

LEGAL HOLIDAYS IN IOWA

JULY — DECEMBER

Four of the holidays established by law in Iowa — New Year's Day, Lincoln's Birthday, Washington's Birthday, and Memorial Day — occur during the first half of the year; five — the Fourth of July or Independence Day, Labor Day, Armistice Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas — fall within the last six months. Although all five are legal holidays in the sense that they are not counted in reckoning time in business dealings, Armistice Day is not generally observed as a holiday from work and Labor Day is observed chiefly in labor centers.

THE FOURTH OF JULY

Liberty and independence were the watchwords throughout the thirteen original colonies in the spring of 1776. George Washington had been appointed commander-in-chief of the American army, the Second Continental Congress was in session in Philadelphia, and the whole Atlantic seaboard was aflame with revolt from historic Boston in the Old Bay State to picturesque Charleston in the Palmetto State. On June 7th Richard Henry Lee had laid before Congress his famous resolution declaring that "these United Colonies are, and, of right, ought to be, Free and Independent States". Four days later a committee, composed of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, was appointed to draft a declaration of independence. On July 2nd Congress approved the Richard Henry Lee Resolu-

tions.¹ The following day it turned its attention to the declaration of independence which Jefferson had drawn up and on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted and officially signed by President John Hancock and Secretary Charles Thomson.² A Philadelphia dispatch declared:

A new nation this day greets the world. The news of its birth is already speeding throughout the States in the hands of trusted, speedy express riders. "The United States of America," to use the name already adopted by the Continental Congress, begins business on the morrow. His Majesty the King of Great Britain has lost thirteen Colonies.³

The Declaration of Independence, the Ordinance of 1787, and the Constitution of the United States are the three greatest and most precious documents in American history. Without the Declaration of Independence the other two documents never would have been written, hence our national history actually stems from July 4, 1776.

Five Iowa counties — Adams, Carroll, Franklin, Hancock, and Jefferson — were named for signers of the Declaration of Independence. The town of Independence honors

¹ Some contemporaries felt that July 2nd would be the memorable date in American history. On July 3rd John Adams wrote his wife: "The Second of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epoch in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games and sports, guns, bells, bonfires and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward, forevermore. You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these States." — George W. Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 350, 351.

² *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol. V, pp. 425, 431, 506-518; George E. Shankle's *State Names, Flags, Seals, Songs, Birds, Flowers, and other Symbols*, pp. 122, 144.

³ Jonathan Rawson's *1776: A Day-by-Day Story*, pp. 204, 205.

the immortal document of American freedom. In addition seventy-six townships in Iowa commemorate the Declaration of Independence. The town of Monticello is named in honor of the home of Thomas Jefferson, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence.⁴

The first celebration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence took place at Philadelphia on July 8, 1776, when a cheering crowd heard it read for the first time. The following year the Continental Congress adjourned for the day, bells rang, bonfires were lighted and fireworks ignited in the evening. A Hessian band played at a dinner in Philadelphia and loyal citizens lighted their windows with candles. In 1788, after the ratification of the Constitution, a more elaborate celebration was staged in Philadelphia. The celebration of Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, as it is more commonly called, soon became the most universally observed public holiday in the United States.

So important was Independence Day in pioneer life that Americans inaugurated significant events on that day. Governor DeWitt Clinton turned the first sod for the digging of the Erie Canal on July 4, 1817. Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, turned the first sod for the building of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad on July 4, 1828, and citizens of Carroll County may well remember Carroll's famous words on that occasion: "I consider this among the most important acts of my life, second only to that of signing the Declaration of Independence, if, indeed, second to that." The cornerstone of the Washington Monument at Washington, D. C., was laid on July 4, 1850. Iowans may recall the words of Enoch W. Eastman inscribed on the Iowa stone

⁴ Leon C. Hills's *History and Legends of Place Names in Iowa*, pp. 21-23; *Iowa Official Register*, 1943-1944, pp. 320-409.

that forms a part of the Washington monument, which reads: "Iowa. Her affections, like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable Union."⁵

The permanent settlement of Iowa did not begin until June, 1833, but there were Fourth of July celebrations in Iowa before that date.⁶ The soldiers at Fort Madison may have observed the Fourth of July from 1809 to 1813, but no documentary evidence exists to record it. The first known celebration of the Fourth of July on Iowa soil occurred in 1820 when Captain Stephen Watts Kearny and a small force of American troops pitched their camp near the site of Dunlap in northeastern Harrison County in the Boyer River Valley. "This day being the anniversary of our Independence", wrote Kearny in his journal, "we celebrated it, to the extent of our means; an extra gill of whiskey was issued to each man, & we made our dinner on pork & biscuit & drank to the memory of our forefathers in a *mint julup*."⁷

