, enrollment reached around 75 percent for both sexes. Attendance gradually declined, but no real disparity between males and females appeared until the age of eighteen, when 33 percent of boys and only 20 percent of girls went to school. Lower attendance rates within the city

33. By 1860, several small institutions for advanced education existed in the city. The first "college" in Dubuque was Mount St. Bernard seminary founded by Bishop Mathias Loras in 1850; it closed five years later, re-appearing in various iterations until taking its current name, Loras College, in 1939. See Peter B. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque and Dubuque County, Iowa 1833–1934* (Dubuque, 1936), 68. The Dubuque Female College was founded by 1854, and the Dubuque Commercial College opened in 1858. By 1867, there were six colleges and academies in Dubuque. See Franklin T. Oldt, *History of Dubuque,* 105, 125, 161.

34. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence, KS, 2005), 83–84.

might relate to the inability of the poor to forgo the income provided by their older children's labor. Reformers believed the lack of education among urban children and the foreign-born encouraged lawlessness in youths, and cited this as a paramount issue in the push for compulsory school in Iowa later in the century.[35] However, higher rural numbers were due, in part, to the pattern of attendance in farming communities and the formulation of the census question, which asked only *if*—not how much—a child attended school in a given year. Since farming families commonly sent older children (particularly boys) to school only in the winter months, when farm work slackened, education could continue into the late teens without affecting the ability of offspring to contribute to the family economy.

The importance of child labor to family farms is clear from Iowa's first compulsory education law, which passed in 1902 only because required attendance was restricted to twelve weeks.[36] Rural Dubuque County census records offer evidence of seasonally alternating activities, with 269 adolescents listed with both an occupation and recent school attendance. Because attendance was limited in any given year, the older teens listed as students may have been still finishing basic education rather than attending secondary school.[37]

By the time of the 1860 census, the majority of Dubuque's youths had access to schools. In 1856, the city's newly appointed Board of Education created a free school system, and by 1858 it had built and furnished three schools to add to the many private and parochial primary schools.[38] In the earliest days of Dubuque's settlement, though, many children lacked such opportunities. The memoir of Rufus Rittenhouse, who spent his adolescent years (1838–45) in the countryside just outside the city, states that he ended his education at the age of ten, when his family moved

35. Engelhardt, "Compulsory Education in Iowa, 1872–1919," 62.

36. Engelhardt, "Compulsory Education in Iowa, 1872–1919," 69–70.

37. See Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 18–19, and Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 72–73.

38. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque*, 58.

to Iowa from New Jersey.[39] Wealthy families in the newly settled frontier, however, solved the predicament with boarding schools. In the 1830s, both Clarissa Gear and her older sister were sent away from Galena, Illinois (just over fifteen miles downriver from Dubuque) in their teen years to receive education back East because "schools in those days in the West were crude."[40] By 1850, however, the schools available in the city of Dubuque were apparently acceptable to the average family. For instance, Josiah Conzett attended two different private German-language schools from 1850 to 1855, before first leaving education at the age of fourteen.[41]

Conzett's experience appears to have been typical for the time period. The biographical sketches in Franklin T. Oldt's history of Dubuque County include seventy-seven narratives which provide some details of the adolescent years of Dubuque residents between 1850 and 1880. Of these, the largest number left school at the age of thirteen or fourteen, though attendance up to the age of fifteen or sixteen was not uncommon. Few remained students at seventeen or older. While Oldt's biographies focus exclusively on well-known businessmen and respected farmers, the variety of their backgrounds—both native and foreign-born; poor, middle class, and wealthy—offers a fairly balanced sample of male adolescent experiences.[42] The details of these biographies, combined with memoirs and census records, paint a picture of staggered advancement toward adulthood. This advancement began around the age of thirteen or fourteen with a sharp drop-off in school attendance for females and more gradual decline for males, though few members of both sexes persisted in education (dependence) through the age of nineteen.

Like leaving school, the undertaking of employment signaled movement towards adulthood. Most of the biographical

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39. Rufus Rittenhouse, *Boyhood Life in Iowa Forty Years Ago, as Found in the Memoirs of Rufus Rittenhouse* (Dubuque, 1880).

40. Clarissa Emely Gear Hobbs, *The Galena Frontier: "Vivid in My Mind"* (Galena, IL, 1974). Galena, Illinois, founded in the decade before Dubuque, shares a similar history, as both towns attracted settlers through the lure of lead mines. Oldt, *History of Dubuque*, 46, passim.

