

From Fair View Farm to Parkview Heights: Involuntary Annexation and the Middle-American Dream

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“THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE are worth striving for,” read a 1970 real estate ad from the *Ames (Iowa) Daily Tribune*,” and this four bedroom two story home is sure to please.”¹ Located in the new neighborhood of Parkview Heights and priced “at only \$33,500,” it was one of nearly 1.25 million new single family houses built that year in the United States.² As the postwar years brought the Baby Boom and economic prosperity, builders worked around the clock to meet the demand for new housing. The need for land led to massive development on the fringe of cities, towns, and villages across America.

Roughly a century after settlers transformed Iowa’s tallgrass prairie into fertile farmland, Neva Morris, the owner of one of Story County, Iowa’s most prominent farms, watched her land transform into Ames’s Parkview Heights neighborhood. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, Fair View Farm—first established by Morris’ family in 1902—passed from rural farmers to the urban middle class in what was considered “inexorable progress.”³ Federal, state, and local legislation cooperated to provide the land needed to meet new economic and social demands.

1. *Ames Daily Tribune*, 2/11/1970.

2. \$223,708 in 2020 or 3.4 times the median family income; “20th Century Statistics,” U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1999, 884.

3. This terminology was used to frame the debate about this annexation issue by those in Ames who favored annexation. See “From Our Point of View: On Annexation,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 12/27/1958.

Private ownership of real property is considered a basic element of independence in the United States. From the establishment of the colonies to the closing of the frontier west, Americans traditionally considered the ownership of land as essential to independence, and historian Robert Beauregard even argued, “control over property is a way to avoid the intrusion of government.”⁴ But during the postwar twentieth century when federal, state, and local government policies encouraged the outward growth of single-family developments, rural farmers’ ownership of their own property did little to slow intrusive annexation plans. Farms on the outskirts of urban areas were absorbed into cities and suburbs, often by intrusive means that were far from democratic.

Research into urban expansion and suburbia is extensive but few studies include the acquisition of the land needed for this expansion.⁵ Frequently the issue is glossed over or described in a way that gives the impression that rural landowners willingly sold their property to developers without voicing any opposition. This was often not the case. Where opposition occurred, changes in postwar definitions of progress and power, and who had the privilege of defining those terms, were often why that opposition failed. A cultural misunderstanding about what was developed and undeveloped land resulted in the loss of land from agricultural use to industry and housing for the growing American middle class that continues to the present day.

In the Cold War battle for cultural superiority, mass consumption and the suburban tract house became the embodiment of the American Dream and annexation became a reliable method deployed by local governments in order to realize that aspiration. The Cold War stakes came into stark relief at the famous

4. Robert A. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban* (Minneapolis, 2006), 92.

5 See, for example, Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*; Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York, 2001); and Heather B. Barrow, *Henry Ford’s Plan for the American Suburb: Dearborn and Detroit* (Dekalb, IL, 2015). Furthermore, Kenneth T. Jackson’s *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1985) devotes an entire chapter, “Suburbs into Neighborhoods: The Rise and Fall of Municipal Annexation,” to the topic, but focuses on the annexation of existing small communities into larger cities.

“kitchen debate” between then Vice President Richard Nixon and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959.⁶ Unlike drab Communist state-owned apartment blocks, Americans resided in owner-occupied single family homes. To meet the demand for these low-density detached houses, voluntary and involuntary annexation became a method used by local governments to incorporate land. It was a losing battle for those who protested. Property owners who resisted “inexorable progress” were suspect and when urban communities required land for expansion, consideration of the greater good outweighed the traditional independence of small land holders.⁷

Rural landholders were not the only ones who did not benefit from government-supported suburbanization and urban expansion. Race-based discrimination made a large number of new developments available only to white Americans, and the high cost of new homes made them unobtainable to anyone below the middle class. Home ownership was the basis for the creation of family wealth, and by denying minorities and the poor access to the postwar housing boom, the gap widened between rich and poor. Insulated in their racially and economically homogeneous neighborhoods, suburbanites immersed themselves in conformity and mass consumption, and could ignore the problems of the urban core. As expansion became sprawl, decisions regarding the “greater good” became centered on personal concerns of increased property taxes and threatened property values.⁸

As the ad in the *Ames Daily Tribune* makes clear, suburbanization and urban expansion were not just East and West Coast phenomena; they occurred in the Middle West as well. The urban population of the United States surpassed that of its rural neighbors in 1920, but it took the state of Iowa an additional fifty years to reach parity. Iowa’s changing demographics threatened

6. Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*, (Minneapolis, 2010), xi.

7. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 174.

8. See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, 2017); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2007).

agriculture's economic and political power in the state as lawmakers struggled to balance rural concerns with the needs of growing urban areas.⁹ One of the rural-urban issues to be contested was property ownership, as municipalities worked to supply land needed for new housing developments.

