

Iowa SHARES • Phrenology • Meskwaki & Amana Society • 1940 Census • Cigars • Ellison Orr

Fall & Winter 2011 • \$7

Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers,

Anyone who has ventured into my cluttered office knows that I stockpile ideas—perhaps to a fault. My file cabinets are crammed with notes, photocopies of images, intriguing leads. Every day in a place like the State Historical Society of Iowa, one stumbles onto fascinating material.

For instance, years ago I ran across an 1860s broadside for a series of lectures on phrenology. Hmmm. I'd heard of phrenology—something about "reading" the bumps on your head. I pulled out a fresh file folder, labeled it "phrenology," and dropped in a copy of the broadside.

If you research the past, you know that serendipity is your best friend. You run across gems in the most unexpected places, when you're least expecting them.

While reading a diary of a farm woman, I came upon another mention of phrenology. While searching for Civil War stories in an 1860s national agricultural publication, I spotted ads for training in phrenology. Knowing of my interest, staff members mentioned rare examples of phrenological charts and early books and pamphlets on the subject right here in our collections. So over the years this particular file grew slowly, waiting for the right conditions to become a feature in this magazine.

Enter Tim Walch. Tim was director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum for several years. After he retired, he volunteered to work on the magazine six hours a week. So one day I handed Tim my phrenology file.

Just set Tim loose at a microfilm reader or with an online newspaper database! After several days of combing Iowa newspapers for the search term "phrenology," Tim brought me more than a hundred articles on what I had thought was an obscure, though intriguing, bit of social history.

Eager to get into the act, I did a little

sleuthing, too. Armed with my trusty scout Google, I discovered that the first president of the State University of Iowa, Amos Dean, was lecturing on phrenology in Albany in the 1830s and became a leader in the movement. (By the way, Dean stayed in the East and never actually showed up for his job in Iowa.)

Google also sniffed out another Iowa phrenology connection. In the 1850s in Davenport, a house was built in the shape of an octagon. That fad in house construction, at least in the early years, was apparently based on phrenologist Orson Fowler's belief that the circle was the perfect shape in nature and conducive to good health. For house construction, an octagon was the next best thing.

Even as late as 1939, the word "phrenology" showed up. An article in the *Des Moines Register and Tribune* reported on gypsies who were temporarily living on Walnut Street in Des Moines: "The men are coppersmiths, and the women are selling books on phrenology."

On a variety of topics, Tim is churning out articles for the magazine, taking my ideas and developing them into well-researched and well-written articles. If you dig deeply into newspapers as Tim does, you'll emerge with a core sample of Iowa history on almost any topic. Ask those who have done it. It's tedious—but rewarding. Searching newspapers online for a particular phrase or date or locale is infinitely easier.

But nothing compares to strolling through an old newspaper day by day. That's when the fabric of a community reveals itself. When you see how the local fits into the national, and often the global. When the present is explained by the past.

Though I'm not the first to say it, Iowa's newspapers are truly the diaries of our communities. They simply have to be preserved. They are irreplaceable.

So are volunteers like Tim Walch.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

Iowa Heritage Illustrated

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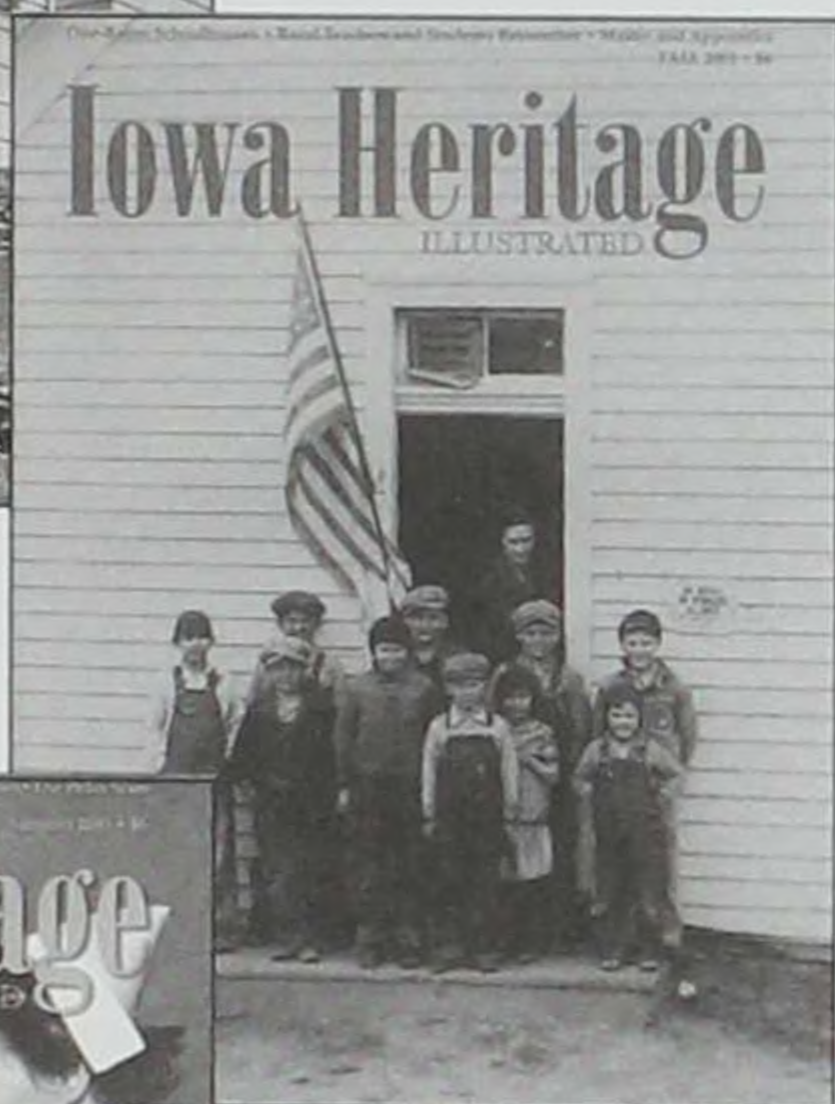
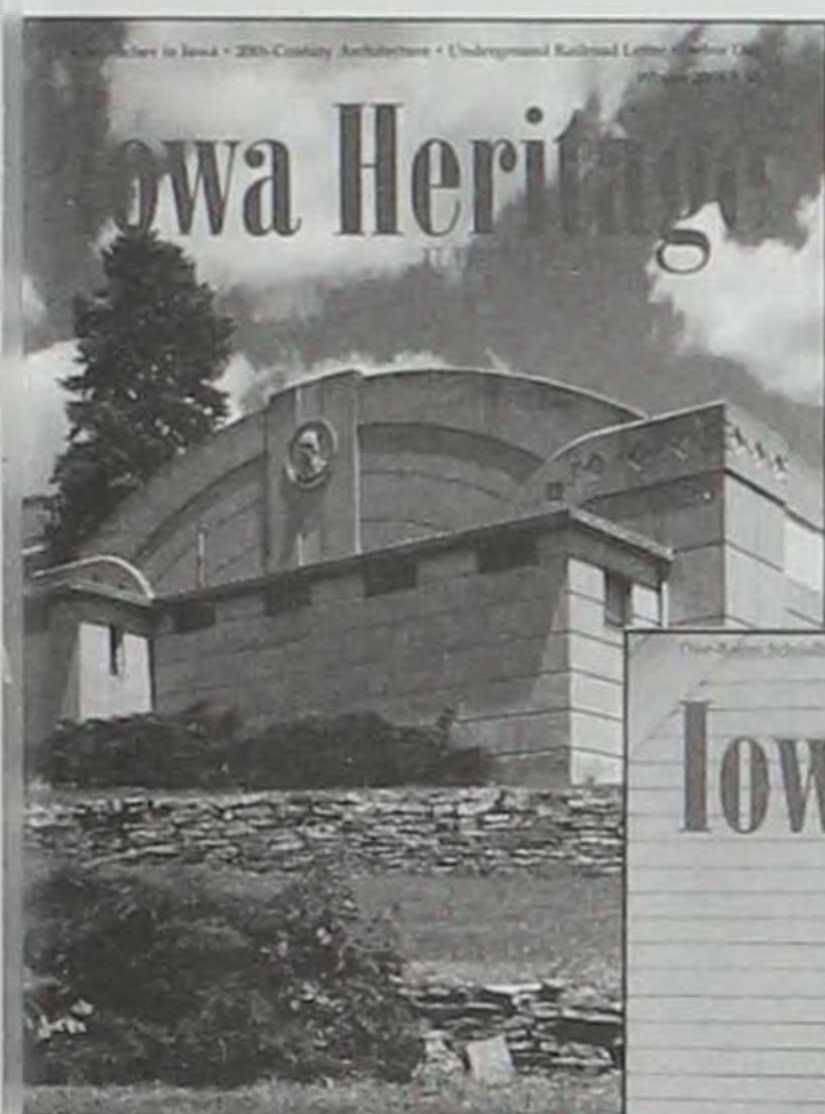
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STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY of IOWA

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Fall & Winter 2011, 92:3,4

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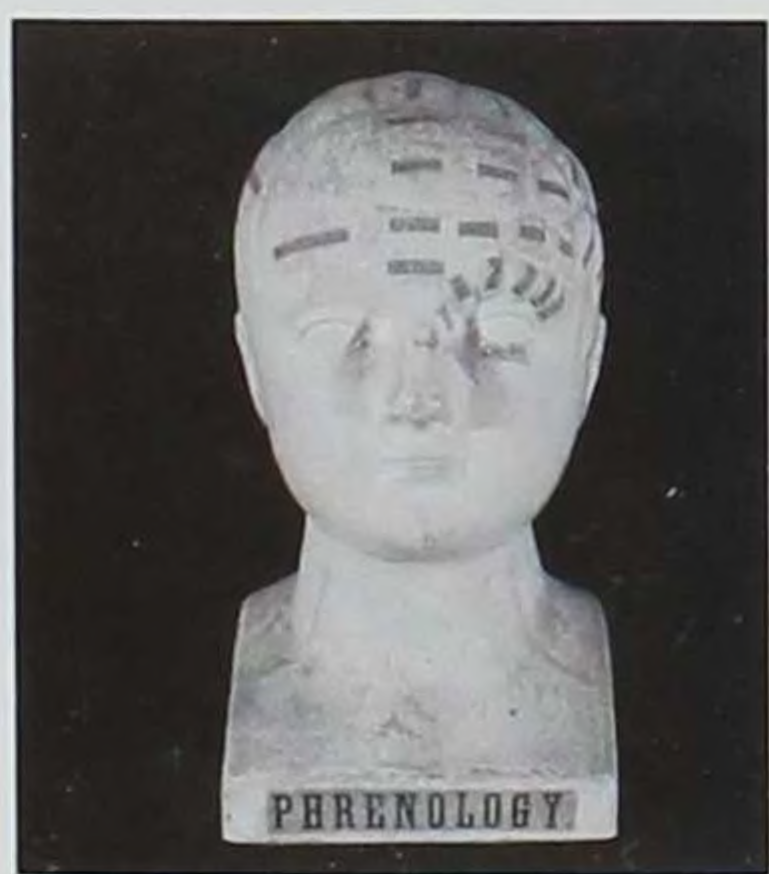
Iowa Heritage

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On the Cover

Plaster heads like this one were standard equipment for phrenologists, who believed that the contours of the skull provided a roadmap to character traits. Phrenology began as an orthodox scientific discipline, but it became part of popular culture as it hit the lecture circuit.



A family at home along the Yellow River, below Pinneys Springs, Allamakee County, 1914. Ellison Orr photographed several log houses in northeast Iowa. Most were abandoned.

The World of Ellison Orr

by Michael J. Perry



SHSI (IOWA CITY); ELLISON ORR COLLECTION

Born in 1857, Ellison James Orr wore many hats in his 93 years of life in Iowa. Farmer, teacher, surveyor, county clerk, telephone company manager, and archaeologist were professions that kept Orr busy. His avocational interests also filled up his time.

Early in the 20th century, Orr took up photography, a hobby that he turned to whenever he found a few spare moments or felt the need to capture on film the natural and cultural world of Iowa.

The photos here are a mere sample of a larger collection of nearly 350 photos that document his wide-ranging interests.

Left: Orr photographed two workers in Guttenberg, 1916. One man watches from below as another is suspended from a utility pole. At one time Orr was manager of a telephone company, so he may have had a particular interest in scenes like this one.



Orr stands with a walking stick on an island in the Mississippi River, near Waukon Junction, circa 1920s. Waukon Junction is about 23 miles southeast of Waukon, Orr's hometown. Exploring the natural world was one of Orr's consuming interests even as a child.



A family at home along the Yellow River, below Pinneys Springs, Allamakee County, 1914. Ellison Orr photographed several log houses in northeast Iowa. Most were abandoned.

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By water clear enough to show reflections, a woman balances on a log as she fishes for sucker in Village Creek, which flows into the Mississippi.

Northeast Iowa

Many of the scenes Orr photographed were of his native northeast Iowa, especially Allamakee County. Curious and observant, he was a self-trained naturalist, interested in botany, geology, and ornithology. His childhood memoir describes prairies and sloughs, birds and beaver dams, wildcats and rattlesnakes.



Mushrooms in soft maple woods on the Turkey River bottoms near Elkader, 1914. Orr often photographed close-ups of wildflowers as well.

Right: Two citizens of Ion, about 1915. Ion is now an Allamakee County ghost town, along the Yellow River and four miles west of the Mississippi.

Below: Fishing by the Yellow River dam at Forest Mills, 1914. In the foreground, a dog cools off in the river while fetching a stick.



ALL THREE PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY); ELLISON ORR COLLECTION





From his childhood, Orr recalled, "Though the meadow lark and the bobolink were very common, their nests were exceedingly hard to find." As an adult, Orr noted on the back of the photo the location of this meadowlark nest in a roadside ditch as NW¼, NW¼, Section 23, Union Prairie Township, Allamakee County, 1947.

BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY); ELLISON ORR COLLECTION



"In those [pioneer] days," Orr wrote, "the only fences were of rails ten feet long, split out of oak and elm logs. The slippery elm, *Ulmus fulva*, was supposed to make the most durable ones. Out of these was built a very substantial zig-zag fence. The bottom rails were laid on a small flat stone or block of wood. The pioneers believed that if the fence was built in the 'dark of the moon,' it would sink into the ground, but if it was built in the 'light of the moon' it would not." Orr added, "Only a few of the lanky, scrub, half-wild cattle of that day ever acquired the high art of jumping. [A rail fence] was said to be horse high, pig tight, and bull stout." Although this Allamakee County photo was taken in 1940, this old fence retains the typical eight to ten horizontal rails and remnants of the vertical stakes.



OFFICE OF THE STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST; CHARLES R. KEYES COLLECTION

Amidst tall prairie in Allamakee County, Orr (right) and Charles Reuben Keyes (next to him) search for evidence of a burial and village area associated with the Oneota culture, 1500–1600 A.D. As director of the new Iowa Archaeological Survey, Keyes hired Orr as field supervisor and then assistant director. Orr was 77 when he was hired. As a young man Orr had learned surveying skills from a Civil War topographical engineer.

Southwest Iowa

Orr spent nearly eight months in the Glenwood locality, conducting extensive surveys and excavations of what would commonly be called the Glenwood prehistoric earthlodge culture. As part of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, the work was funded through the New Deal's Works Progress Administration. It resulted in the most detailed information yet recovered about American Indians who lived in the region some 700 to 800 years ago. Orr's data on the Glenwood culture are still valuable resources for modern archaeologists.



During a November lunch break, WPA workers huddle around a portable stove in a trench at an earthlodge excavation. Note the identical lunchboxes, perhaps provided by the WPA.

Below: Digging by hand, workers hoped to find evidence of a Glenwood earthlodge, such as remains of the support posts, central fire hearth, and large pits for food and refuse. Many of the earthlodge locations were marked by depressions on the surface, giving Orr a good idea where to dig.

BOTH PHOTOS: OFFICE OF THE STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST; CHARLES R. KEYES COLLECTION



Northwest Iowa



OFFICE OF THE STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST: CHARLES R. KEYES COLLECTION

Orr's work with the Iowa Archaeological Survey took him all over the state. He began by leading a tour in northwest Iowa to map and excavate ancient villages and mound sites. Orr's camera captured some of the area's scenic locations, such as Jasper Pool in Gitchie Manitou Park (left). The rocks are Sioux quartzite. While in the area, he photographed the Loess Hills and the remains of what was believed to be an Indian fish dam (or weir).

Right: A spry 81 years of age, Orr stands by his surveyor's transit in 1938. The circle below the transit is evidence of an earthlodge fireplace. He retired from the survey that year but continued to visit archaeological sites, take notes, and work with amateur archaeologists. He died in 1951 at the age of 93.

Michael J. Perry is a project archaeologist at the Office of the State Archaeologist in Iowa City. He has found the work of Charles Keyes and Ellison Orr to be most inspiring and draws upon their archival documents and artifacts regularly in the course of his own research.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City center) maintains 341 photographs as part of its Ellison Orr Collection. In addition there are prints pasted into documents written by Orr; his photo albums, 1910s–1920s; and individual photos, 1940s.

One album includes photos by his son James, who worked on highway surveying and construction projects in 1921 in Cedar Falls and O'Brien County. Those photos offer a rare and detailed glimpse of early highway paving.

Additional photos by Ellison Orr date to his 1930s work with the Iowa Archaeological Survey, and appear in his project reports. Originals of the archaeology-related photos are maintained by Effigy Mounds National Monument and the Office of the State Archaeologist as part of the Charles R. Keyes Collection.

Orr's writings, particularly "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy," edited by former State Archaeologist Marshall McKusick and published in the *Annals of Iowa* in 1971, add context and color to his images.



SHSI (IOWA CITY): ELLISON ORR COLLECTION

Die Colonisten und die Indianer

The Unusual Relationship
Between the Meskwaki Nation
and the Amana Society

by Peter Hoehnle

A Meskwaki woman and two children pass by a man from the Amanas (possibly the author's great-great-grandfather William F. Moershel). In the background is the Zimmermann Kitchen House—now the Ronneburg Restaurant. (Photo by Friedrich Oehl)



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Two of Iowa's most ethnically and culturally distinct groups—the Meskwaki Nation and the Community of True Inspiration—chose to isolate themselves from American society in order to protect their religious and cultural traditions. The Inspirationists took the highly unusual step of forming a communal society. The Meskwaki purchased land, an action then without precedent among American Indian tribes.

Yet these two groups, of such different origins, ended up living within 40 miles of each other along the

Iowa River and interacting through trade and friendship beginning in the 1850s.

Known initially as the Community of True Inspiration, the Amana Society originated in the religious tumult of early 18th-century Europe. Founded in 1714, this Christian sect practiced farming and believed that certain specially endowed individuals, known as *Werkzeuge* (instruments), were inspired to deliver God's word. Like many Pietist sects then, the Inspirationists were pacifists, refused to swear oaths, and did not observe a water baptism ceremony, believing that

baptism by the Holy Spirit came to the true believer directly and that the outward symbol of water was unnecessary. They worshiped in simple prayer meetings conducted by lay elders. The group suffered decades of persecution from unsympathetic religious and state authorities. In 1842, under the leadership of *Werkzeug* Christian Metz, the Inspirationists liquidated their German assets and began the process of relocating to the United States.

The Meskwaki, or "People of the Red Earth," trace their lineage to the eastern coast of the present United States, including the Niagara Falls area. The tribe originated within the Central Algonquian tradition and shares cultural and linguistic characteristics with the Sauk, Kickapoo, Menominee, and Potawatomi. Meskwaki oral tradition places the tribe in Ohio and southern Michigan. By the time of their first recorded contact with Europeans in 1665 or 1666, they had been driven to the Green Bay area of Wisconsin. At that time they may have numbered as many as 12,000 people.

The French traders and missionaries who encountered the Meskwaki found them fiercely independent in their efforts to disrupt the French fur trade. Over time, the Meskwaki emerged as an important political, economic, and military force in the Great Lakes region. By 1712 tensions between the Meskwaki and the French resulted in the start of a series of wars that continued until the 1730s. The French sought the complete extermination of the Meskwaki and, despite prolonged and fierce resistance by the Meskwaki, nearly succeeded; the tribe was greatly diminished, down to less than 1,000. The tribe sought refuge in 1733 with their allies, the Sauk, in Illinois, and eventually established small communities in what would become Iowa. The Meskwaki and Sauk remained distinct tribes, with separate leaders, villages, and cultures. In 1804 some Sauk members visiting St. Louis signed a treaty ceding their Illinois lands to the United States. The treaty recognized these Sauk as representatives of "the United Sac and Fox Tribes." The Meskwaki (mistakenly called the Fox) were thus legally tied to the Sauk (the Sac) by the government.

Because of land cessions demanded by the federal government in the 1830s, the Meskwaki began to move farther into Iowa Territory, away from the Mississippi. Subsequent treaties led to the cession of all Meskwaki land in Iowa and a treaty stipulation to relocate to reservation land in Kansas. Continuing their tradition of resistance and resilience, however, many Meskwaki remained in Iowa.

The Inspirationists' first contact with American Indians (though not the Meskwaki tribe) occurred

in November 1842, when a five-member group from Germany explored land options on the former Seneca Indian Reservation near Buffalo, New York. Prominent Germans whom the Inspirationists had contacted upon their arrival in the city had recommended that they look at the reservation, which was about to be opened to settlement.

The Inspirationists soon began negotiations to pur-



This is believed to be Sauhetenoqua Leaf, standing by one of the Amana kitchen houses. She wears a traditional Amana blanket. (Photo by Friedrich Oehl)

chase a 5,000-acre tract from the Ogden Land Company, a private firm then acquiring land from the Seneca. Company officials assured the Inspirationists that they would have immediate possession. Only later did the Germans learn that the Seneca had been promised a two-year period to remain on the site, and since Ogden had not completed its purchase of the reservation lands, it could not provide a valid deed. The result of this situation was an ongoing struggle over property rights.

Negotiations with individual Seneca did provide the Inspirationists with some tracts of land by the spring of 1843, when the first group arrived from Germany and settled on the property, some occupying recently vacated Seneca cabins. The Seneca who remained continued to press their claim to the property. Ultimately, the Inspirationists agreed to pay the Seneca a fee for a one-year contract during which the Seneca agreed "not to undertake anything to harm the settlers."

The Inspirationists established four villages on the Buffalo Creek lands: Lower Ebenezer, New Ebenezer, Middle Ebenezer (at the site of the Seneca community known as Jack Berrytown), and Upper Ebenezer (at the site of a Seneca village known as Dyo-nah-da-eeh or "hemlock elevation"). They created a formal communal system, in which all land and property were held in common, families ate in central kitchens, and church elders meted out job assignments.

Interaction was reasonably peaceful as the two groups struggled to coexist on the contested reservation land. But misunderstandings, faulty information, and questionable dealings by the Ogden Land Company led to conflict and animosity. Eventually the Seneca appealed to the U.S. government to negate the treaty that had transferred land to Ogden; this would negate Ogden's contract to acquire the land and therefore invalidate the Inspirationists' contract. The Inspirationists successfully petitioned Congress to sustain the treaty. But with the encroachment by the city of Buffalo, they now faced higher real estate prices and water-power disputes. In fall 1854 they dispatched a committee of four to look at land in Kansas Territory.

Their guide was Charles Journeycake, a prominent Delaware tribal leader. Journeycake showed them several tracts of largely Indian-owned land in the eastern portion of the territory. But they were

unable to reach a purchase agreement. This, coupled with sickness among committee members and, perhaps, increasing turmoil over slavery, influenced the committee to abandon Kansas. Returning to Ebenezer, the committee reported unfavorably on their Kansas search.

A second committee visited eastern Iowa, leading to a decision to begin to buy land, and in June 1855, a third committee began purchasing land in the vicinity of the Iowa River—3,300 acres of government land and more from speculators and farmers. They started constructing homes and barns and tilling the soil.

The coincidences of the Inspirationists' attempts to purchase land near Meskwaki lands—first in Kansas and later in eastern Iowa—do not surprise Meskwaki members today. According to tribal historian Jonathan Lantz Buffalo, a Meskwaki/Inspirationist geographic connection had existed even in the region of Niagara Falls and Ebenezer, where the Inspirationists first settled, because as far back as the early 1700s, a small group of Meskwaki had been absorbed and acculturated by the Seneca in that area.

The Iowa land that the Inspirationists bought was already known to the Meskwaki; they had hunted, fished, and gathered food from the prairies, woods, and waterways as they moved into the interior of Iowa as a result of land



Above and right: Both the Meskwaki and Amana people relied on the land by hunting, fishing, harvesting timber, and gathering wild edibles.

cessions in the 1830s. The tribe followed a traditional pattern of planting in spring, hunting in summer, and harvesting in late summer; during the winter they lived in smaller, often family-based, campsites.

In 1839 and 1840, Meskwaki leaders Wacoshashe and Poweshiek moved their bands to a site on the south side of the Iowa River. These combined bands gave the Meskwaki village a population of at least 500 people. Nearby, the federal government, as it had for many tribes, established a model farm for the Meskwaki and hired a man to plow and fence some 800 acres for them to farm in Euro-American fashion. At the same time a fur trader named Patterson, employed by Pierre Chouteau & Co. (formerly known as the American Fur Company), established a trading house nearby. For three years, the Meskwaki lived in the village during the summer, trading with Patterson, cultivating small garden plots in their own ways, hunting, fishing, and burying their dead. In 1842, the government demanded that they leave the area. But many Meskwaki were intent on remaining and maintaining their traditional ways rather than moving farther west.

After the Meskwaki movements westward, Patterson's trading house became the first general store in Iowa County, serving the needs of incoming white settlers. The 800 acres that had been cleared for, but never farmed by, the Meskwaki eventually came into the possession of Charles E. Whiting, who sold the land to the Amana Society on Independence Day 1855. Adjacent to the land, the Inspirationists began

to establish South Amana, the third of seven villages, in 1857. (The first two Inspirationist villages were on the north side of the river.) The timber along the river and just west of South Amana became known as *die Inje Busch* (the Indian Woods), a name still used today.

A story among the Meskwaki, but which does not appear in Amana sources, is that the Amana Society provided funds for the Meskwaki to purchase 80 acres of land in Tama County, which formed the nucleus of their tribal settlement, in 1857. According to deed records, about ten miles away the Inspirationists were also buying land, 1,340 acres, between about 1855 and 1857. The land had been bought either in the event that it would be needed for another Amana village or simply because it was public land available at government prices and could be sold later at a profit. They held this land until the late 1860s.

A strong sense of religiosity marked both groups. The religious beliefs of the Inspirationists were the primary reason they had migrated from Germany and New York and adopted communal living. The Meskwaki have appreciated that the Inspirationists never attempted to convert them, unlike the white missionaries who had encroached on the settlement in the late 19th century. As Johnathan Buffalo says, "One of the connections of the Amana people and the Meskwaki is that we're both very religious, and without trying to convert each other. We respected their religion, their belief. And they recognized us as very religious people."