41. Conzett, "My Civil War;" Conzett, "My Recollections of Dubuque."

42. Oldt, *History of Dubuque*, 497–870.

sketches in Oldt's history show young men commencing work—whether on the family farm or out in the world—immediately after leaving school, but the reality is more complicated. Adolescent work often occurred along a spectrum, being part-time or full-time, and rotated with school attendance (especially in rural communities). Furthermore, this work might take the form of an apprenticeship, which was not always acknowledged as a formal occupation. Additionally, census instructions required the reporting of professions only for individuals over fifteen; though fortunately, the jobs of many younger persons were also listed. Thus, the average age at which full-time work began cannot be established with census data.[43] Essentially, the perception of the head of household determined whether or not adolescent offspring were reported with an occupation. A father whose fifteen-year-old son was an errand boy at the family grocery might not judge that contribution significant enough to be labeled an occupation, while a family that depended on the meager income provided by a thirteen-year-old daughter's work as a domestic servant would likely report her job. Therefore, while census records may not present an entirely accurate accounting of all children and adolescents involved in paid employment, they provide information about how adolescent workers were viewed within their own families.

The number of teens reported with occupations rose steadily with age (see Table 1). However, employed girls significantly outnumbered employed boys until the age of fifteen, indicating a perception that thirteen- and fourteen-year-old females were closer to adulthood than males of the same age. After reaching sixteen years old, the male employment rate exceeded that of females, and at nineteen, 83 percent of men had occupations, while only 37 percent of women did. Nearly all employed girls under

43. Focused studies of family economic strategies show that a wide range of variables (including birth order, survival of parents, presence of non-nuclear adult relatives in household, literacy of the mother, etc.) determined how likely a child was to participate in labor outside the home. See Claudia Goldin, "Family Strategies and the Family Economy in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Role of Secondary Workers," in *Philadelphia*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York, 1981), 277–310.

Age	% of Females with Occupation	% of Males with Occupation
12	1.6	0.8
13	10.0	1.1
14	9.7	2.1
15	15.0	13.0
16	26.8	43.2
17	33.8	62.2
18	35.3	77.6
19	36.8	83.3

Table 1. Percentages of teenagers, divided by age and sex, listed as having an occupation in the 1860 census of the city of Dubuque. Female figures include wives in charge of their own households, in addition to outside professions.

the age of seventeen worked as servants.[44] Meanwhile, a significant portion of teenage boys and girls overall, 26 percent and 53 percent, respectively, were reported as neither working nor attending school, numbers which may reflect family perceptions rather than actual activities.

Despite the lack of recognition in census records, there is ample evidence that thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys were engaged in work. Formal apprenticeships declined in the second half of the nineteenth century in America, but similar vocational training arrangements were still common.[45] Just two of the 404 Dubuque boys aged thirteen to fifteen appeared in the 1860 census as apprentices, but Oldt's biographies include numerous examples. Christian Voelker became a chairmaker's apprentice at thirteen. Fourteen-year-old Jacob Haudenshield trained as a carpenter in the warm months and as a butcher in the winter. From

44. The European tradition of poor families sending female children out to work as domestics, sometimes at a very young age, continued in North America, particularly among immigrant groups. Marilyn Barber, "Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada," *Canada's Ethnic Groups, Booklet No. 16* (Ottawa, ON, 1991), 3–5.

45. Kett, *Rites of Passage,* 145–46.

the age of fifteen, Charles Dell trained with a machinist and Herbert Kretschmer learned plumbing.[46] The scant occupation listings for males of this age show how they were regarded, as boys in training rather than employed youths. Yet in the 1870s, when Dubuque enacted a short-lived curfew law forbidding children to be out in the street after nine o'clock, it exempted those thirteen years old or older, presumably because working teens were understood to have legitimate business in town at night.[47]

Among lower-income families, younger teenage boys were often sent out to work odd jobs without educational aspects.[48] Until he found work as a full-time errand boy at fourteen, Josiah Conzett, whose father was incapacitated by malaria, earned money for his family by gleaning lead from the backdirt of the mines and rounding up stray pigs.[49] Rufus Rittenhouse's stepfather began paying his debts to neighbors with his stepson's labor when the boy was around thirteen.[50] These experiences contrast with those of Peter Hoffman, the son of a middle-class tradesman.[51] Hoffman left school at the age of thirteen and was hired as a bellboy through the connections of a family friend. Finding the work unpleasant, he quit by sneaking out at the end of his first day; the 1870 census shows him as a fifteen-year-old with no occupation.[52]

Though fifteen years old was the threshold specified for the occupation column of the census, the largest gain in employment for males occurred at sixteen years old. At this age, a greater diversity appears in professions and duties. Though "clerk" was the most common occupation, followed by "day laborer," the list also included shoemakers, blacksmiths, printers, and a sexton, to

46. Oldt, *History of Dubuque*, 576, 638, 825–26, 836.

47. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque*, 27.

48. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 17–18.

49. Conzett, "My Civil War."

50. Rittenhouse, *Boyhood Life in Iowa Forty Years Ago*, 8–12.

51. Peter Hoffman's father Mathias appeared in the 1860 federal census as a cooper, and on the 1870 federal census records, he was listed as a "car maker" with an estate valued at $1,400.

52. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque*, 28–29.

name just a few. Most males aged seventeen to nineteen had jobs, with some young men working as stage drivers and teamsters. The variety of opportunities and responsibilities did not confer full adulthood, however. Even at this age—and up to the age of twenty-one—the money generated by labor outside the home customarily went to the father rather than to the worker him or herself.[53] Similarly aged women who were not employed as servants occupied themselves with two types of paid work, either apparel-making (seamstresses, milliners, etc.) or teaching. Twenty-two teenage girls were recorded as wives in charge of their own households, but the majority of those women were nineteen years old.

The onset of the Civil War brought a new employment option for Dubuque's young men. Initially, boys under twenty-one were required to have parental approval to enlist, but written proof was no longer required after September 1862. As a result, several Dubuque residents aged sixteen or younger joined the Union Army, including Frank Mitton, who enlisted at fifteen, likely due to his family's failing fortunes.[54] Though young soldiers did not necessarily come from poor families, their absence from home during the war often exacerbated their family's economic woes. Russell Johnson's study comparing 1860 and 1870 census records found that households that included at least one returning veteran son fared more poorly than those with non-veteran sons in residence, demonstrating the importance of adolescent labor contributions. The loss of this contribution for a period of months or years during the war, and in some cases the long-term loss of the contributor due to disability or death, had a detrimental effect which lingered long after the end of the conflict.[55] Whether working on the family farm, helping with housework, doing odd jobs, training as an apprentice, or beginning formal employment, evidence from primary and secondary sources suggests that most boys and girls were engaged in some kind of labor from an early age. That adolescent girls were listed with

53. Riney-Kehrberg, "Helping Ma and Helping Pa," 121.

54. Russell Johnson, *Warriors into Workers: The Civil War and the Formation of the Urban-Industrial Society in a Northern City* (New York, 2003), 115–20.

55. Johnson, *Warriors into Workers,* 302–03.

formal occupations at a younger age than boys demonstrates that, on average, they began the transition towards adulthood about two years earlier than boys.

In nineteenth-century literature, the act of leaving home was highly sentimentalized as a permanent break, but in reality, young men and women sporadically moved away and returned to their parents' households, often a number of times before living on their own.[56] Whether or not an adolescent remained living in the family home, and for how long, was tied more to the socioeconomic status of the family than the individual's age. Johnson's study of family structures in Dubuque found that households with the highest ratios of sons twelve years old and older still living at home were farm families and households whose head had no occupation.[57] This was likely because both types of households depended on offspring labor. Businessmen's families kept their sons at home for a shorter period of time, primarily for school and training opportunities. Households headed by unskilled laborers kept sons living at home at a similar rate as the businessmen, so the young men could contribute wages to the family. Families headed by artisans were the least likely to have sons at home, perhaps because they were sent out to apprenticeships, or—as Johnson suggested—because their families were neither dependent on their labor nor interested in supporting them.[58]

Young men being sent away for school or work led to the previously noted disparity between the numbers of male and female teenagers reported in the 1860 census of Dubuque. This representation became increasingly lopsided with adolescent age, with 25 percent fewer thirteen- to fourteen-year-old boys than girls enumerated and 40 percent fewer eighteen- and nineteen-year-old males. Though their absence from the Dubuque census pages prevents their inclusion in generalizations about the lives of average teens, these boys are not invisible in the historical record. Oldt's biographical sketches include a number of young men who left the county or state for occupational and educational

56. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 17.

57. This study included all sons, not just those in their teens.

58. Johnson, *Warriors into Workers*, 52–56.

opportunities.[59] John Joseph Blake, son of wealthy brickmaker and prominent Catholic John Blake, went away to college in St. Louis in 1870 at the age of nineteen, though he returned in a cast-iron casket just a few weeks later, felled by an unspecified illness.[60]

Even when the population figures are adjusted for the number of boys who likely left town in adolescence (based on the assumption of equal male and female populations), over 60 percent of males aged twelve to nineteen lived in the parental home. In the rural parts of Dubuque County, 85 percent of adolescents, both male and female, still lived at home. While teenagers on the East Coast were fleeing farms and small villages for the city, those in rural Iowa were apparently staying put.[61]