Parkview Heights in Ames, Iowa, was one of these housing developments, and where there is now a neighborhood, Neva Morris' Fair View Farm once stood. In the shadow of the kitchen debate, a second-generation farm was lost to the prosperity of "the short American century" (1948 to 1974).¹⁰ As the twentieth century progressed, each year a territory roughly the size of Rhode Island was bulldozed for urban development.¹¹ During this period, government policies created conditions that forced Story County residents Edward and Neva Morris and their neighbors from the land. Following the national trend, Parkview Heights became part of Iowa's transformation as the state moved from a predominantly rural population to an urban majority in 1970.¹² For the Morris family, rural depopulation occurred not when they went to the city, but when the city came to them, and demanded the subdivision of their family-owned farm into 495 middle-class, single-family homes.

Fair View Farm

The Morris farm first appeared on the Story County Franklin Township map in 1902. Neva's future father-in-law, Walter Morris, purchased part of the farm after marrying Gertrude Rutheford in 1889 and the remainder in 1902. Totaling 239 acres, it was 61 percent larger than the average farm in America at the time, and the 1911 *History of Story County, Iowa* records that "the place is known as the Fair View Farm and its name is well deserved. Everything about the place is kept in excellent condition and indicates the careful supervision and practical methods of a

9. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City, 1996), 297.

10. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 15.

11. Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 8.

12. "20th Century Statistics," U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1999*, 878.

progressive owner."¹³ The family cultivated grain crops and bred shorthorn cattle and Duroc hogs. As was typical for a successful farmer, Walter Morris was involved in the Story County Fair Association and the Breeders Association of Story County, in addition to various fraternal and service organizations. The family appeared in a 1912 *Ames Daily Intelligencer* story when Fair View Farm hosted a Fourth of July celebration for members of the North Star Rural Club with \$500 worth of fireworks.¹⁴

Walter Morris and his Fair View Farm prospered and the family led Story County's rural middle class. In 1914, Walter and Gertrude's son, Edward, enrolled at Iowa State College and married Neva Freed, the daughter of a local farmer. Three years later, Walter died and farm operations passed to young Edward and Neva. Edward continued his father's progressive practices and adopted mechanized agriculture. In fact, a 1921 article in *Tractor and Gas Engine Review* featured Fair View Farm and noted that Edward Morris "not only owned a tractor, but kept an accurate set of farm accounts." During the debate between horse power versus horsepower, it quoted Edward as praising the reliability and practicality of his machine, which he said allowed him to "keep three horses less than I did before I got the tractor."¹⁵

Mechanized farming not only reduced the need for draft animals, it also reduced the need for farm labor, which allowed the couple to make a short-lived move into the urban middle class.¹⁶ Although Edward spent his entire life on the farm, he was one of only 3.3 percent of Americans to have a college degree in the World War I Era, and he was ready to strike out on his own.¹⁷ In

13. "20th Century Statistics," 886; *Ames Tribune* Photo Archive, Ames History Museum.

14. "North Star Celebrate," *Ames Daily Intelligencer*, 6/26/1912.

15. Harry M. McGuire, "Two Sides to the Tractor Question," *Tractor and Gas Engine Review*, vol. 14, no. 11 (November 1921), 34.

16. "Urban and Rural Population, and by State," US Census 2000, 1.

17. "20th Century Statistics," U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States 1999, 877.



*Portrait of Edward and Neva Morris in 1914.
Photo courtesy of the Ames History Museum.*

the early 1920s, Edward and Neva rented the farm out and moved to Chicago where Edward found work as an engineer for a building contractor. By the late 1920s, after passage of the Federal Highway Act of 1916 funded a burst of road construction, Edward became a road engineer for the Iowa Highway Commission based in Ames. But when his position disappeared during the Great Depression, the family returned to Fair View Farm.¹⁸

By that time, Edward and Neva had four children who provided much of the labor needed to run the farm. According to their youngest son, Walter L. Morris, “my father didn’t really care for farming, but felt this was best for the family to live through the Depression years. These were hard times, but farm families could eek [sic] out a living and have food on the table.”¹⁹ Times were not quite so hard for the Morris family, however, and in 1939 Edward Morris built a new two-story, four-bedroom house at Fair View, and at 2,282 square feet, it was one of the largest residences in rural Story County.²⁰

18. Walter Morris, “Letter to Nik Neville,” 6/24/2006, Morris Family File, Ames History Museum.

19. Morris, “Letter to Nik Neville.”

20. Section 34, Township 84, Range 24, NE 1/2 NW 1/4 Parcel A CFN 13-242 Ames Deed Book, 1996-06050, Story County Assessor.

Despite the agricultural depression of the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s, the population of Ames doubled from 6,270 residents to 12,555 residents between 1920 and 1940.²¹ The city's need for housing to accommodate that growth led to the drive for land that directly affected the Morris family. World War II also brought profound changes to both the town and the Morris family. Factories in Ames operated at full capacity to meet the demand of government production contracts, and Iowa State's various science departments contributed to new technologies in warfare, such as the Manhattan Project. As draft-aged men entered the military, women entered the workforce in record numbers. Wartime labor shortages also allowed Edward to return to an engineering position at the Iowa Highway Commission and running of the farm fell to the rest of the family.