COURTESY GORDON KELLENBERGER

Selma Kellenberger Tschopp (left) and her sister Frieda Kellenberger Schoettmer pose with a few Meskwaki camping near West or High Amana, circa 1920s. For this occasion, the sisters are not dressed in traditional Amana women's garb.

Modern Meskwaki tradition suggests that not only were tribal members anxious to maintain a connection to their former village site, but that they also recognized a figurative kinship with the Amana people. For both groups, communal ownership of land provided security and a barrier against an outside world of which they did not wish to be part. The purchase of land was, in effect, a purchase of religious and cultural freedom. To the Meskwaki, owning their own land freed them to some extent from the federal government's control and allowed them to interact with, or reject, white society as they saw fit. They had defied federal authorities who wanted them to live on a reservation owned and controlled by the government. Isolated from many of the federal government's attempts at assimilation, they were able to maintain traditional ways. Their interaction with the Amana Society represented a half-way compromise with white society.

Likewise, for the Inspirationists, interacting with the Meskwaki did not involve an accommodation to white society. While European in origin, the Amana people chose to be self-reliant and separate from the larger Euro-American society, which they viewed as worldly and ungodly. As part of their communal life, they attended 11 church services each week. They were paid no wages for their work but were provided with

all material needs, such as food, clothing, housing, and medical care.

In many ways, land came to define the two groups. To be a member of either, in part, means to belong to a physical community, as one anthropologist puts it, "localized in space; a place which is home." Both groups have long been noted for land stewardship. Both forged a mystic, highly emotional attachment to their settlements, which continues today in the form of strict controls on land use and trespassing. While both groups recognize the political and economic significance of owning land, a deeper cultural awareness of the natural environment continues to influence modes of land management. Disputes within both communities (such as those in Amana concerning hunting rights and access to timber lands) reflect, by their intensity, how passionately the groups identify with the land.

Because of the large areas of forest and the interest in preserving and improving these tracts, both the Amana Society farms and the Meskwaki Settlement were intensively studied by the Iowa State University Forestry Department in the 1950s. Large timber tracts remain, and even today one can trace the borders of the Amana Society property and the Meskwaki property in aerial photos simply by following the edge of the timber, contrasted to the cleared and plowed ground of neighboring landowners.

Both groups relied on the land and, to some extent, still do today. They hunted game, fished in the Iowa River (sometimes at the stone weir), gathered wild edibles, and used the timber for fuel and shelter. They used native materials for furnishings, to make their homes comfortable and to express themselves artistically. Both groups made wood carvings. The Meskwaki used bulrushes as an interior wall of their wikiups. They wove cattails into mats, basswood into baskets, and yarn into belts. The Amana people wove wool into blankets and made willow baskets. Handcrafted objects and traditional skills are still valued and preserved in both communities.

Long before the Inspirationists settled in the area, Meskwaki men were accustomed to trapping, fishing, and hunting there, and continued to do so on Amana land all through the 19th century and well into the 20th. The Amana people do not seem to have resented this sharing of their natural resources. The Meskwaki traded furs and pelts for manufactured goods and perhaps medical care. Local

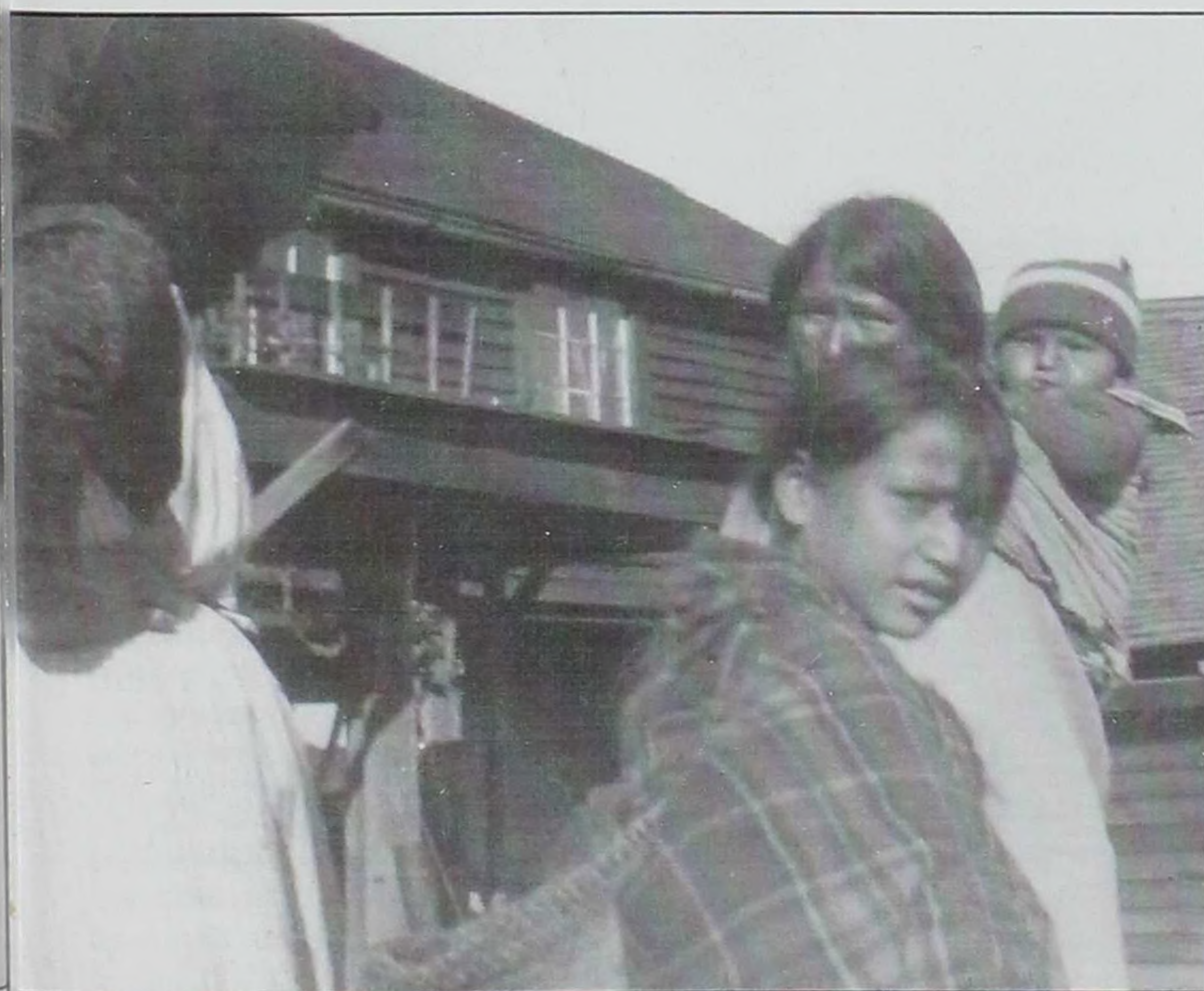


Amana kitchen workers preparing vegetables. Meskwaki and Amana women often interacted at the many kitchen houses in the villages.

tradition notes that some Amana men went trapping with Meskwaki visitors and formed friendships, sometimes spending the night in the Meskwaki camps.

The main exchange and interaction between the Amana and Meskwaki people, however, took place at the 52 communal kitchen houses. Under the communal system, Amana church elders assigned housing and jobs; much of the work was on the farmland and in the gardens, factories, craft shops, and kitchens. Many of the Amana women were assigned to work in a kitchen house, which comprised a dining room and kitchen and was attached to the residence of the appointed manager and, if married, her family. At each kitchen house, meals were prepared for 30 to 40 Inspirationists, who ate at long tables. The men ate at one time, and the women at another.

Meskwaki women sometimes visited the kitchen houses. In some instances



COURTESY OF MADELINE ROEMIG BENDORF

As an Amana woman in a dark bonnet looks on (far left), three Meskwaki stand outside the Heinze Kitchen House. The scene was photographed by Friedrich Oehl about 1900.

food was given to them as gifts. More often, the kitchen staff traded food for baskets, beads, and beadwork. In a cashless society, the Amana people were accustomed to bartering and trading goods and services with each other. The food that they traded typically included lard for cooking, bread, flour, garden produce, and *kuchen* (open-topped fruit custard pie).

Sometimes the visits filled a Saturday afternoon with socializing as well as trading. The Meskwaki women sat on the floor, opening their bags of trade goods and showing their wares to the kitchen workers. The Meskwaki favored colorful regalia; they adorned their clothing with beadwork and jewelry and wore their hair in a particular style. For Amana women, raised in an austere world where adults wore plain, unadorned clothing in blue or black, the Meskwaki manner of dress was "a novelty and a delight," according to Henrietta Ruff. "We were always happy when they came," recalled Henrietta Hergert Leichsenring. In later years, recollections of the clothes worn by Meskwaki women and their practice of carrying babies on cradleboards strapped to their backs were among the most vivid and frequently recalled memories of the Amana residents.

Meskwaki also stopped at the village meat markets. There they obtained fat left from sausage making. As one 19th-century observer of the tribe noted, "Nearly everything they eat is cooked in lard, and a meal of hot fried cakes, pork, and coffee is all-sufficing." They also acquired cracklings and headcheese. Made of the leavings from butchering hogs, both were popular dishes in German communities.

Aside from food, the trade good perhaps most valued by the Meskwaki was the traditional Amana blanket. Turn-of-the-century photographs show Meskwaki holding or wearing the unmistakable patterned blankets woven in the Amana woolen mills. Modern-day Meskwaki writer Ray Young Bear references the blankets in his short stories and in one poem refers to a woman seated on "a red woolen blanket from the Amana Colonies. A prized but costly item among ladies of the Settlement." Traditional Meskwaki burial practices involved wrapping the body in a blanket that, according to older tribal members, after the mid to late 19th century came exclusively from the Amana mills.

An additional exchange between the Amana people and the Meskwaki involved language. Some Meskwaki tribal members learned a little German, and some Amana residents learned some of the Meskwaki language. A character in a short story by Ray Young Bear learned the German words for onion and potato "to hasten the trade." During World War II, German language skills played an interesting role in the experi-

ence of two young Meskwaki soldiers who served as code talkers. The two soldiers were instructed to interrogate a young German officer. The captured officer told the Meskwaki soldiers, "You talk just like my grandmother." Apparently the Meskwaki soldiers were using certain pronunciations, phrases, and idioms of a dialect dating from the Inspirationists' departure from Germany in the 1840s and still used among the elderly in the Amanas—though no longer common in contemporary Germany.

Stories and memories, especially from childhood, attest to the fabric of positive interactions between Meskwaki tribal members and Amana residents. Helene Rohrbacher Leichsenring of Amana recalled receiving necklaces from Meskwaki girls her own age. William E. Heidel, born in 1895, noted that "some of us boys made friends" with the Meskwaki camped around the Amana Lily Lake. He learned to shoot and trap and was permitted to ride Meskwaki ponies. "It was from these Indians that I learned how to swim a little easier way than I knew before." When Walter Leichsenring of South Amana was a child, he hid one time in order to observe a Meskwaki ritual in the *Inje Busch* nearby. Discovered, he was invited to watch. For years thereafter Meskwaki members traveling to South Amana stopped and visited Leichsenring or invited him to their nearby camp.

One High Amana native remembered that when the Meskwaki visited her village in the 1920s and 1930s it was an "exciting" and "happy" time, something out of the ordinary, "like something out of a fairy tale."

Contemporary newspaper references also preserve meaningful experiences. When Homestead's town baker, Herbert Moershel, acquired a dog named Yakoo from the Meskwaki Settlement, the *Amana Society Bulletin* joked that "the dog is lucky that his master is able to speak [the Meskwaki] language as fluently as German and English." Moershel also purchased fox furs from Meskwaki trappers and then resold the furs. "The foxes that they trap or kill are brought to West Amana for sale," an article in 1931 stated. "[The trappers] visit Herbert in his home, and at Christmas time they presented Mrs. Moershel with a handsome basket woven from hickory sprouts; the basket is surely artistic, and Mrs. Moershel values it highly." When Herbert Moershel died in a car accident in 1939, Meskwaki friends attended his funeral service. Later they left a wreath of woven leaves on his grave.



THIS PAGE: PHOTOS BY CHARLES SCOTT; ITEMS LOANED BY RAMONA GERARD, BARBARA SELZER HOEHNLE, ELEANOR AND PETER HOEHNLE, GORDON KELLENBERGER, HAROLD PITZ, AND WENDY ZIEGLER



These Meskwaki handcrafted items were traded or given as gifts to Amana residents and have been treasured for years. Clockwise from top left: beaded watch fob; baskets (set on a shawl woven in the Amanas); beaded necklaces; beaded leather charm bag; and fur hat (with lining and embroidered initials probably by the Amana recipient). Photos on right show front and back of a heavily beaded charm bag.



As a child growing up in Middle Amana, William Jeck was drawn to Native American customs and formed lasting friendships with Meskwaki tribal members. As an adult, he attended the funerals of Meskwaki friends such as George Young Bear. When Jeck died in 1978, his family invited a Meskwaki friend to offer a prayer at the burial; the prayer was delivered in the Meskwaki language.

Following a smallpox outbreak at the Meskwaki Settlement in 1902, government agents ordered the burning of all structures and Meskwaki property to prevent the spread of the disease. According to Meskwaki oral tradition and memories, the Amana Society sent clothing to the tribe at this difficult moment.

Pushetonequa, a longtime tribal leader, was born in a camp along the Iowa River near the Amana villages. Into the 20th century he made occasional visits to the site of his birth, as recalled in a local paper at the time of his death in 1919.

One elderly Meskwaki woman told her granddaughter that when she was young, there were three communities in Iowa where a tribal member could walk down the street and not be made to feel ashamed: Tama, Iowa City, and the Amanas.

In 1932, reeling from the effects of the Great Depression, the outmigration of young people, and a general dissatisfaction with the restrictions of communal life, the members of the Amana Society voted to abandon communal living and form a for-profit corporation. The Great Change, as it came to be known, meant that Amana residents were able to purchase their own homes and work for wages at the businesses managed by the new Amana Society. Each adult member of the society was issued a share of stock. The corporation provided free burial and medical services.

The Great Change seems to have puzzled the Meskwaki. In the context of the American Indian experience, what happened at Amana must have seemed like the allotment policy of the 1880s, when the federal government allotted plots of land on U.S. reservations to individual Indians, thus dismantling their tribal ownership of land. A present-day Meskwaki woman recalls her grandmother telling her that the Great Change was when the Amana people "got allotted," and that she felt sorry for them, one imagines, in the way that she mourned the impact of allotment on other tribes. The Meskwaki grandmother believed that the Amana people had little say in the matter, and that it came about because the Amana Society lacked the

federal recognition that the Meskwaki continually had of tribally held lands.

Once the Amana communal kitchens closed, in 1932, the Meskwaki-Amana relationship appeared to decline. Meskwaki women, perhaps uncomfortable with visiting private homes, did not appear in the villages to trade, and it seems that Meskwaki no longer camped in the Amana timber. A contributing factor to this decline may have been the almost simultaneous trend among the Meskwaki to discontinue the practice of winter camps.

Yet some interaction survived. In the 1930s young men on the Meskwaki and Amana baseball teams played against each other. Other post-1932 examples show up in the *Amana Society Bulletin* and local papers. Until 1991, when processing at the Amana Meat Market ended, tribal members continued to purchase 40-pound boxes of cracklings. Amana bread and, especially, headcheese, were favorite purchases by Meskwaki visitors to the Amanas. The traditional appeal of headcheese seems lost on modern Meskwaki, who are occasionally dispatched to purchase it at the Amana meat market for use in a Ghost Dinner, where the favorite foods of a departed individual are eaten.

Through resiliency and determination, both the Meskwaki and the Amana people successfully preserved their cultural and religious traditions. For over three-quarters of a century, communal life flourished in the seven villages and 26,000 acres known by most Iowans today as the Amana Colonies. Today the Meskwaki Settlement comprises more than 8,000 acres of communally held land. Although each group chose to separate itself from the larger American society, their unusual relationship lasted for decades. ♦

Peter Hoehnle has a doctorate in agricultural history and rural studies from Iowa State University and has written extensively on the Amanas and other communal societies. He is the executive director of Iowa Valley Resource Conservation and Development. He serves as president of the Communal Studies Association and also edits its journal, Communal Societies. He grew up in Homestead, one of the Amana villages, and his Inspirationist ancestors date back to 1723.



PHOTO BY PETER HOEHNLE

A YEARLY TRADITION for area residents and tourists is to stop by Lily Lake in the Amanas when the surface is covered with the spectacular blooms of the lotus (often mistaken as water lilies).

A Meskwaki tradition also centers on the lotus. Called *waki'pimin* in Meskwaki, the lotus was a food source at least as early as the late 18th century, when the tribe lived near the Mississippi River. About the size of bananas, lotus tubers are similar to potatoes. The tubers were boiled, strung on basswood string, and hung to

dry for winter use. Lotus tuber was also an ingredient in medicine administered to the convalescent. Lotus seeds (*oskishi'kuk*) were also dried or eaten fresh.

Amana residents today recall the Meskwaki camping in tents around the lake at harvest time, and a 1921 account notes that the women gathered the tubers out of the mud at the bottom of the lake in the fall. One Meskwaki tribal member vividly remembers watching her great-grandmother in 1972 dive into the water to retrieve the tubers from the muck.

As they were with other natural resources, the Meskwaki were careful not to overharvest the tubers. Stewardship of the lotus bed was reinforced by a tribal legend that a giant snapping turtle lived at the bottom of the lake; if an individual took more tubers than needed, it would dispatch smaller snapping turtles to attack the offender.

The special relationship of the Meskwaki with Amana inspired the use of the lotus as the logo for the Iowa Valley Scenic Byway, which meanders for 70 miles through this historically and visually rich region of Iowa.

—Peter Hoehnle



NOTE ON SOURCES

Much of the author's research involved personal communication with the following individuals: Harry Ackerman, Jeremy Berger, Elizabeth Dickel Bleschmidt, Johnathan Lantz Buffalo, Suzanne Wanatee Buffalo, Thomas Burgher, Jon Childers, Erna Neumann Fels, Dan Hollrah, Emilie Hoppe, Henrietta Hergert Leichsenring, Helene Rohrbacher Leichsenring, Marietta Moershel, Elizabeth T. Momany, Helen Sontag Moser, Henry Moser, Elizabeth Rettig Parvin, Harold Pitz, Ivan Reihmann, Larry Rettig, Carolyn Ruedy, Donald Wanatee, Jerry Youngbear, Carolyn Zuber, Carroll Zuber, and Cornelia Moershel Zuber.

The word "Meskwaki" has several variant spellings. The spelling used in this article is the one used by the tribe today.

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Complete annotations to earlier versions of this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City center).

IOWA SHARES

& the Cambodian Refugees

by Matthew Walsh

"To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss."

—Khmer Rouge motto

**"In a world where there is hate, there is more reason to love.
In a world where there is hunger, there is more reason to share."**

—Governor Robert Ray to Iowans,
Christmas Eve 1979

These two quotations seem so different, yet they are intricately linked. Those who espoused the Khmer Rouge motto created a world of misery and depredation for millions of Cambodians under the oppressive Communist regime between 1975 and 1979. Half a world away, Governor Robert Ray encouraged and inspired ordinary Iowa men, women, and children to alleviate that misery by making tangible gifts through the statewide program called Iowa SHARES (an acronym for Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation).

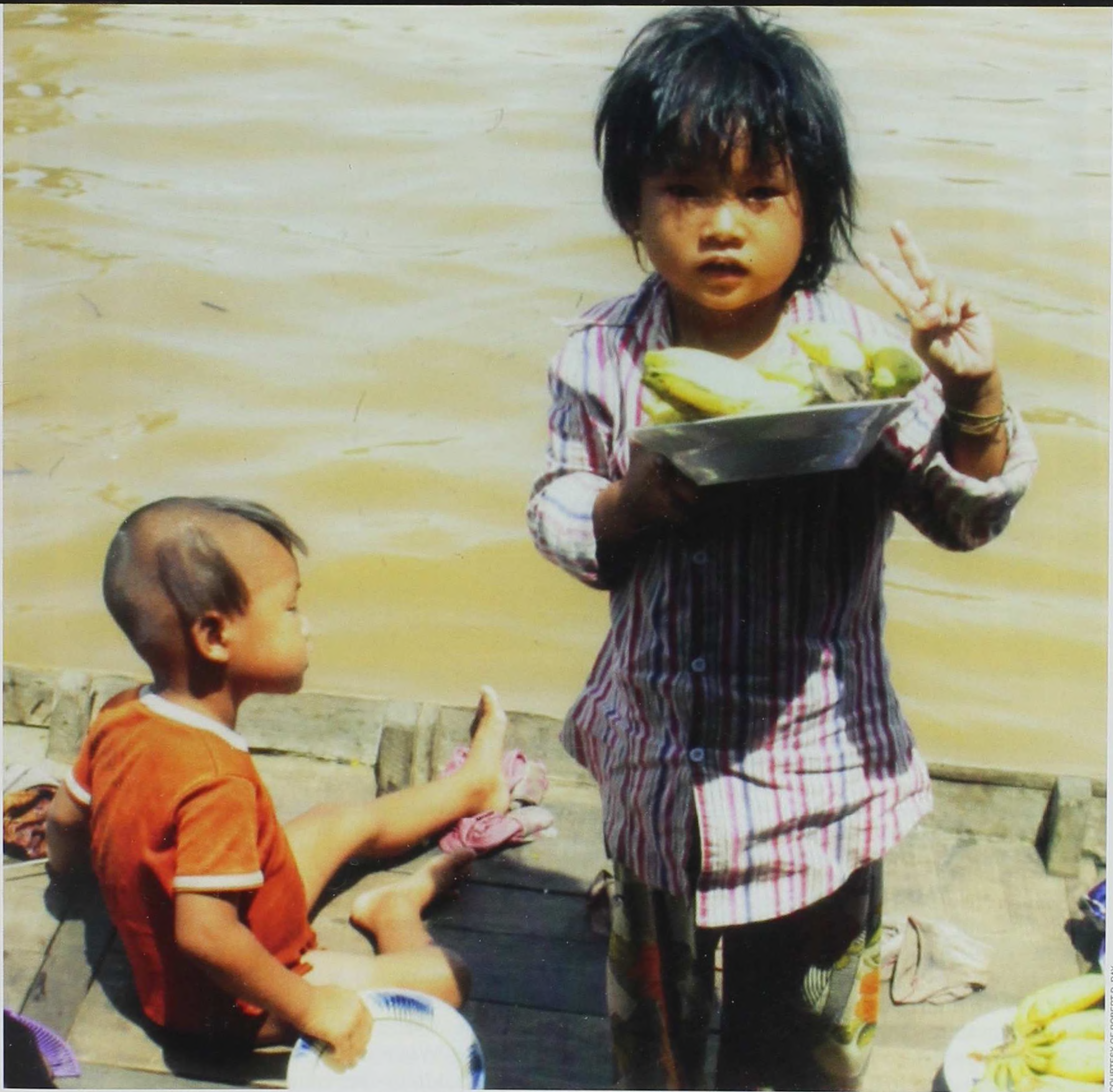
Far from being a simple story of Iowans aiding Cambodians, Iowa SHARES came to mean many different things to many different people.

During Robert Ray's two terms as governor of Iowa (1969–1983), he confronted three crises regarding Vietnam War refugees. The first followed the fall of Saigon to Communism in 1975. As the United States began resettling refugees, one ethnic group, the Tai Dam, petitioned 30 U.S. governors as well as French and Canadian leaders in the hopes of re-

settling their entire group together. Traditionally, American policymakers deliberately sought to break up large groups of refugees in the resettlement process. They feared that large clusters of refugee populations might socioeconomically disrupt and burden local communities or states, concerns then being reinforced by Florida's experience with Cuban refugees during the Castro era.

But Ray considered it vital to keep the Tai Dam community together, in order to save its traditional way of life. Ray traveled to Washington, D.C., to seek a presidential exemption allowing Iowa to accept the entire Tai Dam ethnic group. Subsequently, through his leadership, the Governor's Task Force for Indochinese Refugees began resettling over 1,200 Tai Dam in Iowa in 1975.

Shortly after resettlement, the Tai Dam held a celebration. Ray invited President Gerald Ford to attend. In his place Ford sent Kenneth Quinn, a U.S. Foreign Service diplomat who had been raised in Dubuque. Quinn had worked in Vietnam from 1968 until 1974



COURTESY OF ROBERT D. RAY

A Cambodian boy sells bananas, as photographed by Governor Robert Ray on his visit to Southeast Asia in the late 1970s.

and also served under Henry Kissinger and Richard Holbrook on the National Security Council and in the State Department. Appreciating Quinn's expertise on refugee issues, Ray began recruiting him, and in September 1978, Quinn starting working with Iowa officials while on loan from the State Department.

The second refugee crisis occurred in January 1979. After attending a Drake University basketball game, Ray returned home and saw a *60 Minutes* television news program on the "boat people." Journalist Ed Bradley's report showed desperate and traumatized Vietnamese refugees streaming toward the Malaysian coast in small boats and collapsing from exhaustion. Some were carried inland, but others faced piracy, rape, starvation, drowning, and murder.

Moved by the tragedy, Ray appealed to his counterparts at the National Governors' Association meeting in February to help him petition the federal government to take in the boat people.

As the crisis peaked in July 1979, Ray and Quinn traveled to Geneva for a United Nations Conference on Indochinese Refugees. To a standing ovation, Vice President Walter Mondale announced that the U.S. had pledged to take in 168,000 boat people and to send the U.S. Navy to rescue the thousands of refugees being preyed upon in Southeast Asia. By 1981, nearly 8,000 refugees (including the Tai Dam) had resettled in Iowa.

The change in state demographics was striking. In 1970, the percentage of Asian-born Iowans had



This Hmong story cloth was created by refugee Shoua Her, who came to Oskaloosa in 1976 with 20 other Hmong families. The hand-embroidered story cloth depicts the everyday life of Hmong people in Laos before and during the Vietnam War; their flight to Thailand and refugee camps; and finally the arrival of planes to take them to the United States. This spectacular example of the art of *paj ntaub* conveys Hmong traditions and stories to the next generation.

stood at about 7 percent—by 1990, it was over 42 percent (note that these numbers were not broken down by country). According to the 2000 census, over 7,000 Vietnamese, 4,000 Laotians, and 600 Cambodians populated the state.

The third refugee crisis arose from a decade of civil war and repression that had ravaged Cambodia, first under the dictatorship of Pol Pot and then under the Khmer Rouge. Between 1975 and 1979, 20 percent of Cambodia's population died in an orgy of violence. One former Khmer Rouge soldier later recalled that he had slit so many victims' throats that he developed arthritis in his wrist and forearm from the repetitive motion.

