

The Goldfinch

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Hard Times in Iowa:
1920s and 1930s

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Editor, GINALIE SWAIM

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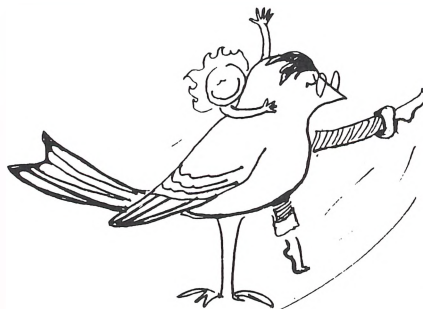
Acknowledgements: This issue includes several excerpts from manuscripts in the collections of the Iowa State Historical Department, including transcripts from the Earthwatch Oral History Project, 1978, and The Homefront in Iowa during World War II Project, 1985. The description of the Blackhawk County dust storm on page 10 is from James Hearst, "We All Worked Together: A Memory of Drought and Depression," *The Palimpsest*, vol. 59 (May/June 1978), p. 67. Editorial assistance was provided by Deborah Gore. The characters of Wild Rosie and Goldfinch are drawn by Jenny Wren. A list of major sources used in researching this issue is available from the editor.

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*Meet
Wild Rosie,
your official
"Goldfinch Tour Guide"
for a trip into Iowa's past. This map
shows some places we'll visit in this issue.*

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ON THE COVER: Drifts of dust cover the play yard of this schoolhouse. The drought and dust storms of the mid-1930s added to America's problems during the Great Depression. (Photo from ISHD, Des Moines)

Near SIOUX CITY, frustrated farmers dump milk at protest strikes (page 9).

In BOONE COUNTY, a stone bridge is this issue's History Mystery (page 22).

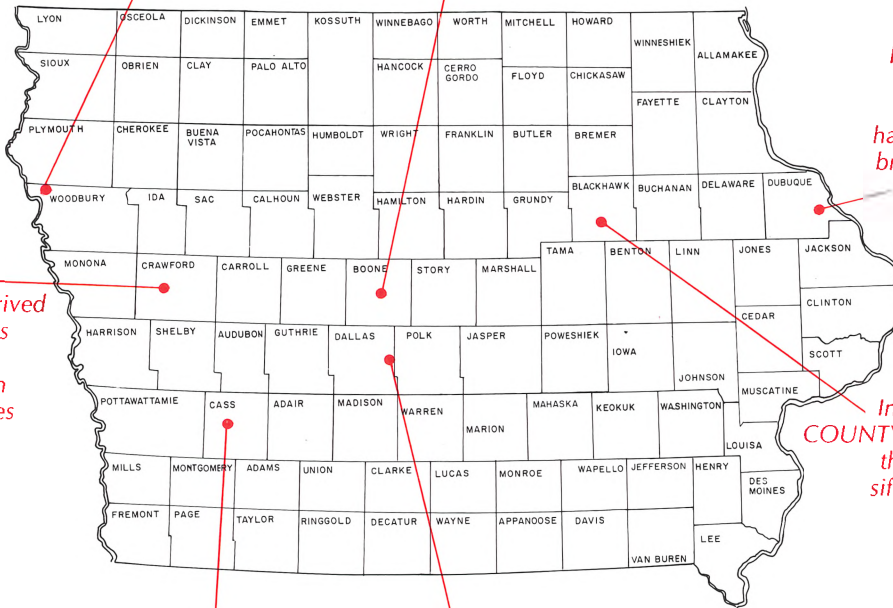
In DUBUQUE, the characters in our play have ketchup on bread for supper (pages 16-19).

In CRAWFORD COUNTY, grasshoppers thrived during the 1930s drought. They even gnawed on pitchfork handles (page 10).

In BLACKHAWK COUNTY, dust covered the pastures and sifted into houses (page 10).

In ATLANTIC; Agnes Gunderman found some unique ways to cope during the Great Depression (page 20).

In WEST DES MOINES, Matt Gunderman is this issue's History-Maker as he "writes his grandmother back into history" (page 20).



Wild Rosie will spend her summer discovering more stories about Iowa's past. If you're involved in a history project this summer, let Wild Rosie and other Goldfinch readers know about it. Send your stories, letters, photographs, or artwork to the Goldfinch. Rosie will try to use them in next year's History-Makers section.

Iowa in the 1920s

IMAGINE that you are an Iowa farmer in the year 1913. It is late autumn. The corn crop is harvested. As you drive a wagonload of corn to market, you daydream about the money you'll be paid when you sell the corn. You will have enough to cover the cost of raising the corn. You will have enough to buy new clothes for the family. And maybe there will be enough to start saving for an automobile.

Farming is certainly good in 1913, you think to yourself. Every year the crops are bigger and better. And the prices are high enough to get a little ahead.

Now imagine that it is the autumn of 1923—ten years later. You drive the same size load of corn to market, but you bring home a lot less money than you did in 1913. You do a little quick arithmetic in your head: no extra money this year. In fact, you paid more to grow the corn than you just earned when you sold it today.

Now imagine that it is the autumn of 1933. You don't even bother to drive your corn to market because prices are the lowest ever. Instead you park the wagon next to the house. Winter is coming. It's cheaper to burn corn to heat the house than it is to buy coal. You shake your head in dismay. What happened to the "Golden Age of Farming," back in 1913?

