

## THE PRONUNCIATION OF THE WORD IOWA

Six different pronunciations of the word *Iowa* have had from time to time more or less acceptance in popular usage. They are: (1) I'oway [·aiôwê], (2) Io'wah [aiôwâ], (3) I'ower [·aiôwër], (4) I'owah [·aiôwà], (5) I'owuh [·aiôwə], (6) I'uhwuh [·aiəwə].<sup>1</sup>

Of these the second form has had but little currency within the State at any time, and the third form even less. It is proposed in this paper to discuss these various pronunciations as to their origins and validity.

Number one approximates the etymological pronunciation; that is, it is reasonably close to the pronunciation of the word from which our modern word *Iowa* is derived. The Indians who gave their name to the river from which the Iowa District was named by Albert Lea were called Ioways or Iooways. The early explorers, chiefly Frenchmen, used various spellings to convey the sounds of this name as they heard them, sixty-eight of which are listed in Frederick Webb Hodge's *Handbook of American Indians*.<sup>2</sup> Some typical spellings follow: Aiaouez, Aiauway, Aiouez, Aiowais, Ayauvai, Ayoouais.<sup>3</sup> There are also a few ending

<sup>1</sup> In each of these six pronunciations, the first form given represents an attempt to indicate the pronunciation by means of the letters of the regular alphabet. The second form represents the sounds by the symbols adopted by the American Dialect Society. (See the third cover page of any issue of *Dialect Notes*.) Throughout this study, symbols placed within brackets are those of this Society. They are similar to those of the *Association Phonétique Internationale*. The various systems of diacritical marks are confusing and founded on misconceptions.

<sup>2</sup> Hodge's *Handbook of American Indians*, Pt. 1, p. 614 (*Bulletin 30 of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution*).

<sup>3</sup> The United States Geographic Board fixed upon *North Aowa* as the name of a creek in Dixon County, Nebraska, which was variously called Agoway,



in *-a* and *-ois*; but most of them end in *-ez*, *-ais*, or *-es*, which represent sounds either equivalent to or approximating the sound of *a* in fate [ê]. The initial *Ai-* (*Ay-*) is a good phonetic representation of our so-called "long *i*" [ai]; and the second vowel sound, frequently represented in these French spellings by *ou*, stands for the sound of *oo* in the English word *spoon* [û]. Mr. Alanson Skinner, Curator of Anthropology in the Public Museum of Milwaukee and our best authority on the Ioway Indians, says in a private letter: "In my ten years' experience with the tribe, I have heard the name repeatedly pronounced by the members of both the Oklahoma and Kansas-Nebraska divisions as follows: ai'-yu-way,<sup>4</sup> the accent being on the first syllable, and the last syllable having the distinct *ay* sound. . . . I am sure that these Indians have never pronounced their name *Iowah* any more than the Ojibway tribe have ever called themselves *Ojibwah* or *Chippewah*." It is clear, in view of these facts, that the person who insists on a strictly etymological pronunciation should say *Iooway* or *Iyooway*.

The *oo* sound of the second syllable [û] seems never to have had much currency in the name when applied to the territory, but there is abundant evidence that *Ioway* was the prevalent pronunciation during the pioneer period. The recollections of pioneers and the occasional spelling of the word with the *-y* final indicate that usage. In Irving's *Adventures of Captain Bonneville* and *Astoria*, in the *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clarke Expedition*, in seven treaties with the Indians between 1815 and 1838, and even in the records of debates in the United States Senate, the *Ayowa*, *Iowa*, *Ioway*, and *Aowa*.—*Fifth Report of the United States Geographic Board*, 1921, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Skinner's *y* sound represents a very natural transition sound between the *i* in the initial diphthong [ai] and the following [û]. The tongue rises after [i]. Note the French spellings like *Ayoes*, *Ayoouais*, etc. (See Note 2.)



word is spelled *Ioway*.<sup>5</sup> So it is in many works relating to the Indians, as in Hamilton and Irvin's *Ioway Grammar*. Moreover many older Iowans still retain the *Ioway* pronunciation, though frequently the final syllable is stressed so little that the *ay* sound is not noticeable.