According to the family's history, "Neva worked hard taking care of chickens, hogs and dairy cattle. Leslee, the oldest son, and his two sisters, Betty Lee and Mary Jane, delivered milk daily to the Iowa State College Dairy Industries Building driving an old black Chevy coup[e] loaded with two 10-gallon milk cans in the trunk."²² As young Walter L. recalled years later, "my brother, some 14 years older than I, loved farming. He completed his education at Iowa State College and, after returning from 4½ years in the U.S. Army Air Corp [sic], came back and farmed both the Freed farm southwest of Ames and the Morris farm north of Ames."²³

The Morris family strived to keep their farm prosperous during this period, but the nation's definition of "progress" shifted to a new urban identity. Mass production and adoption of the automobile during the 1920s increased the distance that workers could live from their place of employment. Programs such as Henry Ford's Five-Dollar Day, which increased Ford's employees' pay to five dollars a day in order to stabilize his workforce and encourage consumerism, transformed factory laborers into

21. "Total Population for Iowa's Incorporated Places: 1850–2000," State Data Center Program, State Library of Iowa.

22. Morris Family History, "Residents," Ames History Museum.

23. Morris, "Letter to Nik Neville."



Photo of Edward and Neva's home on Fair View Farm at Christmas in 1948. Photo courtesy of the Ames History Museum.

consumers with increasing expectations of what a higher income could provide. Additionally, this was the period when industry began decentralizing from major urban centers.²⁴ This combination put pressure on municipalities to adapt to these changing needs or face diminishing tax revenues as industry and housing left their city limits. To remain competitive, state and local governments needed to attract high paying employers and provide desirable housing alternatives to this growing urban middle class.

The postwar years brought these changes to the community of Ames, and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 brought thousands of veterans to the halls of Iowa State College, adding pressure on the city to expand to accommodate new residents. The city's population nearly doubled again between 1940 and 1950 to 22,898 residents. To meet this need, the city initiated a modest annexation in 1950, but it proved to be insufficient to meet the demand for housing, especially affordable housing for lower-earning residents. After visiting Ames in 1957, a visitor reported to her husband's employer that "there appeared to be a shortage of lower-cost housing. One small development [is] occupied almost entirely by students and college staff, and there is a high turnover. . . . Apartments are very scarce in Ames. There are some duplex houses in the older section of Ames which are

24. Barrow, *Henry Ford's Plan for the American Suburb*, 128–29.

in heavy demand. An average two-bedroom apartment rents for \$100 per month."²⁵ At a time when the federal minimum wage was \$1.00 an hour, the postwar years' housing demand outpaced supply, and Ames not only needed additional housing, but it specifically needed affordable housing options.

While other communities in Story County stagnated or experienced decline in population in the postwar era, Ames exploded by attracting highly skilled, highly paying public sector jobs. Between 1950 and 1970, the population of Ames increased by another 72 percent to a new total of 39,505 residents. Some of this growth was due to annexation, but more occurred due to the expansion of Ames' largest employers. Iowa State College received the designation of University in 1959. In 1961, the federal government built the National Animal Disease Laboratory, a major research facility that employed a growing number of scientists, technicians, and other white-collar staff. And, the Iowa Highway Commission, long based in Ames, became part of the Iowa Department of Transportation in 1974. The demand for housing fueled by the high salaries of these public sector employees gave builders, tradespeople, and realtors in Ames all the work they could handle. Capital, supplies, and labor were readily available, but land on which to build was in short supply. When the modest 1950 annexation proved to be insufficient, the city launched the largest annexation since 1910.²⁶

In the fall of 1958, the Ames City Council announced an ambitious plan to annex four areas, one on each side of Ames, which would nearly double the size of the city. The proposed areas would incorporate the future site of the National Animal Disease Laboratory to the east, the municipal airport to the south, and the unincorporated community of Ontario to the west, each of which guaranteed ample tax revenue for the city. The area to the north would incorporate the recently selected site of the new Ames

25. "Your Stories, Nancy Ross," Archives and Collections, Ames History Museum.

26. Ames was far from the only city in Iowa using involuntary annexation to increase municipal territory. Des Moines, Dubuque, Waterloo, Sioux City and Cedar Rapids were also involved in legal disputes over urban expansion in the late 1950s.

High School and the farmland beyond it, including Fair View Farm. Located on some of the highest ground near Ames, safe from the annual flooding of the Skunk River or Squaw Creek, this area was ideally suited for residential housing.²⁷

Citizens living in the unincorporated areas under discussion had only limited means to fight the city's plan. At the Ames City Council meeting of October 21, 1958, nearly 100 concerned property owners turned out to protest the proposed annexation. Edward Morris joined them. He argued that his property was a farm, that his land was zoned by the county for agriculture, that he would not benefit in any way from city services, and that he, in fact, "could not continue his operation if it were brought into the city."²⁸ After hearing from several like-minded property owners, the council deferred action until a later meeting.²⁹ In November, they decided to turn the controversial proposal over to a public vote, set for January 6, 1959. However, under the Code of Iowa the vote would only be open to residents of the city of Ames.³⁰ Residents in these unincorporated areas were not allowed to vote, a move that clearly favored the urban population at the expense of their rural counterparts.