The violence seared Cambodian survivors who later arrived in Iowa. As teenagers at Hoover High School in Des Moines, Monyra Chau and Pa Mao wrote essays recalling the horrors. Chau, whose father was killed by the Communists, remembered: "It was strange. They were wearing black cloths and black caps. They carried guns all over the places. Some of them went into people's houses and took their properties. . . . They told the people to leave their homes and town. Everybody had to go to different places. The people had to work

on the farms, nobody worked in the city. People had to work hard and do whatever they said. If somebody did not follow them, they killed him. We didn't have much food to eat either. . . . They let people eat like animals. We had to get up to work at four o'clock in the morning. When people told them that they were sick, they wouldn't believe the people. They had to take the people to go to work."

Pa Mao, who had also lost her father to Communist violence, recalled the starvation that drove her family to escape to Thailand. "We got up very early before sunrise and walked 40 km. a day. We took pottery, rice, food, and only the clothes that we wore. We walked three days and nights that seemed like one very long day because we didn't sleep. We were too afraid of the soldiers, so we didn't walk on the road, we walked through the jungle."

Hundreds of thousands of war-ravaged and starving Cambodians made the same decision to flee to Thailand. As Robert Ray saw firsthand, however, arrival in Thailand did not ease their misery.

In October 1979, Ray and five other American governors toured Communist China as part of the normalization of relations between China and the United

States. He suggested that the small delegation take a side tour of Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand. Ray's reputation for resettling refugees preceded him; at a refugee camp, he saw an Iowa Department of Transportation map with refugee populations highlighted across the state. Ray, his wife, Billie, his aide Kenneth Quinn, and the other governors were shocked and haunted by the camp's horrible conditions. On his flight back to Iowa, Ray began to compose a speech to deliver a few days later at the General Assembly of the Christian Church in St. Louis. He described how they had seen over 30,000 people packed together.

"Have you ever stood in a small muddy spot about two hours while five people died around you? I did, two days ago, at the Cambodian border camp of Sa Kaeo," Ray said. "Those deaths were only part of the more than 50 that died in that one camp, on that one day. To see little kids with sunken eyes and protruding tummies trying to eke out a smile will bring a tear to the eyes of even the most calloused."

In the speech, Ray referred to Pope John Paul II's visit that month to Living History Farms near Des Moines, and he emphasized the message that Judeo-Christians had an obligation to work to alleviate world suffering and to relieve victims of crimes against human rights.

"Christianity and Christian love know no boundaries. They don't stop at state lines or national borders," he said. "They are universal."

Ray had been struck by China's tremendous poverty and recent struggles to modernize agriculture. Life in China, however, "was like a walk through the park compared with our last stop" at the refugee camps in Thailand, he said. He compared the suffering of the refugees of Indochina with the plight of the Jews during Nazi Germany. Ray declared that the world had missed an opportunity to help the Jews—the world had failed that test but now faced a new crisis of mass distress.

"I believe that we can never live with a clear conscience if we turn our backs on dying human beings who cry out for a touch of life," he said. "There is no way I can describe the misery and human suffering and anguish of these people—God's children. It's indescribable. But try if you will to imagine what it would be like to run, hide and scramble through wet and rough terrain for weeks, day after day, in an attempt to escape Communist torture and death. Add to that the fact that you were leaving your home, your belongings, your family, or that your spouse, or children or parents had already been killed. And, that if you reached a border you would have no assurance you wouldn't be thrown right back into the path of the pursuers."

Ray told his listeners that as the people of a prosperous nation, Americans needed to take action. He added that even critics who opposed resettling refugees in the U.S. still should aim to relieve their immediate suffering: "We're talking not where these people are going to live—but whether they are going to live."

Ray played on Missouri's nickname in his appeal: "As we meet here tonight in Missouri, the 'show-me state,' I sincerely believe that Jesus is saying to our church: Don't tell me of your concerns for human rights, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for the poor, the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the unemployed, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for the rejected, the prisoner, the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for these people when you have a chance to save their lives—Show Me! Don't tell me how Christian you are, Show Me! Show Me!"

Ray's concern for refugees resonated with other Iowans as the international crisis attracted growing publicity. After the Iowa delegation returned from the camps, the governor handed his undeveloped photos from the trip to reporter David Yepsen of the *Des Moines Register*, which devoted a number of articles and editorials to documenting the crisis.

In November, after reading the article "Let's Bomb Cambodia. This Time with Food," fourth graders at Brooklyn-Guernsey-Malcolm elementary schools wrote to Ray. The youngsters enthusiastically volunteered ideas. Several suggested using airplanes, boats, or trains to deliver food to the desperate. Donita Nicklas recommended putting cartons of milk and juice onto an airplane, and added, "Why don't we take a boat with fruit and go down there with tractors and medicine." David Hawkins stated, "If I was governor I would make a bridge to Cambodia and take a lot of food for them." Lynn Huddleson asked, "Why don't you try getting food by submarine?" She insisted, "I'd like you to do something about the people starving in Cambodia. I hate looking at the half-starved person with no clothes on. I hope you do something about it." Dale Henry Goodrich declared, "I wouldn't eat for a week if I could get the food I was suppose to eat to them."

In writing to their governor, students engaged in active citizenship, perhaps for the first time. While teachers helped students reflect upon and sort out powerful issues like starvation and politics, they deep-

ened Iowa's relationship with the Cambodian refugees. Student Ada Marie Weiermann asked, "Are the Cambodians going to live? I hope so. Because it isn't right for the Vietnams to try to kill them when they didn't do nothing to the Vietnams." Students generally blamed Communist Vietnam for the plight of the Cambodians, overlooking the genocidal role of Pol Pot and the Cambodian Communists. But while these fourth-graders missed much of the complexities of recent Asian turmoil, several specifically suggested that America itself bore some culpability for the misery, since U.S. forces had devastated Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Donita Nicklas asked, "Why did we attack them? My teacher said we bombed them once." "Iowa has spare money," Danny Allen wrote. "We should give it to Cambodia [because] it was half our fault."

In his St. Louis speech at the end of October, Ray had not yet proposed a specific mechanism to channel midwestern aid to refugees, but in a November press release, he announced the formation of Iowa SHARES—Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation. Again citing the teachings of Pope John Paul II on his recent visit, Ray declared that Iowans had a special role as "stewards of the earth with an obligation to share the fruit of our land with all mankind."

The relief project tapped into Iowa's sense of pride and duty as a leading agricultural state. "We will be measuring contributions . . . in terms of how many bushels of Iowa grain could be bought with the money donated. A bushel of corn right now sells for about \$2.20 and that is the figure we will use throughout the campaign. Each bushel of grain purchased will be considered as having bought a SHARE in humanity." Ray aimed to raise a sum equal to the value of 52,500 bushels, representing one barge full of Iowa grain. This, he said, "would be a mighty symbol of Iowa generosity and an important example for the rest of the world."

Although Iowa SHARES accepted large donations from corporate donors such as Pioneer Hi-Bred International of Des Moines, Ray and Quinn primarily envisioned Iowa SHARES as a grass-roots project enlisting

"agriculture, business, labor unions, civic and social organizations, schools, fraternal organizations, and individual citizens." Ray declared, "Many times in the past we have proved that ours is not just a state in the heart of the nation, but also a state with a heart."

Iowa SHARES was set up as a tax-exempt non-profit corporation coordinated by the Governor's Office. The program's bipartisan and ecumenical board of directors included Ray, Quinn, and other prominent Iowans. Religious figures rallied to promote Iowa SHARES; early leaders included Rabbi Jay Goldberg and Reverend Fred Strickland. Media personality Mary Jane Odell at Iowa Public Television (IPTV) and *Des Moines Register* and *Tribune* editor and president Michael Gartner were also closely involved, helping launch Iowa SHARES with a well-orchestrated publicity campaign in radio, television, and newspapers. Odell described how she would talk about the program to people in elevators and to anyone who would listen. She told her fellow members of the board of directors, "If you need me, I am on somebody's telephone."

Early fundraising strategically connected Iowa SHARES to the spirit of charity during the holiday season. The Governor's Office declared the week right before Christmas to be an official "Iowa SHARES week." Echoing the emotional impact of refugee misery that had commanded Ray's attention, the *Des Moines Register* published articles dramatically detailing the plight of Cambodians. Next to compelling images of starving children, the newspaper printed a coupon that readers could mail in with an Iowa SHARES donation. Other

Iowa newspapers also promoted the program. To gain more publicity, Quinn sent dozens of letters to other major U.S. newspapers.

Ray joined Odell to record four public-service announcements. In the middle of an emotional plea for funds, Odell crumpled up her script and fought back tears: "I just want to talk to you for a minute about the starvation and disease of the Cambodian refugees. Lot of hunger and starvation around the world and at home too. But the situation of the Cambodians is so desperate, so immediate."

On November 21, Odell hosted a special IPTV pro-

SHSI: STATE ARCHIVES, RAY PAPERS

Iowa SHARES



Already as many as two million Cambodians may have perished and countless others now face death from a possible famine.

On November 21, Governor Robert Ray announced an urgent appeal to all Iowans to respond to this tragic situation called Iowa SHARES (Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation).

YOU CAN HELP

Contributions to this drive will be measured in terms of the number of bushels of Iowa grain they could produce. And, while Iowa grain will not actually be shipped to Southeast Asia, the equivalent amounts of money raised will be used to buy food and medical supplies.

As Governor Ray said, "Iowans have proved many times that ours is not just a state in the heart of the nation, but also a state with a heart. Together, by sharing what we have, we, the people of Iowa, can have a direct effect in the saving of human lives. Surely there is no greater work on the face of this earth."

Please Give Generously

Iowa SHARES

YES, I'D LIKE TO SHARE —
And, because I want to Send Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation, I am giving \$_____ (Every \$2.20 contributed will buy the equivalent of a bushel of Iowa grain.)

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Send your check or money order to:

IOWA SHARES,
P.O. BOX 1977
Des Moines IA 50306

Thank you for your contribution.



gram titled *Cambodia: What Iowans Need to Know*. On this show, Ray, his wife, Billie, and Kenneth Quinn spoke about witnessing refugees die of starvation. Viewers saw emotionally moving photographs that Ray had taken, documenting the camp conditions. IPTV followed up with documentaries such as *Cambodia: A Nation is Dying* and *Don't Forget the Khmer*.

The campaign quickly drew responses from Iowa's young people, who often came up with ingenious methods for raising money. Angie King's third-grade class at King Elementary in Des Moines took out a loan from First Federal Bank to buy and sell popcorn balls. Youngsters Dan VandeLune, Rob Tompkins, Ryan Tompkins, and Travis Spurgeon of West Des Moines went door to door for donations. A sixth-grade class at Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls raised money through a candy sale, and Beaverdale's Holy Trinity School sponsored a Mardi Gras parade and food sale. Students in the Aquin School system held an 11-mile walkathon from Garryowen to Cascade. In February, instead of exchanging Valentines, fifth and sixth graders at Washington Elementary in Mason City gave money to Iowa SHARES. The ten-person youth group team at Altoona Christian Church fasted for 22 hours to raise funds. Nine-year-old Eric Sharp got an advance on his Christmas money and then wrote to Ray: "Please take my Christmas money of \$50 and send it to the Cambodians. I think they deserve a Christmas too."

College-age Iowans also mobilized, following Quinn's call for cash-strapped students to have "one less beer, one less movie, or one less meal" and donate the savings to Iowa SHARES. At the University of Northern Iowa, Kappa Delta Pi Honorary Society for Education raised money. Cornell College students bought special cafeteria meals that included a one-dollar contribution to Iowa SHARES. At the student and faculty Christmas dinner, "symbolic empty [collection] bowls" sat at the dinner tables. David Kalianov, an engineering student at Iowa State University, composed and recorded a song titled "Child of Cambodia." It became the theme song, and he donated the copyright.

Community organizations and companies also pitched in. One group advertised the opportunity for families to take photographs of their children with Santa Claus for a dollar each, donating all the proceeds. The Des Moines Judo Club held a special tournament at the YMCA, sending the admissions fees to Iowa SHARES. Employees at Weitz Brothers Construction Company forfeited their usual Christmas bonuses of hams or fruit baskets in order to help. Individual Iowans also responded. After seeing a public televi-

sion special on Cambodia, Therese Koch of Boone felt guilty for having bought an electric frying pan. She returned it and donated the funds to Iowa SHARES. A Des Moines family felt compelled to donate despite their own struggles with old age, cancer, and heart failure. They acknowledged, "We are not too flush but feel we must help this much."

The overall success of Iowa SHARES stunned even the most optimistic board members. In its first week, the program raised over \$25,000, and by December 14, over \$205,000. Between the opening of the campaign on November 23, 1979, through its conclusion on April 30, 1981, Iowa SHARES brought in \$554,789 (nearly \$1.4 million in today's dollars), more than four times the governor's initial goal.

Board members voted to send the aid to the Cambodians through private relief agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, UNICEF, American Refugee Services, and the World Food Program. Iowa medical professionals like registered nurse Debra Tate and physician Harlo Hove volunteered their services and worked in refugee camps in Thailand, supported by Iowa SHARES funds.

Individual Iowans chose to donate to Iowa SHARES for a variety of reasons—emotional, personal, and political. Many felt compelled to donate after being bombarded with powerful images from the media. Their letters to the Governor's Office constantly referred to the public television shows about Cambodia, and one couple requested a copy of the IPTV interview with Ray, to share with others who wanted to raise money. Edna Spencer of Chariton wrote, "The pictures and reports are heartbreaking." Kathie Horney acknowledged that when she saw newspaper photos of refugees, she felt guilty for having had a huge meal. Referring to her own infant and seven-year-old, she wrote, "I cannot imagine what they would look like if they were starving."

Some Iowans gave in honor of others. When First Lady Rosalyn Carter visited Clinton, Catholic grade school students donated to Iowa SHARES in her name. For the grandchildren of the deceased Herman VanOort, a donation to Iowa SHARES meant a way to honor their grandfather, and Quinn's thank-you note to their widowed grandmother brought her cheer. While some donors preferred to remain anonymous, Iowa's newspapers recognized others by printing long lists of names.

Many Iowans supported Iowa SHARES because they had participated in the earlier resettlement of Indochi-

nese refugees. Through her church, Norma Weaver of Newburg had helped sponsor a Cambodian family, assisting them in adjusting to Iowa life and driving them to doctor's appointments. Recognizing how much the starving Cambodians on television specials looked like the family she had come to adore, she made a donation.

William Rosenfeld, a Mason City doctor, volunteered to serve on Iowa medical teams sent by Iowa SHARES to aid Cambodian refugees in Thailand, citing his earlier experience working at the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in that very country. As a medical student and doctor, Rosenfeld had read in textbooks about exotic diseases, but to encounter them in real life shocked him. "In four days, I saw more acute medicine than I will ever see again," he wrote. "People had malaria, dysentery with dehydration to the point of shock and coma, large tropical ulcers crawling with maggots, meningococcal meningitis, polio, measles, severe pneumonia, and draining abscesses from Potts disease of the spine. Most of them had worms or other intestinal parasites." Rosenfeld had treated 60 to 70 patients daily at a camp sheltering over 130,000 refugees. He recalled a young boy who stayed with an older woman through her death. "He didn't cry; he didn't do anything. He just sat there. He had no one else."

He described how some children in the camp "would enact atrocities done under Pol Pot's regime. A child would act like an old woman being led with a rope to a pit. Another child would hit her over the head with a stick, and she'd fall into the pit. That's the way [the Pol Pot] executed people. . . . The children would tie another child to a tree and pretend they were cutting out the captive's gall bladder and drinking the bile from it, another thing they recalled that the troops did."

Religious beliefs motivated many Iowans. For some Jews, Iowa SHARES represented a means to fulfill the post-Holocaust pledge of "never again." Synagogues joined in fundraising, and five Iowa rabbis wrote an open letter to the Jewish community, citing the Torah's dictum "Do not stand by idly while your fellow human being's blood is spilled." Their message continued: "The reality of Cambodia, in all its tragedy, assaults us daily. As Jews who are survivors of the Holocaust, be it [in] fact or in memory, we recall the silence and the indifference of the world during those days. We vowed that it would never happen again. Today, it is time for us to redeem that vow."

Across Iowa, religious leaders wrote sermons addressing the Cambodian crisis and publicized Iowa SHARES in church bulletins. Churchgoers collected contributions by fasting, tithing, and holding silent

auctions. St. Johns High School in Independence announced a "pilgrimage" in which their self-proclaimed "Holy Strollers" would walk 80 miles from Independence to Guttenberg, to raise donations for Iowa SHARES and awareness of the Christian mission of helping others.

From the start, the Governor's Office had structured Iowa SHARES as a distinctively Iowan civic engagement, and many donors' comments reflected that appeal to state pride. The record harvest in 1979 showed off Iowa's agricultural power, while at the same time newspapers and television showed images of people elsewhere starving to death. One *Des Moines Register* columnist emphasized Iowa's opportunity as a leading farm state to feed not just the Midwest, but ideally the needy around the world. California resident Harvey Glasser declared that the push for Cambodian relief helped "restore" his joy in his Iowa roots. "[It] certainly breaks all stereotypes of Midwestern provincialism to find [that] this wonderful spirit of international consciousness and sensitivity to the plight . . . [of] these suffering people is not only shared but responded to by your generous contributors to Iowa Shares."

Others contributed to demonstrate support for Ray, who had enjoyed strong popularity since his initial election in 1968. Donor John Murray commented, "It is not my nature to write letters to political leaders. I am compelled to do so, however, by your activities on behalf of the hapless refugees. . . . Never have I been more proud of the conduct of any representative of my interests in the world." Fort Dodge teenager Tom Yetmar echoed that praise: "In a time when everything is up in the air such as inflation, energy, Iran, and the election you still have the time to go to Cambodia, and see for yourself the suffering. You really amaze me as a strong leader of the state of Iowa. I'm really happy to live in Iowa, I would like to thank you and your administration for making this a state to be proud of."

Noting the international political context of the refugee disaster, others supported Iowa SHARES as a way to extend America's Cold War fight against Soviet influence. Former intelligence officer Hugh Stafford of Tri State Toro Company recommended to Quinn that Iowa SHARES should send aid directly to Thailand as a "breadbasket" and crucial Cold War ally. Stafford worried that the Cambodian government might take advantage of the crisis to send spies and Communist agents to infiltrate refugee camps and destabilize the government of Thailand. He feared that any funds going through Cambodia's Communist government would ultimately backfire



COURTESY OF ROBERT D. RAY

Refugee mother and child, one of several compelling photographs taken in Southeast Asia by Governor Robert Ray.

"to the detriment of our allies." West Des Moines resident Jerry Johnson wanted to extend the scope of Iowa SHARES to fight Communist aggression even more widely, referring to the U.S. grain embargo after the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. Donations to nonprofit organizations like Iowa SHARES should be set up to flood grain into places where the Soviets encroached, Johnson suggested. Such food purchases would help Iowa farmers while weakening Soviet power and promoting America's global reputation after its post-Vietnam War slump.

It was the international political dimension of Iowa SHARES that proved most controversial. Despite the heart-rending images, widespread publicity, and community support, a significant number of Iowans opposed Iowa SHARES. The most passionate backers of a Cold War hard line objected that the funds supported Cambodians whose Communist government took directives from Vietnamese Communists, who had just inflicted a humiliating defeat on the United States. A man from Ottumwa mailed in his Iowa SHARES coupon with a bold zero written in the donation line, adding angrily: "Not one penny to Cambodia or Gov. Ray am I going to give you. If we had won that war in south-

east asia and kept the Communists out they wouldn't have that trouble now. I am a world war ii veteran and 65 years of age."

Critics like this man blamed wartime Cambodians for helping smuggle provisions and troops along the Ho Chi Minh Trail; they now felt that Americans had no obligation to help deal with the consequences.

Similarly, a woman complained to the Governor's Office, "We have been reading for years that UNICEF MONEY GOES TO THE COMMUNISTS. With Vietnam a communist takeover, wont the same thing happen??? In Cambodia. Will your Governor be in for a possible embarrassment??? I hope not."

Other critics, within Iowa and nationwide, worried about American food and medicine falling into the hands of the Vietnamese Communists. Widespread rumors reported that Vietnamese trucks were hauling Cambodian refugee supplies into Vietnam. To counter such rumors, representatives from the Church World Services organization issued public statements. Since poorly built Cambodian roads became impassable during the wet season, they noted, cargo had to be trucked northeast through Vietnam before reaching refugee camps. Far from blocking aid, they said, the Vietnamese had opened up the Mekong River and local airports to speed up special shipments.

Skepticism persisted. In December a letter writer to the *Algona Upper Des Moines* maintained that Iowa SHARES donations had never reached Cambodian refugees. Through the media, Quinn flatly denied such charges. He pointed out that the Iowa SHARES program had just started and had not yet actually distributed any money; it was therefore impossible for its relief to have fallen into the wrong hands. Other Iowa citizens ignored or discounted such disturbing rumors, counting on what one called the "squeaky clean" record of Ray to see that their donations got to the right place.

Even as some critics worried that Iowa SHARES might end up bolstering Communism, observers on the other end of the political spectrum feared that aid might prolong the Cold War. Writing to the Governor's Office, members of the Consortium on International Peace and Reconciliation (CIPAR) stressed that paranoia about Communism should not trump humanitarian considerations. CIPAR chairperson Chester Guinn criticized Iowa SHARES for focusing relief efforts on Cambodians in Thailand, a non-Communist state, while overlooking greater need within Cambodia itself. CIPAR questioned whether Quinn's past political involvement with the State Department and U.S. military forces in Vietnam had biased his ideas about the allocation of funds. It warned that misguided relief

that only helped refugees fleeing to Thailand risked destabilizing Cambodia and worsening tension between the alliances of Soviet Union/Vietnam and China/Cambodia.

Ray's appeal to state pride and agricultural abundance wound up aggravating and alienating a farm woman who wrote that she felt "disgusted" with fundraising and media appeals for implying that all Iowa farmers were prosperous and therefore obliged to donate. She noted that the year's record crop of 1979 hardly made up for the prior year and the uncertainties of the next. After seeing an Iowa SHARES commercial featuring a farm family, she wrote to Ray, "Why don't you show the labor man receiving his large paycheck and then flash the picture of the starving [Cambodian] People? Why is it only the grain harvest? Let's show equal responsibility! . . . I am a farm wife, work hard, last year [1978] we had nearly no crop." In her opinion the campaign should emphasize that everyone should pitch in, not just farmers.

The largest group of opponents criticized Iowa SHARES for diverting funds from domestic needs. One Iowan wrote that the relief project "disturbed" him because "there are too many people in Iowa as well as the rest of the United States who will go hungry[,] possibly starve or freeze to death this winter because they have to make the choice between food or warmth." Others criticized Ray for focusing too much on issues thousands of miles away. Asserting that charity must begin at home, they pointed to local difficulties connected to the energy crisis, inflation, and growing unemployment. One suggested that relief money could be put to better use by building a para-transit system for Iowa's elderly and disabled.

Other skeptics feared that the Iowa SHARES initiative might bring more refugees to Iowa. A *Des Moines Register* poll in September 1979 (this was before Ray visited Southeast Asia) revealed that more than half of all Iowans polled opposed additional resettlement of refugees in the state. The state economy had taken a downturn, and some worried that the newcomers took jobs from Americans and imposed additional burdens on the welfare system.

This attitude was not unique to opponents of Iowa SHARES. On December 4, the nationally syndicated column of Paul Harvey (which appeared in the *Clinton Herald* and other Iowa papers) railed against "extend[ing] charity to other than homefolks" and "a new church emphasis on resettling Indochinese in the United States." Exemplifying a common anti-immigrant rhetoric, Harvey continued, "Some bring with them old world ways in diametrical contradiction to

ours. They buy and sell their teen-age daughters; they skin and eat dogs and cats; they ravage our fishing grounds. Transporting them here is cruel to them and a rude affront to our own jobless."

Such hostility to refugee resettlement spilled over into the Iowa SHARES campaign. On a donation coupon sent anonymously, the line "Yes, I'd Like to Share" was altered to read "Yes, I'd Like to ship everyone back," with the comment, "Those men go back to their country and fight for it instead of coming here and live off of us for nothing." Another Iowan wrote, "These people don't belong in our country. . . . We don't need more people. . . . Maybe they have by their own actions and complacency permitted these situations to happen."

Even one of Ray's fellow governors objected. After reading Quinn's publicity promoting Iowa SHARES, Governor William Janklow of South Dakota wrote to Ray, "I wholeheartedly endorse the efforts being made by private agencies and certain federal agencies to accommodate immigrants." But he added, "Despite my personal feelings of compassion, I honestly believe it would be improper for a state government to initiate a private fundraising effort. There are many private charity organizations in South Dakota. We cooperate with them in proclaiming weeks in their honor and helping them with publicity. However, we do not actively promote one charity more than any other." Janklow interpreted Iowa SHARES to be at the least a misuse, and at the worst, an abuse of the governor's power. For Janklow, a governor's creation and promotion of one charity over others led to conflicts of interest. It diverted a governor from attending to the issues brought up by the voters and infringed upon the domains of private charities.

Although the political dimensions of Iowa SHARES stirred up deep reactions, pro and con, the ultimate purpose, of course, was a humanitarian one. The money raised in the 17-month campaign accomplished a number of immediate results: rehabilitation of three rural hospital dispensaries in the Kandal Province; creation of two rural orphanages in Svey Rieng and Prey Veng; and completion of a nine-truck Christmas convoy carrying rice, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, and medicine to the neediest populations. American donations helped purchase K-MIX-2, a concentrated nutrition source that brought people back from the brink of starvation, and two medical teams were sent over.

By healing Cambodian refugees through participation in Iowa SHARES, Iowans hoped to find a way

to heal themselves—from the wounds of the Vietnam War and the disillusionment of the Watergate debacle.

Even public officials like Quinn had felt the stigma of being associated with the U.S. government. Prior to the turbulent Vietnam era, Quinn had believed that “the White House was always the symbol of all that was right and good of our country. The presidents were all noble people to be emulated.” But during the Watergate scandal, he realized how much ordinary citizens felt betrayed by their officials. He recalled that when he had used a White House identification card at a store in Washington, the clerk snapped, “That’s nothing to be proud of.”

Quinn’s work with Iowa SHARES renewed his self-image as a public official: “I felt so proud to be a part of Iowa and Iowa government and Governor Ray’s administration because of our work on refugees.”

Iowa State University student David Kalianov was profoundly affected by William Shawcross’s 1979 book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*. “It was my personal introduction to the notion that what we believe to be true, as told to us by the powers that be, may not be truth at all,” he later remembered. “I could not help but ponder what the children of Cambodia must think of us. And after reading *Sideshow*, I did not know what to think of us either.”