If the final *-y* had not been dropped in spelling, there would probably have been no change in pronunciation. Albert Lea, late in life, regretted the movement away from the old *Ioway*, but if he and other early writers and map-makers had retained the *-y* he would probably have had nothing to complain of.<sup>6</sup>

The origin of pronunciation number two — *Io'wa* — is difficult to find. When one tries to account for the second-syllable accent by analogy, remembering *Iona* and *iota*, one is embarrassed by the commoner *iodine*. There is no trouble about accenting the the first syllable of the trisyllabic *Idaho*. It is scarcely possible that the penultimate accent of *Ohio* has affected the accent in *Iowa*, although there is no doubt that many Easterners confuse the two States. The fact remains that in the East and South the second-syllable accent for *Iowa* is very common. I have asked many people their reasons for this pronunciation, and have sometimes received the answer that it was taught at school. Yet the geographies and dictionaries in use do not have it. Out of the ninety-two records of pronunciation of the word *Iowa* which I have found in various books,<sup>7</sup> only three give the

<sup>5</sup> Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, and Senator Clement C. Clay of Alabama in a debate on a bill to grant preëmption rights to actual settlers on the public lands, January 29, 1838.— *Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix to Vol. VI, pp. 139, 140. See also Salter's *Iowa: the First Free State in the Louisiana Purchase*, Appendix, p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> See *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. VI, p. 557, where it is asserted that Lea was the first to drop the *-y* in spelling the word on his famous map.

<sup>7</sup> A list of these pronunciations and the sources from which they were obtained appears in note fourteen.



penultimate accent, and two of them are English, and only one of the three was published in the last half century. They are Chambers' *Concise Gazetteer of the World*, London, 1914; Beeton's *Dictionary of Geography*, London (preface 1868); and Cartee's *Elements of Physical and Political Geography*, Boston, 1855. Though the first-named is important for England, it surely has not affected American pronunciation; and the chief popular British dictionary — Cassell's — accents the word on the first syllable.

Those who stress the *o* often give the so-called "Italian" value to the final vowel instead of the more common *-uh* — [â] instead of [ə]. Yet *Io'wuh* is common, and may be listed as a variant of number two.

Among Iowans themselves the second-syllable stress of the name of their State is very rare. So far as "correctness" is concerned, this pronunciation may then be ruled out, for it is a general and a sound lexicographical principle that the pronunciation of a place-name is determined by the consensus of usage where the word is most used, *i. e.*, in the place that it names.

This principle will also dispose of number three. *I'ower* is perhaps scarcely important enough to deserve a place in our list, as it represents merely the application of a New England dialectal peculiarity to the word under consideration.

The fourth pronunciation — *I'owah* — is the result of the efforts of the purists to correct what seemed to them the false pronunciation *Ioway*. There was a mistaken belief that the Indians pronounced the final vowel like *a* in *father*, and this final sound was also affected by the pedantic enthusiasm for the bastard sound foisted upon *a* in *ask* [â]. But it was analogy upon which the purist-reformers chiefly depended. They cited the fact that in Christian names like *Ezra*, *Anna*, and *Elisha*, and in place-names like *America*,



*Africa*, and *Minnesota*, the final *-a* was not pronounced *ay*. *Joshuay* was an illiterate pronunciation; therefore *Ioway* must be illiterate. The leaders in this crusade were the school teachers, and it seems to have begun in the 'sixties and to have been especially important in the 'seventies and 'eighties. It still continues, as may be seen in our list of recorded pronunciations.<sup>8</sup>

This continuous effort succeeded in greatly weakening the hold of *Ioway*; but in substituting a slack vowel for the tense *-ay*, the purists had invited its eventual reduction to [ə], the actual sound of *-a* in *Ezra* — a fate that usually attends a slack vowel in an unaccented syllable. Thus we have the pronunciation *Iowuh*, listed as number five, and sometimes heard from platforms and in careful speech. The second vowel is like the *o* in *approbation*.

The sixth pronunciation, *Iuhwuh*, represents a slackening of the tongue and an unrounding of the lips for the middle vowel. This is the pronunciation listed as standard by Professor George Philip Krapp.<sup>9</sup> A study of the pronunciation of the word by fifty students in the University of Iowa hailing from different parts of the State resulted in forty-six uses of this form and four of *Iowuh*. It is believed, then, that the standard pronunciation in the State is *I'uhwuh* [·aiəwə]. Of course, the difference between numbers five and six is so slight as not to be commonly noticeable.<sup>10</sup>

Dictionaries, geographies, and gazetteers, which seem to have, ordinarily, a predilection for pronunciations slightly more careful than those in common use, now generally

<sup>8</sup> See note fourteen.