We do not know whether troops from Fort Crawford or Fort Armstrong ever celebrated the Fourth of July in Iowa. We do know that on July 4, 1828, a party of lead miners from Galena, Illinois, chartered the steamboat *Indiana* for a Fourth of July excursion to Julien Dubuque's grave at the mouth of Catfish Creek. These Galenians were the first white settlers known to have celebrated the Fourth of July on Iowa soil. They raised the American flag opposite the tepee of an Indian maiden and this is said to have been the first time the Stars and Stripes was

⁵ Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 352-358.

⁶ Lewis and Clark did not reach Iowa soil until July 18, 1804.—R. G. Thwaites's *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition 1804-1806*, Vol. I, pp. 66, 67.

⁷ William J. Petersen's "Trailmaking on the Frontier" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. XII, p. 299.

displayed by private citizens in what is now the State of Iowa.⁸

Undoubtedly the lead miners who entered Iowa in June, 1833, celebrated Independence Day in proper style but no details are available.⁹ It remained for the *Dubuque Visitor*, the first newspaper in Iowa, to record a meeting of Dubuque citizens in the Tontine House on June 14, 1836, at which arrangements were made for the first elaborate celebration of July Fourth.¹⁰ Whenever a community wishes to stage a successful celebration it includes the local editor on the committee of arrangements. Dubuquers were aware of this for on June 29th John King editorialized:

Monday next will be the 59th anniversary of our National Independence, and the Birth-Day of Wisconsin Territory. It will be celebrated in this town with great eclat. We are glad of it. So long as the return of that day is duly honored by the American people, we may well presume that the principles which were proclaimed upon it sixty years ago, are still cherished, and the glorious institutions founded upon those principles are still safe!

The observance of the Fourth of July in 1836 required a host of "Officers of the Day" at Dubuque. Dr. Stephen Langworthy served as "President of the Day", with four fellow townsmen assisting him as vice presidents. Ezekiel Lockwood was named "Marshal of the Day" with three assistant "Marshals" to aid him. The parade formed at the Tontine House at eleven o'clock in the morning and marched to the Catholic Church for divine services where

⁸ *The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois* (1878), pp. 254, 255; William J. Petersen's *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi*, pp. 287, 288.

⁹ Franklin T. Oldt's *History of Dubuque County*, p. 48. Oldt records a Fourth of July celebration on the Bee Branch in 1834. Simon Clark was the orator and he and Lucius H. Langworthy sang the "Star Spangled Banner".

¹⁰ For accounts of this celebration see the *Dubuque Visitor*, June 22, 29, July 6, 13, 1836.

the Reverend Samuel C. Mazzuchelli acted as chaplain. Milo H. Prentice read the Declaration of Independence and William W. Coriell delivered the oration in an "eloquent and impressive manner". The procession then reformed and marched "to the green in front of the town, where an excellent dinner was prepared to which the company did ample honor."

Following the "removal of the cloth" the Dubuquers prepared to drink the toasts which formed a customary part of every Independence Day celebration. Thirteen "regular" toasts were drunk in honor of the thirteen original colonies. The pattern of these toasts was well outlined by custom. In quick succession the lead miners raised their glasses to "The Day We Celebrate", "The Signers of the Declaration of Independence", "The Memory of Washington", "The Sages and Heroes of the Revolution", "The Constitution of the United States" (the "greatest work of human wisdom" whose "sacred pages" it was hoped would not be marred by "the blindness of ambition, nor the madness of party strife"), "The Union", "The Army and Navy of the United States", "The Territory of Wisconsin", "The President of the United States", "The Governor of Wisconsin Territory and our Delegate in Congress", "The Press" (hope was expressed that its "licentiousness should be tolerated rather than its freedom be destroyed"), and "The Elective Franchise". The thirteenth toast was invariably given to the fairer sex and the gallant Dubuque lead miners were not slow to conclude this series with a toast to "The Fair of Wisconsin — Although *minus* in numerical comparison with the other sex, yet *plus* in virtue and acquirements." Six hearty cheers greeted this popular toast for the dearth of women was keenly felt by many a lonesome miner on the Iowa frontier.