Almost 65 percent of teenage females in the city of Dubuque still lived with their parents. The largest portion of girls living away from home worked as servants, while a few were listed with other occupations or were wives in charge of their own households. Girls listed as attending school likely came from rural areas and boarded in town for better access to education. However, the remaining 133 young women living away from their parents are unexplained. Some may have been domestics who were not listed as such; Marilyn Barber noted that American servants sometimes rejected the title, insisting on being called simply "girls" or "help."[62] Additionally, older offspring who had grown too expensive to keep at home (often supplanted by younger siblings) were sometimes sent to live with neighbors or relatives as unofficial helping hands.[63] Other young women may have lived in households where they received training of a vocational or artistic nature, such as dressmaking or music instruction. In some cases, they may have left home for personal reasons. For instance, Conzett's memoirs mention that his sweetheart, Nellie, was

59. Oldt, *History of Dubuque*, 497–870.

60. Robin M. Lillie and Jennifer E. Mack, *Dubuque's Forgotten Cemetery: Excavating a Nineteenth-century Burial Ground in a Twenty-first-century City* (Iowa City, 2015), 127–41.

61. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 86–107.

62. Barber, "Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada," 4.

63. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 17–18.

"living out" because her stepmother was "harsh and cruel."[64] Regardless of the reasons for leaving, Kett noted that as early as the 1820s girls departed the family home at younger ages than boys.[65]

Though many youths left school, began to work, and moved away from home as teenagers, the large number of boys and girls who still lived with their parents and were listed in 1860 with no occupation—over 50 percent—demonstrates that adolescence involved a gradual transition, with ever-increasing responsibilities and hard-won gains in independence. Males became legally culpable at the age of fourteen. They were tried as adults for serious crimes and, in Illinois, could be "bounded out" as involuntary apprentices if found to be vagrant.[66] Reminiscent of colonial militia requirements, the bylaws of the Dubuque Emigrating Company to California, written in 1852, specified that all males over the age of sixteen must take turns standing guard.[67]

Nevertheless, these individuals were not treated as full adults. Rufus Rittenhouse's life of adolescent drudgery, laboring for his stepfather and neighbors without pay, began in 1838 at the age of thirteen. Though he attempted to earn money on the side by cutting hay and growing onion seed over the next few years, payment for his entrepreneurial ventures was given directly to his mother or, in one case, simply seized by his stepfather. His parents finally permitted him to leave the family home to work as a mason's assistant at seventeen. Apprenticeship brought greater freedom, but not true independence. The mason did not pay him (except in room and board), but he did allow Rittenhouse to earn money for himself by cutting wood in his spare time. Fearing he would be put to work again by his stepfather, he visited home infrequently for the next two years. He completed

64. Conzett, "My Civil War."

65. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 95–96, 247.

66. Joan Gittens, *Poor Relations: The Children of the State of Illinois 1818–1990* (Chicago, 1994), 91–92; Shane Landrum, "From Bibles to Birth Certificates: Young People, Proof of Age, and American Political Cultures, 1820–1915," in *Age in America*, 127; and James D. Schmidt, "'Rendered More Useful': Child Labor and Age Consciousness in the Long Nineteenth Century," in *Age in America*, 155–56.

67. Lucy Rutledge Cooke, *Covered Wagon Days: Crossing the Plains in 1852* (Quincy, CA, 1980), 18.

his training and began his career as a contractor at the age of twenty.[68] His narrative demonstrates that while adult responsibilities were sometimes heaped upon young teenagers, the right of self-determination was more elusive. Prior to reaching the age of majority, only by placing physical distance between himself and his family did Rittenhouse break free from their authority. Leaving home did not always provide such a break; Conzett, in contrast, continued to provide support for his family (in the form of dry goods) after his permanent departure from his parents' home.

Census records provide a glimpse not only of the lives of adolescents but also of their deaths, indicating again that adolescents constituted a group distinct from children and adults, with causes of death specific to their physiology and behaviors. The U.S. compiled mortality schedules along with general population information during the four enumerations from 1850 to 1880, recording both age at death and cause of death. However, the number of teenagers reported for these four years is low—just twenty-six—and Dubuque County did not keep official death records prior to 1880. However, burial reports compiled by the city cemetery sexton provide details for 123 adolescents who were buried in Dubuque between 1855 and 1875.[69] Combined, these sources illustrate the primary factors affecting the health of Dubuque's teenagers, listing over thirty different causes of death. The most frequent causes were tuberculosis (forty-nine cases), accidental drowning (seventeen cases), typhoid fever (seventeen cases), meningitis (twelve cases), and other accidents (nine cases), together accounting for two-thirds of the listed adolescent deaths.