<sup>9</sup> Krapp's *Pronunciation of Standard English in America*, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> This represents a slight change from the conclusion reached in my brief article on the subject in *The Palimpsest* for October, 1924. When the speaker is more self-conscious, he is likely to use number five.



record the pronunciation as *Iowuh*, without a secondary usage, though some of the geographies insist on the "Italian" *-a* final. The confusion of diacritical markings in America could not be better illustrated than by the fact that in the ninety-two records of pronunciation that I have found for the word Iowa there are thirty-three different combinations of markings.<sup>11</sup> The final *-a* may have one or two dots over or under it, or both over and under, a breve over or under it, etc. The game is capable of many variations. The only marking which occurs more than four times in my list is the very simple one of Webster's dictionary of 1848 (a revision of the 1840 Webster). It appears fifteen times in my list. The thirty-three markings referred to are evidently intended to record only seven or eight pronunciations,<sup>12</sup> of which three receive most of the votes. Those three are the familiar *Iowuh* [·aiôwə], which has a plurality of all votes cast, and the two forms of the more puristic *Iowah* indicated the one by two dots and the other by one dot over the *-a* [·aiôwâ, ·aiôwà].

What, then, is the correct pronunciation? This question necessitates an inquiry into the standards of correctness for place-names. There is, after all, but one standard for the pronunciation of any word, and that is the consensus of

<sup>11</sup> See note fourteen.

<sup>12</sup> The pronunciations referred to are: (1) *Iowuh* [·aiôwə], (2) *Iowä* [·aiôwâ], (3) *Iowà* [·aiôwà], (4) *Iowä* [·aiôwæ], (5) *Ioway* [·aiôwê], (6) *Iowaw'* [·aiôwâ], (7) *Io'wa* [aiôwə], (8) *I'oa* [aiôə]. It may be observed in regard to these pronunciations that (2) and (3) are practically identical, as in an unstressed syllable the difference between the so-called full Italian and half Italian *a* is negligible; or, to speak in terms of the diacritical markers, there is practically no difference between unstressed ä and unstressed â. When the old Scotchman's daughter remonstrated with him about his broad pronunciation of the word *difference*, Sandy replied, "Ah, lass, I caun't see the dufference between dufferance an' dufference!" But to return: numbers (4) and (6) — the latter appearing but once — never had any currency, and (8) — which also appears but once — is impossible for popular usage. This leaves (1), (2), (5), and (7).



usage. Now if this consensus is not clear, that is, if there appears to be a division in common usage, the conscientious seeker after correctness may do one of two things: he may be guided by the usage of some person or some group of persons that he respects, (and the size of the group often determines the choice), or he may go to his favorite dictionary for its "preferred" pronunciation. He may choose the latter guidance because he feels that in the dictionary the god of words speaks, and the three legs of his dictionary-stand are the tripod of the sibyl; but if he should, in an unwary moment, consult the preface of this sacred tome, he would find the full and frank acknowledgment that, after all, the lexicographer is trying merely to record usages as he has carefully observed them, and that the *vox dei* he thought he heard is only the *vox populi*. So that whether he follows his preferred group or his dictionary, he is imitating the popular example — he is yielding to social coercion.

This may seem to some a very weak and essentially wrong procedure. It may seem better to determine the essentially "right" pronunciation from etymology and the history of the word, and then stick to it in spite of ridicule — say *Iooway*, for instance. But the purpose of language is the interchange of thought among very large groups without any lost motion or friction caused by the use of strange or difficult words or pronunciations; so that the ideal speech, from a practical standpoint, is that which is perfectly and completely familiar to all hearers. Thus the ethics of pronunciation may be said not only to forbid idiosyncrasies, but to discourage all independence of usage, at least without a definite compensation in emphasis.