More than forty "volunteer" toasts were offered by the

assembled lead miners, a noteworthy feat when it is remembered that these Dubuque pioneers seldom imbibed water on such occasions. The majority of these "volunteer" toasts were personal, local, or regional in character. The Dubuque lead miners quaffed toasts to "The Pioneers of the West", "The Squatters of the Black Hawk Purchase", and "The Miners and Smelters of the Upper Mississippi Lead Mines". Because of the large Irish population at Dubuque it was natural that they should toast the Irish among them as well as "Daniel O'Connor — The Liberator of Ireland".

Numerous toasts were drunk to newly-born Wisconsin Territory, to Dubuque and Des Moines counties, and to Dubuque — the "future capital" as well as the "Geographical and Popular Centre" of Wisconsin. Two toasts were drunk to General Sam Houston and another to the "Heroes of Texas" who were winning their independence in 1836. The "Fair of Wisconsin" were twice-remembered, that of John King being a classic — "*Woman — Were it not for Woman, our infancy would be without succor, our age without relief, our manhood without enjoyment, and Dubuque without an inhabitant.*"

As mushroom settlements sprang up in Iowa and Wisconsin numerous Fourth of July celebrations were observed. In 1837 the *Iowa News* recorded Independence Day programs at such far-flung points as the foot of the Lower Rapids in Lee County and the newly rising capital at Madison.¹¹ In 1838 the Federal government named the Fourth of July as the natal day of the Territory of Iowa. Formal exercises dignified the observance of the holiday at Dubuque, Burlington, Fort Madison, West Point, and

¹¹ *Iowa News* (Dubuque), July 8, 15, August 12, 1837. Celebrations were recorded at Parkhurst and the Lower Rapids west of the Mississippi. A Fourth of July excursion was run from Dubuque to Prairie du Chien aboard the *Huntress*.

Denmark, and similar celebrations were probably held in other places between Keokuk and Fort Snelling. Burlington celebrated the birthday of the Territory in a "handsome style". James W. Grimes read the Declaration of Independence, David Rorer delivered the oration, and Charles Mason served as marshal. Judge David Irvin presided at the "sumptuous repast" at the Wisconsin Hotel. Thirteen "regular" and twenty-eight "volunteer" toasts were proposed.

In Fort Madison the citizens met in Jacob Cutler's new building at the ringing of the bell to celebrate Independence Day. Among the notable guests who sat down to a dinner served in an arbor on the bank of the Mississippi was Chief Black Hawk, who attended "decently clothed in citizen's dress". Six hundred friends of "civil and religious liberty" gathered at West Point in Lee County to celebrate Independence Day. The citizens of Denmark in Lee County heard the Rev. Asa Turner open the meeting with prayer and then read the Declaration of Independence. J. P. Stewart of Burlington then gave a temperance lecture after which fifty-three persons took the total abstinence pledge and a temperance society was organized. The toasts at Denmark were drunk in cold water, a fact which won the applause of many temperance advocates who deplored the use of "brandy and wine to aid the tongue or mind on such an occasion."¹²

The year 1846 was memorable in the history of Iowa. It marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the adoption of the Constitution of 1846, and the admission of Iowa into the Union as a State on December 28, 1846. On July 8th one-fourth of the *Iowa City Standard* was devoted to reprinting the

¹² *Iowa News* (Dubuque), June 23, 30, July 7, 1838; *Fort Madison Patriot*, June 27, July 4, 11, 1838. See also William J. Petersen's "The Birthday of the Territory" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. XIX, pp. 241-250.

newly adopted Constitution and little space remained to record the unusual Fourth of July service conducted by the Sabbath schools of Iowa City in the Methodist Episcopal Church. "The performances of the scholars were highly interesting, and were witnessed by a numerous and gratified audience", an editor declared. "After the exercises at the Church were concluded, the scholars were formed in procession, and, accompanied by their teachers and a large number of citizens, proceeded to the Capitol, where they partook of a sumptuous collation, prepared by the Ladies of our city."¹³

Panics and economic depressions did not prevent Iowans from celebrating the Fourth of July. McGregor, for example, scheduled the "biggest kind" of a Fourth in 1857. "Harding of the American will prepare the dinner — the orator is not yet selected — a good band will be in attendance. There will be a Boat race to Prairie du Chien and back — a horse race on the other side, by way of varying the exercises, and — dancing will commence at American Hall at precisely three o'clock, to be continued till 12 — midnight. Those not entirely blind will see sights and wonders here on that national day of 'Yankee Doodle'."¹⁴