In the few weeks between the announcement and the vote, the *Ames Daily Tribune* weighed in on the side of annexation. In an editorial on December 27, 1958, the editors appeared to express the feelings of many who desired "progress" for the city. With echoes of nineteenth-century Manifest Destiny, the editorial explained that the 1950 annexation proved insufficient as "it was discovered that the homebuilding industry in Ames had, during the last eight years, converted many of the barren acres into housing subdivisions." Regarding Edward Morris and his neighbors, the editors wrote: "we can sympathize with the

27. Due to renewed awareness of the term's offensive connotation, local officials began the process of changing "Squaw Creek" to "Ioway Creek" in 2019. Robbie Sequeira, "Ames City Council to Recommend Ioway Creek Name for Proposed Squaw Creek Name Change," *Ames Tribune*, 1/30/2020.

28. "Objections to City Annexation Heard," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 10/22/1958.

29. Ames Council Meeting Minutes, 10/21/1958.

30. "To Vote Jan. 6 On Annexation," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 11/19/1958. Code of Iowa § 362.26 (1958).

feelings of these people, especially those who built outside the city to provide adequate living space for their families. But Progress is inexorable."³¹

The editors' rhetoric set the terms of the annexation debate. Describing farmland as "barren" and suburbanization as "progress" served their argument by undercutting the value of how farmers used the land and how farmers were making their own kind of progress in the twentieth century. The misinterpretation of what was developed and undeveloped land signaled the loss of rural political power. As such, the newspaper spread a message favored by municipal officials and downtown merchants. Adding "inexorable" to this urban definition of progress also signaled the city's determination to annex the proposed territory.

Despite assurances from the city that farmers could continue their operations if annexed, Edward Morris and his neighbors remained suspicious that the city's true intent for the annexation was ultimately to end farming on the land that they inherited from their fathers and mothers and that they hoped to pass on to their children. In the days before the vote, the city attempted to placate farmers' concerns that annexation would increase their property taxes, arguing that by using agricultural tax credits, farm owners would see a decrease in their tax levy. But the vote proposal, Resolution 3170, began with:

WHEREAS, there is not only a lack of available facilities within the City limits of the City of Ames, Iowa to properly house the inhabitants thereof, but also a lack of available vacant lots and tracts of land upon which housing facilities can be erected."³²

The farmers' cleared, level, and well-drained cropland was ideal for constructing new housing developments.

The city also assured its citizens that the increase in expenditures to expand services to the annexed areas would be spread over the increased number of properties, resulting in an overall decrease in the tax levy. But a group of Ames citizens called the Taxpayer's Committee distributed pamphlets and bought ad space in the *Tribune* to publicly spread their counterargument

31. "From Our Point of View: On Annexation," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 12/27/1958.

32. Ames City Council Meeting Minutes, 11/18/1958.

that the annexation plan was overly ambitious, would increase the tax levy, and result in the loss of individual control in the proposed annexation areas. An ad paid for by the Taxpayer's Committee condemned the plan with alarmist statements such as "With annexation your taxes will skyrocket!" and "Your taxes can double!"³³ A pro-annexation ad featured "FACTS ABOUT ANNEXATION" and promised a "yes" vote would "allow Ames to grow in a desirable orderly planned manner."³⁴ Historian Kenneth Jackson noted the significance of such language. In his analysis, such postwar appeals for orderliness and efficiency were "a mask for the desire to exploit and to control, it might be termed the local or downtown branch of urban imperialism."³⁵ Jackson's observation aptly describes the events that unfolded in Ames where power had clearly shifted to the city.

Edward Morris made his final plea to the citizens of Ames in a letter to the editor on January 3, 1959, under the title "He Can't Vote."

Some 183 years ago, in the year 1776, this nation was born from the idea of individual rights. To a great extent, this was brought about because the colonies were being taxed without a voice in the governing body. . . . Next week when the citizens of Ames vote on the issue of annexation, a group of people will have lost the right to cast their ballot. . . . Whether the law denying them the right to vote is right or wrong, the people in this area may be annexed into a city and governed by a city government without having any voice in the matter. . . . So when you, the citizens of Ames, go to the polls next week give some thought to the subject at hand. You must vote for me. I can't vote.³⁶

Beauregard's argument that ownership of private property protected one from government intrusion is clearly contradicted by the experiences of Morris and his neighbors. Finding his situation un-American, Morris anchored his appeal in the nation's fundamental principles of liberty, freedom, and franchise. In the

33. "Vote 'No' to Annexation," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/5/1959.

34. "Facts About Annexation," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/5/1959.

35. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 145.

36. "He Can't Vote," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/3/1959.

fight to prevent his farm from being incorporated into the city of Ames, he was personally powerless and could only appeal to those enfranchised citizens.