That dismay comes through in the first verse of Kalianov’s song “Child of Cambodia”:

*Child of Cambodia,
what do you think when you think of U.S.?
Oh Child of Cambodia,
do you see compassion, or the reach of love?
For we live in a way, that sometimes,
Blinds our eyes, from the painful cries,
Of a people that live in a world much less than ours.*

Kalianov was appalled by the U.S. role in first creating misery in Cambodia—between 1970 and 1973, U.S. forces dropped nearly 540,000 tons of munitions onto Cambodia to weaken Vietnamese supply lines—and then in being deaf to the “painful cries” of the Cambodians. But he did not believe that Americans were bad at heart, and when the Governor’s Office launched Iowa SHARES, Kalianov said, “It gave me a renewed sense of us.” The final verse of his song stresses the promise represented by Iowans giving and helping:

*Child of Cambodia,
what do you think when you think of us?
Oh Child of Cambodia,*

*help us to remember we were made for love.
It is in giving, that we receive,
And by helping you, make it through,
These painful times in your world much less than ours.*

Iowa SHARES could not end all controversy or uncertainty about how the United States might act in a world still torn by Cold War suspicions. In fact, for some Iowans, it fed into and even fanned mistrust of foreigners and relief programs. Nevertheless, in seeking to alleviate the suffering of refugees thousands of miles away, Robert Ray’s leadership and the Iowa SHARES project served to preserve faith in government for at least some Iowans during tumultuous times. The project allowed Republicans and Democrats, hawks and doves, Christians and Jews, young and old, rich and poor, to rally behind a singular humanitarian cause. ♦

Matthew Walsh teaches history at Des Moines Community College, Urban Campus. Former refugees and their sponsors from the era of the Vietnam War who are interested in sharing their stories may contact him at 515-248-7232 or at mrwalsh@dmacc.edu.

Dozens of photographs taken by Robert D. Ray, like those on pages 101 and 107, are showcased in *Robert D. Ray: An Iowa Treasure*. A passionate photographer, Ray takes the viewer on a “historical tour of Iowa and the world.” To order, please visit www.keeptowabeautiful.com.

NOTE ON SOURCES

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Annotations to this article are housed in the Iowa Heritage Illustrated production files, SHSI (Iowa City).

Having Your Head Examined

The Strange Odyssey of Phrenology in Iowa

by Timothy Walch

A brief but prescient announcement appeared in the *Burlington Daily Hawk-eye & Telegraph* on April 8, 1857. The editor took notice of one "Professor O'Leary" who was lecturing on phrenology that day at Marion Hall. "Like all the popular lecturers on this subject we have ever heard," remarked the editor, "the Professor is given to exaggeration." That did not mean that the good citizens of Burlington should not attend the lecture. "Go and get your head examined and let us hear what comes of it."

That brief notice touched upon the core elements of phrenology in Iowa. Over a period of nearly 60 years, Iowans were educated, entertained, examined, and inspired by the principles of something called "phrenology." Was it a science? Was it flim-flam? Iowans would go back and forth on the topic well into the 20th century.

As early as 1844, Iowa newspapers mentioned this new way to study human behavior, and books on phrenology were advertised in the *Hawk-eye* as early as 1847. And only a month before O'Leary appeared in Burlington in 1857, the Jackson County Teachers' Association had passed a resolution stating that "a thorough knowledge of the science of Phrenology [is] a highly important qualification for a teacher."

So what was phrenology? Simply put, it was a system that claimed to discern mental faculties and character attributes by interpreting the size and contours of the human skull. Although the desire to better understand the human mind was as old as ancient Greece, no systematic effort addressed this complex issue until the late 18th century, when a Viennese physician named Franz Joseph Gall began to lecture on a new discipline that he called "craniology," the science of the mind. Gall postulated that the human brain comprised 27 distinct "organs" that governed human character and behavior. More important, Gall hypothesized that every human skull, with its individualized bumps, ridges, dips, and crannies, was key to the secrets of

those 27 organs. A close examination of any skull could reveal a great deal about that particular individual.

Gall commissioned models of the heads of great men to explain the links between the shape of the skull and personal achievement. Gall's protégé Johann Spurzheim spread the discipline to the English-speaking world under the term "phrenology"—from the Greek word *phrenos* for brain. By the time Spurzheim visited the United States in 1832, he was no stranger to the American medical and scientific communities, nor were his ideas. The noted phrenologist was fêted at numerous banquets and receptions in New York; in Boston, his lectures, planned for the Athenaeum, had to be moved to the Masonic Temple because of the size of the crowds. But within a matter of weeks, he fell ill and died. Three thousand people attended his memorial service, including the president of Harvard University and the entire membership of the Boston Medical Association. His grave was marked by a marble monument purchased by a prominent merchant.

Spurzheim's death did not diminish Americans' interest in phrenology. Historian Richard Boyer writes that phrenology became "part of the vocabulary of most intellectuals, as current as Freudianism was to become later." Although there was always opposition to it, phrenology through the 1840s was considered an orthodox scientific discipline by many, and its possibilities captivated thinkers such as Horace Mann, Samuel Gridley Howe, and Orestes Brownson, as well as writers such as Poe, Emerson, and Whitman.

In the search to understand humankind, phrenology seemed to make sense. Because the "organs" that





SHSI (IOWA CITY): SCHULTZ, PA 232

composed the brain supposedly correlated to attributes (such as combativeness, benevolence, tenacity, and grandiosity), the attributes that were most dominant and developed in an individual would therefore appear as more prominent bumps, which one could detect on the surface of the head. Organs less developed meant that those faculties were weak and showed up as indentations or slight valleys on the head. Reformers saw phrenology as a key to understanding social problems like crime, intemperance, and insanity, and it was not uncommon for phrenological research to be done in asylums and prisons.

But phrenology quickly shifted from a scientific discipline devoted to researching and observing hu-

An extremely rare image of a phrenologist, taken in Klemme, Iowa, about 1900. He holds a model head, standard to the practice. An empty chair awaits a volunteer to be "phrenologized," and the hefty books on the table are meant to imply training and expertise. Note the two men on the side fences; they're holding up a backdrop for the photograph.

man behavior to a practical system of personal analysis to help individuals map out their lives. "Practical phrenology" had substantial appeal to the people of a new nation eager to re-invent themselves. It proved irresistible to Americans of all social classes. Through "mental exercise," an individual could strengthen and cultivate positive traits and repress and inhibit negative ones.

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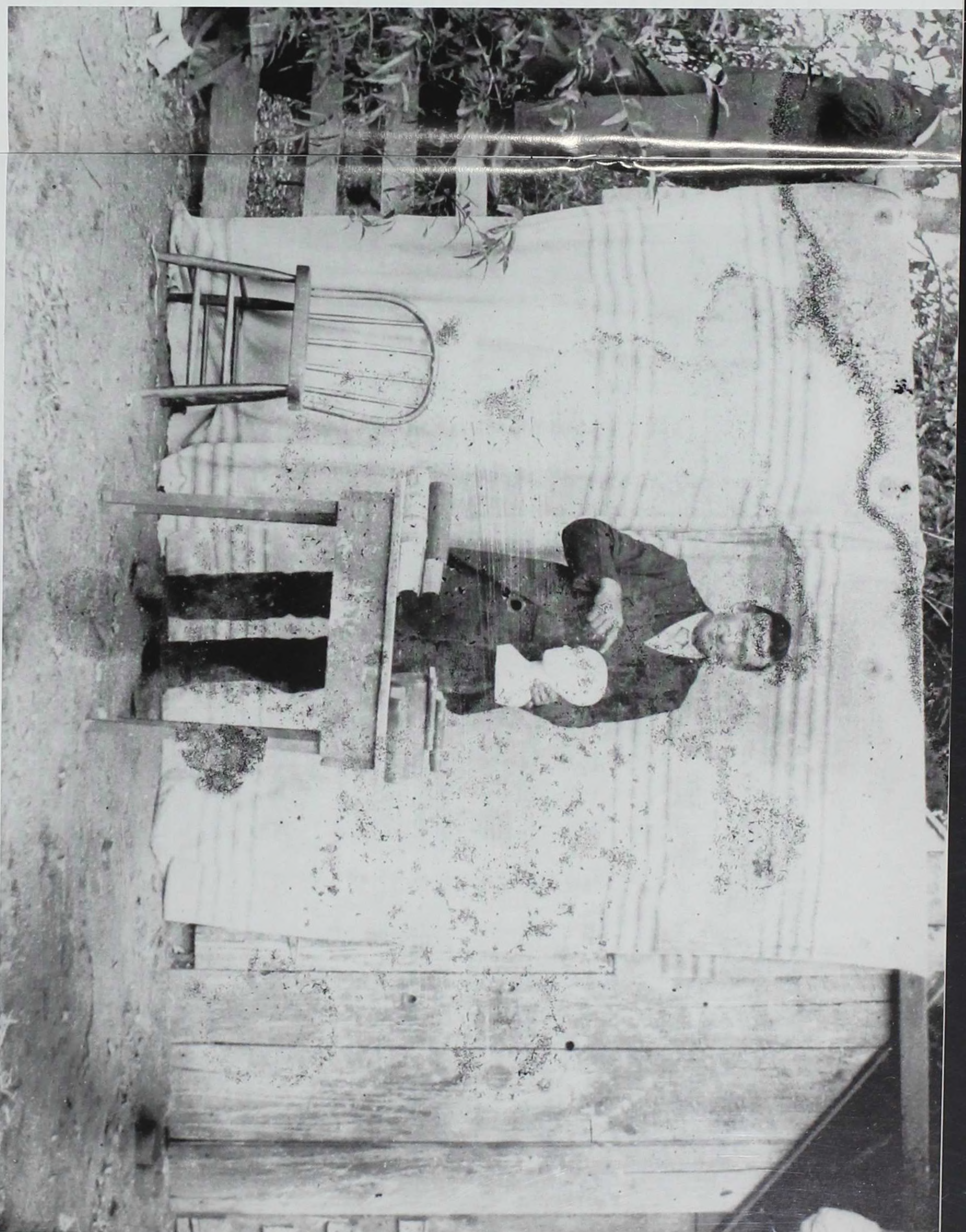
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Attesting to their broad appeal, phrenology publications were widely advertised in national periodicals. These ads appeared in issues of *American Agriculturist* in 1864.

The new science was used for everything from advising parents on their children's future careers to finding the perfect mate to evaluating the work tendencies of prospective employees.

In the masterful hands of Lorenzo Fowler and his brother Orson, practical phrenology swept across the United States. Together with Samuel Wells and Nelson Sizer, the Fowler brothers offered training courses and established a publishing house in New York that produced a national journal (with a circulation of 50,000) and a steady stream of textbooks and pamphlets. Advertisements for Fowler & Wells were commonplace in newspapers all across the country, including Iowa.

The mechanism that had the most to do with the popularity of phrenology in the 19th century was the lecture circuit and its yearly crop of self-trained "professors" and "doctors" who traveled from town to town to give talks and demonstrations. "One authority has calculated that about twenty thousand practical phrenologists plied the trade in the nineteenth century," notes historian Charles Colbert. "Whatever the number, there were certainly enough to visit every hamlet in the union."

Curious audiences were not hard to drum up; even skeptics welcomed the occasional diversion. Thomas Macbride, a botanist and later State University of Iowa

president, was a child in eastern Iowa when a phrenologist—"a glib speaker"—arrived in the area. "Night after night," Macbride recalled, "the [school]house was full, first at ten cents and then fifteen, [with] charts in the name of O. S. Fowler, duly signed; drafts on the future for each lucky boy. . . . The fancy of youth was captured; in many a manly heart ambition stirred; and doubtless beyond the meadows the noblest visions rose, even hovered above the handles of the plow."

Macbride quoted a neighbor's more blunt assessment of the phrenology lecturer: "The man says something nice now about everybody; but I think they'll all be over it by and by; there can't be so much goodness in one neighborhood."

Over the course of several decades, thousands of Americans listened to traveling lecturers and then paid them to examine their heads, chart their findings, and provide personal recommendations. Free lectures typically ran for several nights; the private examinations brought in the profit. The charts and the advice were generally positive, and such "scientific" reinforcement gave the subjects a sense of their own self-worth—proof of one's special talents, good character, and promising future. Wasn't that assessment worth a dollar or two?

John Pattee apparently thought so. In 1855 Pattee had been appointed by the governor to fill a vacancy as auditor of public accounts. When Orson Fowler came to Iowa City, then the state capital, in 1856, Pat-

tee requested a phrenological chart. Among many strengths, Fowler noted Pattee's tenacity, benevolence, and morality—though he lacked "brass, boldness and self-assurance." He had too much caution and too little self-esteem to be a lawyer, but he was "methodical," "good in figures," and wanted "every single thing in place." This boded well. That fall Pattee was elected state auditor.

Well-known phrenologist Nelson Sizer assessed Jared Fuller in 1854 as having "in your nature commingled, two distinct physical elements, power and activity, & were you not a tough man you would have broken down long ago, for you work with all your might."

John Elkins's phrenologist had good things to say about the young man's honesty though he lacked the "mental temperament to be more than a common man." Elkins became a blacksmith and later served in the Civil War as a sergeant in the 29th Iowa Infantry.

A phrenologist named James Walker prepared a profile for James L. Winter of Iowa City in 1866. Here again, the written assessment reflected positive attributes. "[You have] much self respect," wrote Walker of Winter, "a dignity of character, and an active mind, a passion for self improvement, a full appreciation of the value of education and a desire to attain its benefits." Winter went on for several pages with remarks of a similar tone and nature—although one passage is completely blacked out, perhaps by a self-conscious Winter.

It is difficult to determine whether Pattee, Fuller, Elkins, and Winter took their charts seriously. But judging by diaries and scrapbooks, it's certain that a farm family named Gillespie put great stock in phrenology.

Emily and James Gillespie lived in Delaware County. As Emily's diary shows, she was in an unhappy, abusive marriage. But she had a fervid belief in education and great hopes for herself and her two children, Henry and Sarah. Phrenology fueled those hopes.

Emily had attended local phrenology lectures as early as 1873, and Henry attended such a lecture when he was 15—"the first time he has ever been alone, any place in the evening," she wrote. Three years later, when Henry was 18, Emily ordered his phrenological chart from Nelson Sizer in New York. As instructed, she sent two photos of Henry (front and side views), along with his chest, waist, and head measurements; height and weight; color of complexion, eyes, and hair; and information on his marital status, general health, and education.

How could a phrenologist in New York ascertain the attributes of a young farmer in Iowa? As historian Robert E. Riegel makes clear, "The work and theories of the phrenologists were by no means confined to the bumps of the head, as is often assumed. In diagnosing any individual their first interest was in his general physical characteristics, such as height, weight, and texture of the skin." Thus, in common parlance, the term phrenology also referred to physiognomy, which was the study of facial features and contours—the size and shape of the forehead or jaw, for instance, or the distance between the eyes. Coarse features might imply anger or oafishness, for example; a pale, delicate look suggested nervousness or a poetic sensitivity. The stance and movement of the body, even how one spoke and shook hands, also yielded clues for sizing up one's character. To a phrenologist, "kindness bent the head forward, dignity carried it upward and backward,

SHSI (IOWA CITY): JAN. 21, 1864

PHRENOLOGIKAL KARACTER OF MR. MARK M. LEBERRY *Given at the offiss of Proff. Josh Billings, praktikal phrenologis, prise \$4*

Amivness.—Big. Stiks out like a hornet's ness. You ought tew be able tew luv the whole human familee with yure bump at onst.—You will never be a widderer long, not enny.

Pollytiks.—You have got the natral wa. A splendid bump. It feels like a Dimmokratik pumb, too. Menny a man has got to be konstable with half yure bump.

Kombatifness.—Sleightually, very much. Yu might fite a woman, but tuff match. I shud like tew bet on the woman. This bump wants poultising.

Besides announcing and advertising phrenologists, local newspapers poked fun at them. These quips ran on the front page of Toledo's *Iowa Transcript* in 1864.

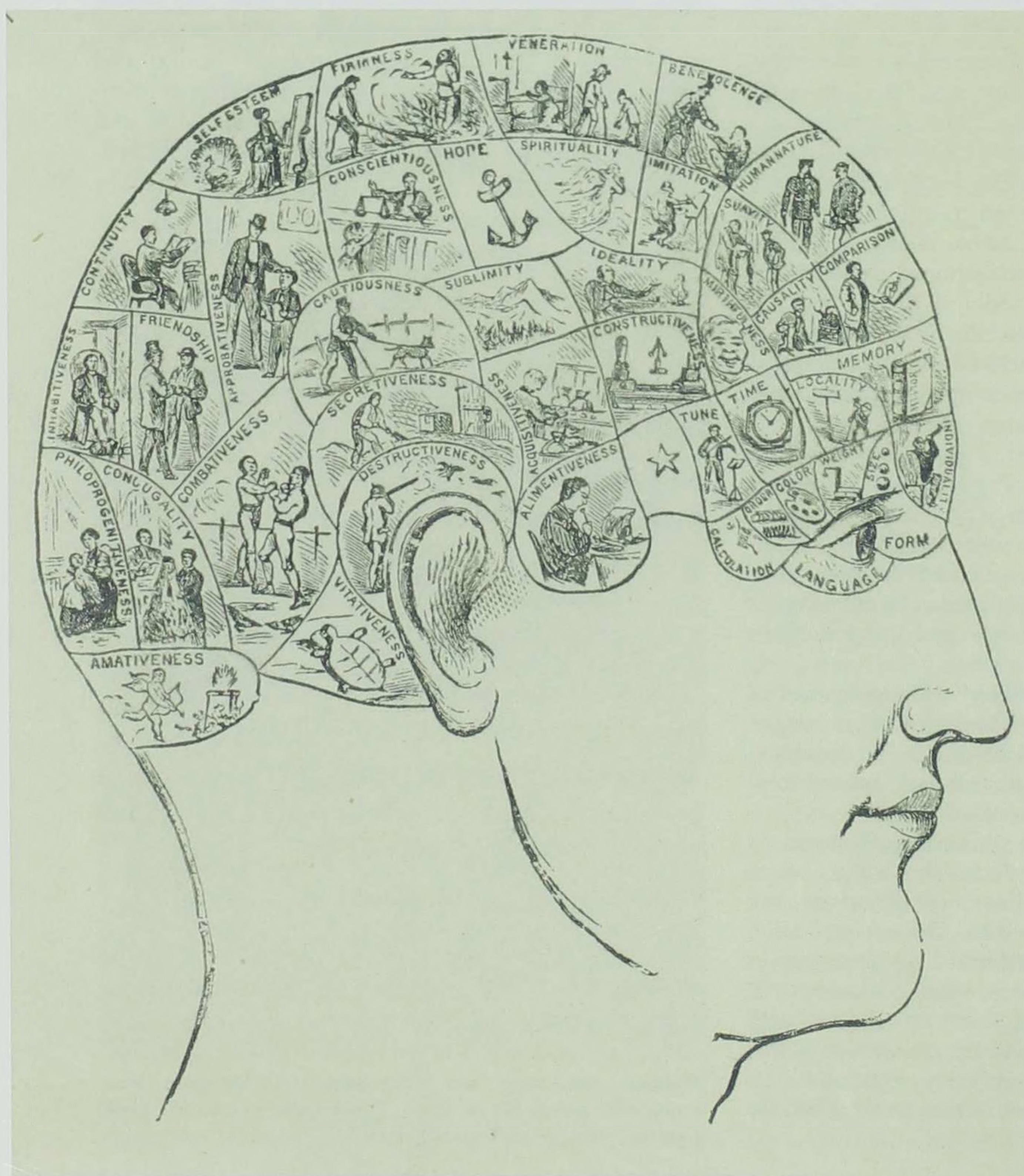
firmness produced straight posture," writes scholar Madeleine Stern.

Thus, when photos of Henry Gillespie arrived by mail, Sizer evaluated his facial features and shape of his head. From that assessment, he recommended suitable occupations for the 18-year-old. And based on the written description of his health, weight, height, and complexion, Sizer prescribed certain healthful habits and discouraged harmful ones. Advice on healthy living was a common component of phrenological charts and was considered useful by the subjects.

According to her diary, Emily Gillespie was de-

lighted with Sizer's analysis of her son, according to her diary: "This [is] indeed a model Chart, giving him the highest recommendation as to the different scientific works which he might do—or adopt as a business—to succeed in life. . . . Doctor. Merchant. Photographer. in fact every thing scientific—even down to a dentist."

Sarah, his sister, was equally proud of Henry's "splendid" chart, though her diary notes less prestigious career possibilities that Sizer had recommended. "He can be a jeweler, keep a variety store, or a book store, could be a carriage trimmer, make inside finishing of house, or a piano-forte maker," Sarah wrote.

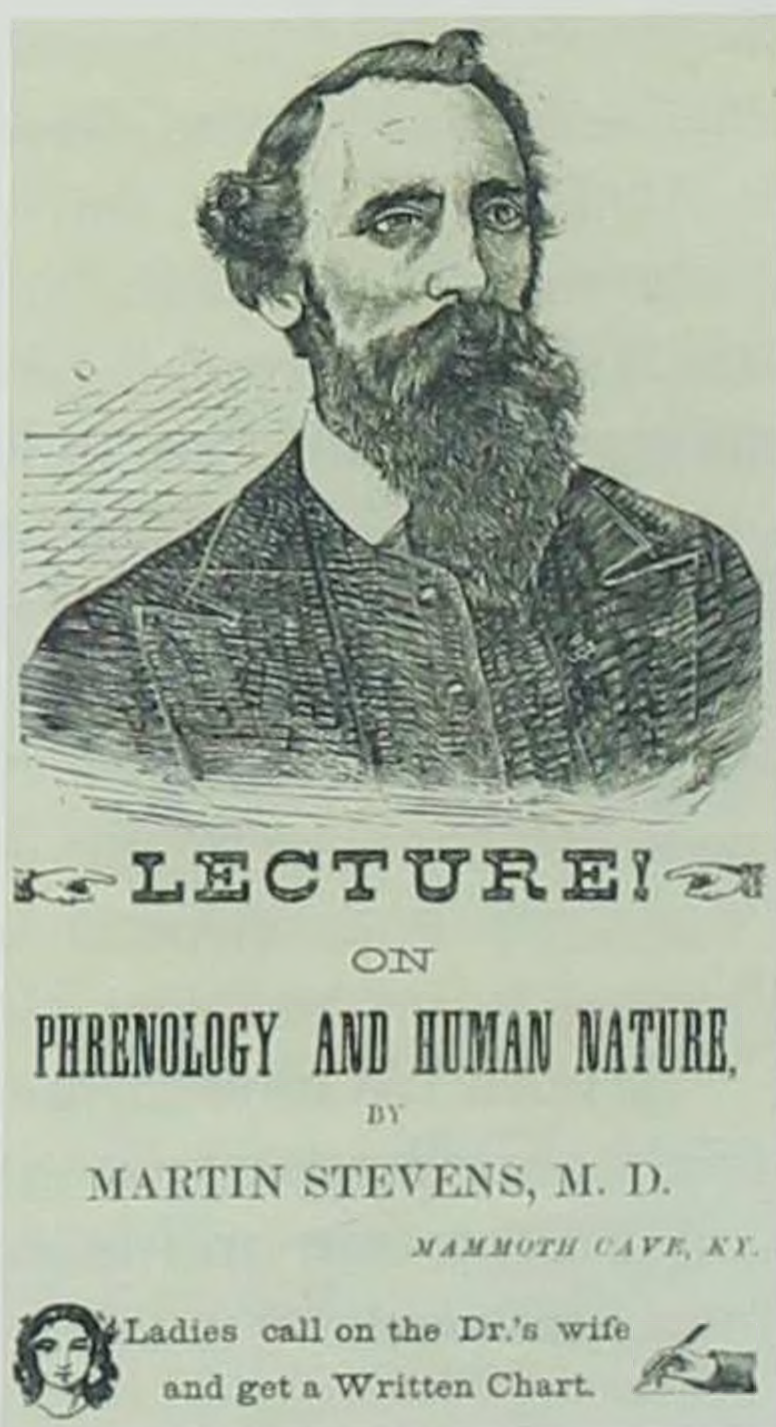


Marry someone pleasant and plump. Don't pursue mechanical work. Watch your health. That was the advice of phrenologist Martin Stevens (below) for Samuel S. Townsley.

Left: Each brain "organ" was responsible for a character trait. The positions of the organs appear on this diagram.

Right: Based on the skull's contours, traits were rated from 1 to 7. High ratings like Townsley's were common; phrenologists knew the value of flattering their subjects.

Bottom right: In just a few lines, Stevens made recommendations for Townsley's future.



BOTH PAGES: SHSI (IOWA CITY); DETAILS OF SAMUEL S. TOWNSLEY'S PHRENOLOGICAL CHART

"His Hope is like the head light of a Locomotive & illuminates the distance, though like the Locomotive you may travel in darkness."

A few months later, Sarah, 17, received her own 16-page chart from Nelson Sizer. The first half advised seeking good food, "sleep, fresh air, pure water and sunshine." The second half stated that she was "steadfast, positive, decided and determined." She should marry "a man with . . . a head a little broader than yours; it need not be quite so high at the crown." "You could learn a mechanical [manual] trade, such as millinery; but you never would be satisfied with it....

Medicine first; teaching second, reporting and type writing third, would place you on an independent basis, whether you married or lived single."

Sarah's mother, Emily, was ecstatic. "Only think of it both my Children Doctors—well I am proud of it & will help them all I can."

Two years later, Emily noted in her diary that she had attended a local lecture by Professor G. Morris and then "went to his room. he examined my head & I got a Chart. . . . [Morris] said it was the most remarkable head he ever examined. that it was almost impossible for a person to reach as high a position as I was capable

Sizes, Names and Meanings of the Signs of Character.