An equally "great time" in the form of a picnic dinner was promised at West Union. Those bringing food were advised to "leave knives and forks at home as the dinner is to be eaten in the most rural style possible."¹⁵ Far to the west, on the chocolate-covered Missouri River, the citizens of Sioux City paid homage to the founding fathers in 1857 by celebrating their first Fourth of July. The event was chronicled in the first number of the first newspaper printed in Woodbury County which was issued on the

¹³ *Iowa City Standard*, July 1, 8, 1846.

¹⁴ *North Iowa Times* (McGregor), June 19, 1857.

¹⁵ *North Iowa Times* (McGregor), June 26, 1857.

afternoon of July Fourth. The *Sioux City Eagle* declared:

The glorious natal day of our independence was properly celebrated for the first time in Sioux City, to-day, by the gathering of our citizens in the grove above Perry creek, where seats had been prepared. The assemblage was addressed in a spirited and eloquent manner, by Dr. S. P. Yeomans (register of the United States land office) and County Judge William Van O'Linda.

True, there was no firing of cannon or strains of music, but every bosom swelled with patriotic emotion at the remembrance of that glorious and successful struggle for freedom, made by the gallant and rebellious sons of '76.¹⁶

The observance of the Fourth of July was, indeed, an important social event in the life of the frontier. It afforded an opportunity for the pioneers to get together and discuss the weather, the prospects for good crops, and the coming land sales. Politicians could also display their patriotism and oratorical prowess.¹⁷ Many rural communities throughout this period had to content themselves with the floating of "Old Glory" from a newly-raised Liberty Pole. A pot-luck dinner, the reading of the Declaration of Independence, and an oration by a local preacher or some prominent citizen from a nearby community generally concluded such rural programs.¹⁸ The speeches and toasts at the banquets gave composite expression to the hopes and fears, the opinions and prejudices of the pioneers.¹⁹

¹⁶ *History of Woodbury and Plymouth County* (1890-1891), pp. 254, 255.

¹⁷ Seven Dubuque Fourth of July orators were listed in 1861 as going into the country to speak: David S. Wilson to Holy Cross, S. P. Adams to Epworth, Ben M. Samuels, J. D. Jennings, and J. J. E. Norman to Garryowen, and D. N. Cooley and Frank M. Robinson to York.—*The Weekly Times* (Dubuque), July 4, 1861.

¹⁸ The first Independence Day celebration in Fayette County was said to have been celebrated at Knob Prairie on July 4, 1849. The settlers converted a fine "hickory elm" into a Liberty Pole and then listened intently to the reading of the Declaration and two orations.—*The History of Fayette County, Iowa*, p. 343.

¹⁹ In 1837, twenty excursionists aboard the *Huntress* refused to drink to a

The larger cities endeavored to observe the Fourth of July in more elaborate form. In 1857 Dubuque advertised a lavish celebration and kept her citizens informed of progress through the columns of her daily newspapers. The editor urged that a decent and orderly celebration demanded a "clear head" and that drunkenness was especially "disgraceful" on Independence Day. "Let us keep the day as Washington and his brave compeers would do, were they still among us — with minds unclouded and hearts patriotically warm."

The following arrangements were outlined. The roar of a cannon would usher in the Fourth of July at daybreak. A salute of thirty-one guns at sunrise and the ringing of bells assured most Dubuquers of the futility of sleep for the remainder of the day. The procession formed in the public square at 10:30 a. m. and, led by the Dubuque Band, marched through the principal streets. The remainder of the parade was composed of the Dubuque City Guards, the German Turnverein Society, the several fire, hook and ladder, and hose companies, the mayor and the common council, the members of the bar and judiciary, citizens, and strangers. Guns were fired during the procession and a salute of thirteen guns was fired at sunset. In the evening the Hon. Ben. M. Samuels read the Declaration of Independence after which short addresses were made by the mayor and other dignitaries. A band rendered martial

toast urging the re-establishment of a National Bank. Everyone "stood mum" until someone suggested the inappropriateness of the sentiment and it was promptly dropped. During the Civil War the Republican editor of the *Dubuque Weekly Times* was assured by citizens of Garryowen that if either Dubuque orator [Ben M. Samuels or J. D. Jennings] uttered a single sentiment opposing the support of the Constitution and the Stars and Stripes, or savoring in the least of secession, they would be peremptorily stopped. When John T. Lovell declared before a Zwingle audience that "no power on earth, in heaven or hell, could make him take up arms against his brethren in Virginia" he was immediately silenced.—*Iowa News* (Dubuque), July 8, 1837, and *The Weekly Times* (Dubuque), July 4, 11, 1861.