There is no need, however, for the Iowa legislature to attempt to bring about uniformity as did the Arkansas legislature when it jointly resolved, after hearing reports from certain learned societies of that State, that "the only



true pronunciation of the name of the state, in the opinion of this body, is that received by the French from the native Indians, and committed to writing in the French word representing the sound" as *Arkansaw*, "being the pronunciation formerly universally, and now most commonly used."<sup>13</sup> In Iowa the Indian pronunciation is not the one "most commonly used"; nor are the variations in usage great enough to warrant legislative interference. But even if the corn song, or perchance an unexpected wave of interest in Amerind etymologies, should bring the *Ioway* pronunciation into competition again, a legislative effort at fiat language would have little to commend it.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sandels and Hill's *Arkansas Digest of Statutes*, p. xi.

<sup>14</sup> This list, though only a beginning, is perhaps extensive enough to illustrate tendencies. No attempt has been made to get the latest edition of a given work, though the latest edition was always used when it was at hand. Different editions are not listed unless the record of the pronunciation itself varies in different editions. If the title-page bears no date, the latest copyright date is used. An effort has been made to present the markings, syllable division, and other features exactly as in the original.

1845 I-o-waw' Fowle & Fitz's *Elementary Geography for Massachusetts Children*.

1846 I-o-wa Worcester's *Dictionary*.

1848 I'-o-wa Webster's *American Dictionary*.

1851 I'-o-wa Webster's *American Dictionary*.

1855 Iō'wa Cartee's *Elements of Physical and Political Geography*.

1855 I'-o-wa Colton and Fitch's *Modern School Geography*.

1862 I'-o-wa Monteith's *Manual of Geography*.

1863 I'-o-wa White's *Class Book of Geography*.

1864 I'-o-wa Mitchell's *New Primary Geography*.

1865 I'-ow-a Warren's *Primary Geography*.

1865 I'-o-wa Webster's *American Dictionary*.

1866 I'-o-wa Colton & Fitch's *Introductory Geography*.

1866 I'-o-wah Mitchell's *Descriptive Geography*.

1867 I'-o-wah Mitchell's *School Geography* (revised).

1868 I-o'-wa Beeton's *Dictionary of Geography* (London; date is that of preface).



- 1869 I'-o-wa Monteith's *Physical and Intermediate Geography*.  
 1870 I' ô wə Guyot's *Intermediate Geography*.  
 1870 I'-o-wā *Key to Cornell's Outline Maps* (for instructor).  
 1870 I' ɔ-wə *Eclectic Primary Geography*.  
 1870 I'-o-wa Goodrich's *Pictorial History of the United States*.  
 1871 I' o-wa Maury's *World We Live In*.  
 1873 I'-o-wa Guyot's *Common-School Geography*.  
 1875 I' o-wah Colton's *New Introductory Geography*.  
 1875 I' o-wə Swinton's *Elementary Course in Geography*.  
 1875 I' o-wa Swinton's *Complete Course in Geography*.  
 1877 I' o wa Harper's *Introductory Geography*.  
 1878 I' o-wah Mitchell's *Modern Atlas*.  
 1880 I' o-wah Hall's *Our World* No. II.  
 1881 I' o-wah Mitchell's *New International Geography*.  
 1882 I' o-wa Swinton's *Introductory Geography*.  
 1882 I' ô wə Guyot's *New Intermediate Geography*.  
 1884 I' ô wə Webster's *American Dictionary*.  
 1885 I' o wā Monteith's *Complete Geography* (Barnes).  
 1886 I' o wə Lippincott's *Pronouncing Gazetteer*.  
 1886 I'-ô-wa Warren's *New Brief Course in Geography*.  
 1887 I' o-wah Hall's *Our World*.  
 1887 I'-ô-wa Warren's *Common School Geography* (revised).  
 1888 I' o-wa Redway's *Elementary Geography* (Butler).  
 1889 I' o wa Monteith's *Comprehensive Geography*.  
 1895 I' ô-wə Frye's *Grammar School Geography*.  
 1895 I' ô-wə Frye's *Complete Geography*.  
 1895 I' o wā Monteith's *Introduction to the Manual of Geography*.  
 1896 I' o wa Sadlier's *Excelsior Geography* No. 2.  
 1896 I' o-wə *Eclectic Elementary Geography*.  
 1896 I' owa Appleton's *Standard Geography*.  
 1896 I' o wa Harper's *School Geography*.  
 1897 I'-ô-wä Gore's *Manual of Geography*.  
 1897 I' ô-wa Frye's *Primary Geography*.  
 1898 I' ô-wə Frye's *Elements of Geography*.  
 1900 I'-ô-wa Tarr and McMurry's *Home Geography*, Book I.  
 1900 I'-ô-wa Tarr and McMurry's *Geography*, Book II.  
 1900 I' ô-wä Wagner's *New Pacific School Geography*.  
 1900 I'-ô-wä Tarbell's *Introductory Geography* (Werner).  
 1900 I' ô-wa Davis & Dean's *Elementary Inductive Geography*.  
 1900 I' ô-wə Morton's *Elementary Geography*.  
 1901 I'-ô-wə Tarr and McMurry's *Geography*, Book III.  
 1901 I' o-wā Morton's *Advanced Geography* (Potter).  
 1902 I' ô wə Roddy's *Elementary Geography*.  
 1902 I'-ô-wə Tarr and McMurry's *Complete Geography*.  
 1902 I' ô-wa Davis & Dean's *Inductive Geography*.  
 1902 I' ô wa McBride's *Complete Geography*. (a as in at).