AMITIVENESS.—Connubial love, affection. ⁶	IMITATION.—Copying, aptitude for mimicry. ⁶	TEMPERAMENTS.
CONJUGAL LOVE.—Union for life, instinct. ⁶	MIRTH.—Fun, wit, ridicule, facetiousness. ⁷	
PARENTAL LOVE.—Care of offspring, and all young. ⁶	INDIVIDUALITY.—Observation, curiosity to see. ⁶	
FRIENDSHIP.—Sociability, union of friends. ⁶	FORM.—Memory of shape, looks, persons, things. ⁶	
INHABITIVENESS.—Love of home and country. ⁶	SIZE.—Measurement of quantity by the eye. ⁶	
CONTINUITY.—Application, consecutiveness. ⁵	WEIGHT.—Control of motion, balancing. ⁶	
VITATIVENESS.—Clinging to life, tenacity, endurance. ⁴	COLOR.—Discernment, and love of colors, hues, tints. ⁵	
COMBATIVENESS.—Defence, courage, criticism. ⁶	ORDER.—Method system, going by rule, arrange't. ⁵	
DESTRUCTIVENESS.—Executiveness, push, propel. ⁶	CALCULATION.—Mental arithmetic, numbers. ⁶	
ALIMENTIVENESS.—Appetite for food, etc. ⁶	LOCALITY.—Memory of place, position, travels. ⁶	
ACQUISITIVENESS.—Frugality, economy, to get. ⁵	EVENTUALITY.—Memory of facts, events, history. ⁵	MENTAL, Gives thought ⁷
SECRETIVENESS.—Self-control, policy, to keep. ⁵	TIME.—Telling when, time of day, dates, punctuality. ⁶	VITAL, produces vitality ⁴
CAUTIOUSNESS.—Guardedness, care-taking, safety. ⁶	TUNE.—Love of music, sense of harmony, singing. ⁵	MOTIVE, furnishes strength ⁵
APPROBATIVENESS.—Love of applause and display. ⁸	LANGUAGE.—Expression by words, signs or acts. ⁵	
SELF-ESTEEM.—Self-respect, dignity, authority. ⁶	CAUSALITY.—Planning, thinking, philosophy. ⁷	
FIRMNESS.—Stability, perseverance, steadfastness. ⁴	COMPARISON.—Analysis, inferring, illustration. ⁷	Signs of longevity are for ⁶⁵
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS.—Sense of right, justice. ⁶	HUMAN NATURE.—Sagacity, perception, motives. ⁷	years old.
HOPE.—Expectation, anticipation, perfect trust. ⁶	SUAVITY.—Pleasantness, blandness, politeness. ⁴	Your health is ———
SPIRITUALITY.—Intuition, prescience, faith. ⁵	CONSTRUCTIVENESS.—Ingenuity, invention, tools. ⁶	
VENERATION.—Worship, adoration, deference. ⁶	IDEALITY.—Taste, love of beauty, poetry and art. ⁶	
BENEVOLENCE.—Sympathy, kindness, mercy. ⁶	SUBLIMITY.—Love of the grand, vast, magnificent. ⁷	23½

MR, you would live very happily with a person who is plump and has dark eyes, dark hair, and pleasant appearance. You can follow a professional, business or mechanical pursuit and should roam in the fields of literature. You should make a teacher, Minister, Statesman or Phrenologist. You would advance in society affairs and march on science with gigantic strides. You must take care of your health.

The Doctor charges 50 cents for a Phrenological Examination, and 50 cents more for a written Chart, which is worth more than Prof. O. S. Fowler's \$5 charts. Call and have a social chat with the Doctor about Wyandotte Cave, Indiana, or Mammoth Cave, Kentucky.

of doing & also desirous to do. . . . That I could be one of the finest poets, one of the best authors, & in the finest arts I could have reached the very highest."

Sarah's diary reveals that she and Henry were considering "going to the Phrenological Institute in N.Y. & we *will* too if we can, as soon as we can. We will have to read & study some first." Though often plagued by ill health, Sarah saw great promise in phrenology, and it appears that she re-read Sizer's report whenever she faced personal challenges. She kept in touch with him, and on the back of one

envelope, she wrote, "Latent talent and ambitions thwarted. I naturally turned to him who had understood & these responses boosted hope & courage up." Years later she wrote an afterthought to her chart: "I should like to add that this characterization is perfect in every detail." Then she made reference to the challenges she had faced on the farm: "Conditions environing the formative years were filled to overflowing with duties that overburdened the heart, head and hands; leaving me a physical wreck at twenty-one."



SHS: (IOWA CITY: WETHERBY COLLECTION)



"Let the hair be wet and brushed down as smoothly to the head as possible, so as to show its shape," instructed Fowler and Wells to those who mailed photos to a phrenologist. Above: These images of B. Mishler were taken by Iowa City photographer and artist Isaac Wetherby, who also drew and painted nearly 70 busts of famous people, from Shakespeare to John C. Fremont; these were used by traveling phrenologists in the 1850s. Below: Henry Gillespie's photos for Nelson Sizer.



SHS: (IOWA CITY: GILLESPIE COLLECTION)



A touring phrenologist relied on local newspapers to draw an audience, and editors surely welcomed the advertising as well as something new to write about, though their tone varied. Some lecturers were praised: a Dr. Brevoort was deemed a "celebrated Phrenologist" and spoken of "in the highest terms" by a Cedar Falls newspaper in 1861. Others were scorned: in Clarksville in 1868, the audience was "beautifully sold" by "Professor Bronson and his infant guide," but the "bogus lecturer" skipped town without paying his bills. And some were fodder for humor: in 1860, the *Cedar Falls Gazette* reported that "a Yankee that has come lately West, advertises that he will mend clocks, lecture on phrenology, milk cows . . . and catch crabs in creeks." Clearly, by 1860 phrenology had lost much of its scientific luster.

Touring phrenologists, even those with faux titles of "doctor" or "professor," had to broaden their appeal and promise entertainment. They routinely pulled volunteers from the audience to demonstrate how they read their traits. If the volunteer was a local celebrity, or a pretty young woman looking for a mate, so much the merrier.

Magnetism, hypnotism, and a song or two were often part of the evening's instruction and entertainment. A four-man show appeared in Fort Dodge in early September 1866. The mesmerist, banjo player, and tightrope walker all "astonish[ed] the natives," but the fourth act cancelled: Professor Warnick, a phre-

nologist and ventriloquist had lost his voice. (Warnick was billed as "the world renowned Negro Delineator [of character]. Another phrenologist who toured in Iowa with a similar act was George S. Yates, "The Colored Phrenologist and Ventriloquist.")

Of course, lecturers continued to tout the practical value of phrenology. "The Great Prophet St. Germain," who visited Dubuque in 1870, had "the ability to cure persons radically from deep-rooted vices, such as excessive drinking, gambling and unfaithfulness within nine days," or so claimed his advertisement. In 1876, A. E. Willis also lectured there on "phrenology and kindred sciences" that would "Benefit the Human Family" and focus on "Domestic Happiness, or Marriage and Divorce." Hardly any condition was outside the bounds of phrenology.

The *Davenport Daily Leader* reported that "Prof. Warren is considered the best entertainer in the lecture field," and "laughter, merriment and instruction attract large audiences to his lectures." Warren displayed "skulls of idiots, murderers and eccentric people" to illustrate his talks. Although the skulls were surely replicas, the gruesomeness would have appealed to some of the public.

Models of heads, as well as portraits, were typical props. U. E. Traer had "a splendid gallery of . . . a great number of portraits of 'great, good' or bad men, showing the traits of the human head." In fact, as early as the 1850s, Traer had been using phrenological portraits created by Iowa photographer and artist Isaac Wetherby. With "no rival in the West," Traer was a frequent lecturer in the state. In an 1886 lecture, he advised two young people to marry. "They were total strangers," Nelson Sizer later wrote, "and formed part of a group of persons who were invited to come forward to the platform at a lecture. They became acquainted and were married a year later." The couple named one of their children after Traer.

Traer also managed the Siloam Spring Sanitarium in Iowa Falls, a "resort" for the "treatment of all the various chronic diseases." But a story from Primghar in O'Brien County in 1894 marred his reputation. Following a lecture at which he identified Carrie B. Hitchings of Sanborn as an invalid, Traer treated her for an undisclosed illness. According to the *Waterloo Courier*, Traer allegedly "performed an operation and Hitchings complained of a great pain." She died five days later. A coroner's inquest concluded that "Mrs. Hitchings came to her death as the result of an operation performed by Dr. Traer, with some metal instrument, and that said operation was unskillfully and carelessly done." He later sued the *Iowa Capital* for \$25,000 for al-

leged libel in connection with the woman's death. He did not stop lecturing.

Iowa newspapers reprinted stories on everything phrenological—from general explanations of the principles, to speculation that phrenology might have some value in treating mental disorders, to humorous stories about phrenological parties where a local phrenologist amused guests with his skills. Upon the death of Orson Fowler in 1887 (he had visited Dubuque again, in 1880), a substantial obituary appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, but no other Iowa paper took notice of his passing.

Judging from 1890s articles, there was something of a resurgence of what some editors referred to as "bumpology." A bill introduced in the Minnesota state legislature called for a commission on phrenology, anatomy, and physiology. The *Davenport Daily Leader* noted the 1896 centennial of phrenology in a widely reprinted story. Other Iowa papers published stories about a national phrenology convention in Chicago.

But despite ongoing popular interest in phrenology, newspapers paid it only marginal respect—and that respect was shifting toward derision. Perhaps the *Cedar Falls Gazette* best captured the Iowa sentiment at the turn of the century: a professor of phrenology could no more "tell what's in a man's head by running his fingers over it, than a skillful chicken thief can tell by running his fingers over the clapboards of a chicken coop how many chickens are inside."

One Iowa phrenologist, Robert J. Black of Vinton, was prepared to publicly defend his profession. Black first came to public attention as the result of a fluke interview with former president Grover Cleveland in early November 1900. Black had been lecturing at Princeton University and took it upon himself to visit Cleveland, who lived in the area. Although Black was known as a phrenologist, his visit had nothing to do with that subject.

The two men talked politics and focused on Cleveland's views on the upcoming campaign. A Philadelphia reporter interviewed Black, and the story appeared in numerous U.S. papers. This prominence carried over long after Black returned to Iowa. And when a professor of psychology from the State University of Iowa in Iowa City criticized Black's beloved profession, he responded vigorously.

The confrontation began in March 1905 when Carl E. Seashore, the new chairman of the psychology department, lectured to the student body. Seashore said bluntly, "The man who says that he can tell your char-

acter by the bumps on your head lies when he says so."

Under the headline "Seashore Hits Bump Artists," the *Waterloo Courier* quoted the lecture at length. "Phrenology claims to be a science of the function of the brain," Seashore was reported as saying. "It rests upon four principles, three of which are absolutely false. The phrenologist argues that first the brain is the organ of the mind which is true, but figurative; second, that the mind may be reduced to a number of faculties; third that these faculties are seated in different regions; and fourth that the size of each region is a measure of the faculty associated with it. The last three principles are preposterous nonsense."

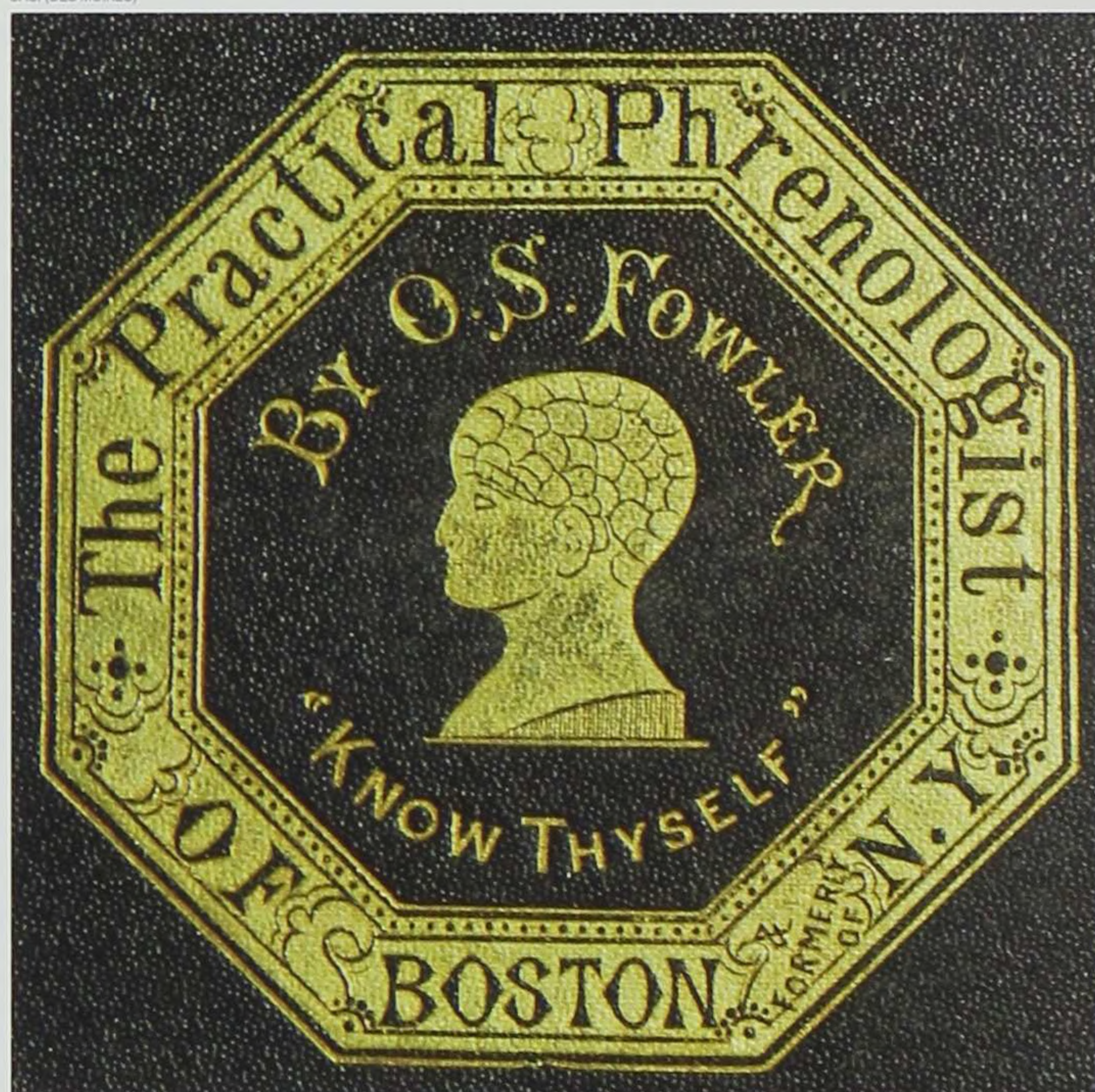
Seashore elaborated on each of the false tenets of phrenology and warned that although phrenologists had keen powers of observation of personal appearance, "the phrenologist tells you just what you tell him. A glib tongue and a ready command of bold generalities are the only other material aids."

Glib tongue? Bold generalities? These were fighting words to Bob Black. Black's "back is up," the *Iowa City Daily Press* reported, and he "will prove the integrity of his profession, and the power of phrenology." Black later told a *Waterloo* paper that "he could teach the professor a thing or two if he could meet him."

The *Waterloo Daily Reporter* continued, "As no attention was paid to [Black's] statement, he decided upon more aggressive measures and he has now issued a sweeping challenge which includes every professor in the state university of Iowa to the effect that he will meet any one of their number in a public debate on the validity of his science for a purse of four hundred dollars."

Under the headline "Bump Reader Sore," the *Daily Iowan* reviewed the terms laid down by Black and speculated on who should speak for the university. No mention was made of Seashore. "Perhaps it will be necessary," joked the student paper, "to use the 'try-out' system, selecting the men best informed on the subject and sending these into what might be called a 'Black' preliminary." But "because of the lateness of the season, the difficulty in getting a large enough hall,

SHSI (DES MOINES)



For those who ascribed to phrenology, "Know Thyself" implied "Improve Thyself." The symbol of phrenology was a side profile of a human head, with the "organs" of the brain delineated. The symbol appears here on the cover of a book by Orson Fowler (1869).

and the trouble in securing competent judges, nothing will come of this challenge."

"Up to the hour of going to press," noted the *Daily Press*, "members of the university community have not stumbled over one another in a wild desperate and destructive rush to accept Black's challenge."

Black repeated his challenge. But there is no record of any comment from Seashore or the university.

For the rest of the decade, Bob Black and a few other phrenologists on the lecture circuit appeared in the press from time to time. A few articles by Jessie Fowler, daughter of phrenologist Lorenzo Fowler, touted the practical uses of phrenology by reading faces from photographs. The presidential campaign of 1908 prompted her article on the qualities of candidates William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan, also based on her reading their faces.

In the 1912 campaign, "bumps on the head" again figured in. "If there's anything in phrenology," noted one wire story, "Bob LaFollette is slated for the

presidency. Dr. J. T. Allen, president of Aurora college [in Illinois], who recently examined LaFollette's head, says the pugnacious statesman's bumps spell 'president.'"

Not to be outdone, Bob Black weighed in for Woodrow Wilson (who had endorsed Black when he visited Princeton back in 1900). "Black is known to practically every resident of Cedar Rapids," noted the *Gazette*, "and during his lifetime claims that he has 'read the heads' of 24,000 people in this city alone." Quite an achievement. (And, of course, Woodrow Wilson won.)

The phrenological movement in Iowa essentially ended on January 4, 1916, with the announcement of the passing of Robert J. Black. His obituary called him "the man who examined more craniums and started more men on a successful career than the most noted college professor who ever lived." Noting Black's unwavering belief in phrenological principles, the obituary concluded, "For years the people of Cedar Rapids have been accustomed to receive a call from Black and his familiar handbag once or twice a week. His visits to the different stores and office buildings have been the occasion of much good-natured fun—for Black knew the value of humor as well as the serious side of life."

But it was the last sentence of the obituary that best captured the epitaph of the movement: "[Black's] demise marks the passing of a phrenologist of the old school."

No others came forth to replace him or to champion the movement in the state. One has to look hard to find even a passing mention of phrenology in Iowa papers after his death. And these few references are to a discredited pseudo-science of the 19th century. For all practical purposes, the strange odyssey of phrenology in Iowa was over.

So what are we to make of the role of phrenology in American culture? Robert Riegel offers one of the best assessments. "Contrary to common belief," he reminds us, "phrenology did not originate as the scheme of money-making fakers, but from the study of able men using the best scientific methods of that day." He points to the rise of the "practical phrenologist" as the beginning of the end of the discipline. "This practitioner, frequently without training," he adds "sought to capitalize on the new science and make it pay dividends."

In sum, that was the story. By the time phrenology reached Iowa, the scientific discipline had become a pseudo-science, a parade of practical phrenologists offering answers—sometimes vague, sometimes spe-

cific—to the pressing questions about one's talents and future.

No doubt, many Americans valued this advice. "A paltry two bits entitled the sitter to sage counsel about vocational aptitude or marital prospects," concludes Charles Colbert, "and in a nation where social and geographic mobility were increasingly the norm, such advice was in great demand." Iowa was no different than the rest of the nation in that regard.

Even today, Americans in general, and perhaps Iowans in particular, have a persistent desire to improve themselves. For nearly six decades Iowans had the opportunity to use practical phrenology to do just that. Perhaps having your head examined wasn't such a bad idea after all. ♦

As a volunteer at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Timothy Walch scours Iowa newspapers for topics ranging from the Civil War to phrenology lectures to the 1940 federal census.

NOTE ON SOURCES

This article is based on a search of online databases of Iowa newspapers from the earliest editions to 1950, as well as on rare phrenological materials in the Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. In SHSI-Des Moines: John Elkins; Jared Fuller; and Stall Family Papers. In SHSI-Iowa City: Sarah Jane Kimball (see BB 27.1); John Pattee; Samuel S. Townsley; James L. Winter; and Emily, Henry, and Sarah Gillespie. See also Judy Nolte Lensink, "A Secret to Be Buried": *The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989); and Suzanne L. Bunkers, "All Will Yet Be Well": *The Diary of Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, 1873-1952* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993).

In SHSI Libraries are several 19th-century books and pamphlets on phrenology, as well as *American Agriculturist* and Toledo's *Iowa Transcript*. Material on Isaac Wetherby appears in Marybeth Slonneger, *Wetherby's Gallery* (Iowa City: By Hand Press, 2006), 51-56, 61, 146-47. Thomas H. Macbride described a phrenologist in his *In Cabins and Sod-Houses* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1928). Nelson Sizer, *How to Study Strangers by Temperament, Face and Head* (New York: Fowler & Wells, Co., 1895) was located online, as were issues of the *Phrenological Journal*.

In addition, the author consulted a number of scholarly works about phrenology in the United States. The most important work remains the published dissertation by John D. Davies, *Phrenology: Fad and Science—A Nineteenth Century American Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955); and Robert E. Riegel, "The Introduction of Phrenology to the United States," *American Historical Review* 39 (Oct. 1933). Charles Colbert focuses on the role of phrenology in American art history; see *A Measure of Perfection: Phrenology and the Fine Arts in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). A useful overview appears in the introduction to Madeleine B. Stern, comp., *A Phrenological Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1982). See also Richard O. Boyer, *The Legend of John Brown* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 450.

Copies of all Iowa newspaper articles located on phrenology are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).



Making the Perfect Cigar in Iowa

by Lori Vermaas



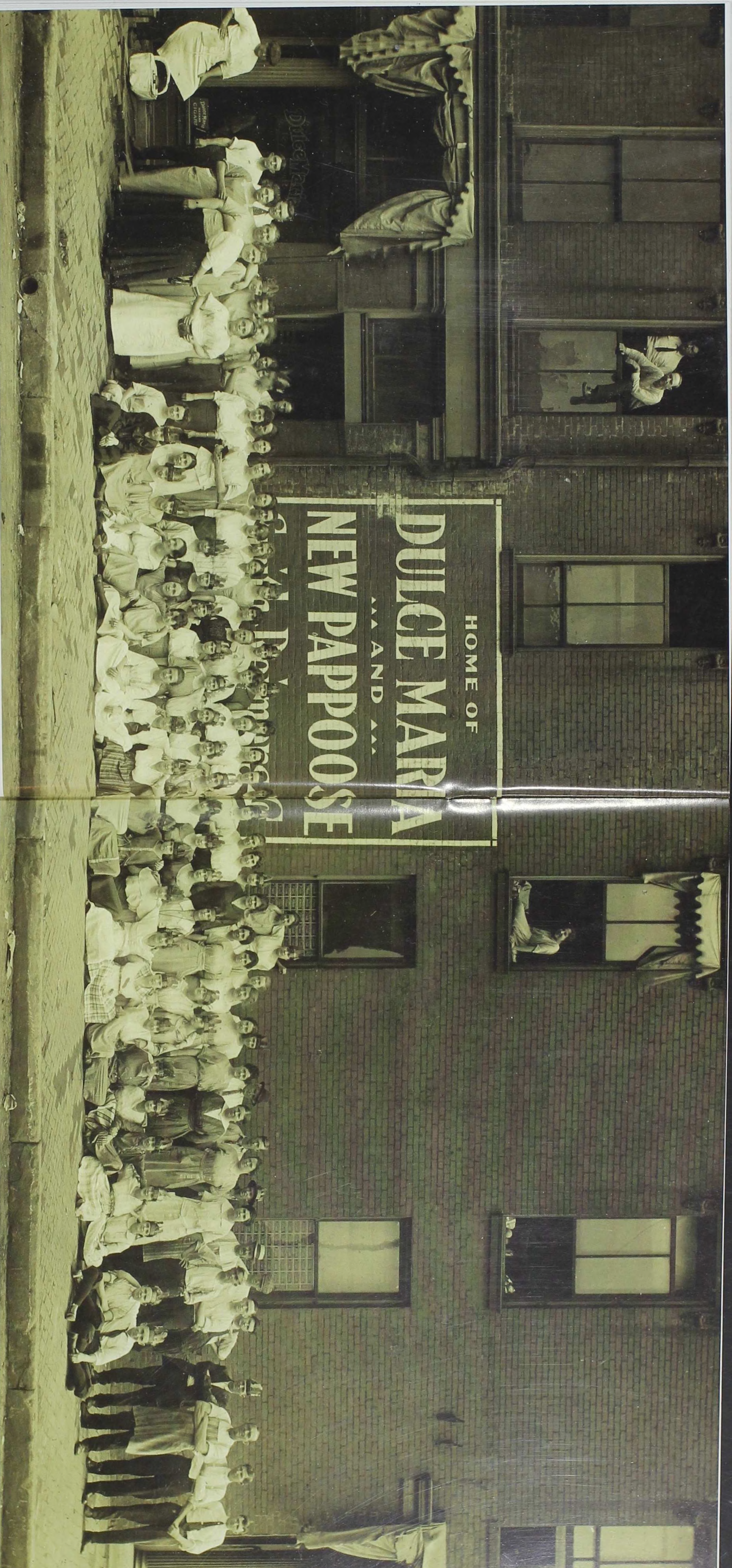
PUTNAM MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND NATURAL SCIENCE, DAVENPORT, IOWA

When Fred Powers was 14 years old, in the year 1915, he dropped out of school and began working at Julius Fecht's cigar factory in Ottumwa, Iowa. Powers worked as a "roustabout" for about a year, "mostly helping with bringing in the tobacco and also packing cigar clippings in packages," he recounted decades later.

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Above: Workers pose outside a cigar factory, probably in Davenport. The headdresses worn in the front row may refer to Pappoose cigars manufactured there by Nicholas Kuhn.



PITMAN MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND NATURAL SCIENCE, DAVENPORT, IOWA

Making the Perfect Cigar in Iowa

by Lori Vermaas

When Fred Powers was 14 years old, in the year 1915, he dropped out of school and began working at Julius Fecht's cigar factory in Ottumwa, Iowa. Powers worked as a "roustabout" for about a year, "mostly helping with bringing in the tobacco and also packing cigar clippings in packages," he recounted decades later.

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a role in the rise of the cigar as a consumer product in the United States.

After a year in the factory, Powers "went to the bench . . . to start apprenticeship as a cigar maker," he said. "But after looking at the other people working there [rolling cigars], humped over from sitting there over those benches, I decided that that wasn't the job I wanted and left."

Despite Powers's quick departure from the job, substantial numbers of Iowans worked in the cigar industry during its heyday, the 1880s to the 1920s. The growth of the cigar industry in Iowa hinged on the popularity of the cigar in American social culture. The cigar was attractive to a nation eager to distinguish itself from pretentious Europe. As social historian Eric Burns puts it, "Everything about the cigar . . . set it apart from the pipe. And that, in turn, gave [Americans] . . . yet another way to set themselves apart from the British. . . . A cigar was a small

symbol of the gathering drive toward independence, just as was the preference for certain kinds of alcoholic beverage rather than the tea so often associated with the Motherland."

Burns writes that during the Civil War, "commanding officers wanted their men to smoke, knowing that they needed distraction from the ennui and horrors around them and much preferring tobacco to booze." Burns continues, "A man who smoked too much could still aim his gun and hit the enemy; one who drank to excess might pull the trigger and amputate his toe."

Although Americans preferred to chew tobacco for much of the 19th century, cigar smoking was on the increase. By the 1880s the cigar had become the most popular tobacco product in the United States—and a powerful symbol of success. As Burns states, it was a "badge of the fellow whose time was his own to govern, or who wanted to give [the] impression . . . [that] he owned the block." And as historian Patricia Cooper notes, cigars had become "a familiar prop in male culture"—for politicians cutting deals, gentlemen relaxing after dinner, and laborers stopping at the neighborhood saloon.

In step with the growing popularity of cigars, factory production in the U.S. more than tripled between 1869 and 1899. Iowa's cigar output would never come close to that of eastern cities, most notably New York, where hundreds of manufactories thrived, many employing over a thousand cigar makers. Nevertheless, cigar making was considered a major industry in Des Moines, Davenport, Sioux City, Burlington, Keokuk, Muscatine, Council Bluffs, Dubuque, and Ottumwa. The privately compiled *United States Directory of Cigar Manufacturers* (1902) listed 375 manufacturers in 158 Iowa towns.