On January 6, 1959, the residents of Ames defeated the resolution by a margin of 5 to 3. The 3,216-voter turnout set a record for a single-purpose vote in Ames. For city officials, the defeat was disappointing. The *Tribune* quoted one councilman as saying that they merely failed to “get our message across” and suggested that “a new study probably will be made” to resolve the city’s need for expansion.³⁷ On the other side, the Taxpayer’s Committee treasurer told the paper that the vote was a victory for the “freedom fighters” who although “outnumbered [and] out-shouted by a hostile press and radio . . . brought home the issues crystal clear to the voters.”³⁸ Despite their disenfranchisement, the citizens of Ames voted in favor of the rural landowners.

If Edward Morris and the Taxpayer’s Committee were relieved by the defeat of the annexation plan, their relief would be short lived. By September 1959, a group of private business owners called Ames Industrial Development, Inc. (AID, Inc.) presented a petition to the city council asking that another proposal be put to public vote. The Ames League of Women Voters supplied the new annexation study, which reduced the targeted land area from nine to four and a half square miles. The Ames Chamber of Commerce presented the revised proposal to the city council for action. Giving themselves ample time to campaign, in February the council began the process of setting another vote for September 8, 1960.³⁹

On the evening of May 19, 1960, the council chambers filled with approximately 140 property owners once again protesting their inclusion in the annexation plan. Representatives from AID, Inc., the League, and the Chamber spoke in favor, but over a two and a half hour period, dozens of opponents petitioned the council and again questioned the rationale behind the plan.⁴⁰ The

37. “Voters Turn Down Annexation Plan,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/7/1959.

38. “Simple Solution is Seen,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/10/1959.

39. “Ask Vote on Annexation Proposal,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 1/20/1960.

40. “On Annexation: Air Benefits, Opposition,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 5/18/1960.

arguments in favor and against had not changed; however, the tactics did. Both sides harangued voters in the press and by pamphlet, mail, radio, and even in a broadcast on Iowa State University-owned WOI-TV. But on September 8, 1960, the involuntary annexation plan passed in the second election, this time by a margin of 2 to 1 and with a turnout exceeding the last election by over 400 voters.⁴¹

The vote, however, did not end the matter. Per the Code of Iowa, involuntary annexation required the city to file a lawsuit in district court on behalf of the annexed property owners, with the city of Ames acting as plaintiff.⁴² The city was then burdened to prove it could provide “substantial benefits,” such as police and fire protection, water and sewer services, and paved and maintained streets, to the annexed areas.⁴³ Over the next two years, the city filed paperwork on behalf of the landowners, who in turn also sued the city, claiming that their constitutional rights had been violated when they were unable to vote on the resolution affecting their property.⁴⁴ The case went up to the Iowa Supreme Court in 1962, which cited the precedent of a U.S. Supreme Court decision in favor of the city of Cedar Rapids after a five-year involuntary annexation battle there. The Court remanded the decision back to Story County where district court Judge John M. Schaupp decided the case in favor of the city on November 26, 1962.⁴⁵ The portion of Fair View Farm east of the Chicago and North Western railroad officially became part of the city of Ames and “benefited” from all it had to offer. The coordinated power of city officials, downtown merchants, and the nation’s judicial system resulted in defeat for disenfranchised residents in the annexed areas.

41. “Four-Area City Annexation Proposal OK’d,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 9/9/1960.

42. For annexation procedures, Code of Iowa § 362.26 and 362.27 (1958). For incorporation procedure, Code of Iowa § 362.1 to 362.9 (1958).

43. “To Assuage Growing Pains Orderly Development Urged,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 10/10/1959.

44. Dan Garcia, “Annexation Hearing is June 28,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 6/25/1962.

45. Dan Garcia, “Ames Annexation Ok’d; City Gets Go-Ahead,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 11/26/1962.

Edward Morris' battle to save his farm ended just two months after the September 1960 annexation vote when he died suddenly at the age of sixty-four. At the time of his death, Edward's estate was valued at \$50,386.58. His will left the farm to Neva and their four adult children, who then signed an agreement among themselves allowing Neva to "receive and enjoy, during the remaining years of her life, the use and income from said real estate."⁴⁶

As the consequences of the annexation vote began to take effect, Neva continued to live in the big house while her oldest son, Leslee, lived in another smaller home on the property and ran the farm. One of the first "benefits" the family received from the city was a \$9,716.72 tax assessment for the installation of sanitary sewer lines during the paving of 24th Street, which ran along the south end of the farm.⁴⁷ The family promptly filed suit against the city to stop the assessment. When the city planned to build a second sanitary sewer line along the northern half of the property in 1964, the family again filed suit to stop the plan. Their complaint asserted "that the preliminary plans and specifications, assessments, inclusion of plaintiff's land are arbitrary, confiscatory . . . and contrary to Iowa law." They continued, "all of the land involved will receive no special benefits from the sewer system since it will be used for agricultural purposes for an indefinite number of years."⁴⁸ After the court rejected both cases, Neva Morris, land rich but cash poor, had to sell Fair View Farm.