What is a depression?

By the 1930s the United States was in the Great Depression. A depression is a time when business

slows down. People lose their jobs or are paid very low wages. If a family earns no money, they have no money to spend. If no one is spending money, factories and businesses need fewer workers, and even more workers lose their jobs.

Perhaps you have heard of the Great Depression. Perhaps your grandparents have talked about the hard times during the 1930s. For American farmers, the depression began ten years earlier—in the 1920s. To understand the farming depression of the 1920s we must look back to 1914.

“Win the war with food!”

In 1914 World War I began in Europe. European nations could not produce enough food while fighting the war. The United States had plenty of food. In fact, farmers were actually producing *more* than America needed. Europe bought food from America at high prices. Farmers were paid well for the crops and livestock they raised.

In March 1917 America entered the war. As soldiers crossed the Atlantic to fight, Americans at home began to produce the enormous amounts of supplies needed. Factories worked day and night producing guns and war supplies.

Farmers were urged to grow even more food to be sent to Europe. “Plow up your pastures and roadsides,” the government urged farmers. “Buy more land and machinery. Grow more crops. We can win the war with food.”

Many farmers in Iowa and other Midwest states



This poster urged farmers to build silos for storing the extra grain they were producing during World War I.

did just that. They borrowed money from banks to buy more land and machinery.

It seemed safe to believe that prices would stay high. "In just a few years," thought the farmer, "I can pay off the loan. Now is the time to buy more land."

Farm prices fall

In 1918 the war ended. Europe no longer bought huge supplies of American food. The government stopped promising high prices to farmers. The banks could not continue to loan money to farmers. The railroads charged farmers more for shipping their products.

When farmers sold their crops and livestock, they were paid much less than during the war. With such low prices, how could they pay back

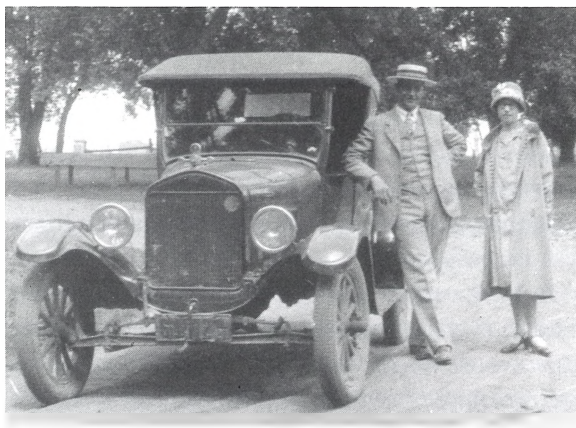
the money they had borrowed to buy more land? Many could not. Many sold their farms and looked for other jobs.

Other farm families managed to keep their land, but they lived without many things they needed or wanted. At least they did not have to worry about food. The farm produced plenty of eggs, milk products, meat, fruits, and vegetables.

Farmers were angry and felt hopeless as they struggled through the 1920s. "Farm life is hard enough," they thought, "without this depression." Farm families lived without electricity or indoor plumbing. Most still used workhorses in the fields. Life seemed so different in America's cities.

Fast dancing and busy factories

People wanted to enjoy the good things in life and forget the horrors of the war. And there seemed like so many new ways of enjoying life! In cities



Rickels Collection, ISHD

A 1920s couple poses by their automobile. Short skirts and short hair were popular in the 1920s.

across America, people danced a fast new step called the Charleston and listened to a new music called jazz. Women boldly wore new styles, began new careers, and celebrated their new right to vote.

Equipped with new machinery, factories ran at top speed producing refrigerators, radios, and automobiles. The stores were bursting with new products like these, and people were eager to buy them. If they didn't have enough money, they borrowed from a bank or bought on credit (paying a little each month).

Many businesses were booming, and the owners believed they were "on the road to riches." Eager to share in that *prosperity* (financial success), many Americans bought and sold shares in the stock market. A stock is a share of ownership in a business. When business is good, the value of the shares rises. When you sell the shares, you get more money back than you paid for the shares.

Others struggle

But like the farmers, other Americans were struggling through hard times, too. Factory workers were paid low wages. Mining, shipbuilding, and *textiles* (fabric) were also in an economic depression. For these industries there was no prosperity.

In Iowa, many businesses and industries were related to farming. As the farming depression grew worse, some Iowa businesses slowed down too, and hired fewer workers. Many Iowa banks closed during the 1920s.

The 1920s meant hard times for some Americans, and easy times for others. □

The Great Depression Begins

LATE IN 1929, American prosperity turned to panic.

In the New York Stock Exchange, the price of stocks had been climbing, year after year. Then in October, the stock market crashed. Prices fell drastically. Everyone wanted to sell their now-worthless stock, but no one wanted to buy them.

Imagine if you had bought ten shares of stock in January. Each stock cost \$53. You had spent \$530 in all. Then in October the price falls to \$1 a share. For every share you own, you've lost \$52—or a total of \$520.

Some people owned thousands of shares, and lost millions of dollars. Millionaires lost fortunes in a day. People who were not rich and who had used their savings to buy stocks suddenly realized that their stocks were worthless. The dream of getting rich became a nightmare.