music between speeches. A "grand display of fire-works" concluded the program.²⁰

The State of Iowa was thirty years old when the nation celebrated the centennial of the Declaration of Independence. The youthful commonwealth had made giant strides in those three decades. Her population had grown from 102,388 when Iowa was admitted into the Union to 1,350,553 on the eve of the national centennial. In 1846 only the eastern half of the State was thinly settled; in 1876 the entire western half was populated and the frontier line had moved across the Big Sioux River into Dakota.²¹

During these heroic years Iowa had taken part in the Mexican War; waged a bitter partisan battle over the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision; and seen the organization of the Republican Party in 1856. In 1876 the sordid days of reconstruction were drawing to a close. Colorado entered the Union on July 4th as the "Centennial State", the twenty-fifth to join the original thirteen. News of the Custer Massacre was telegraphed from Salt Lake City on July 4, 1876, vying with reports of the Fourth of July and the "centennial storms".²²

While all the great metropolitan centers celebrated Independence Day with genuine fervor in 1876 the most elaborate of the ceremonies was held at Philadelphia where the Centennial Exposition had been opened by President U. S. Grant on May 19th. Alexander Graham Bell astounded Americans as well as such foreigners as Emperor Dom

²⁰ *Dubuque Daily Times*, July 1, 2, 3, 6, 1857. A disappointed witness to the fireworks wrote a sarcastic letter to the editor upbraiding the distinguished committee for subjecting Dubuque citizens to a monotonous display of 160 dozen Roman candles — "and — nothing else."

²¹ John A. T. Hull's *Census of Iowa for 1880*, pp. xxxi, xlv.

²² *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 4, 6, 1876.

Pedro of Brazil by his exhibition of the telephone.²³ There, too, John Stewart of Manchester, Iowa, took the gold medal and the first premium with the golden butter churned at his Spring Branch Creamery.²⁴ Young William Dean Howells believed the Agricultural Hall was the "most exclusively American" display at the Philadelphia Exposition and the most novel of all the exhibits in Agricultural Hall was Iowa's display of her rich soil — five and six feet deep — revealed in huge glass cylinders.²⁵

Although it ranked below such towns as Dubuque, Davenport, and Burlington in population, no Iowa community surpassed Des Moines in the magnitude of its Fourth of July celebration in 1876. Special passenger trains ran to the State capital from all directions, with fares reduced one-half for the occasion. One hundred extra policemen were engaged to maintain "perfect order" in the vast throng of citizens and strangers. The decorations of the city were said to be "unrivalled" both in number and quality. The main streets were lined with banners and bunting, beautiful arches spanned strategic points, and the profuse exhibition of flags of all nations added color to the celebration.

Fifty thousand people jammed Des Moines that day. Many were doubtless attracted to the capital city by "Howes' Great London Circus Hippodrome" which afforded spectators a "Panoply of Splendor" and a "Blaze of Gold". This self-styled "Largest Show Upon Earth" boasted of "Five Educated Elephants" and claimed more

²³ Colin Simkin's *Fairs: Past & Present*, pp. 24, 25.

²⁴ William J. Petersen's "The Iowa Dairy Association" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. XV, pp. 357-359.

²⁵ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 1, 4, 8, 1876; W. D. Howells's "A Sennight of the Centennial" in *The Atlantic*, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 101, 102.

“performing animals” than “any other Ten Menageries in the World!”

The three-mile-long parade through the streets of Des Moines was described as the “grandest spectacle ever seen in Iowa”. The procession began with a float entitled “Iowa in 1776”, depicting a vast unbroken prairie on which three live cub wolves were playing. The next float was called “Iowa in 1830” and represented the Indian and the white man in council. The third was labeled “Iowa Today” and revealed the agricultural interests of the Hawkeye State. The Third Regiment of Iowa Militia followed, Baker’s Battery of Artillery bringing up the rear. Next came the orators and dignitaries with Governor Samuel J. Kirkwood occupying the first carriage.