Tuberculosis (TB) was a leading cause of death worldwide at the end of the nineteenth century.[70] The disease could be fatal at any age, but almost one-third of adolescent deaths in the city cemetery records were attributed to this cause, a higher proportion

68. Rittenhouse, *Boyhood Life in Iowa Forty Years Ago.*

69. Phoenix Project, *City Cemetery, Dubuque, Dubuque County, Iowa: Burials and Lot Sales 1855–1875,* Know Your Ancestors Series (Dubuque, 2002).

70. Charlotte Roberts and Jane E. Buikstra, *The Bioarchaeology of Tuberculosis: A Global View on a Reemerging Disease* (Gainesville, FL, 2003), 216–18.

than that found in any other age group. Though over 20 percent of adults in the city cemetery also succumbed to TB, the higher rate for adolescents may reflect greater susceptibility and the tendency for secondary TB to emerge in adolescence due to changes in the immune system.[71] A sudden increase in exposure as a result of the variety of social interactions occurring once teenagers began full-time work may also be responsible for the higher death rate among Dubuque's youths. In a parallel with Conzett's life, Rittenhouse was also "sent home to die of consumption" at nineteen.[72] Eighteen-year-old Clarissa Gear nearly died of cholera instead after returning to Galena from school in Tennessee. At twenty-one, she married the doctor who treated her.[73]

Around 19 percent of adolescents buried in the city cemetery died in accidents, while fewer than 10 percent of the younger children and adults had accidental causes of death. Only one of the twenty-six adolescents killed in accidents was female, and given the sex bias in occupational status from the age of sixteen years onward, one might conclude that entry into the workforce, particularly in low-level and potentially hazardous positions, posed a significant risk for such deaths. However, if the majority of accidental deaths were work-related, the number of teenagers dying would rise with each year of age, as the employed portion of the adolescent population increased. No such pattern exists among entries for the city cemetery. Furthermore, none of the fatal adolescent accident listings specifies work-related circumstances, and supplementary details found in newspaper articles provide no occupational connections. For instance, eighteen-year-old B. Pragatz accidentally shot himself in the face while duck hunting, and Theodore Bilasch, thirteen, was run over by a train when he rolled onto the tracks while wrestling with another boy.[74]

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71. Mary Lewis, *Paleopathology of Children: Identification of Pathological Conditions in the Human Skeletal Remains of Non-Adults* (London, 2018), 155.

72. Rittenhouse, *Boyhood Life in Iowa Forty Years Ago.*

73. Hobbs, *The Galena Frontier.* Clarissa's age at marriage was extrapolated from her entry in the 1850 federal census, Schedule 1, City of Galena, 25.

74. "Severe Accident," *Dubuque Daily Herald,* 10/2/1866; "Shocking Death," *Dubuque Daily Herald,* 6/15/1871.

Drownings constituted the majority of the accidental adolescent deaths, a finding which is not surprising given the proximity of Dubuque to the Mississippi River. Adolescent males in this era regarded swimming as an essential part of their social lives and recreation, with horseplay considered an acceptable expression of rebellion.[75] A study of nineteenth-century Philadelphia found drownings were generally related to leisure, with men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five making up most of the cases.[76] While the economy of Dubuque provided a variety of potentially dangerous jobs on the water, the fact that all seventeen deaths took place between late May and early September suggests recreational circumstances. Newspaper accounts detailing some of the drownings in the city cemetery records include the stories of two brothers and a friend who drowned while swimming and another teenage boy who died while boating home from a picnic.[77] Peter Hoffman wrote in his memoir about swimming in the slough, the Mississippi River, and even in the aisles of a Dubuque lumberyard during a flood, and commented on the many drownings—and narrow escapes—that occurred.[78] An article describing the sinking of a rowboat stolen by a fourteen-year-old and two younger friends opens, "The first, for this season, of the annual drowning horrors that visit Dubuque occurred last night," and ends, "The lesson is sad, but one that is never heeded."[79] Clearly, these adolescent drownings were considered preventable deaths caused, in part, by the reckless behavior of the victims.

Though official records demonstrate, to some extent, what teenagers were doing and how they were regarded in the community, they give little sense of the lived experience of adolescence. Few autobiographies (and no available diaries) address

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75. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America Since 1865* (Lawrence, KS, 2014), 68–69.

76. Roger Lane, *Violent Death in the City: Suicide, Accident, and Murder in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia.* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 48–49.

77. "More Drowning," *Dubuque Daily Herald*, 5/21/1872; "The Recent Drowning Cases," *Dubuque Daily Herald*, 7/7/1870.

78. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque.*

79. "Death by Drowning," *Dubuque Daily Herald*, 5/19/1872.

the authors' teenage years in nineteenth-century Dubuque, but the vignettes found in these sources illustrate some aspects of daily life and peer interactions for those coming of age in the town and surrounding countryside. Clarissa Gear, who grew up in Galena, Illinois, spent most of her adolescence at school in Tennessee. In 1846, at the age of seventeen, she returned to her hometown, and her stories from this period reflect the duality of her status, not only in the eyes of others, but in her own perceptions. At her first adult party, she felt insulted when an older gentleman teased her about playing with dolls, as she considered herself quite grown up. Yet the next paragraph of her memoir includes the story of riding her pony up a nearly vertical slope on a dare. She fondly remembered horseback riding, dancing, and boating with others in her youthful social circle. Teenage life had not been quite as carefree for her older sister, Maria, who was around sixteen when their mother died in 1835. Maria filled the maternal role for nearly two years, providing care for the youngest child of the family until leaving for high school in Philadelphia.[80]

Rittenhouse recalled little leisure in his teenage years, aside from "pleasant gatherings" for biweekly religious sermons. He felt that his fine appearance in his dead father's brass-buttoned coat set him above his peers at these meetings, and that mothers considered him "a favorite suitor who might sometime marry one of their girls." Around the age of fourteen, he "converted" at a tent revival, an event which provided one of his few opportunities to mingle with residents of other settlements. After beginning his apprenticeship, he finally obtained a rifle, and took enormous pride in his shooting ability. Yet his dependent status was clear from the fact that when he recklessly test-fired the rifle towards houses in town, the neighbors complained to his master, rather than confronting the young man himself.[81]

Like Rittenhouse, Conzett entered the workforce at a young age. Living in the city afforded more opportunities for recreation though, and Conzett recalled attending a circus, performing acrobatic feats, swimming, skating, playing pranks on his friends

80. Hobbs, *The Galena Frontier.*

81. Rittenhouse, *Boyhood Life in Iowa Forty Years Ago.*

(sometimes involving rifles), and donning a fashionable pair of pants to witness a public hanging.[82] The only Catholic who recorded substantial recollections of his teenage years was Hoffman, who received First Holy Communion at the age of twelve and left Catholic school at thirteen in 1868. Apparently, his only youthful employment was his one-day stint as a bellboy. Instead he wrote about watching stage plays, minstrels, and concerts, as well as swimming and ice skating at the harbor rink, though he mentioned that bolder youths preferred to skate on the river.[83]

The narratives in these memoirs correspond with the patterns gleaned from the census and other official records. Children from less prosperous families, like Rittenhouse and Conzett, entered the workforce at a younger age and enjoyed fewer amusements than wealthier teens like Gear and Hoffman. Previous studies have asserted that the transformation of adolescence into a period of semi-independence in America arose from the evangelical Protestant belief that religious conversion must be made through free will.[84] Revivals such as the one where Rittenhouse converted were not restricted to the hinterlands in Dubuque County; even in the majority-Catholic city, evangelical revivals were periodically organized.[85] However, in Dubuque, the circumstance of religious conversion does not appear to have conferred any additional freedom of choice on teens (certainly not for Rittenhouse). Despite the heavy burden of responsibility sometimes placed on these young people, the right to make independent decisions was generally withheld until the age of twenty.

Disease susceptibility is another aspect of adolescent life illustrated in these biographies. Three of the four autobiographical subjects discussed here were suddenly laid low by life-threatening disease in their teens, demonstrating the continued vulnerability, despite having survived the high-risk periods of infancy and early childhood. The brief life of John Joseph Blake, reconstructed through church records and newspaper articles, also followed

82. Conzett, "My Civil War."

83. Hoffman, *A Concise History of Dubuque.*

84. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 62–85.

85. John C. Holbrook, *Recollections of a Nonagenarian* (Boston, 1897), 86–90.

these patterns. This youngest teenage son of a prominent Catholic family was sent away to college in 1870, though his older brother William, upon reaching adolescence twenty-five years earlier, went to work in the family business. The differential treatment of the boys illustrates the trend towards extended adolescence in the late nineteenth century, as well as the prolonging of dependence in upper-class families, since the Blakes had accumulated more wealth by 1870 than they had in the 1840s when William was a teen. Like the adolescents from the memoirs, John Joseph also suffered a life-threatening illness, one from which he did not recover.[86]

New concepts concerning youth and maturation which arose in the middle classes by the 1880s and 1890s eventually spread to the rest of American society, providing the basis for the modern social definition of adolescence.[87] Additional data gathered from the 1880 federal census demonstrates how these late nineteenth-century trends affected family dynamics in more westerly towns like Dubuque. In 1880, 2,009 females and 1,668 males aged thirteen to nineteen lived in Dubuque (the city's total population was 22,254).[88] Just as in 1860, the larger number of females enumerated suggests that Dubuque-born males migrated away from town in adolescence, though the proportion of those who left was lower in 1880, a projected 17 percent as opposed to 26 percent in 1860.[89]

The year 1880 saw a more equitable division of school attendance between males and females in the city of Dubuque (see Figure 2). In fact, sixteen- and eighteen-year-old female students outnumbered their male peers, whose attendance rates from the age of fifteen onward were virtually identical to the 1860 numbers and still well below rural attendance figures, for previously discussed reasons.