The nightmare grew worse. In the following months, businesses and factories shut down. Workers lost their jobs. No one had money to buy new products. No one had money to invest in businesses. People wanted to hold on to any money they had.

Panic spread across America. People rushed to their local banks to take out the money they had in



Bank runs and bank closings became everyday news in the first years of the Great Depression. In this photograph a crowd forms around the Union Savings Bank in Davenport.

their accounts—only to find that everyone else was doing the same thing. But the banks did not have enough money on hand to match the amounts people wanted to take out. The banks closed. People who had savings in the bank were left without a penny.

The Great Depression had begun.

Looking for work

Millions of Americans lost nearly everything they

had. They lost their jobs. They lost money they had saved. Many lost their pride and their hopes for the future.

People who had been proud of how hard they worked at their jobs now found themselves fired or laid off or working only 10 hours a week. People who had never needed help from anyone found that they were too poor to buy food or clothes for their children. People who had enjoyed their leisure time in the carefree 1920s

now desperately wanted to work—if only to earn enough for a cup of soup.

By 1932 one out of every four workers in America was without a job. Families broke up as the adults and older children went anywhere they could to find work.

Irvin Junck remembers how he and three other men went searching for jobs. “We decided we were going to go up to the harvest in North Dakota. And so we got on a freight train . . . And there were more men [hoping to get hired] than there were bundles [of wheat to harvest] . . . so we kept on riding . . . We went down along the coast, West Coast, and it was practically a whole train that was just empty box cars, and people sitting in that just as thick as they could sit . . . One place, there was no place to ride in box cars,

so we caught [a train loaded with lumber] . . . And here was a man and a woman and about a six-month old baby. And we were going through that valley which is a desert, and I felt so sorry for that little baby. Oh, just imagine, it’s probably 125 degrees on that load of lumber . . . and here they were—trying to find some place to work, to live.”

People faced hard questions. Without jobs, how would they buy what they needed? Where would they get food? How would they stay warm in the winter? And healthy? What would happen to their hopes and dreams? People didn’t know what to do.

America needed help. Where would that help come from? □

The hard times of the Depression seemed like they would never end for Iowans like this woman and child. The photo was taken in January 1937.



Farm Security Administration (Russell Lee, photographer)

Strike



ISHD, Des Moines

Frustrated by low prices, some farmers organized strikes to stop delivery of farm products to market.

SOME FARMERS thought the way to raise farm prices was by organizing protest strikes in the early 1930s.

In a protest strike, people stop an activity that other people depend on. Strikers want other people to realize how much that product or activity is needed.

In Iowa and other Midwest states, some farmers organized milk strikes to protest the low prices they were paid. They blocked the roads to stop delivery of milk and cream to market. If the driver did not turn back, the strikers would dump the milk.

Striking farmers were tired of losing money on their products. “Why should we even buy gas to drive our products into town?” they said to each other. “With prices this low, we might as well throw the milk away as haul it to town.”

Strikers wanted all farmers to unite and join the strike. They believed that the protest would attract

attention. Government leaders would then realize that it cost more for farmers to produce the milk than they were paid for selling it. As one observer commented, “Maybe some of the big bugs will get it through their thick heads that we’re hurting out here.”

Strikers also believed that if the supply of milk in towns was reduced, the demand would increase and people would pay higher prices for it.

Many farmers disagreed with milk strikes. They thought that dumping milk was wasteful. They were proud of the farm products they raised and did not want to destroy them. Many depended on the money they got for selling milk and cream—even if it wasn’t much. They did not think the strikes would help raise prices.

Sometime the strikes got out of control and became violent. No one had wanted violence, but it showed how angry and desperate many American farmers were during the Depression. □

Dry, Dusty 1936

THE WEATHER of the Great Depression years brought more bad luck to Iowa—especially in 1936.

The winter of 1936 seemed like one long blizzard. Snowdrifts ten to fifteen feet high clogged the roads. Trains could not blast through the drifts on the tracks and had to be dug out. Coal supplies ran low. Schools were closed. Families could afford to heat only a few rooms in their homes.

As the spring of 1936 approached, Iowans hoped that all the snow had been a good sign. Surely the *drought* (continued dry, hot weather) of the last few summers was over.

As the weather warmed up, farmers searched the sky for signs of rain. “There would be black clouds, just as black as black, and lightning and thunder. The clouds would reach clear to the ground and they’d come rolling in,” said J. Bruce Haddock. But the clouds seemed to tease the farmers—rain fell, but “only a few drops.”

As the drought continued, the corn crop withered in the fields. “On the Fourth of July,” Haddock remembered, “the corn was just as tall as the wheel on the cultivator. And by a month later it was as though someone had pulled it back into the ground.”

States farther west were suffering from the drought, too. As plants died on the Great Plains, there was nothing to hold the soil in place. Winds picked up the soil and carried it in dark, swirling clouds of dust. These states were called the Dust

Bowl. But the clouds of dust did not stop at state boundaries. They hit Iowa, too.

“The dust settled so thickly on the pastures that the cattle would not eat,” author James Hearst wrote later about 1934-1936, “and cows, and calves, and steers wandered about bawling their hunger. We found it hard to believe. We all knew about dust storms in the dry plains of the Southwest, but for drought and wind and dust to sweep, like a plague, over the fertile fields of Blackhawk County, Iowa, seemed a bad dream.”