Beautiful floats followed, depicting such stirring pictures as “Columbia”, the “Temple of Liberty”, the “Thirteen States”, and “Washington and His Staff”. The Capital City Band marched ahead of the Des Moines Fire Department which presented one of the “grandest pictures” in this moving pageantry of color and life. The “Army and Navy” vied with the “Public Schools” for applause. The march of the “Trades” was hailed as the “grandest part of the procession” not because of its beauty and history but because of the steady stream of bricklayers, carpenters, coal miners, carriage makers, mill workers, merchant tailors, boiler makers, pottery workers, tanners, stone cutters, soap makers, meat packers, etc., showed with striking eloquence and meaning the “remarkable growth of our proud young city.”

The colorful “Fantastics”—Indians, devils, suffragists, sailors — was composed of fully 700 mounted men while as many more rode in vehicles or marched on foot. The parade countermarched at the courthouse and then proceeded to the Fair Grounds where twenty thousand spectators

were gathered around the stand. Governor Kirkwood presided and excellent orations were delivered, but the *Iowa State Register* concentrated on the many-columned speech of William M. Evarts which had been delivered at Philadelphia.

Only the fireworks failed to please the people and the press, much resentment being displayed over the fact that the east side of the town had been chosen for the display instead of one of the bridges. This was too far for most people to walk and it was charged that not one of the emblematical pieces was visible from the west bank. According to the *Iowa State Register*: "Not an accident marred the day, and everything connected with it, with the exception of the fireworks, had been completely successful."²⁶

Des Moines was but one of hundreds of Iowa communities that observed the nation's birthday in 1876. At Polk City the centennial Fourth was celebrated in "good style" despite the accidental explosion of an anvil that could be heard ten miles away. At Prairie City the crowds enjoyed the greased pole climb, the sack and potato race, and the dancing and swinging. At Montezuma, J. B. Grinnell gave an eloquent oration during which he endeavored to picture what Iowa could be like in 1976. Mrs. Kate Harrington, the "greatest poet" in the Hawkeye State, read a "beautiful and original poem" at the Clear Lake celebration. Jackson County attracted attention when the local women suffragists were assigned a place in the Maquoketa procession and were later, by the common consent of the crowd, granted a place on the speakers' stand.

Oskaloosa featured the Fourth of July with "more fast horses" than had ever before "congregated" at one Iowa fair. Probably one thousand strangers joined citizens in listening to the services. The splendid oration was marred,

²⁶ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 2, 3, 4, 6, 1876.

according to one eye-witness, by a "most disgraceful scene" when a brewery wagon "decorated with flags and bunting, and bearing the mottoes, 'Take your drinks where folks can see you,' 'down with fanatics,' etc. was loaded with kegs of beer, both human and wooden, and driven around the square several times in the presence of the assembly; the occupants displaying goblets of beer at arm's length, at times quaffing it and indulging in bacchanalian revels; at other times handing out beer to bystanders."²⁷

While Iowans were "shooting the works" on July 4, 1876, Dame Nature joined in the celebration with what was aptly called by many editors the "Centennial Storm". Scores of communities suffered devastating losses from cyclonic winds and torrential downpours. The town of Rockdale on Catfish Creek on the outskirts of Dubuque was swept away in a maelstrom that took thirty-nine lives. A tornado at Indianola took five lives, badly injured scores of Warren County residents, and caused property damage estimated at \$500,000. Pella suffered a "fearful" rain and hail storm and the damage at Oskaloosa was equally severe. The hurricane at Cedar Rapids destroyed thirty homes — driving their inmates into the "pitiless black night". Fort Madison experienced the "most terrific tornado" in its history, Burlington felt the wrath of the storm, and the town of Tracy was reported destroyed.²⁸

Fifty years later, when Philadelphia celebrated the sesqui-centennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1926, Iowa had grown from sturdy youth to strong maturity. The manner in which the Fourth of July was observed had also undergone many changes. Gone was the

²⁷ The *Iowa State Register* carried news about the centennial celebrations in other communities for a full week after the event. See issues of July 6-12, 1876.