It would take the combined effort of three of Ames' largest development firms, Friedrich and Sons Construction, Buck Construction, Inc., and H and F Builders, to create the city's largest housing development—Parkview Heights. On April 28, 1966, the partnership contracted with Neva Morris to pay \$3,000 per acre with the option to buy additional land in units of 40 continuous

46. Abstract of Title, No. 32187, Lot 5, Twentieth Addition to Parkview Heights, Subdivision to the City of Ames, Iowa.

47. \$82,275 in 2020; "Seek to Prevent Tax Collection," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 6/6/1964.

48. "Jury Term of Court Opens," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 9/15/1964.

acres, with price adjustments, through January 1, 1976.⁴⁹ Neva Morris retained ownership of the two-story house and just over one acre of land surrounding it and her son Leslee purchased the remaining portion of Fair View Farm outside of the city limits.

The fate of Fair View Farm illustrates the shift of power from rural to urban in the late twentieth century, even in the traditionally agriculturally dominated state of Iowa. To diversify its economy, the state passed legislation to help municipalities acquire the land needed for industry and housing, which would entice higher paying jobs and thus increase the state's tax base and revenues. If the Morris family had the means to pay the storm sewer assessment, it is probable that the city would have started enforcing ordinances against keeping livestock or operating farm equipment on paved roads within the city limits. The Morris family found, as the age-old saying goes, "you can't fight City Hall." "Undeveloped" land that had taken nearly a century to transform from tallgrass prairie into fertile farmland would now be developed into Parkview Heights over the next three decades.

Parkview Heights

The Friedrich partnership's plan for the new neighborhood mitigated mistakes made by early postwar suburban developments. In the twenty years since its creation, the flaws of New York's Levittown had become apparent. Criticism of its identically mass-produced houses on vast flattened expanses of land changed the American public's perception of suburbia. Homes in these early developments were served by wells and septic tanks and lacked other public services such as sidewalks, schools, and playgrounds. In particular, the lack of green space was of special concern. Squeezing profit from every square acre of land, some developers argued that each lot became its own "park" once the trees matured.⁵⁰ Historian Christopher Sellers argued that in the wake of the emerging environmental movement "mass

49. \$23,991 in 2020; Abstract of Title, No. 32187.

50. In *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, Adam Rome states that Levitt's house building system eventually rivaled that of Henry Ford's assembly line, with "a new one finished every 15 minutes;" Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 122.



Aerial photo of Ames's Roosevelt neighborhood in the mid-1940s, featuring Fair View Farm located in the upper left corner. Photo courtesy of Ames History Museum.

suburbia no longer dramatized heroic builders' flourish, but instead, how a countryside had been razed."⁵¹ But in Parkview Heights the streets were paved, its houses connected to city services, and because it was built after Lyndon Johnson's Conference of Natural Beauty in 1965, ample green space for play and recreation was set aside for neighborhood children.⁵²

Despite the continued need for affordable housing in Ames, Parkview Heights, and its sister developments of Northwood and Westwood, would be unattainable for most residents other than businessmen, professors, scientists, and other professionals. Parkview Heights derives its name from its unique platting, with approximately fourteen acres set aside for a public park fronting not the street, but set behind the lots, where backyards blended seamlessly with the green space. Rather than from the developer, the directive for the design came from the city of Ames. With a recently passed city ordinance requiring new lots in an R-1 zoned subdivision to average 10,000 square feet and burdened to provide land for a public park, the cost of lots excluded all but the most affluent buyers. Reinhard Friedrich Sr., the founder of Friedrich and Sons Construction, appeared at the March 15, 1966, city

51. Christopher Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 2012), 248.

52. Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible*, 291.

council meeting to protest the placement of the park, arguing “that lots in the area are already too expensive and acceptance of the plan if the developer were liable for providing the park area would naturally increase the cost of the lots still more.”⁵³ First-time buyers only benefited by a “trickle-down” phenomenon as Parkview Heights buyers sold their older homes in other areas of Ames.⁵⁴

Analysis from the 1968 *Ames City Directory* affirms the consequences of these higher lot prices. Of the first twenty-four owners to build in Parkview Heights, 62 percent of the households derived their income from the public sector with fifteen employed at Iowa State, the Iowa Department of Transportation, the National Animal Disease Laboratory, and one as a municipal court judge. Six others were self-employed business owners and the last three were white collar professionals employed by private businesses. Six married women in Parkview Heights were either co-owners of their family’s business firms or employed outside the home. Records also listed two single men cohabitating and no single women in the neighborhood.⁵⁵ This reveals that rural farmers were displaced in order to make way not just for more housing, but to create more housing for a particular class of citizens in Ames.

Beyond class, housing discrimination was always an issue for minorities in Ames. For example, although George Washington Carver enrolled at Iowa State College in 1891, he was required to reside in a cabin outside the city limits, far from the campus. Archie and Nancy Martin, prominent African American residents of Ames, housed black students attending Iowa State College in the 1930s and 1940s in their home because no other accommodations were made available to them.⁵⁶ By 1964, an *Ames Daily Tribune* article estimated there were only “27 Negro households in Ames and two or three other non-white households [and] this ratio has

53. Ames City Council Meeting Minutes, 3/15/1966.

54. Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York, 1981), 244.

55. *Polk’s Ames City Directory 1968*, Ames History Museum.