During the 1850s and '60s, before the industry took off, cigar making existed on a small scale. These small enterprises, called buckeyes, were often operated out of a backroom, sometimes in a house, with a lone worker or a few more.

In Iowa, one of the earliest cigar-making hubs with small shops was Burlington, where Henry Gabriel had started up his business by 1856. Gabriel's shop was likely a buckeye. Despite the modest size of buckeyes, the value of cigars and tobacco products manufactured in Burlington already ranked 13th out of 22 industries, right beside manufacture of furniture, cut stone, and boots and shoes. Meanwhile, other cigar entrepreneurs were setting up production in the western half of the state—for example, John W. Peregoy in Council Bluffs in 1868. In Des Moines between 1862 and 1876, nine cigar manufacturers established businesses.

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Cigars and walking sticks are the accouterments of these eight stylish gents posing for a group portrait.

Most Iowa cigar enterprises would always remain small and short-lived, employing 5 to 30 workers, but others flourished and became actual factories. In Davenport, Nicholas Kuhnlen, who had started up in 1854, expanded his business into one of the largest cigar factories in the state; in 1882, he employed nearly 300 women and men. Ferd Haak, a local competitor, opened a shop in 1869; by the 1880s he employed 60 workers and produced two million cigars annually. D. D. Myers of Dubuque opened his business in 1869; by 1880 he had upgraded into a three-story business building and a similar-sized factory.

Cigar making began with the arrival of large bales of tobacco at the factory. "Since a tax had to be paid on the weight of the bale," Tom Quinn explains, "it was carefully handled to avoid waste. The highest quality, largest leafed tobacco was used as an outside wrapper on the cigars [and] the poorer quality, smaller leafed tobacco was used to make the cigar's core or 'filler.' The tobacco leaves were wet down so that they would be pliable and not brittle."

Next the leaves went to the strippers, who extracted, or "stripped away," the leaves' midribs. Martha (Dougherty) Eddy worked at Fecht's in the early to mid-1930s: "I worked with three other girls stripping the stems out of the tobacco leaves. It was kind of fun. We would dampen the leaves like you used to dampen clothes before you ironed them. And then you would stretch and spread the leaves out on your knees and rip the stem out." In some factories, the leaves were smoothed by feeding them through a wringer-like mechanism.

Then the leaves were tied into bundles called "hands." Quinn continues: "The tobacco destined to become the filler would be dried on large racks for several hours. . . . The high quality tobacco would be kept in the 'hand,' where it would remain soft and pliable."

The next step was rolling the actual cigars. A writer for *The Manufacturer and Builder* in 1872 meticulously described this procedure, an approach that changed little over time: "Sitting at separate tables we found twenty-four men; each one had a piece of hard wood before him which, with a peculiarly shaped knife and a little pot of paste constituted his stock of tools. By his side were two heaps of tobacco, one composed of wrappers and another of [dried] fillers. Taking a leaf in his hand, the workman spreads it out on the slab before him, smoothing it carefully to remove all creases; then with his knife he cuts it into a peculiar nearly semi-circular



Bertha and Karoline Gabelmann from Clarksville, Iowa, stand amidst tobacco, perhaps grown for home use. Tobacco never became a significant crop in Iowa. But in the 1860s Davenport cigar maker Nicholas Kuhnlen gave free seed to local farmers, and in 1863, the state yielded over half a million pounds. Ottumwa's Julius Fecht imported some Cuban tobacco for his best cigars, but most Iowa factories used tobacco from Wisconsin and a few eastern states.

shape. He then picks up the material for his filling with his left hand, making it into a kind of bundle; of course this requires an accurate judgment as to the amount required to make the cigar of the exact shape and thickness. As soon as he has collected enough leaves, he presses them together and lays them on the wrapper before him. Then, by a peculiar sort of twist, he brings up the edges of the latter and with a quick roll envelops the loose bundle. The form of the cigar is at once apparent. He now finishes off the end for the mouth by carefully trimming the leaf and smoothing it to a point, fastening the extremity with a little paste; the other end he cuts off smooth. A few more rolls between his flat knife and the slab and the cigar is done. The celerity and neatness of the work is incredible, and, of course, evidences a refinement of skill."

The working environment in a cigar factory was often dark and dank with little ventilation, partly because moisture was essential to keep the wrapper leaves pliable. Patricia Cooper describes how the noxious mix of tobacco odors and fumes from coal stoves created nausea and an "intoxication of [a] thick, penetrating smell." She explains that "except for the work tables, where the cigar makers' busy motions kept the surface clean, a fine brown dust settled everywhere; it mounted on the window sills, since the



COURTESY TOM QUINN

Three dozen women and men cigar makers in Ottumwa. In the foreground, a male worker rolls a cigar. In front of him are three tied bundles of finished cigars. On the far left, cigar molds are visible on the table.

windows were rarely opened, and the glass became so coated that it was no longer transparent." Cigar workers suffered from higher rates of tuberculosis than workers in all other jobs except stone cutting.

Ruth Diehn recalled, "I can remember getting on the street car to go home from high school [in Ottumwa]. The ladies that worked at the cigar factories just smelled to high heaven of tobacco. The odor would fill the whole place. Their clothes would be saturated. Their skin, too, I suppose."

Edna Breon recounted that "when I first went in there, I didn't know if I was going to be able to take to that tobacco—the odor from it. Us girls would pitch in a nickel and go down to Kresge's dime store and get some chocolate candy stars and maybe some lemon drops. By the time we got done eating, the bottom of the sack was covered with tobacco."

The work was labor intensive, monotonous, and sedentary. For Tom Dougherty in Ottumwa, rolling cigars was one of his few options. "My father was crippled and walked with crutches," Martha Eddy explained. "That was about the only kind of job he could do. He had to work sitting down."

But unlike many other factories, the workplace was relatively quiet, and employees socialized to pass the time. "It was interesting to be there," Breon said. "There was quite a bunch of girls. If a story got started at one end, by the time it got to the other end, it was

different." Although foremen tried to keep a lid on such distractions, often reminding workers to focus on their tasks, they generally allowed conversation so as not to alienate the workforce.

According to Cooper, about a third of the nation's cigar makers were itinerants, constantly moving from shop to shop across a state or region, certain they could find jobs. It is not clear to what extent this occurred in Iowa, but these nomads (generally young, single men) became such a fixture in the industry nationwide that many referred to them as a "traveling fraternity" who often relied on industry publications to post their whereabouts to worried families and update them on jobs and employers. As Cooper writes, "Travel signified their freedom to control their own time [and] to be very particular about working conditions." In fact, cigar makers generally controlled their own hours each day, coming and going as they chose, at least in the earlier decades.

Most U.S. cigar factories were open about 45 weeks a year, tending to close in July and over the new year for inventory. In Iowa, however, workers in general found employment in the industry nearly year-round. Workers were paid by the hour or by the piece (per 1,000 cigars). If given the choice, most chose piecework, because the skilled could make more money that way. Unfortunately, specifics about Iowa cigar makers are difficult to determine; factories were probably incon-

sistent in returning questionnaires to the state's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Therefore, data on wages and union membership and breakdowns by race, nationality, gender, and age are suspect. Nevertheless, according to one statistic for 1894–1895, 85 percent of Iowa cigar makers preferred piecework. One employee said, "At piecework the fast man does not have to help make a living for the slow one."

In the early days, shops generally employed only a handful of male craftsmen, with workers carrying out any or all of the tasks. But gradually women entered the industry. Stripping leaves—which Cooper describes as "dirty, dead-end, low-wage work"—was primarily done by women. As factories expanded and adopted mechanization in the 1870s and '80s, more women were hired, although it was still for the less skilled jobs and at lower wages. According to Tom Quinn, "Nearly half of the [cigar workers in Ottumwa] in 1910 were young, unmarried women living at home with their

parents." By the early 20th century, however, it wasn't unusual for women to advance. As Margaret (Watts) Davis said, "You had to work your way up." When Davis was 16, she started stripping leaves in an Ottumwa factory. Three years later, she was rolling cigars.

One industry innovation that further eased women's entry into the workplace at this time was the cigar mold, essentially a two-part metal or wooden rectangle, with a row of cigar-shaped troughs. The worker would pile dried tobacco into one half and then screw on the top half. After several hours, the mold was opened, and the compressed filler was ready to be rolled up in the wrapper.

To Edna Breon, who worked in Ottumwa in the late 1920s, the cigar mold transformed tobacco scraps overnight into what she proudly called the "perfect cigar."

According to Fred Powers, workers at Fecht's used molds only for the cheaper cigars "made out of scraps of tobacco." He explained that higher quality cigars

PHOTO BY JOHN ZELLER



The names of Iowa manufacturers appear on these cigar boxes from the museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. "[Young women] sometimes put their names and addresses inside the cigar boxes as they packed them," Tom Quinn writes, "hoping that an eligible young man would find it and call on them."



In the 1920s, cigarettes surpassed cigars in popularity. Even so, Davenport's Peter N. Jacobsen Cigar Company boasted of 250 employees in this photo dated 1926.

were rolled by hand, the worker's sense of the proper measure informed by years of coaxing and shaping the leaves. Rolling a cigar was "delicate and complicated," Patricia Cooper writes. The tobacco's aroma and taste would be blocked if the filler was unevenly spaced or if the spiral of the wrapper overlapped too much. Cigar makers took great pride in their skill, to the benefit of the growing number of cigar smokers who savored their favorite brands.

Cigar making was hardly a lucrative occupation. Pay typically ranked in the middle of other Iowa manufacturing jobs. An 1890 study noted that a cigar worker's average yearly pay did not keep up with the basic cost of living for a married couple with three children. Women had it tougher than men, for employers consistently paid roughly half of what male workers averaged. And this cannot be entirely explained by the fact that most female cigar makers had the less skilled jobs. Even those few women who obtained managerial positions still earned about half of what their male counterparts garnered.

Although cigar making provided employment for most of the year, the modest wages had to have been the primary catalyst for union involvement. Unfortunately, such activism hardly ensured fair pay or hiring practices for women. One example of union activity in Iowa occurred in November 1882 at Kuhn's Davenport factory, then "the single-largest employer of women in the city,"

according to historian Sharon Wood. After about a fifth of Kuhn's female employees joined the newly formed Local 172 of the Cigar Makers International Union, Nicholas Kuhn slashed women's piecework rates by 25 percent. A large majority of all of his cigar workers, both men and women, retaliated by going on strike, even inspiring employees at a local smaller cigar shop to strike in solidarity. Unfazed, Kuhn retaliated again, introducing mechanization into his factory so he could hire cheaper, unskilled labor.

Four months later, the strike collapsed, the biggest losers the women who had joined the union. Not only did women continue to work at the lower piecework rates, but the union actually levied a \$15 fine on those women who had returned to work after the strike failed. The fine was more than just a slap on the wrist—it was the equivalent of over three weeks' wages. As Wood observes, union involvement proved to be a trap for these women workers.

Given this turn of events, when Davenport's Local 172 began readying for another strike three years later, women employees forsook union support and instead threw in their lot with Kuhn, even though he had cut their piece rate even more—down to nearly half of what union members earned in other factories.

Based on state labor statistics, female cigar-union membership in Iowa in the 1880s through the 1920s remained exceptionally low or nonexistent, as did the national average, which peaked at 10 percent in 1920. That's not to say that the nation's female cigar workers never went on strike. During the period before World War I, they struck quite often. In New Jersey alone, they initiated 24 strikes (versus three conducted by males). But the women won only seven.

Despite some success, women workers did not gain much support from their brothers in the Cigar Makers International Union. Fighting for the rights of the mostly white male constituency, the Iowa locals increased their activity around the turn of the century. By then, 16 locals had been established (eventually there would be four more). Bolstered by the larger membership, Iowa cigar makers went on strike around the state 11 times in 1899 and 13 times in 1900. But the union didn't seem to benefit even the men all that dramatically. Women's pay, of course, was a lost cause, never markedly improving in comparison to men's. The union was able to establish fixed piece rates, however, but only for members (nearly half of Iowa cigar makers). Many workers didn't reap the rewards of this preferred pay scale, and the average pay remained steady.

Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics did not keep a close count on the incidence of child labor in the

cigar industry in Iowa, the bureau's biennial reports after the turn of the century listed a handful of calls by cigar workers for enforcement of child-labor laws.

By the 1920s, the cigarette had replaced cigars in popularity. By then, cigarettes had recovered from earlier image problems—as feminine and dilettantish (with brand names like Opera Puffs and Bon Ton); as evil playthings of immigrants; and as cheap indulgences for workingmen. During World War I, cigarettes gained the kind of vigorous associations formerly attached to the cigar. As General John Pershing proclaimed in 1917, the answer to winning the war was “tobacco as much as bullets.” The U.S. government complied, supplying soldiers with what Eric Burns calls the “easily replaceable, instantly rechargeable, immediately gratifying” cigarette.

Soon the government, including health officials, joined the bandwagon and began actively promoting cigarette smoking, even advertising it as a patriotic act (despite anti-cigarette laws in many states, including Iowa, which were largely aimed at youth). The cultural switch in tobacco products was perhaps best captured by how magazines and movies depicted smokers. Now villains lit up cigars; heroes smoked cigarettes.

Other factors besides the cigarette helped snuff out Iowa's cigar businesses. With World War I came a scarcity of workers and unrest in the unions. As new technologies were added, the large U.S. factories outpaced the production of Iowa's smaller ones. Cheaply manufactured national brands overshadowed local, independent ones.

Prohibition also cut into profits because cigar sales had been commonplace in taverns. As Clem Schadle, a Dubuque cigar worker, recalled, “The cigar business went to hell when the saloons went out.”

Lack of sanitation was another culprit. James Engstrand, whose father ran a modest factory in Sioux City, recalled how large factories promoted their product as “no spit tip cigars,” to the detriment of smaller operations. “In the old days,” Engstrand said, cigar makers had a tendency to put their finger in their mouth and then into the glue that put the wrapper on. I wouldn't say they did it in all factories, but some of the cigar makers did, because I . . . seen them do it.” In a Dubuque factory, according to Schadle, one worker “kept on doing it and he got fired. And then he went and started a factory of his own.”

Big-city journalists exposed unsanitary conditions when they wrote about immigrants making cigars in tenement-based operations. But it's unclear whether such scandal affected the longevity of any Iowa cigar factories.

As U.S. cigar sales declined steadily after 1920, the number of cigar factories nationwide began to drop. Iowa followed suit. In 1918 Fecht's employed around 119 local residents—in 1922, only 53.

From the 1880s to the 1920s, the cigar had been the tobacco king in America and Iowa and a powerful icon. Smoking cigars signaled masculinity and status. Manufacturing cigars represented success for the owners who had expanded from backrooms to brick factories. And for the actual cigar workers, it was a symbol of pride in craftsmanship. Patsy Burton, who boxed up cigars in Ottumwa, put it simply: “It took a lot of skill to be a cigar maker.” ♦

Lori Vermaas is a freelance writer and poet. She earned her Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Iowa in 2000. She is the author of *Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture* (Smithsonian, 2003).

NOTE ON SOURCES

Personal stories of Iowa cigar workers are from two sets of oral history interviews. For interviews of James Engstrand, Fred Powers, and Clem Schadle, see transcripts of the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City center). Interviews of Patsy Burton, Edna Breon, Margaret Davis, Bernhardt Diehn, and Martha Eddy appear in Tom Quinn, comp., *Cigar Manufacturing in Ottumwa, Iowa: An 83 Year History* (Ottumwa: Wapello County Historical Society, 1989). Additional Iowa sources are Marlys A. Svendsen, et al., *Davenport, Where the Mississippi Runs West: A Survey of Davenport History & Architecture* (Davenport: City of Davenport [?], 1981); and Sharon E. Wood, *The Freedom of the Streets: Work, Citizenship, and Sexuality in a Gilded Age City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

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A rich context for U.S. cigar making appears in Eric Burns, *The Smoke of the Gods: A Social History of Tobacco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); and Patricia A. Cooper, *Once a Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900–1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987/1992). For online versions of the following sources, google the publication title: Anonymous, “How Cigars Are Made,” *The Manufacturer and Builder* (April 1872), 77–78; and *United States Directory of Cigar Manufacturers*, compiled and published by Jay Y. Trout (Philadelphia: 1902). Trout also edited *The Tobacco World*, an excellent online resource.

Annotations to this article are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

Thoughts about Remaking the Heartland

by Robert Wuthnow

Editor's Note: "Tread[ing] the line between history and social science," Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow looks at his native Midwest in this excerpt from his book Remaking the American Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s.

It may have been that cold windy morning in central Nebraska when I pulled off the highway to watch the sun rise, golden red, across the open fields. That may have been the day I decided to write this book. Or it may have been another day, when I was driving through small towns in eastern Iowa. That moment, perhaps, when a highway marker reminded me of my childhood home. Or it may have been only the slow realization that something there in the nation's heartland was calling me to write about it. Who knows?

What I do recall as vividly as if it were yesterday is listening to a public lecture by a visiting speaker at my university, my mind wandering as it often does, and

realizing that I had it all wrong. Well into the research at that point, I was working on the assumption that the heartland was a place of withering decline, like the soil itself gradually eroding away. I thought that was the story that needed to be told. It made sense of small towns with empty storefronts. Large fields with no farmsteads. Reports of joblessness. But it did not square with other evidence. New technology. A surprisingly robust economy. Strong schools. An upbeat feeling among residents about the future. Clearly I needed to think harder about what was happening. By the time I finished with the research, I had a much different story in mind than when I started.

My central claim is that the American Middle West has undergone a strong, positive transformation since the 1950s. The reshaping that occurred in this period is striking because the region was worse off in the years immediately following World War II than has commonly been assumed. The transformation is surprising because it took place in the nation's heartland.

Most accounts of dramatic social change have focused on other parts of the country—especially the Sunbelt and coastal cities—not on the Middle West, a region of small towns and farms, wheat fields and prairies. The transformation that occurred here was largely beneficial, notwithstanding the fact that millions of people were displaced from their communities, because this displacement resulted in new opportunities for employment and a healthier relationship between the region and the rest of the nation. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Middle West was a more vibrant contributor to the national economy than it had been a half century earlier.

This argument, I confess, is counterintuitive. The typical approach is to regard the American Middle West as a kind of throwback to earlier times, a vast museum of dwindling farms and small towns to be visited by folks who live elsewhere and would not want to stay for very long. The view that things were better in the past fits neatly with a nostalgic image of an America that was in fact rural and less complicated than it is today. A related view popularized in news magazines and schoolbooks showed a heartland in the 1950s prospering from good crops, with happy housewives preparing luscious meals on modern kitchen appliances for grateful husbands and children—a time followed by disappointment and decline. That image of the 1950s may have been true for the few but not for the many. A better sense of how the Middle West has changed over the past five or six decades is gained by thinking of the 1950s as a time when many families were still recovering from the Great Depression. Farmers were again suffering from dust storms, uncertain crops, and wildly fluctuating prices. Farm communities often lacked paved roads, electricity, or dependable telephone service. Millions of people were leaving the farms and rural communities in search of meager employment opportunities elsewhere.

It is also counterintuitive to argue that the Middle West is vibrant economically and culturally. Most depictions of the region's recent history view it as a sad tale of rural people clinging to outmoded lives, of dying communities, and of old-fashioned values tinged with bigotry and ignorance. When writers who pass briefly through the region find other stories to tell, the stories are usually about food the writers romantically wished was still grown in the family garden, smelly feedlots, or undocumented workers being exploited by rich agribusiness owners who reap unjustified millions in government subsidies. But these accounts miss the fact that the region has upgraded itself even as it has downsized. The technology, the new industries, and

the cultural diversity of the heartland could hardly have been imagined a half century ago.

The transformation that has occurred in the American Middle West cannot be attributed to any single cause, tempting as it may be to seek answers in the magic of, say, rugged individualism. I break the narrative [of my book] into several parts. The first is about the struggles of Middle Western farmers in the 1950s. Difficult as those struggles were, they enabled farming to become more efficient and capital intensive. The second is a saga of cultural redefinition. As the Middle West modernized, it rediscovered its legends of hardy pioneers, adventuresome cowboys, and Dust Bowl survivors. It reshaped these legends into a less spatially confined image of congeniality and can-do inventiveness. These new understandings improved the region's self-image and contributed to its ability to transform itself. A third story is about public education. The region invested heavily in schools, administered them well, and encouraged children to regard school achievement as their best hope for occupational success. Higher education became the source of both upward and outward mobility. A fourth story tells of small communities that are dying by the hundreds and yet are not doing so

I was working on the assumption that the heartland was a place of withering decline, like the soil itself gradually eroding away.

very quickly or completely. Community downsizing has been a matter of great concern to the residents of these communities, but it has worked remarkably well for the region as a whole. Small communities remain attractive for low-income families needing inexpensive housing. Many of these communities are within commuting distance of larger towns where work can be found in construction, manufacturing, and human services. High fuel prices are making it harder for these commuters, but electronic technology and decentralization are opening new opportunities. A fifth story examines the growth of large-scale agribusiness and its effects on the ethnic composition of the region. Contrary to tales about extreme ethnic conflicts, the picture that comes into focus from closer inspection is one of greater diversity over a longer period, continuing difficulties for immigrants

and undocumented workers, and yet shows a striking degree of community-wide accommodation to new realities. A final story is about the phenomenon least expected in this part of the country—rapidly expanding edge cities. The growth of these communities has been nothing short of spectacular. And yet the sources of this growth lie in more than simply the availability of land and the decline of smaller towns.

My approach treads the line between history and social science. Change in the heartland is a big topic that can only be grasped by delving deeply into the lives of particular communities, looking at their past, learning from their current residents, and situating these communities in wider comparisons. Much of the change resides in small details that can only be seen in the trajectories of children leaving, stores closing, citizens remembering dust storms and taking pride in their ancestors, neighbors watching out for one another, schools consolidating, residents looking for new jobs, and planners planning. The Middle West is enormously diverse in both its geography and its people. The diversity makes for interesting comparisons. Missouri and Arkansas developed schools quite differently than Iowa and Minnesota. Farming diverged sharply between the grasslands of western Nebraska and the wheat fields of western Kansas. The evidence for these comparisons comes from data on population, crops, schools, and economic condi-

The typical approach is to regard the Middle West as a throwback, a vast museum of dwindling farms and small towns.

tions; information about the growth and decline of towns and about their business conditions; records of town meetings and planning boards; diaries and newspaper stories; and interviews with more than two hundred residents about farming, school administration, town and county government, agribusiness, and regional planning.

Although no single factor can explain the region's transformation, several preconditions for the social change that has taken place loom large. One is the fact that the region largely comprised rich land with vast potential for crops and livestock and often mineral wealth as well. The region was essentially taken from

its native inhabitants and used by the United States for colonization by white settlers, who in turn raised crops and livestock, created a demand for towns and railroads, and for years existed as debtors to eastern banks. During the last half of the twentieth century, the land continued to be a crucial aspect of the region's social life, shaping the location and livelihood of towns, influencing the establishment of agribusiness, providing funds for public schools, and encouraging the development of military and transportation industries. Another precondition may have been less obvious. That was the extensive geographic mobility of the region's first several generations of white settlers. Settlement implied people coming to stay, and those who did were often hailed as community founders. But they were the exception rather than the rule. Settlers were people who had lived elsewhere before, often in several places, and although they may have wished to stay in one place, they moved on in hopes of something better. They seldom objected when their children packed up to attend college or to marry and find jobs in other towns or states. That adaptability made it possible for the region's population to disperse as economic conditions warranted. A third precondition was the institution building carried out by the region's first century of settlers. They came as merchants and schoolteachers, with skills in business and law and with knowledge of shops and offices. The region benefited from carefully crafted laws, town and county governments, school districts, and state constitutions that had been worked out previously in other parts of the country. The smallest towns soon had churches, Masonic lodges, opera houses, and schools. Despite an ethic of self-sufficiency, residents worked out programs to care for the needy and established asylums for the blind and the insane. All of these institutional precedents served as resources when the time came to consider new schools, new jobs, and new programs of government assistance.

The danger in writing about a place in which one lived as a child is the possibility of either romanticizing it or viewing it too harshly. To guard against these tendencies, I tried to employ the same mind-set an academic writer would adopt for any other topic. I read countless memoirs to see how other writers have dealt with the issue. Unlike some, I am not so glad to have escaped the Middle West that I hold it in disdain; and unlike others, I have never been much tempted by pangs of regret. As the research progressed, I was surprised to find myself telling an upbeat story. That focus, however, in no way diminishes the difficulties communities face when their populations decline.

Down the sanded country road, past an overgrown hedge row and an unused pasture, just beyond a small rise a quarter of a mile from where I grew up, stands an abandoned farmhouse owned by our closest neighbors, the Morganfields, before they retired in the late 1950s. The shabby frame house, nearly obscured by tall prairie grass and weeds, has turned a weathered gray. None of the windows are intact. Tenants made it their home for a few years, and squatters for a few more after that. A sagging shed that served well in its time as a chicken coop remains, but the grand red barn where fat roan cows once came to be milked has collapsed. A quarter mile to the south where the Bains, an enterprising young farm family, lived, nothing exists but a clump of trees and the outline of the house's and barn's foundations. After they quit farming, Mr. and Mrs. Bain lived in town for a few years and died one day when a truck careened into their car. A half mile beyond their former house is the remnant of the old Wilms place, which burned to the ground after being struck by lightning. A half mile to the north is where the Staffords lived, until a teenager stole his father's rifle one night and shot Mr. Stafford in the head through the kitchen window.

The farmhouse I grew up in fared a little better than any of its neighbors. Called Sunny Crest Farm by its original owners, it was solidly constructed in 1911, but after several subsequent families lived there, including one whose son committed suicide in the garage and another that lost everything during the Great Depression, it was in disrepair by the time my parents bought it in 1952. My mother sold it shortly after my father died in 1965. The new owners kept it for several years as a place to raise dogs and then sold it to a man who used it to salvage parts from wrecked vehicles that soon surrounded the house and decaying outbuildings.

The small farmhouse we occupied before that was three and a half miles away. My parents bought it in 1945 when my father came home from World War II. They invested their savings and poured their energy into fixing it up, installing indoor plumbing and electricity, planting hundreds of trees and a garden, and repairing the barn and shed. In 1951, the state condemned the property to build a highway. A year later, our house was gone. I visited the site a few years ago. In the ditch under a layer of dead weeds was a roll of barbed wire my father had used to put up a fence. No other sign of his work remained.

On that trip, I drove the two strikingly familiar miles into town where my parents bought groceries at Suchland's store and banked at the tall brick building on the corner and where I attended grade school.