Dust drifted two or three feet high, around fences and buildings. Dust sifted into houses, under doors and through cracks around windows. It filled the air, darkening the day.

“The year I came here to teach,” recalled Georgette Haddock, “that fall the dust storms were here. And most of the time for several weeks that fall we’d have our lights on, because it was like evening.”

Grasshoppers thrived in the dry, hot weather. They attacked the few crops still growing.

Ruby Howorth recalled how grasshoppers on their Crawford County farm seemed to devour everything. “We left a pitchfork sit outside. You could see where they chewed into the wood on the pitchfork. Now that sounds crazy, but that’s the truth.”

The drought and dust storms taught Americans to protect their soil from wind erosion. Through better soil conservation, Americans tried to correct the disaster of the Dust Bowl years. □

Good Times



If you had lived during the 1930s, you and your family might have participated in some of the good times listed below. Despite the Great Depression, American society still enjoyed entertainment, recreation, and exciting adventures. How many of these names do you recognize?

MOVIES

A curly-haired child actress named Shirley Temple becomes a movie star. Johnny Weissmuller stars in his first Tarzan movie. The novel *Little Women* is made into a movie with Katharine Hepburn playing the character Jo. Walt Disney makes the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

MUSIC AND DANCE

The hot new dance step in the late 1930s is the Jitterbug. Many song titles seem to reflect the hard times:

“Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?”

“I Got Plenty o’ Nuthin’ ”

“Pennies from Heaven”

HEROES AND HEROINES

Pilot Charles Lindbergh continues to set flight records since his 1927 non-stop solo flight from New York to Paris. Amelia Earhart is the first woman pilot to fly alone across the Atlantic. (In 1937 her plane is lost over the Pacific.) Admiral Richard Byrd begins his second expedition to explore the South Pole.

RECREATION

Comic strips feature new science fiction and adventure stories, and new characters like Dick Tracy, Superman, and Little Orphan Annie. Monopoly becomes a best-selling board game. Vacant lots are turned into miniature golf courses. Baseball star Babe Ruth hits record numbers of home runs. The first national all-star baseball game is played in Chicago.

Getting Through the Thirties

What Iowans Did

IOWANS found new ways to help themselves and their neighbors as they lived through the hard times. Thousands of Iowans who lived in cities and towns lost their jobs. Thousands of Iowa farmers were paid less for their products than it cost to raise them. One farmer could not even sell a load of corn for enough money to buy one pair of shoes for his son—and he had eight other children.

To survive without paychecks, people tried to

find other ways of getting what they needed. They *bartered* (or traded) work for food. They shared houses and apartments with cousins and aunts and uncles. They recycled fabric and made their own clothes. They grew gardens and shared with each other.

And thousands of Iowans simply *did without*. They learned to live without many things they were used to having.

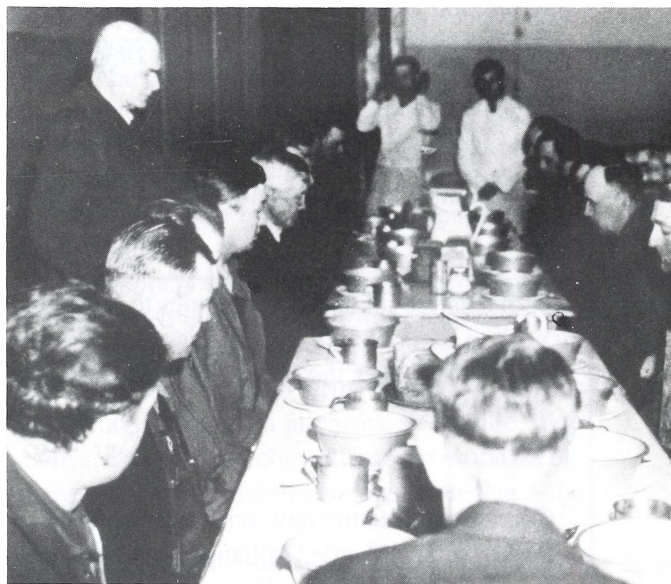
Here are some of the ways people helped each

What the Government Did

WHEN Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933, he announced a new government plan to end the Depression. He called this plan the “New Deal.”

The New Deal joined communities in trying to feed the hungry. City people were urged to plant large gardens. Hot lunch programs were set up in schools.

Americans needed jobs, too. The New Deal created thousands and thousands of jobs. The people in those jobs accomplished many projects that benefited the public. These photos show Iowans involved in New Deal projects.



Cities set up their own soup kitchens to feed the homeless.

other—told by Iowans who remember the Great Depression.

Extra jobs

“I remember one year I used to trap, and I caught \$100 worth of furs. That was worth as much as a thousand bushel of corn at that time . . . I’d [check the trap lines] before school . . . It was a pretty welcome addition to the family income because times were real hard.” (*Charles Eno*)

Food

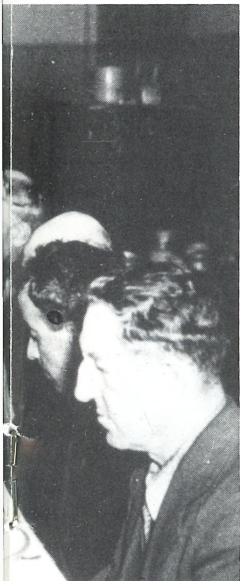
“I remember one spring when we all went out into the fields and picked greens, dandelion greens.