56. “Archie and Nancy Martin,” Residents Collection, Ames History Museum.

not changed much in the past 30 years."⁵⁷ No evidence suggests that Parkview Heights was an exception to this history.

As Parkview Heights was beginning to take shape during the Civil Rights Era, however, this small population of racial minorities voiced its frustration to the Ames City Council. In 1963, the *Ames Daily Tribune* reported one such incident from the Mayor's Committee on Fair Housing involving a man identified only as "Captain M," an engineering student at Iowa State University and a graduate of West Point, along with his young family. Because Captain M's \$6,000 annual income exceeded Iowa State's threshold to qualify for married student housing, he was required to find off-campus housing.⁵⁸ After Ames landlords became aware of his race, they turned the family away from every rental inquiry Captain M made. With the intervention of the city, Captain M was able to rent a house outside of the city limits from a "native of India," who was himself being threatened by "a neighbor who has made it clear he does not want any 'colored' people in the 'deluxe' development."⁵⁹ Race did not come up in the debates about involuntary annexation of Fair View Farm, the development of rural spaces, or the construction of new homes, and its absence, particularly in the wake of the experiences of Captain M, reveals that like the rest of Ames, housing integration was not even a topic of consideration for the new affluent neighborhood.

After hearing of such incidents, the Ames City Council passed a Fair Housing Ordinance in 1966 and later appointed Reinhard Friedrich Jr.—the son of the man who helped spearhead the Parkview Heights development—to chair the Fair Housing Commission in 1969. *The Tribune* pointed out that although the ordinance lacked any enforcement or penalty provision, city leaders hoped that "the threat of public exposure would be sufficient to curb any practitioners of discriminatory

57. Joyce Manchester, "Rights Group Ok's Five-Part Purpose," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 3/12/1964.

58. \$50,804 in 2020.

59. "Find Feeling Against Negro Neighbors Here," *Ames Daily Tribune*, 7/12/1963.

practices” and called it “a milestone in the history of this city’s progress.”⁶⁰

Although racially based discrimination became illegal in 1968, discrimination based on economic status remained and often carried racial consequences along with it. In his critique of suburbanization, historian Kenneth Jackson wrote that the “most important characteristic of the postwar suburb was economic and racial homogeneity.”⁶¹ This pattern became an issue in Parkview Heights when the last three houses on what had been Fair View Farm were built in 2001. That year the undeveloped far southeastern corner of the farm, once occupied by North Star School and later by a municipal water tower, was sold to the Story County Land Trust, which intended to build homes for needy residents with the cooperation of Habitat for Humanity.

When the plan was publicized, nearby Parkview Heights neighbors protested. Homeowners adjacent to the Water Tower Place development demanded that the proposed homes conform to Parkview Heights’s standard: an 1,800 square foot house with an attached two-car garage on a 10,000 square foot lot. While some expressed “benevolent” concern whether “their new neighbors would keep their property maintained,” another more bluntly stated “I would like a look—I don’t know if I want to say ‘richer’—but more in keeping with the neighborhood” and not something that would “take down the value of our homes.”⁶² In the end, designs for three affordable 1,000 square foot homes, each with an attached single-car garage on a 6,000 square foot lot were accepted by the neighbors. But Habitat for Humanity homes were not a long-term affordable housing solution, since once the mortgage had been paid in full the house became the legal property of the owners who were free to sell on the open market. The Habitat project did not offer any provision for future buyers to gain similar access to affordable housing.

60. “Laugh after Laugh,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, 8/18/1966.

61. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 241

62. David Grebe, “Housing Advocates, Parkview Residents Express Concerns,” *Ames Tribune*, 6/13/2001; David Grebe, “Council Moves Forward on Hubbell Subdivision,” *Ames Tribune*, 10/24/2001.

In the spring of 2005, the city made another attempt to bring affordable housing to the former Fair View Farm land, proposing to build a 130-unit owner-occupied development on the triangular portion west of the railroad tracks. The land Leslee Morris purchased from Neva in 1966 was eventually sold to the Ames Community School District, which intended to erect a school there to accommodate the anticipated growth in family size. However, those projections proved overly ambitious as enrollment in the city decreased in the 1990s. With that parcel still available, city officials presented the school board with the proposition for affordable housing. They suggested that if the board donated the land, the city would use \$900,000 in federal grants to install necessary services for a new subdivision targeted to those who earned 80 percent or less of the Story County median income.⁶³

Local developers, including Reinhard Friedrich Sr.'s grandsons Bob Jr. and Kurt Friedrich, met with city officials to begin plotting the twenty-six-acre site, but residents in Parkview Heights expressed the same concerns as they had with the Habitat houses in Water Tower Place. At an April 15, 2005, neighborhood meeting, approximately fifty property owners confronted city officials. Neighborhood concerns of increased traffic, noise, lot sizes, home designs, and decreased property values were now joined by outrage that the school district would donate the land. A budget shortfall earlier that year forced the district to close two elementary schools at the same time as the plan was proposed. Angry citizens demanded that the land be sold, not donated, to alleviate the financial crunch.⁶⁴ If the city was required to purchase the land, the units would no longer be affordable for targeted buyers. "In order to succeed, it is essential that we have the support of the City Council, school board, private developers, surrounding residents and non-profit agencies," the Ames city manager wrote in an announcement abandoning the project in

63. Chuck Hackenmiller, "Board Approves Affordable Housing Proposal," *Ames Tribune*, 3/18/2005.

64. Jason Kristufek, "Proposed Subdivision Near Somerset Draws Criticism," *Ames Tribune*, 4/16/2005.

August 2005.⁶⁵ The land remained undeveloped until 2015, when the Ames school district built a new \$10 million school administration building and sports complex on the site.