The grade school building was new in the late 1940s, and a large basketball gymnasium was added in 1958. In those years, more than a hundred children went to the school and about six hundred people lived in the town. Times were hard for us but even harder for the families of many people who had come as section hands for the railroad and to work in the oil fields or on the farms. My friend Jimmy lived with his family in a dugout cut into the side of a hill, surviving mostly on fifty-pound bags of peanuts during the long winter

Had I never left the Middle West, it likely would not have occurred to me to write about it at all.

his father was laid up with a broken leg. Galen lived in a drafty, unpainted ramshackle house next to the railroad track with plastic nailed over the windows and practically no furniture. Diane carried deep scars from the night she was dragged out of the upstairs window of her burning house. By the end of the century, the school was boarded up and the town's population had dropped by two-thirds.

I grew up believing I would spend my life in the Middle West, probably farming the small plot of land my father owned and where I drove a tractor every summer until I was eighteen, and probably supplementing my income by teaching school, like my mother did, or doing bookkeeping and tax returns, which was one of the few professions available in a county seat of fewer than four thousand people. My father's death from a massive heart attack when I was a freshman in college altered those plans and eventually led me to graduate school and a very different life than the one I had imagined. Perhaps because I had expected to stay, and perhaps because I had known it as my home, I held a strong attachment to the Middle West even though I no longer lived there. But unlike writers who remain attached to their places of origin through family and friends, I had no such continuing connections. Nor did the heavy routine demands of work and family make it possible to return except on rare occasions. When I did return, there were the ghost memories of people who no longer existed and the strangeness of realities that had taken their place. Understanding

how the Middle West had changed was the aim that impelled me to write this book.

The journey began with several lengthy road trips through the Middle West, driving thousands of miles along back roads and highways through small country towns and the region's larger cities. I talked to strangers at gas stations and restaurants, visited places I had heard about as a child, and looked up cousins I had not seen in years. I found the farm my German great-grandfather purchased in 1878 and his grave in the cemetery on land the railroad company gave to his neighbors. I located the farm my great-grandfather from West Virginia bought in 1870 and visited his unmarked grave at the state insane asylum where he spent the last twenty years of his life suffering from trauma inflicted by the Civil War. My travels took me onto an interstate built through the slum neighborhood where his widow ran a boardinghouse and through the cities where my grandmother worked as a stenographer and my mother taught school. I learned how little I knew about the region, despite having studied its history in school and having considered it home. But one lesson from my childhood was reaffirmed: if an outsider asked where you were from, you replied simply that you were from the Midwest, and if a Midwesterner asked, you probably said proudly that you were from Kansas or Nebraska or Iowa or Missouri; but your real identity was your hometown. Small or large, your home community was what you knew. It was Main Street, the streets and shops you knew,

The Middle West's emphasis on friendliness, hospitality, and native ingenuity owes much to the redefinition of its heritage in the 1950s and 1960s.

the school you attended, its mascot, its football field, the park, the favorite swimming hole, the doughnut shop where friends gathered, the church where funerals were held, the place where people knew your name.

I determined that whatever I might be able to learn about the Middle West as a region of the country, I had to be true to that realization about the importance of communities. I opted for what we sociologists call a

multimethod research design. It would combine statistical data about individuals, towns, and counties with qualitative information about local histories, events, and perceptions drawn from interviews, observations, and publications. I also knew that I would have to write as an outsider. However much I might identify with the communities I studied, it was not possible to

However much I might identify with the communities I studied, it was not possible to know them the way insiders did.

know them the way insiders did. And yet there is an advantage in approaching subject matter with which one is not intimately familiar. Had I never left the Middle West, it likely would not have occurred to me to write about it at all. My audience would be people like myself who did not live there, who may have had relatives who did, and who most likely regarded the Middle West as a large blank space between the excitement of the nation's coasts.

I had never been to Lebanon, Kansas, or Smith Center until one of my research trips took me there. They were enough like my home community that I felt it possible to understand them. They had the further good fortune of having been visited and written about enough by outsiders that impressions of their history could be pieced together. Putting their stories together with statistical evidence gave me a different picture of the rural Middle West in the 1950s than anything I had read in standard accounts. The story in those accounts was of hard times during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, good times during World War II at least for those who stayed home, and even better times in the 1950s. That story fit some of what I grew up hearing my parents tell, but not all. I knew they had waited until the Depression was over to marry and that my father had worked as a farm laborer for a dollar a day in the 1930s. The part about later prosperity did not square with my parents' income of only a thousand dollars a year in the early 1950s or with the struggles of so many of our neighbors. The statistical evidence revealed that our experience was not unique. Recovery from the Great Depression lasted well into the 1950s. Farmers with luck enough to have purchased cheap land at the right time, to have struck oil, or to have had wealthy relatives did well. Tens of thousands of farmers did not. The decade after World War II was difficult

for nearly everyone. Roads, electricity, telephone service, and machinery had all been put on hold by the Depression and the war. Marginal farmers were unable to make the transition. They did not have the capital to purchase additional land, to mechanize, or to invest in livestock. Ultimately, their failure nevertheless served the region and the nation. Farming became better capitalized and more efficient as a result.

A sociological truism is that in unsettled times, people tell stories to make sense of what they are experiencing. The trouble with this truism is that all times are, in their particular ways, unsettled. Certainly the Middle West was unsettled even in the nineteenth century when it was being, in a different sense of the word, settled. It was unsettled in the 1930s by the dust storms and in the 1940s by the war. Yet as I read stories of people growing up in the 1950s, pondered their accounts in interviews, and looked through old newspapers and magazines, I was struck that the Middle West was going through a transition that was as much cultural as economic or demographic. The old stories of cowboys and Indians, pioneers, and Dust Bowl survivors were being told, but with different meanings. The heartland was redefining itself, seeking to offset the country-bumpkin images still present in the mainstream press, and aiming to demonstrate that it was as modern as anywhere else while preserving some of its distinctive identity. A region's self-image is always in flux, but I believe the Middle West's emphasis on friendliness, hospitality, and native ingenuity owes much to the redefinition of its heritage that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s.

In seeking factors facilitating the Middle West's economic growth during the last half of the twentieth century, I was most surprised by the strength of its historic emphasis on education. I grew up believing that my parents valued education because my father's had stopped in eighth grade and my mother was in her fifties before she earned a college degree. By a truly unusual confluence of events, I wound up as an adult among people who traced their ancestry to graduates of elite colleges for five to ten generations and had little use for those who could not. But the Middle West was remarkably successful in bringing the cherished ideals of democratic education—of schooling for all—into reality. It became the education belt, with a strong system of primary and secondary education that prepared its children well for the challenges they faced on farms and in small towns, and it was on that basis that the

region established the colleges and universities that became instrumental in its subsequent economic development.

My surprise in researching the decline of small communities was not that so many were losing population but that there was as much optimism and as robust a sense of community present in the ones that remained. This is not to suggest that things are going well in the region's smallest communities. In town after town, I was struck by the numerous houses that were in ill repair, by the families living in an abandoned schoolhouse they had fixed up as a home or in an aging trailer home, by the boarded-up stores and shops with no customers, by the churches no longer in use, and by the ancient pickup trucks and rusted automobiles. The smallest towns have become places where the elderly poor still reside and where younger families with meager incomes have sought refuge because it was all they could afford. The larger towns with even three thousand to five thousand residents, though, are doing better. The school very likely has fewer children than it did a few years ago, but it is probably the newest building in town and serves as a community center. A small manufacturing plant may keep some of the residents employed as others commute to larger towns twenty or thirty miles away. As long as fuel prices do not rise exorbitantly, these communities provide attractive locations for their residents.

The small communities were part of a regional

Thirty miles from where I was raised, a massive wind farm has emerged with more than a hundred towering machines.

network of railroads from almost the start, and they are more nearly woven together now than ever before by paved highways and trucking companies. Residents shop at Walmart for goods imported from China, order supplies online, and are connected in the remotest areas by cell phone. The agricultural cooperatives of the early twentieth century have expanded in geographic scope and product lines. Agribusiness has simply evolved to make better use of the decentralization that these modes of communication provide. The meat-processing industry is the part of agribusiness that has attracted the greatest attention, not only because of concerns about pack-

aged meals in fast-food chains, but also because of questions about human-rights violations, immigrant labor, and ethnic tensions. Like other researchers, I was drawn to Garden City because of its prominence as a meat-processing center. But I came away impressed by the community's institutions as much as by the challenges it faced. Garden City was adapting to the growth, immigration, ethnic diversity, and economic uncertainties it experienced.

I saved the cities and suburbs until last, even though that is where the region's population is increasingly located, because the story of suburban growth is in many respects least characteristic of the Middle West. It is a story that researchers for many years have tracked near New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, Phoenix, and similar locations in the Sunbelt and on the coasts. Residents in the Middle West's edge cities informed me in no uncertain terms that it was not unusual at all to find populous suburbs in the region, and yet there is a history to these communities that residents who may have lived there only a few years do not always appreciate. Olathe and other communities in Johnson County, Kansas, are places where dramatic growth is a way of life and is expected to continue for decades to come. Olathe is also where one of my great-grandfathers settled shortly after the

Sociologists sometimes pride themselves on studies that seize on one aspect of social life. . . . Communities are too complex to be understood that way.

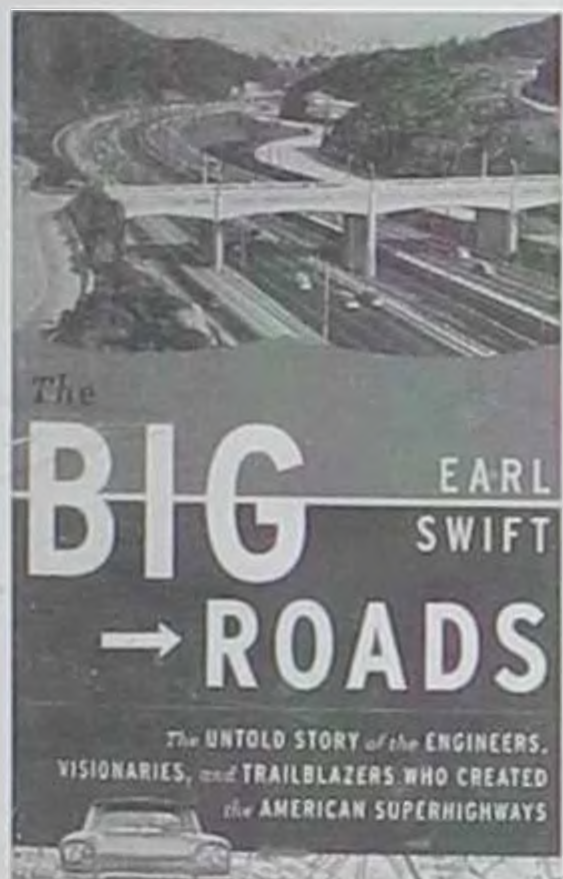
Civil War, where my mother was born, near where she returned to teach school in the late 1930s, where my wife's father was a pastor in the 1940s, and near where my wife was born. Olathe's growth in the twenty-first century is continuous with its history in those earlier decades. It, like other edge cities, has taken the place of farms, but it has long depended on its adjacency to one of the region's largest urban centers and has developed not only as a bedroom community but also because of military installations, entrepreneurial manufacturing and distribution firms, and investments in education and technology.

The remaking of a region is evident in more ways than I have been able to describe here. Thirty miles from where I was raised, a massive wind farm has emerged with more than a hundred towering machines that produce energy free of ill effects to the environment. Nearby is a new ethanol plant that has weathered uncertain government policies and is bringing new jobs to the area. My hometown recently celebrated the construction of a new hospital that dramatically improves its medical capabilities. There is a small industrial park and a new community center. At the high school, where nearly 100 percent of the students used to be white Anglos, 30 percent are now Hispanic.

Sociologists sometimes pride themselves on studies that seize on one aspect of social life, such as class differences or the role of the state, and claim to explain everything else in relation to that aspect. I confess to never having found such studies appealing. Communities are too complex to be understood that way. The remaking of the Middle West has happened because of disparate developments in agriculture, culture, education, towns, and business. In popular accounts, a common thread in these developments is the region's emphasis on rugged individualism. Even now, many of the people I spoke to insisted that things would be better if they were simply left alone. They had little use for government intervention or regulation, especially if that meant the federal government. And yet the single theme that runs through so much of what I have described is the hand of government. Ordinary citizens may have chafed at government's role in subsidizing the railroads or commandeering land for munitions plants, but they were as often as not the beneficiaries of government planning as well.

That, though, is a lesson that probably speaks more to me than to anyone else. For I was the one who, as a five-year-old, protesting in my small way against government intrusion, committed my first act of civil disobedience by pulling up each of the orange-topped stakes the transportation department's surveyors placed on our property to mark where they planned to construct the highway through our home. ❖

Wuthnow, Robert; *Remaking the Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s*. Princeton University Press (2011). Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.



Reading the Past: America's Superhighways

IN THE LAST HALF of the 19th century, as railroads spread across Iowa, they transformed the economic, social, and physical landscape. They also determined the fate of the communities they passed through—or passed by. Recognizing their influence, generations of historians and other writers have produced countless shelves of books examining every conceivable facet of railroad history.

In the last half of the 20th century, interstate highways bisected Iowa north to south and east to west (and bisected its capital city as well). Those highways, like the railroads that preceded them, dramatically altered the fate of small towns, big-city downtowns, urban neighborhoods, and so-called edge cities and flattened the landscape for those who traveled on them through rural America. Yet historians have paid little attention so far to these transformations. So Earl Swift's engaging history, *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways*, is especially welcome.

Swift leavens what could be a dry bureaucratic story with lively anecdotes, colorful characters (such as Carl Fisher and his promotion of automobile travel), and telling statistics. He celebrates the engineers who created the interstate highway system—noting that “the system’s nearly forty-seven thousand miles represent the greatest single investment that the American people have made in public works”—but he does not ignore its critics, singling out the cultural critic Lewis Mumford in particular for significant attention.

One of the heroes of the story is native Iowan Thomas MacDonald, who was chief of the Federal Bureau of Public Roads from 1919 to 1953 and mastermind of the interstate highway system, which was authorized by the Federal Highway Act of 1956. But half of the book addresses highway developments before the act was passed. The advantage of Swift's long view is to reaffirm what history does best: show us how we got from the past to the present. We see the layers of precedent that preceded the present system of interstate highways. It was not created from scratch.

A big part of the point of all this buildup is to insist that Dwight Eisenhower “was not, by any means, the father of the interstates. . . . The system was a done deal in every important respect but financing by the time Ike entered politics.” Swift clearly doesn't think much of Ike. “He entered the Oval Office professing an interest in building ‘a network of modern roads,’ rating it ‘as necessary to defense as it is to our national economy and personal safety’ but having

conducted little, if any, research on the subject. He didn't know that the executive and legislative branches had already worked out the details of the network he sought. He had no idea that the Bureau of Public Roads had produced two reports, more than a decade before, that spelled out its design and approximate footprints. His own views about highways were at odds with those of the government's experts: unaware that the greatest need for expressways was in cities, he favored a strictly rural network; and not knowing that the bureau had concluded that a national program could not be financed with tolls, he favored ‘self-liquidating’ highway projects, or those that generated the revenue to repay their costs.” And the crucial legislation itself “bore little resemblance to the bill Ike had sponsored; the chief contributor to the system's financing in the executive branch wasn't the president, but Frank Turner.”

Perhaps ironically, MacDonald, from rural Iowa, had long resisted Eisenhower's preferred path of making large expenditures on roads through sparsely populated, rural areas, preferring instead to prioritize spending where it was most needed according to his careful statistical analyses: in and near urban centers. After Ike forced MacDonald to retire from the scene, an unknown bureaucrat named Frank Turner continued this research-driven model. Turner “more than anyone else, [midwived] a conceptual network of superhighways into the concrete and steel octopus that now spans the continent.” Turner took great pride in an aspect of the system that is one of its most criticized: it was “so uniform you can't tell what state you are in except as you look at the sign.” Swift puts this in context, noting that “travel had been moving toward monotony for a long time,” whether by foot, horse, stagecoach, train, or car.

The later chapters of the book are largely devoted to battles over the location of urban highways. Swift also addresses the interstate system's effects on small towns and their businesses—it “diverts traffic away from former arteries of travel, drains the life's blood from established firms which are situated on the old highways and leaves them to die.” He notes briefly the effects on farmers: Iowa's “710 miles of freeway would devour 26,000 acres of productive cropland, or more than forty square miles” and divide farms, “isolating pieces beyond four lanes of impenetrable concrete and rebar” and forcing farmers to travel miles to reach former adjoining properties.

Anyone interested in how “the big roads” have transformed our lives will appreciate Swift's *Big Roads*.

— by Marvin Bergman, editor, *The Annals of Iowa*

Stand Up and Be Counted!

Iowa and the 1940 Federal Census

by Timothy Walch

"Don't be surprised to find a man at the door, asking 'Do you have a telephone, an automobile, a radio, a bathtub, running water?'" Thus were newspaper readers in Cedar Rapids alerted to the inevitable arrival of "the government's quiz doctor"—the enumerator for the 1940 census.

This wasn't a surprising or unexpected endeavor. In fact, conducting a federal census had been written into the U.S. Constitution. Every decade since 1790, a federal census had recorded specific information about the nation. Iowa first participated in 1840, six years before statehood. In April 1940, amidst economic and political uncertainty at home, and predictions of war in Europe, thousands of workers hired by the U.S. government would engage the American people in this decennial responsibility.

The changes in one decade would certainly make a difference in the future of Iowa. Because seats in the U.S. House of Representatives could be reapportioned based on population changes revealed in the census, there was a real possibility that many states, including Iowa, would lose a member of their congressional delegations.

Besides population, how else had Iowa and the nation changed—especially after several years of economic depression and New Deal legislation? To ferret out these answers, the 1940 census form was expanded with several new questions, but some just seemed too

intrusive and personal, provoking controversy and diatribes.

Put another way, was the U.S. Bureau of the Census just counting noses—or poking its nose into the private lives of U.S. citizens?

It was likely that more than a few Americans would balk at answering some census questions when

an enumerator came knocking at the door. Anticipating criticism and objections, the census bureau knew that it had to set the proper tone and educate Americans about the value of the census. Beginning in January and continuing into April, the bureau's Division of Public Relations sent out press releases and speakers. The topic was a frequent one in Iowa's newspapers. Some stories were attributed to the census bureau or wire services like the Associated Press. Locally written articles often quoted census officials and community leaders who urged the public to participate.

The first of these articles began in early January, when the federal Manufacturing and Business Census was launched (three months ahead of the population, housing, and agricultural censuses). The *LeMars*

Globe Post took the opportunity to introduce Joe Duster, the fellow who was traveling across Plymouth County with manufacturing and business census forms. "He is paid 60¢ for each report, but so far he has only been able to complete 5 or 6 reports a day," the paper stated.

J. N. "DING" DARLING WILDLIFE SOCIETY



"All the privacy of a gold fish." *Des Moines Register* cartoonist Ding Darling comments on the intrusive nature of certain questions in the 1940 census.

Why was it taking Duster so long to complete these reports? "According to reports from all parts of the country, the public is more suspicious than usual of census takers, due to the increased government snooping in all private affairs, and many a citizen is likely to put off, or try to mislead the census taker, hoping thereby to evade some New Deal tax or governmental meddling." None of the information, according to the story, "would be used for the purpose of taxing, suppressing, or destroying any private individual or business." Apparently some Americans were wary that census data could also lead to military or jury duty, school attendance monitoring, or immigration regulations.

O. J. Ditto, the census district supervisor for the Cherokee area, stressed that the information given to enumerators was completely private. "The individual census return is the most confidential document in the archives of the United States Government," he boasted. "Not even the President of the United States is privileged to examine these reports and they are absolutely immune from inspections by courts or other agencies of government."

Community spokespersons and census officials were not above reminding Americans of the penalty for giving false information or failing to cooperate. In mid-January, for example, the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* ran a story headlined "Friendly Hand of Census Man Can Turn to Iron Fist: Cooperation Usual Here, Says Supervisor, But Penalties Exist." The supervisor in question was Stanley Comfort.

Comfort was not making an idle threat; penalties for non-compliance by a U.S. resident were nothing new. They ranged from a fine of \$100 or 60 days in jail for refusing to answer the questions to a \$500 fine or a year in prison for providing false information. The penalties for a census worker giving false information were twice those of a resident. Do your duty, obey the law—that was the advice of Stanley Comfort.

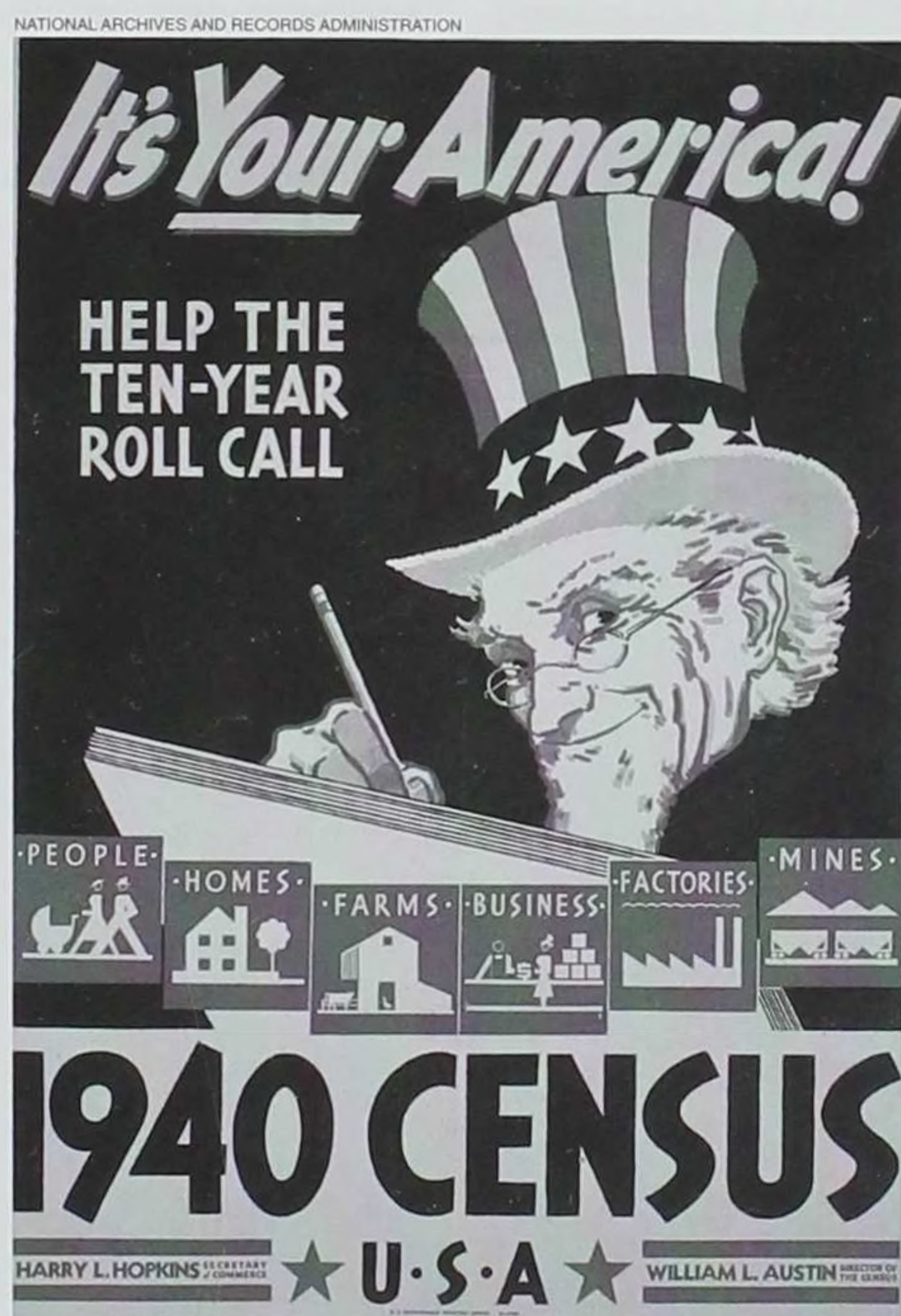
On KGLO Radio and in the *Globe-Gazette*, Comfort noted that the quality and quantity of information to be gathered on income, payroll, and inventory were directly linked to community improvement. He was passionate in his pitch: "People who make or sell all kinds of merchandise are pleading all the time for better and more detailed information about markets; and markets

are people." The census was good for business and therefore good for the American people.

Garfield E. Breese, the director of the Mason City Chamber of Commerce, echoed Comfort's message in an article headlined "Cooperation in Census is Asked: Manufacturers Serve Own and Community's Interests by Helping." Breese said, "Every manufacturer in Mason City is a component part of this great national production organization. If he fails to make his information available to the great pool of essential facts on manufacturing which the census is about to put together for the guidance of the manufacturers themselves, he is standing in his own light." Newspapers across the state repeated the rallying cry: stand up and be counted.

Most Iowa manufacturers and businesses owners apparently were willing if not enthusiastic to provide the information requested. The biggest concern was confidentiality. Once convinced that information would appear only in the aggregate by industry or activity, they generally complied.

With the manufacturing and business enumeration completed, attention shifted to the population, housing, and agricultural censuses, set to begin on April 2. In the months leading up to April, Iowa newspapers pushed the message that these counts were vital. After a tumultuous decade, both the private and public sectors were eager to harvest a bumper crop of socioeconomic information about the American people, believing that more facts would lead to better solutions.