We brought them in and cooked them for dinner, and to me this was kind of unusual because I had never eaten greens in my life before. I thought if the rest of the family can eat them, I’ll give them a try.” (*Faye Goodwin*)

Bartering

“I know one woman that paid the doctor bill just by carrying two or three eggs to [his office in] town at a time and two or three jars of something she’d canned.” (*Almeda Gray*)

“I remember there was a family living about a mile from us. They had two girls. Their mother



Farm Security Administration (John Vachon, photographer)



Work Projects Administration

Adult education students learn new skills for better jobs.



Work Projects Administration

Beyond a New Deal sign, workers build a country road.

asked me if I would give piano lessons to them. We had a piano. I said, 'Yes, I would.' The two girls walked a mile up. Fifty cents for a half-hour lesson each. She wanted to know if I wanted to take my pay in eggs. I said, 'Yes, I would.' ” (*Ida Belle Sands*)

Recycling

“The feed sacks [that farmers bought feed in] were made out of beautiful material. We would go to the feed store when they brought in a load of feed. We would mark the sacks of feed that we wanted. We’d pick out our patterns [the designs on the material] because the patterns were just

lovely . . . One sack could make a dress for a little girl.” (*Ida Belle Sands*)

Sharing

“[A farmer nearby] had some good Hereford cattle . . . so he just told them ‘anybody that needed meat to come out there.’ They were going to butcher. They butchered four of those steers and anybody that needed meat could take it home.” (*Brownie L. MacVey*)

“We would go . . . to the store and maybe get us a quart of milk and maybe some day-old bread and day-old rolls . . . So many places they’d add



Work Projects Administration

Seamstresses use their sewing skills to make clothes.



Work Projects Administration

A woman carefully paints rows of new street signs.

something, a little bit to it. You know, you find some awful good people sometimes. And I know one place they invited us to go in the back room of the store. And we could just sit there, and it was cool, and eat, you know . . . And I imagine those people didn't have too much either." (Irvin Junck)

"I wasn't old enough to have any money of my own, and the hardship, and it was a hardship, teaches you to get along with what you've got and have respect for other people and their feelings, and you know, their plight. It just isn't a question of . . . everybody for himself . . . It was community." (Brownie L. MacVey) □



Carpenters concentrate on woodworking projects.

ASK WILD ROSIE



"Rosie, was Roosevelt's New Deal a success?"

"Many people thought that Roosevelt and his New Deal government tried to control private business too much. Others thought that Roosevelt saved the country. New Deal jobs often lasted only a few months at a time and paid low wages. But the New Deal gave people hope that things were getting better."

"Rosie, what did the New Deal do for Iowa farmers?"

"Farmers had a longer time to pay back loans. They received money to raise less livestock and crops. This would reduce the food supply and then prices would rise. Electricity was brought to farms."

"Rosie, what was happening in the rest of the world during the 1930s?"

"Nations all over the world suffered through an economic depression. In Germany, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were gaining power. As Hitler invaded surrounding nations, Europe and America feared another world war."

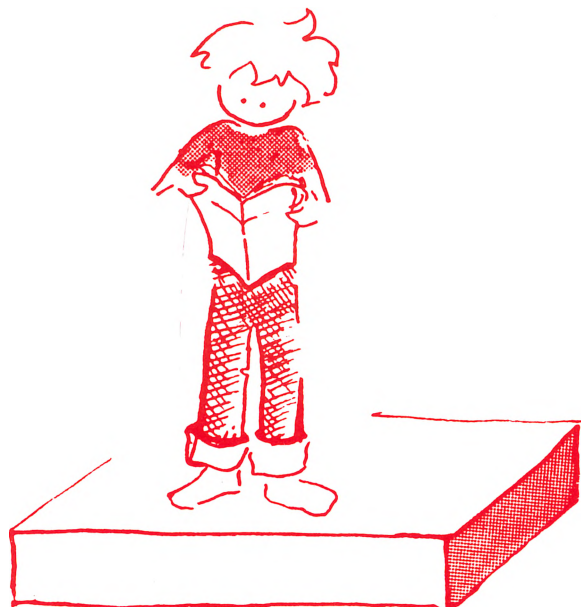
"Rosie, when did the Great Depression end?"

"Not until about 1941. After America entered World War II, factories again worked day and night to produce war supplies. Millions of workers were needed in the factories and in other businesses."

Ketchup on Bread

A Depression Play to Read or Perform

by Deborah Gore



This four-act play can be read silently or performed with the simple props listed. Set up a table and chairs in a cleared space to represent the kitchen or dining room of the Smith and Kading homes. Stage the middle of Act 3 (the milk strike) on the side of the room, using chairs and boxes as the car and road block.

Discussion Questions: see page 23.

Cast:

Narrator
Bernice Smith, farmer
Ray Smith, farmer
Howie, 11 } their children
Ethel, 8 }
Ed Kading, factory worker
Millie Kading, seamstress
Prudy, 12 } their children
Sam, 9 }
Radio Announcer
Farmer #1
Farmer #2

Props:

table and four chairs
basketball
cake pan
letters and envelopes
radio
sewing basket, needle, thread, fabric
large sticks

Note: The words in italics and brackets [*like this*] tell the actors what they should be doing as they speak the lines or what tone of voice they should use.