The middle-class residents of Parkview Heights nearly derailed the Habitat project and successfully thwarted the 2005 development, demonstrating their power to influence the use of the land. Control appeared to be shifting from the city, which had pushed through the annexation plan in 1960, to the affluent tax and voting base that now made up the neighborhood. While the protestations of the rural residents at meetings in the 1950s failed to stop annexation, Parkview Heights' new residents managed to use their voices, votes, and money to control the use of land in their neighborhood. This power was successfully exercised again, and this time used to police which class would be allowed to live on what was formerly Fair View Farm.

Conclusion

Like a corn-belt Tara incongruously surrounded by ranch houses, the big white farmhouse Edward and Neva Morris built in 1939 still stands on Hoover Avenue in Ames, Iowa's Parkview Heights neighborhood. One of her longtime neighbors was prominent Ames developer Reinhard Friedrich Jr., whose family had been instrumental in transforming Neva's farm. Neva finally left her home in 1996 at the age of 99½. When she died in 2010 at the age of 114, she was the oldest person in the United States of America.

When Iowa caught up with national trends, as Iowa historian Dorothy Schwieder emphasized, "perhaps of greatest importance between 1945 and 1960 was the transition toward a more urban orientation; this trend rested on several major changes, particularly a population shift toward the cities and a major increase in industrial operations."⁶⁶ Up to the postwar period, it was desirable and advantageous for a farm to be located near markets and transportation, but following World War II government policies created conditions that favored single

65. Jeff Raasch, "City Abandons Housing Project," *Ames Tribune*, 8/17/2005.

66. Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 294.



Photo of Edward and Neva's home in 2019, now situated squarely in Parkview Heights. Photo courtesy of the Edith M. Hunter.

family homes, spurring suburbanization and urban expansion. As Beauregard explained, these programs increased the need for land “by subsidizing home ownership, building highways to connect suburbs to downtowns, underwriting the cost of operating an automobile, underfunding mass transit, and subsidizing the building of infrastructure.”⁶⁷ Unlike other industrialized nations, growth in the United States would be *out*, not *up*. Funding for these programs then trickled down to the local level, transforming at least one sleepy college town into a small city.⁶⁸

From the federal government's perspective, expansion of home ownership was a means to strengthen democracy during the Cold War. During the Great Depression, New Deal legislation, like that which created the Federal Housing Administration, was intended to stimulate construction and employment. At the same time, such programs promised to create a “release valve” against revolutionary socialist radicalism.⁶⁹ Likewise, it was not only the involuntary annexation of land by local governments, but the GI Bill of Rights, the Interstate Highway Act, and dozens of other federal government policies such as home mortgage deductions and subsidies “the equivalent of a Marshall Plan every year” that also contributed to the creation of new single

67. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 83.

68. Ironically, Ames hosted a “Save the Farm” rally in 1986.

69. Kathryn Olmstead, *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism*, (New York, 2015), 25.

family housing developments in the postwar period.⁷⁰ A greater portion of Thomas Jefferson's landless mob, "prone to authoritarianism and posing a threat to democracy," could now have access to their own piece of the American Dream.⁷¹ Expanding access to private homeownership brought more Americans into the political mainstream. As the well-known postwar developer William Levitt proclaimed, "no man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do!"⁷²

In 1977, Neva's long-time neighbor, Mildred Dodd Taylor, wrote a presentation titled "The Past One Hundred Years on 24th Street" for the local chapter of a national women's club. In it she reflected upon her childhood on the family farm, shared stories about her neighbors, including the Morrises, and told of the changes she witnessed over the decades. At the end of her essay, she wrote with pride of having received a Century Farm plaque from the Iowa Department of Agriculture the year before and implored:

When annexation comes up again, please don't vote our farm into the city to be destroyed as such with homes, shopping centers, wide highways, industries, etc. The day will come when children in this area will wonder what an Iowa farm was like and why there isn't more food, for the good black ground will have been covered by cement.⁷³

Despite her pleas, Mildred Dodd Taylor's family farm was converted in 2002 into the Friedrich-developed "village" of Somerset, another addition to Ames' "inexorable progress."

70. Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia: Green Fields and Urban Growth, 1820–2000*, (New York, 2003), 231.

71. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 73.

72. Beauregard, *When America Became Suburban*, 156.

73. Mildred Dodd Taylor, "The Past One Hundred Years on 24th Street," Reference Collection, Ames History Museum.