²⁸ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 6-9, 1876; Pauline P. Grahame's "The Rockdale Flood" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. X, pp. 233-242.

reading of the Declaration of Independence, in honor of which "The Day We Celebrate" had originally been observed. Gone was the drinking of the "regular" and "volunteer" toasts that had paid such fitting tribute to the "Founding Fathers" and all that was great in American history. Gone too were the colorful community parades of yesteryears, enjoyed by town and country folk alike.²⁹

In their stead had developed an emphasis on the private and public display of fireworks, an emphasis on "noise" rather than a contemplation of the deeper significance of Independence Day. With this shift in emphasis came a growing loss in lives and property. On July 4, 1931, carelessly handled fireworks destroyed the entire business section of Spencer causing property damage estimated at \$2,000,000. The use of fireworks within the town limits of Spencer thereafter was prohibited.³⁰

The danger of an over-emphasis of fireworks and explosives on the Fourth had long been recognized by thoughtful Iowans. "The land will reek with gunpowder, and many will be killed", declared the *Iowa State Register* on July 2, 1876. By 1890 this paper observed with regret that the "Old Fashioned Fourth" was being supplanted by the small boy with firecrackers. "This is a day that never steals in unannounced", the editor declared. "It always makes itself heard on arrival. It isn't backward about when it shall announce its approach, and so begins when patriots are trying to sleep the sleep of the just. . . . The small boy claims the Fourth of July as his own. He is willing to give Memorial Day to the veterans and Thanksgiving Day to the churches. He will divide Christmas with

²⁹ *The Des Moines Register*, July 3, 4, 5, 1926.

³⁰ *The Des Moines Register*, July 5, 1931; *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, p. 412.

the rest of the family, but the Fourth of July he claims as his own."

"Celebrations are not as common on this day as they used to be a few years ago", the editor pointed out, and continued:

Citizens generally seem very apt to think that they have performed their duty when they buy firecrackers for the children and then go off fishing for themselves. Not so. Keep up the Fourth with old-fashioned celebrations. Have some inspiring addresses. This is a good occasion to teach lessons of patriotism. It is all right to be merry and have a good time, but the real meaning of the day should not be forgotten. It was on the Fourth of July that the fathers declared the colonies free and independent. The sons should see to it that on the Fourth of July at least there should be some serious thinking about how to promote the welfare and prosperity of the Nation, that was born on that day.³¹

But celebrations were not the only form of observing the holiday. Great and lasting projects were often inaugurated on Independence Day. The cornerstone of the Old Stone Capitol at Iowa City was laid on July 4, 1840. The Methodists can point with pride to the fact that just as Reverend George B. Bowman laid the foundations for Cornell College on July 4, 1852, so the citizens of Sioux City laid the cornerstone of the present-day Morningside College on July 4, 1890.³² But will the citizens of Chariton remember in 1976 that the Charitonians of 1876 made up an iron box filled with the things of that first centennial day which they hoped would be opened by the mayor of Chariton on the second centennial of the Fourth of July?³³

The tragic destruction of downtown Spencer in 1931 was

³¹ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 4, 1890.

³² Benj. F. Shambaugh's *The Old Stone Capitol Remembers*, pp. 115-118; Pauline P. Grahame's "Elder Bowman" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. XVII, pp. 37-48; *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 5, 1890.

³³ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), July 8, 1876.

a powerful argument against the unlicensed sale and use of fireworks and firecrackers. After a carelessly thrown firecracker ignited a blaze that gutted Remsen on July 4, 1936, causing damage estimated at around half a million dollars the General Assembly, following the example of a number of towns and cities, declared the sale of firecrackers and fireworks for individual use illegal in Iowa.³⁴

The return to the "old time atmosphere" was observed by the *Des Moines Register* as it studied the Fourth of July programs in 1937. Community celebrations, baseball games, racing, picnics, and patriotic programs had taken the place of exploding cannon crackers in most places. Red Oak had played host to eleven southwestern Iowa bands in a celebration sponsored by the American Legion and featuring an afternoon and evening parade. Eldon had sponsored an old-fashioned celebration at the Wapello County fairgrounds. Keokuk had dedicated its new airport and Senator Guy M. Gillette had spoken at Emmetsburg at a picnic sponsored by the Bethany Lutheran Church. The Delaware County Agricultural Society had sponsored a ball game, horse races, band concerts, free acts, and a dance program at Manchester. Strict supervision was taken over all community-sponsored fireworks.³⁵

In 1944 Iowa soldiers observed the Fourth of July on far-flung battlefields. Most significant of all was that held on the field of Normandy where General Omar N. Bradley pulled the lanyard of a 155-millimeter "Long Tom" artillery piece to start a devastating artillery barrage on La Haye du Puits. An Iowa war correspondent, Gordon Gammack, was deeply stirred by the genuine Fourth of July celebration sponsored by a liberated Normandy town.