- 1903 I' o wa McBride's *Elementary Geography*.  
 1904 I' o-wa Dodge's *Principles of Geography*, Book III.  
 1904 I' o-wa Dodge's *Elements of Continental Geography*.  
 1904 I' o-wa Dodge's *Elementary Geography*.  
 1906 I' o-wa Frye's *First Steps in Geography*.  
 1906 I' o wa Maury's *New Complete Geography*.  
 1907 I' o-wa Maury's *Elements of Geography*.  
 1907 I' o-wa Swinton's *Primary Geography*.  
 1909 I' o-a *Encyclopedia Americana*.  
 1910 I' o-wa Frye's *First Book in Geography*.  
 1910 I' o-wa Tarr and McMurry's *New Geography*, Book I.  
 1910 I' o-wa Tarr and McMurry's *New Geography*, Book II.  
 1911 I' o-wa Dodge's *Advanced Geography*.  
 1914 I' o wa Chambers' *Concise Gazetteer of the World* (London).  
 1914 I' o-wa Phyfe's *Eighteen Thousand Words Often Mispronounced*.  
 1914 I' o-wa *Century Cyclopedia of Names*.  
 1915 I' o-wa *New International Encyclopedia*.  
 1919 I' o-wa Cassell's *New English Dictionary* (London).  
 1919 aI' o-wa; I' o-wa Vizetelly's *Desk Book of 25,000 Words Frequently Mispronounced*.  
 1920 I' o-wa Mackey's *Pronunciation of 10,000 Proper Names*.  
 1920 I' o-wa Laird & Lee's *School Webster Dictionary*.  
 1920 I' o-wa Frye's *New Geography*, Book I.  
 1920 I' o-wa Brigham & McFarlane's *Essentials of Geography*, First Book.  
 1921 I' o-wa McMurry & Parkins' *Elementary Geography*.  
 1921 I' o-wa Smith's *Human Geography*.  
 1922 I' o-wa McMurry & Parkins' *Advanced Geography*.  
 1923 I' o-wa Webster's *New International Dictionary*.  
 1923 ai'-c-wa; I' o-wa Funk & Wagnall's *New Standard Dictionary*.  
 No date I' o-wa Sadlier's *Excelsior Introduction to Geography* (probably about 1896).

A study of this list will show the dictionary markings to have been the ruling factors. In the above list markings occurring in the various editions of Webster and Worcester have been recorded only in those years where a change has taken place. The writer has not been able to examine a complete file of either of these dictionaries, but from an examination of twenty-three editions of Webster the following incomplete record is made:

- 1848-1849 I' o-wa (two examined), Revision of 1847. American.  
 1851-1854 I' o-wa (four examined).  
 1856-1859 The word omitted from geographical list (three examined).  
 1865-1881 I' o-wa (eight examined). Revision of 1864, the "unabridged."  
 1884-1908 (?) I' o-wa (three examined). International 1891.  
 1910-1923 I' o-wa (three examined). Revision of 1909. New International.

In the eleven editions of Worcester, 1846-1890, examined there is no variation in the marking. In Worcester's *Gazetteer of the United States* (1818) no pronunciations were given.