ACT ONE

Narrator: It is September 1926, in the Smith farmhouse near Sioux City, Iowa. Home from school, Howie enters the kitchen in his typical manner, bouncing a basketball. But today he seems frustrated.

Howie: Well, I told Joe and Morty today. I told them I couldn't shoot baskets after school anymore.

Bernice: I'm proud of you, Howie. I know you'll miss spending the time with your friends, but your father really needs your help milking the cows. He's had such a rough time getting all of the chores done. We just don't have enough money to pay a hired man to help us with the farmwork these days.

Ethel: *[carrying cake pan]* This coffee cake is ready!

Bernice: Thank you, dear. That makes five cakes we've baked today. I hope we can sell them in town tomorrow.

Howie: *[sits down at kitchen table]* I still don't understand why I can't stay after school and play ball. It doesn't seem fair.

Bernice: Stop your grumbling and get on out to the barn! *[She looks out the window.]* Oh, here comes your father.

[Ray Smith enters and sits down at the table. He takes off his cap. Ethel hands him a glass of water. He looks tired. He pulls an envelope out of his pocket and opens it.]

Ray: Here's a letter from your sister Millie, dear. I'll read it. *[Ray reads the following letter aloud.]*

Dear Folks,

Hope things are better on your farm. Has the

bank given you more time to pay back the loan? Here in Dubuque, the money situation is getting worse every day. Everybody with jobs connected with farming is very worried that they may lose their jobs. The people who work for farm supply companies are getting laid off. Businesses in town are not making much money. I guess it's because Iowa farmers are feeling mighty broke these days and don't have any money to buy things with. I'm so glad Ed has steady work with the milling company. I have been sewing clothes for extra money. Even Sam has a newspaper route. Every little bit helps! Wish we could visit you. Our new Chevrolet is so fine! But I wonder if we should have bought a new car this year. Now we can't afford to buy the gas to drive from one end of Iowa to the other—even though the kids would love to see their cousins!

Love to all, Millie

Bernice: Oh, I hate to see this trouble spread all across Iowa. It sounds like even city people are having problems.

Howie: Well, I still bet city people get paid more than farmers do.

Ethel: You mean the low prices we get for our milk and butter?

Ray: If those prices don't go up soon, we're going to lose this farm. We're so behind on making loan payments. The bank isn't going to wait much longer.

Ethel: *[looks shocked]* Selling the farm would be terrible! Grandpa settled this land. This has always been home for the Smiths. I WON'T

move! *[She runs out of the room.]*

Ray: Well, maybe things will get better soon. They can't get much worse.

ACT TWO

Narrator: Now it is three years later—October 29, 1929. In their Dubuque home, Millie and Ed Kading and the children sit down to dinner. The radio plays music in the background.

Sam: Prudy, what do you think we'll have for supper tonight? Biscuits and gravy, or ketchup on bread?

Prudy: *[laughs]* I hope both! I'm getting so sick of this food. Remember when we used to have roast beef on Sundays?

Ed: I guess I better tell you all. I lost my job down at the mill. They had to lay off 100 workers today. They said business has gotten worse each year. They couldn't afford to pay all of us.

Narrator: The Kadings sit silently. They are all thinking quietly what this means to the family. Suddenly their thoughts are interrupted by the urgent voice of the radio news announcer.

Radio Announcer: Today on Wall Street, the New York Stock Exchange recorded the lowest stock prices in its history. As prices crashed, panic spread throughout the financial district and the nation. Many banks have closed, as customers rushed to pull out their money in savings. Stay tuned to this station for more information.

Sam: What does it mean?

Millie: *[looking worried]* Oh, what a dark day! Ed loses his job. Now this on Wall Street. How are we going to make it? How is anybody going to make it?

ACT THREE

Narrator: It is three years later—September 1932. Businesses have failed. Banks have closed. People are hungry and out of work. In Iowa, farmers are losing their farms every day. At the Smith farm near Sioux City, Ethel enters the kitchen, where her mother is sewing.

Bernice: How was school, Ethel?

Ethel: Fine, but I feel so sorry for Janie McDonald. She doesn't want to go to school anymore because her clothes are so shabby and worn out.

Bernice: Oh, we can't worry about clothes these days. We're all feeling pretty shabby. But I have some extra feed sacks here left over from the quilt I made. Does Jane like blue? We'll just sew up a dress for her as a surprise.

Narrator: An hour later, Bernice and her daughter get into their old Ford and drive toward the McDonald farm. The car slows as they approach a group of men blocking the road and holding large sticks.

Farmer #1: Sorry for the disruption, Bernice. But we have to check. Are you taking any milk into town?

Farmer #2: Why isn't your husband here with us? You tell him that we farmers have to unite in these milk strikes. Unless we all stop delivering milk to towns, nobody in Washington, D.C. is going to try and help farmers.

Bernice: *[angrily]* You really think this strike will do any good? Of course I don't have any milk in this car! We're just driving over to the McDonald farm.

Narrator: The strikers step aside and the Smith

car drives through. Later that night, the family gathers around the kitchen table.

Bernice: It seems like such a waste to dump all of that good milk! I read in the newspapers how people are starving in Chicago, and here we are, throwing milk away. It doesn't make sense.