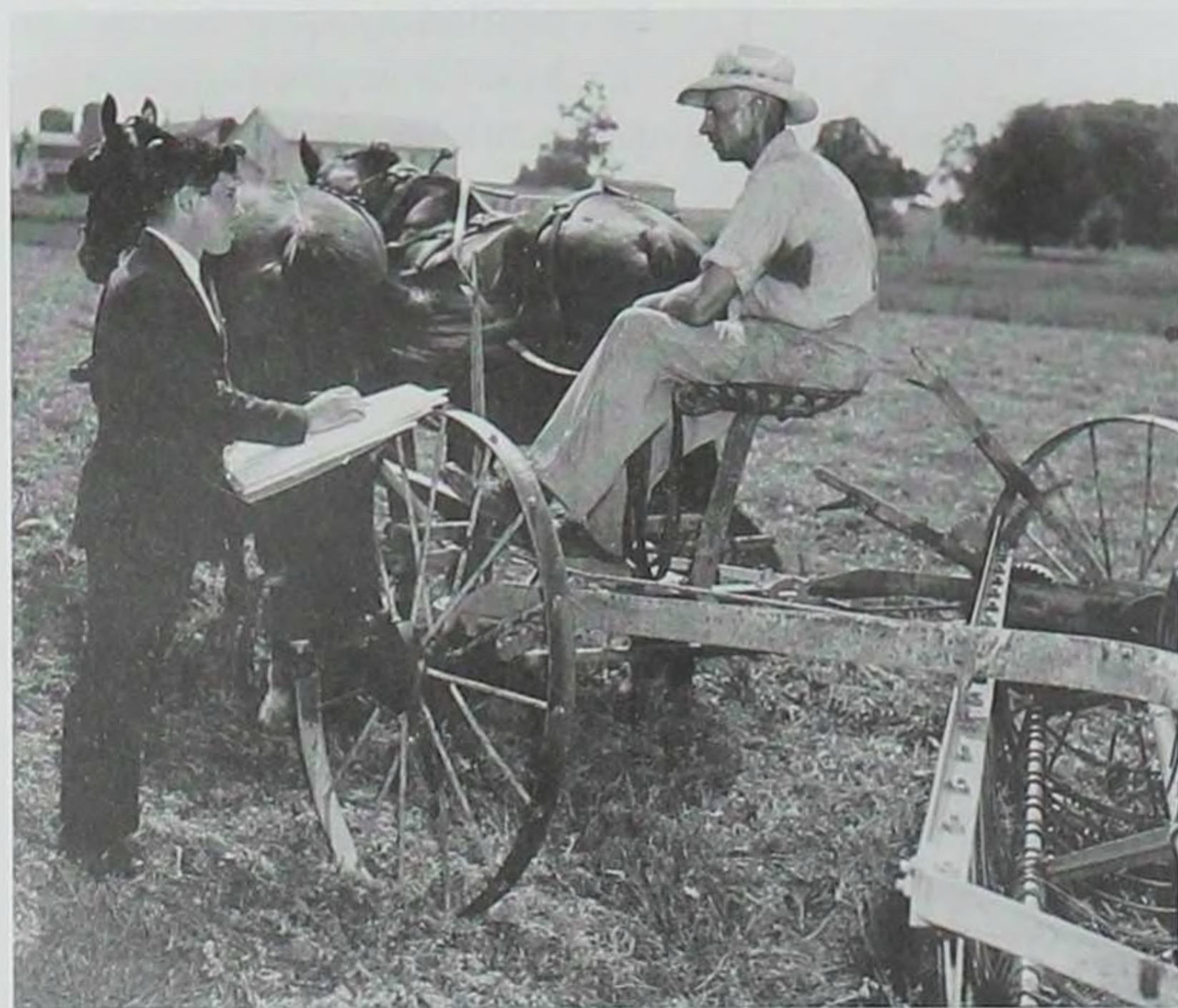


Several of the new census questions focused on housing. Some were fairly general: Did you own or rent your "dwelling unit"? What was its value or rent? What was its condition? Other questions were far more specific and inquired about the number of rooms, water supply, toilet and bathing facilities, radio, lighting, refrigeration, heating, and fuel for heating and cooking.

BOTH PHOTOS: NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



An enumerator goes about his job, counting U.S. residents. According to a wire-service story from Washington, the mantra of census workers was to be: "Get the answers . . . and get the right ones, but don't hold your foot in the door or make threats—be courteous, be clever, be persuasive."



Although an article in the *Oelwein Register* stated that the "moguls of the census bureau have overstepped the bounds of propriety and common sense," William Austin, director of the federal census, argued from Washington that if private industry and the government believed that home construction would revive the economy, then the nature of current housing needed to be assessed. And as Stanley Comfort had reasoned earlier, "It is American business above all, which wants to know . . . what kind of home or farm you occupy, whether it is modern or obsolete and how many conveniences it has. For each obsolete home means the possible buyer of a new one."

Several new questions focused on the employment status of individuals 14 years and older during the week of March 24–30, 1940. Were you employed? Was it in "Emergency Work" (the New Deal work relief programs)? Were you seeking work, engaged in "home housework" or school, or unable to work? The hope here was to measure the "twilight zone," as Austin called it, between unemployment and employment.

A random 5 percent of the population would be asked 15 supplemental questions pertaining to parents' birthplace, mother tongue, "usual" occupation, veteran's status, and social security. Each woman in this sample was also asked her number of marriages, age at first marriage, and number of children born alive. Using the relatively new concept of "systematic sampling," these sample questions could be tabulated and released sooner than the full census.

There seemed to be a general curiosity about all the information to be compiled in Washington. In response, William Bruckart, a nationally syndicated columnist whose work appeared in many Iowa weeklies, remarked that the census was nothing short of "a complete self-examination of Uncle Sam by Uncle Sam" and an important exercise in civic engagement. "There was and is a certain number of people who think the whole thing is silly," he wrote. "It is not silly. . . . The census deals in facts, and surely we cannot have too many facts about ourselves."

"It seems to me, then," added Bruckart, "that we can look forward to the results of the census. . . . It will show that many theories of what the government can do or has done have failed or have succeeded by revealing just how much human nature can be influenced by man-made rules."

In an effort to find a bit of humor in all of the hubbub, Louis Wirth, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, remarked on a radio show that as far back as 1850, "citizens were required to tell the census takers whether they were idiots, . . . prisoners or paupers and

the value of all their real estate and property." Wirth said that one of his favorite questions had appeared on a 1907 census: "How many petticoats do you wear?" Since 1907 was not a census year for the nation or most states, the columnist may have been joking.

What wasn't a joke was that U.S. farmers were required to respond to a whopping 232 questions for the agricultural census. The *Bremer County Independent* advised farmers to pick up a sample form at a bank or Farm Bureau office: "If you start figuring now, you'll be sure to get finished in time to cultivate corn."

Once again, the official word was that agricultural changes in the 1930s needed to be tracked. How extensively had tractors replaced workhorses and mules? How had mechanization affected the need for hired men? And, as one Iowa paper put it, "How many farmers [had] abandoned their homes in the 'dust bowl' and where did they go?"

David J. Murphy, an Iowa census district supervisor, stressed the value of the answers to the gov-

ernment—and to farmers themselves. "No group has a greater degree of self interest in the success of the decennial census of 1940 than has the farmer," he noted in the *Marion Sentinel*. "Agriculture as an industry has been in bad health for a number of years. Just as a prudent person goes to his doctor for a complete check-up, the farmers will, in the 1940 census, get the most complete study of their symptoms that has ever been made." It would "tell the farmer which way he is going."

Not everyone was pleased with the census. Certain questions, for example, drew the ire of one Republican senator, Charles W. Tobey of New Hampshire. In the weeks leading up to the start of census-taking, he mounted a campaign to remove questions on personal income. He advised Americans to refuse to answer them and to tell the enumerators that "it was none of their damned business." For a small



ALL THREE PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES), DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



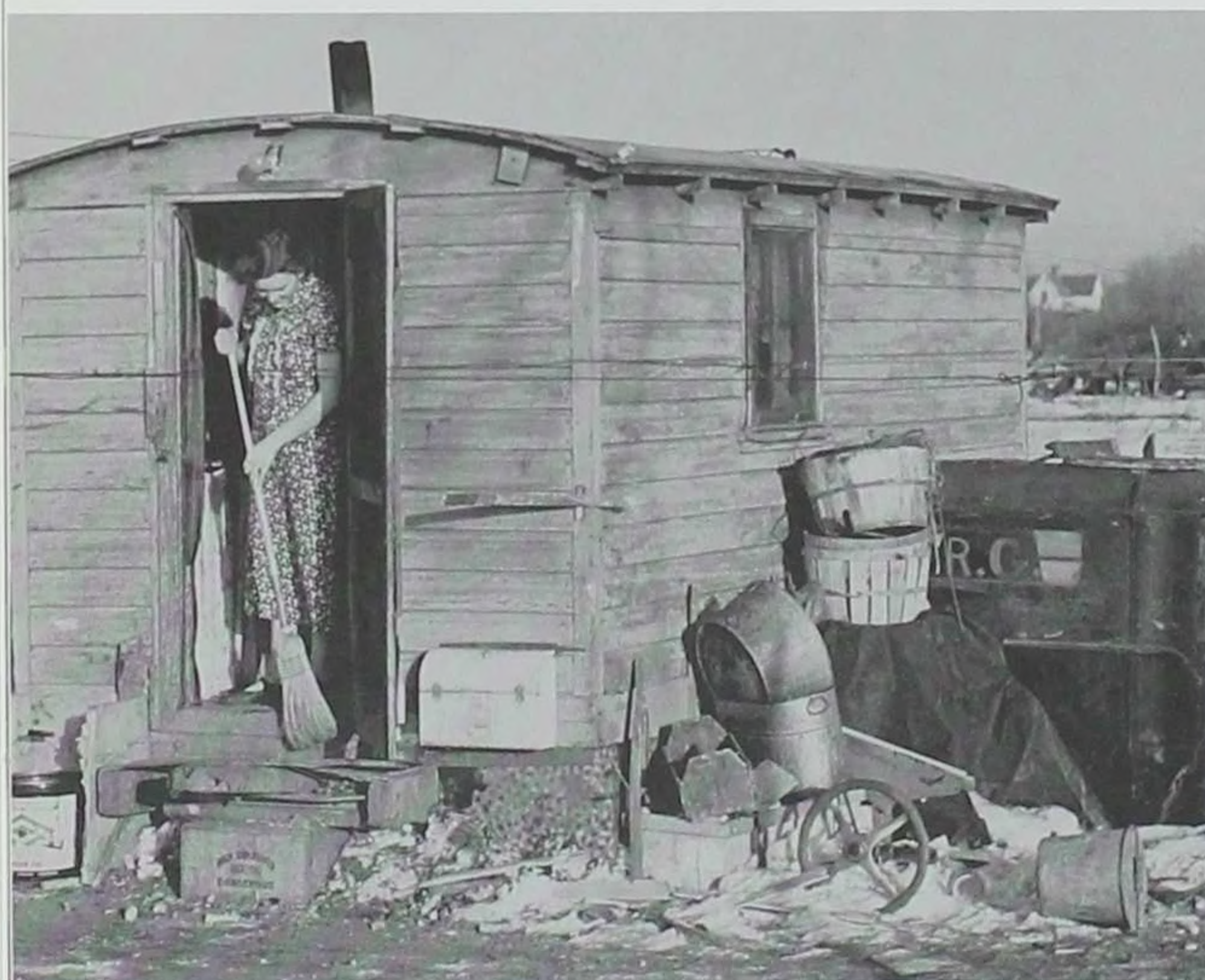
Culturally nomadic, a group of Romani, or "gypsies," set up camp in the 1930s in the Des Moines area. Census workers in 1940 were reminded not to overlook people who might be living in lumber and convict camps, boats, missions, warehouses, tents, factories, and huts. Determined to count every U.S. resident, the census bureau designated the evening of April 8, 1940, for enumerators to visit tourist camps, flophouses, and hotels.





ALL FIVE PHOTOS: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The 1930s had reduced many Americans to dwellings like these in northwest Iowa, as documented in 1936 by photographer Russell Lee for the Farm Security Administration. Some politicians criticized the U.S. Census Bureau for invading the privacy of residents by asking about condition of housing, indoor plumbing, and income levels. On the other hand, according to reporter Morgan Beatty, "some of them are curious to know, too, whether the president was right—or talking through his hat—when he said one-third of the nation is ill-clad, ill-housed, and ill-fed."



cluster of Republicans led by Tobey, income questions "flaunted" the Bill of Rights and "represent[ed] snooping in its most insidious form."

"To put the issue in context," writes historian Margo Anderson, "one should remember that until World War II, relatively few Americans reported any financial information to the federal government. Few, for example, filed federal income tax returns." Now the government was requiring all residents 14 and over to report their income to a stranger who appeared at the door.

Associated Press reporter Morgan Beatty believed that the income questions had bearing in the political arena. "Many politicians and statesmen want the income data for speeches, programs, bills, and what-have-you, dealing with unemployment and relief," he wrote in late March. And a census bureau press release likened "the flow of wages and salaries" to the "economic blood pressure of the nation."

To mollify Tobey and other critics, the census bureau added an option for high-income earners, who were most likely to object. The option was spelled out in the enumeration manual. Those who earned \$5,000 or less (roughly \$82,000 today) were required to report the exact amount. However, "for amounts above \$5,000, enter '5,000+.' This means that you are not to report the actual amount of money wages and salary for persons who have received more than \$5,000. Keep this in mind in enumerating any household which seems likely to have an income above this amount. Some persons who might otherwise be reluctant to report wages or salary would be quite willing to do so if they learn that the amount above \$5,000 need not be specified."

Any individual who earned above \$5,000 was expected to write down the actual amount on the confidential Form P-16 (name, address, and signature were not required), seal it in an envelope and give it to the enumerator to mail.

But Senator Tobey's anger did not abate in the weeks leading up to April 1. He fumed that the American people were "incensed" at the prospect of answering income questions, and he introduced a Senate resolution to remove them. President Roosevelt called Tobey's resolution a "political move and nothing else."

Tobey did achieve a victory of sorts when the Senate Commerce Committee narrowly approved his resolution calling to eliminate the income questions. But the bill floundered. "The bureau of the census possesses the confidence of the American people," said Milo J. Sedlacek, one of Iowa's area supervisors. "The questions to be asked in the 1940 census contain nothing that will shake that confidence."

Tobey would not give up. In a national radio address on the night of April 1, as enumerators gathered up their supplies for the next morning, the senator claimed that there was no statutory authority for the census bureau to require citizens to answer specific questions. He, for one, would not respond to the questions about income.

There was no indication in the Iowa press that anyone in the state joined Tobey in his protest. And in the end, only 2 percent of the U.S. population did not answer the income questions.

On April 2, versed in 87 pages of instructions, census workers headed out to count America. Thirty-three questions would be asked at every dwelling unit (and many more at farms). "If every family would devote the conversation at one single dinner hour to a discussion of [the census]," district supervisor Murphy advised, "it would be a great convenience to the family and an aid to the community and the government." Murphy went so far as to encourage every family to appoint a "spokesman" to respond when the census taker arrived.

All individuals alive at 12:01 a.m. on April 1 would be counted; those born after that exact moment would not be included. "Census experts said that the 1940 census should show that the United States is nearing maturity in population growth," the *Oelwein Register* reported. "They predict that a maximum population of about 145,000,000 will be reached between 1965 and 1975." (The "experts" underestimated; the 1970 population would be 203 million.)

After the initial sweep by census workers, several communities double-checked the pulse of their population to identify individuals who might have been missed. It was a matter of civic pride for Iowans to boast that their towns were growing, but the proof would be in the census. "For years there has been talk that the small town is on its way out," noted the *Lenox Time Table*. "If we continue to make our town a better place in which to live," it added, "people will come here."

In Iowa City, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a large newspaper ad asking, "Did the Census Taker Miss You?" "Scores of Iowa City persons were missed by the census taker because of families being away at the time of his call, because of oversights, because of residents being busy, and because of the limited time provided by law. . . . It is most important that Iowa City receive full credit for its full population—the final figure reported will stand

officially for the next 10 years. . . . With other cities in Iowa assured of substantial population gains we simply cannot afford to fall back."

Community stakeholders in Mason City understood that population gains could increase state and federal appropriations and economic development, so an army of 500 "re-checkers" went block by block looking for residents who were still unrecorded. As the local paper reported, "One man telephoned to say that he had a large family and none of them had been counted." The man asked the enumerator to come by again, explaining that "I remember you being here . . . but I thought you were the assessor."

When the final figures were released months later, it was clear that the 1940 census reflected the consequences of a decade of depression. "The predictions that the Depression had had a dramatic effect on the character and trajectory of the population proved correct," Margo Anderson comments. "Population growth between 1930 and 1940 dropped to the historically low rate of 7.2 percent. Cities stopped growing."

The aggregate totals for Iowa were also disappointing. Granted, its population had grown since 1930, but by less than 3 percent. With 2,538,268 residents, Iowa was the 20th most populous state. Unfortunately, its growth was eclipsed by that of other states, especially in the South and the West. Iowa's number of congressional delegates dropped from nine to eight. Eight other states lost seats as well.

But the *Globe-Gazette* found a bit of a silver lining. "Mason City [is] Iowa's Bright Spot" was the front-page headline on October 1. Based on a preliminary report, the community was the "fastest growing" of Iowa's 16 largest cities, and Cerro Gordo County had moved up to become its ninth most populous county.

A companion story noted economic growth in a cross-section of local industries, forecasting a major shift in the local economy. "Not yet has Mason City felt the stimulus of the defense program," noted the editor, alluding to the growing tension in Europe. "That lies still in the future."

Many of the young Iowans who were dutifully counted in April 1940 would not live to be recorded in the next census, the results of a nation at war.

Unexpected uses of the 1940 census also reflected a nation at war. Four months after Pearl Harbor, Congress signed the Second War Powers Act of 1942. This act authorized Secretary of Commerce Harry Hopkins (who oversaw the census bureau) to make available

any census information "to any branch or agency of the Government." To help mobilize the nation for war, "the bureau provided tabulations for projecting draft quotas [and] population data for the location of military installations and the impact of defense industries," writes Anderson. "On a more sinister note, the population census also identified alien populations who might post a security threat to the nation," she continues. "The Japanese were readily identified in the 1940 population census because they were a small, highly concentrated ethnic minority. . . . Detailed counts of the Japanese for small geographic areas [provided] the parameters for finding and interning the population."

Today, seven decades after the cantankerous Senator Charles Tobey railed against what he called "census snooping," the U.S. Census Bureau has officially released individual census returns for 1940, and genealogists and historians are trolling the internet for information. Little did Americans in April 1940 realize just how curious we would be today about where they lived and worked and what they owned and earned. ♦

Timothy Walch is a volunteer at the State Historical of Iowa and a frequent contributor to this magazine.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Although the census has been an ongoing constitutional responsibility of the federal government since 1790, there has been only modest interest in the social history of how it has been conducted. The most useful secondary source is Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). This excellent overview is the place to begin. In addition to Anderson, historians Jennifer L. Hochschild and Brenna M. Powell have written on the subject of "race or color" categories; see their "Racial Reorganization and the United States Census 1850–1930: Mulattoes, Half-Breeds, Mixed Parentage, Hindoos, and the Mexican Race," in *Studies in American Political Development* (Spring 2008).

For the 1940 census, one should begin with Robert M. Jenkins, *Procedural History of the 1940 Census of Population and Housing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Although this is a highly scholarly work of greatest value to demographers and other social scientists, the patient researcher will be rewarded by a careful review of the text.

For genealogists and family historians, the best source of information on the 1940 census is available online from the National Archives and Records Administration. See: <http://1940census.archives.gov> for more on the documentary legacy of the census as manifested in the enumeration sheets compiled in spring 1940. See also these articles in *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives*: Constance Potter, "New Questions in the 1940 Census," 42 (Winter 2010); and Diane Petro, "Brother Can You Spare a Dime? The 1940 Census: Employment and Income," 44 (Spring 2012). Both can be found online.

This article was based on a careful review of Iowa newspapers published in 1940. Copies of the stories used and quoted in this article are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, SHSI (Iowa City center).

Census question #10 asked for "color or race." According to historians Jennifer Hochschild and Brenna Powell, "after the 1930 census, the Census Bureau perceived only three races (white, Negro, Indian) and five Asian nationalities"—namely, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and "Hindu." The 1940 census manual dictated that "a person of mixed white and Negro blood should be [recorded] as a Negro, no matter how small the percentage of Negro blood." Specifying European nationalities was no longer relevant, since immigration quotas were a fraction of what they had been before 1924 and limited mostly to northern Europeans.

Right: Japanese American farmers from relocation camps in Colorado and Arkansas visit Sam Kennedy's potato fields near Clear Lake, as guests of the Iowa State Vegetable Growers Association (July 1943).

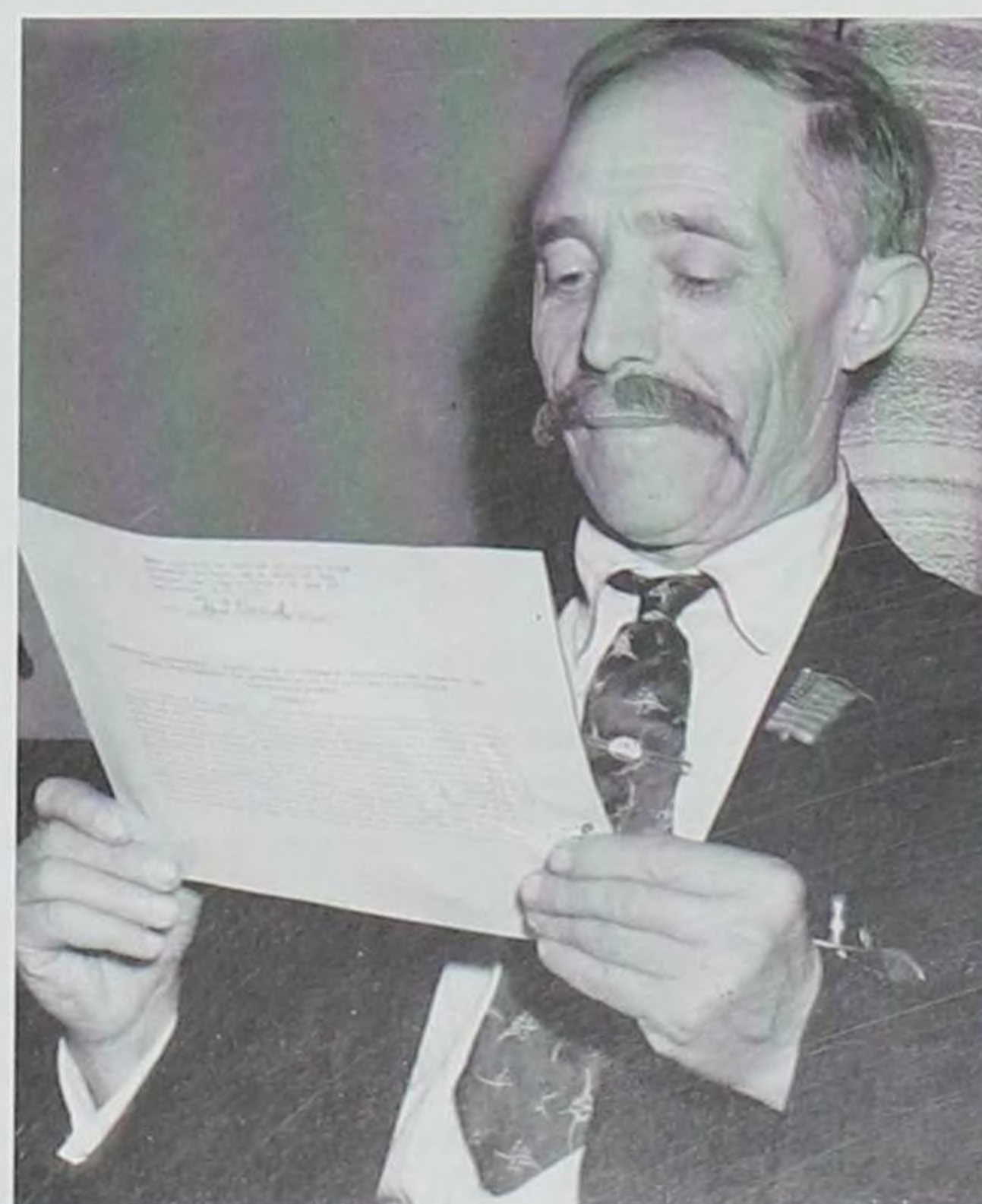


SHSI (DES MOINES)



Left: A home in the Des Moines Center Street neighborhood, which largely comprised African American homes and businesses.

Below: Italian immigrant Jim Farago holds his final citizenship certificate, in Des Moines, 1939.



LEFT: SHSI (DES MOINES); RIGHT: SHSI (DES MOINES); PATTEN COLLECTION

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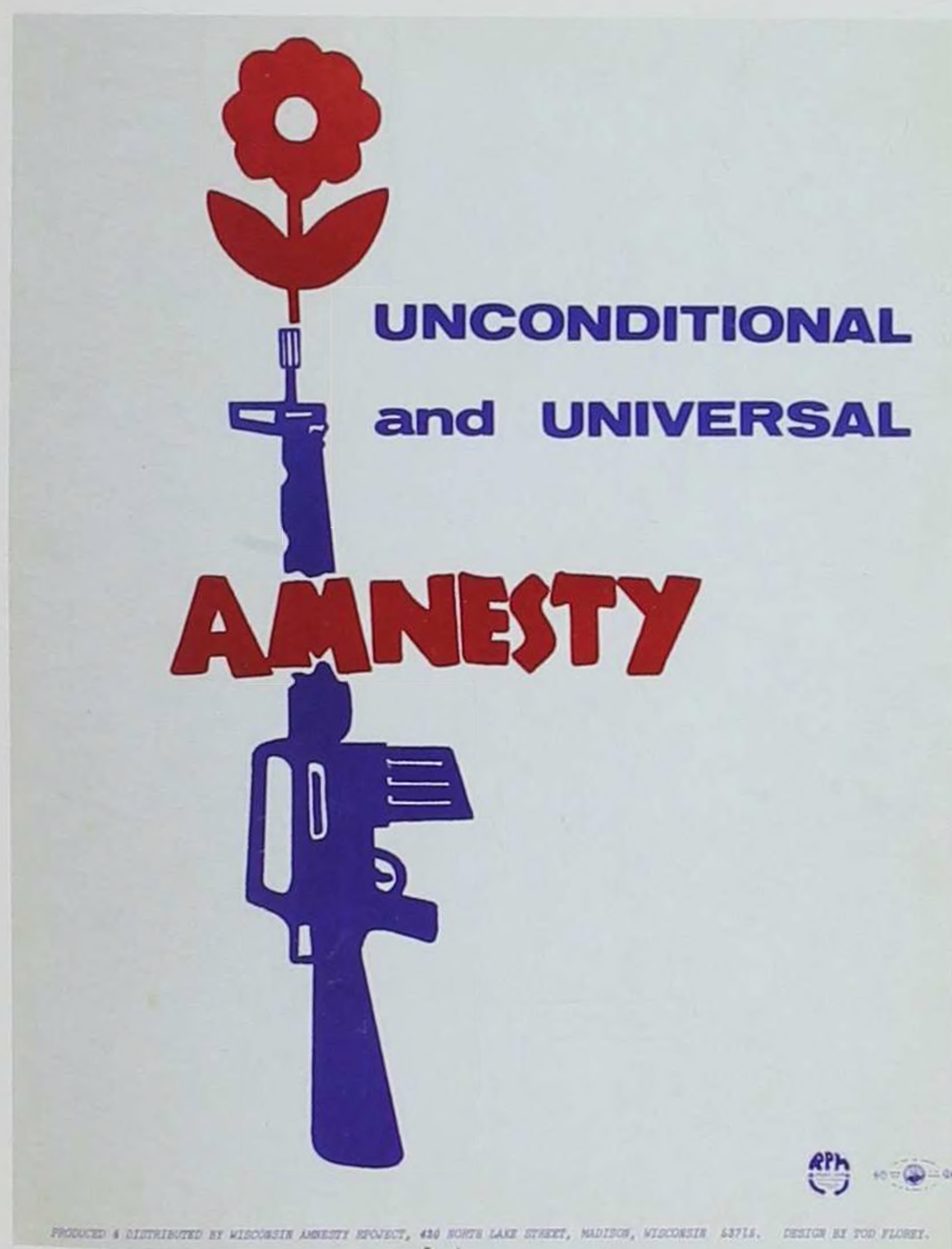
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