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86. Lillie and Mack, *Dubuque's Forgotten Cemetery*, 127–41.

87. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 215.

88. Twelve-year-olds were not included in the 1880 count, as 1860 census data demonstrated the minimum age of social adolescence was thirteen. The total population figure was taken from John A.T. Hull, *Census for Iowa for 1880* (Des Moines, 1883), 474.

89. These figures assume that 50 percent of the children born and/or raised in Dubuque were male.

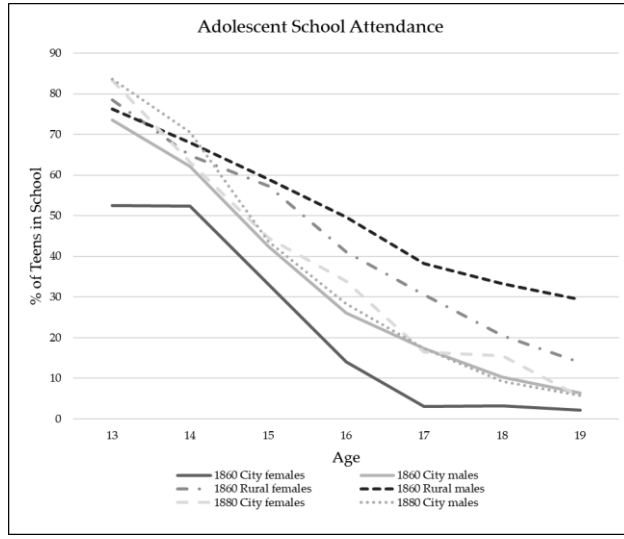

Figure 2. Graph showing the percentage of adolescents, separated by age and sex, attending school according to census enumerations of the city of Dubuque in 1860 and 1880 and of the rural townships of Dubuque County in 1860.

The census records also reveal overall higher rates of employment among adolescents in 1880, as well as a shift in the earliest employment age. As seen in Table 2, the portion of girls entering servitude at the age of thirteen dropped by half, with a larger percentage of girls working at fourteen. Meanwhile, male employment appears to have started at an earlier age on average in 1880, with a significant jump in the number of boys having jobs at fourteen. As discussed, these higher numbers may reflect greater recognition of employment, rather than an increase in the number of boys actually involved in work.

Though the number of formal apprentices reported in the census records remained low—just 3 percent of Dubuque's teenage boys—it represents a significant increase over the 0.5 percent reported in 1860. This growing body of apprentices—and employed youths in general—represents a trend that was moving in the opposite direction from labor patterns in the eastern United States, where the introduction of machines eliminated the need for true apprenticeships. While the demand for cheap youth labor,

Age	% of Females with Occupation		% of Males with Occupation	
	1860	**1880**	**1860**	**1880**
13	10.0	5.0	1.1	7.9
14	9.7	13.8	2.1	19.0
15	15.0	20.3	13.0	36.0
16	26.8	29.6	43.2	54.7
17	33.8	44.0	62.2	68.6
18	35.3	44.2	77.6	82.4
19	36.8	58.1	83.3	86.1

Table 2. Percentages of teenagers, divided by age and sex, listed as having an occupation in the 1860 and 1880 census enumerations of the city of Dubuque. Female figures include wives in charge of their own households, in addition to outside professions.

without any educative component, initially rose with mechanized factory production, union regulations and the availability of inexpensive adult immigrant labor gradually reduced the number of adolescents in the workforce in states like New York.[90]

By the 1880s, the sense that early employment left young men stuck in dead-end factory jobs led families who could afford the luxury to keep their sons in school until the age of sixteen or eighteen.[91] Evidently this trend had not yet reached towns like Dubuque, where craftsmen still provided a substantial share of local employment, and ninety of the adolescent boys were listed in census records as performing work in factories. This enumeration also saw an increase in female work listings, with more than half of nineteen-year-old girls reported as employed or managing their own households. In addition to the traditional professions of domestic service, education, and apparel-making, young women were listed as clerks, hotel staff, and factory workers, as well as one artist and a printing compositor.

In 1880, adolescent females were more likely to continue living at home, with only 21 percent living away from their parents, as opposed to 35 percent in 1860. The vast majority of those who

90. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 144–52.

91. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 144–52.

Iowa City High School class picture, 1886. Photo courtesy State Historical Society of Iowa.

had left home in 1880 were working or running their own households. Over 60 percent of adolescent females lived at home and had no occupation, and of those, just over half attended school. Around 40 percent of males lived with their parents and did not work, but 73 percent of those boys were enrolled in school. These numbers suggest that despite high teen employment rates the East Coast trend towards an extended adolescence—with longer periods of school attendance and family residence—had started to affect Dubuque.

THOUGH SOCIETAL ATTITUDES were gradually changing across the country by 1880, for most of the nineteenth century adolescence was an ill-defined period of transition, rather than a distinct developmental stage. The timing of its onset was influenced by a number of factors including the nature and location of the community (urban vs. rural, East Coast vs. the Midwest and the western frontier), the socioeconomic status of the family, and the sex of the individual. The marriages of fourteen-year-old girls in the pioneer days of Dubuque indicate a brief adolescence that was extended as the community grew and urbanized. The practice of impoverished families sending their thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls away as servants forced on them adult-like responsibilities not experienced by the sons and daughters

of middle-class and wealthy families at that age.[92] However, among all classes, females started their transition towards adulthood at a younger age than males, likely coinciding with the onset of menarche, which occurred as early as thirteen or fourteen years old.[93] Meanwhile, males reached their transitional stage at around fifteen years old, by which age most boys had finished school and started working. By the late nineteenth century, however, the age of fourteen marked the average beginning of the transition period for both girls and boys.

Though females were empowered to marry without consent at the age of eighteen, the low numbers of such women who lived independently with their husbands suggests they had not quite attained the status of adulthood. Most eighteen-year-old women were unmarried and many still attended some type of school, especially as the century progressed and the extended education of daughters became a symbol of prestige.[94] By nineteen, though, many women in Dubuque managed their own households, and this is also the age of the youngest recorded nuns.[95] The range of ages, then, which might be considered a transitional period of adolescence for females in mid- to late nineteenth-century Dubuque is thirteen to eighteen years old. Males, who began the transition a little later, also achieved adulthood later. Though the age of majority was twenty-one, some men married at twenty and established their own households or even started their own businesses, like Rufus Rittenhouse. The range of adolescence for males, then, is fifteen to nineteen years old, with a shift down to fourteen years old in the later part of the century.

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92. Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 75–76.

93. "The Age of First Menstruation in the United States. Excerpt from the Proceedings of the 26th Meeting of the American Gynecological Society," *Medical News* 78 (1901), 1001.

94. Especially in cities where public high schools provided tuition-free education, girls tended to stay in school longer than their brothers because their labor was less vital to family economy. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 129–38.

95. A thirteen-year-old recorded as a Sister of Charity on the 1860 census of Dubuque may have been a novitiate or a mistaken entry, as her name appears at the transition between the list of nuns and the list of students.

Adolescents in mid- to late nineteenth-century Dubuque experienced some circumstances similar to those of their counterparts on the East Coast—including an increase in average marriage age and in female school attendance in the second half of the century—with a few key differences. Compulsory schooling legislation, which produced graded public schools in the East, led to the concentration of adolescents in classes with their peers.[96] These conditions did not yet exist in Iowa. The sentiment that created opposition to the legislation—objection to infringement on parental rights—appears to have pervaded the adolescent experience in Dubuque.

The majority of teenagers portrayed in the autobiographical narratives and Oldt's biographical sketches could not choose their life courses without family approval. Most older teens were expected to work, often in the same profession as a parent, or one chosen by their parents, and their earnings were usually not their own, even when no longer residing in the parental home.[97] The recurring theme of life-threatening illness in adolescence illustrates teenage vulnerability to infectious diseases—particularly TB—likely due to exposure in the workplace. The types and frequency of leisure activities depended on a teen's socioeconomic status and parental permission. Water recreation, which was plentiful and largely free, brought risk as well as entertainment, and mortality was strongly skewed towards boys, who were more prone to reckless behavior. Though real independence was not granted until adolescents reached nineteen or twenty years old, the small freedoms made possible by working in adult settings and living away from home—cutting wood for pocket money, performing in a circus act, flirting with peers of the opposite sex—offset the heavy responsibilities sometimes carried on those young shoulders.

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96. Kett, *Rites of Passage,* 123–27,

97. W. Norton Grubb, "Preparing Youth for Work: The Dilemmas of Education and Training Programs," in *Adolescence and Work: Influences of Social Structure, Labor Markets, and Culture,* eds. David Stern and Dorothy Eichorn (Hillsdale, NJ, 1989), 13–45.