Ray: Nothing makes sense these days. But what should farmers do? We haven't gotten decent prices since 1920—twelve years ago. Half the families in this neighborhood are losing their farms. We can't afford to buy you kids new shoes before winter!

Ethel: Howie, Janie McDonald told me today that they may have to move off the farm. I felt so bad when I heard . . .

Ray: *[interrupting angrily]* Stop talking about it! Do we always have to go on and on about how bad life is? *[He stalks out of the room.]*

Bernice: Forgive your father, kids. He's under a lot of pressure. He doesn't want to lose this farm. It's been in the Smith family for almost 80 years. But whatever happens, we all have to pull together. We have each other. Remember that. Now let's get to bed. It's been a long day.

Howie: In a minute, Mom. I want to finish this letter to Sam.

[As Ethel and Bernice leave, Howie pulls out a letter to his cousin. He reads it aloud.]

Dear Sam,

Do you still have your job delivering papers? We can't even afford to buy newspapers anymore—or anything else. But at least we have food. Mom's been canning vegetables from the garden all summer. She trades some for sugar and coffee from the grocer. How did your

garden turn out? Maybe next summer I can come and teach my city cousin how to grow a big garden like ours. Maybe I'll be a city cousin next summer. We went to an auction last week. One of our neighbors couldn't make loan payments. So the bank that loaned them the money had an auction to sell the animals and machinery. All the neighbors came and tried to stop the auction. I wish somebody would just stop this depression! Write soon.

Your cousin, Howie.

ACT FOUR

Narrator: It is May 1933. Under the new president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, several laws have been passed in an effort to end the Depression. At the Kading house in Dubuque, Ed strides into the kitchen.

Ed: *[happily]* I found a part-time job with the government to build roads! Now we can start paying our bills and get back on our feet.

Millie: That's great! Do you think things are going to change now that there's a new president?

Ed: I just don't know, Millie. Things are so bad everywhere. But at least I have a job—for awhile anyway. Hey, let's celebrate! There's a new Shirley Temple movie in town. Today I feel like we can afford to go have some fun. Prudy! Sam! Let's go. This family's had enough hard times to last a decade. Today, just for one day, let's have some good times.

THE END

History-Makers



DEAR READERS:

The story below was written by Matt Gunderman, who is in 8th grade at Stilwell Junior High School in West Des Moines. His teacher is Karen Biggs. Matt's story won Honorable Mention in the "Write Women Back into History" essay contest. Matt's story tells how his grandmother—like other Iowans in this *Goldfinch*—coped with hard times during the Great Depression.

All essays entered in the contest will be added to the Manuscripts Collection of the Iowa State Historical Department. Congratulations to Matt and the other winners listed here, and to all who entered the contest.

First Place: **Frank Sackett** (7th grade,

Middle School, Spencer; teacher, Judy Knight).

Second Place: **Christine Faber** (8th grade, Williamsburg Community Schools, Williamsburg; teacher, Diana Sherlock).

Third Place: **Brent Johnson** (7th grade, Manson Junior-Senior High School, Manson; teacher, Kim Rost).

Honorable Mention: **Mary Hutson** (8th grade, Hoyt Junior High School, Des Moines; teacher, Roberta Manguson). **Jenny Synhorst** (7th grade, Middle School, Spencer; teacher, Judy Knight). **Nam Van Cao** (7th grade, Middle School, Spencer; teacher, Judy Knight). **Margie Welsh** (8th grade, Central Lee Junior High School, Argyle; teacher, Eunice Beckett).

by Matt Gunderman

ON A BITTER cold winter morning on the twentieth of January during the year of 1899 in Columbus, Nebraska, Agnes Gunderman, my grandmother, was born. She was born into a family of thirteen children on a 160-acre farm in central Nebraska. When she was thirteen her father died of typhoid fever.

When Agnes was seventeen years old she graduated from Columbus High School, which very few female farm children did at this time. She went to a college and stayed for one year. She earned a diploma which allowed her to teach in an elementary school. After she finished college she taught in a small one-room school in rural Nebraska.

While attending a teachers' conference in Columbus, she met a young banker from Atlantic, Iowa.

Agnes and Harry got married a year later and settled in Atlantic.

Five years later a period of bad luck started for the Gundermans. First the economy collapsed, and then the bank closed, which left her husband unemployed. Next Harry caught smallpox about the time Agnes delivered her first child. She lived in fear that she or the baby would develop the pox but luckily they were spared.

During the Depression Agnes worked hard to take care of her family and others. She earned money by caring for two elderly women.

She started entering contests and was soon one of the top contest winners in the state. She won a total of four thousand dollars in various cash prizes. She won other prizes such as food, toys, radios, tricycles, livestock, and grain which she

usually sold for cash. On their small acreage she raised chickens and cows which supplied them with eggs, meat, and milk. She also had a large garden which provided fresh vegetables in the summer, and what was left she canned for the winter. They sold honey from their bees and produce from their orchard.

After the Depression, times became better and Harry returned to work. Several years later he developed rheumatic fever and became a semi-invalid. He died August 24, 1952.

Agnes died on October 20, 1981, and is survived by two children and five grandchildren. She was a credit to all women as well as to her community and state. Even though her name doesn't appear in history books, she, and other women like her, are the foundation of our society. □

Interview Great-Uncle Pete

THE GREAT Depression was only fifty years ago. Perhaps you could interview an older relative or family friend who lived through it. Here are some hints on how to interview.

Choose a specific topic

The Great Depression is too big a topic for a short interview. Choose something more specific about the 1930s, such as: family celebrations; feeding the family; recreation; how electricity changed life on the farm; weather; or finding work. Read more about the 1930s in your history book or the encyclopedia. Write a list of questions for the interview. Questions that ask *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, *who*, and *how* are better than questions that are answered with *yes* or *no*.

Set up the interview

Contact the person you want to interview (let's call him "Great-Uncle Pete" here). Tell him politely that you are eager to learn more about his life during the Great Depression. If he agrees to an interview, plan a time (30 to 60 minutes) and place (indoors is best, and make sure you have your parents' approval). Tell him your specific topic so he can begin thinking about it.

Gather your tools

You will need paper and pencils, a tape recorder, a good-quality tape, an extension cord, and batteries. Practice operating the recorder.

Begin the interview

Set up the recorder and make sure it is picking up

voices clearly. If the recorder makes Great-Uncle Pete nervous, explain that you can listen more closely to him if the recorder is on because you won't have to write at the same time. If he still objects, use paper and pencil.

Tell him your specific topic again and begin your questions. You will probably add questions to your list as you listen. Sometimes he may stop talking. Silence is all right; it takes time to remember the past. And sometimes he may talk about other things than your topic. You might need to interrupt politely and say, "That's really interesting. But we only have a little time today. Could you tell me more about the jobs you had?" (or whatever the topic is).

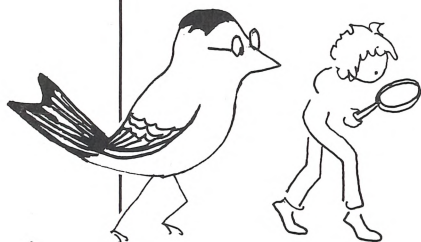
Back at home

While the interview is still fresh in your mind, review your notes and the tape. Write Great-Uncle Pete a thank-you note, and ask him anything that is still not clear to you. Label the tape and notes with the date and names.

What have you learned?

What did Great-Uncle Pete's tone of voice tell you about his memories of the Depression? Does the interview help explain attitudes in your family about money and jobs, about not wasting food, and about other parts of life that were hard during the 1930s? You have discovered and recorded valuable information about one American's life during the Depression and about your family. Write a short report on your topic or share the tape with your family. □

History Mystery



Work Projects Administration

CLUES:

1. This footbridge is in Ledges State Park in Boone County.
2. This photograph was taken in 1939.
3. The bridge is similar to hundreds of other bridges in Iowa parks.

What does this bridge have to do with the Great Depression? (Answer on page 23.)



Pass It On

Pass this page on to someone who might share your interest in the Great Depression and the farming depression in the 1920s. A teacher or parent, a grandparent or friend? These projects would be fun to do together.

Talking about the Play

The play explores the differences in the effect of the Depression on rural and urban Iowans, and the emotional reaction and confusion of families during hard times. Consider these discussion questions:

1. How did the Great Depression affect farm families like the Smiths? How did it affect city families like the Kadings?
2. Why were some Iowa farmers holding milk strikes in 1932? Do you think that was a good idea? Why or why not? Discuss other protest strikes in America's past or present.
3. How do the families' experiences compare with the farming crisis today? How are they alike or different?
4. The Kading and Smith families often wrote to each other about their problems. Can you think of any other people the families might have contacted about their problems? (Teachers? Neighbors?) Why is it important to let other people know about problems you are having? How do you feel after you have shared your problems with someone who will listen?
5. Find lines in the play where the characters show the emotions they are feeling, such as anger, sadness, relief, confusion, or hope. Choose some of these lines and show with your face and your

body how you would feel if you were that character. How do *you* act when you feel angry, happy, confused, or encouraged?

Useful Books for History Projects

For more thorough discussions of student projects (elementary through high school) on oral history interviews or local history, consult these: *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)*, by Thad Sitton, George L. Mehaffy, and O.L. Davis, Jr. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983); and *Who Put the Cannon in the Courthouse Square? A Guide to Uncovering the Past*, by Kay Cooper (New York: Walker and Company, 1985).

This Land Is Your Land

Do you know the song "This Land Is Your Land"? Woody Guthrie wrote the song about the Great Depression. Guthrie was a wandering folksinger and song writer from Oklahoma (part of the Dust Bowl during the 1930s). The land was too dry to grow anything, and thousands of families headed to California to look for jobs picking fruit and vegetables. In your library try to find all the verses of Guthrie's song. When you sing the song, think about the Depression and why Guthrie wrote the song.

Answers

History Mystery:

The footbridge in Ledges State Park was built by workers in New Deal jobs. The shelters, bridges, and bath houses in your favorite park may have been built during the Depression—by a nation eager to get back on the job. Other New Deal workers cleared snow off of roads, built lakes, and planted forests. They built roads and dams, park shelters and swimming pools, hospitals and school playgrounds. They painted murals on post office walls and wrote books.

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This is the last issue of the Goldfinch until school starts again next fall. Enjoy your summer. See you in September!