³⁴ *The Des Moines Register*, July 5, 1931, July 5, 1936; *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, pp. 412, 467; *Laws of Iowa*, 1937, Ch. 181.

³⁵ *The Des Moines Register*, July 4, 5, 1937.

A dozen French children had been taught "America" which they sang while Thunderbolts and Mustangs roared overhead. A fourteen-year-old boy told how the hearts of all Frenchmen were "overflowing with joy because you have come". The mayor of the town (who reminded Gammack of former Representative Gus Alesch of Plymouth County) told of their "four years as prisoners and even hostages" and expressed thanks that "the end of a nightmare" had finally come. The mayor said there was a sacred duty to perform — to honor the dead. At his suggestion "the French women and children departed to lay roses from the thorny bushes of Normandy on the graves of American soldiers who died during the liberation of their town."³⁶

LABOR DAY

Labor Day was first suggested by Peter J. McGuire, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, in an address before the Central Labor Union of New York City on May 8, 1882. The genial Irishman had observed that there were holidays of a civil, military, and religious nature and argued in favor of a holiday "representative of the industrial spirit, the great vital force of the nation." He recommended the first Monday in September as a suitable time for an annual labor day parade and picnic because it fell midway between the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving. McGuire's proposal was readily adopted by the Central Labor Union and the first Labor Day celebration in America took place on September 5, 1882, when the Union paraded the streets of New York.³⁷

Not long after this parade the Knights of Labor voted

³⁶ *The Des Moines Register*, July 4, 5, 6, 1944.

³⁷ P. J. McGuire's "Labor Day—Its Origin and Significance" in *The American Federationist*, October, 1897; McGuire and others, "The Day We Celebrate" in *The American Federationist*, September, 1902.

in favor of an annual Labor Day celebration. On October 9, 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada (which became the American Federation of Labor two years later) endorsed the observance of Labor Day at their Chicago convention. On February 21, 1887, Oregon became the first State to set aside the first Monday in September as a legal holiday honoring labor. Thirty-one States (including Iowa) had followed the lead of Oregon by the time President Cleveland signed a bill on June 28, 1894, making Labor Day a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and in the Territories. Today Labor Day is celebrated in every State in the Union as well as in Canada.³⁸

Iowa was among the early States to adopt Labor Day as a legal holiday. The Knights of Labor, organized in 1876, together with several trade unions, were instrumental in securing the legalization of Labor Day as a holiday.³⁹ A bill to "recognize and establish labor day, being the second day of September, as a legal holiday" was introduced in the Iowa Senate by Senator William W. Dodge on January 21, 1890. Dodge was the grandson of Henry Dodge, the first Governor of the Territory of Wisconsin, and the son of Augustus Caesar Dodge, who as Delegate from the Territory of Iowa shepherded through Congress the bill that brought Iowa into the Union as a State in 1846. William W. Dodge's interest in the working man is attested by the fact that he drafted such important laws as the prohibition of the employment of children under fifteen in factories, workshops, and mines, and those protecting workmen in the use of their labels and trademarks.⁴⁰

³⁸ Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 440, 441.

³⁹ Ezekiel Downey's *History of Labor Legislation in Iowa*, p. 3; *Journal of the Senate*, 1890, pp. 325, 341; *Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 1888-1889, pp. 87, 96.

⁴⁰ Benjamin F. Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. IV, p. 78.

The Committee on Judiciary changed the bill to provide that Section 2094 of the *Code of 1873* should so be amended that the "first Monday in September" would be known as "Labor Day" and would be regarded as a holiday for "all purposes relating to the presenting for payment or acceptance" of bills, notes, and bank checks. Senator Dodge himself moved the adoption of this substitute measure. The bill in its new form was approved by Governor Horace Boies on April 5, 1890,⁴¹ and the first gubernatorial proclamation inviting the people of Iowa to observe Labor Day was issued on August 20, 1890. The Governor closed with the following statement:

I, therefore, urge that the usual avocations of our citizens be suspended, and that all unite on this occasion in rendering a suitable tribute of respect for a day designed to honor those whose strong arms are the shield of our nation as well as the source of our wealth.⁴²

The cities of Iowa were quick to respond to Governor Boies's Labor Day proclamation. Des Moines, with a population of 50,093, was the largest city. Sioux City was already in second place with 37,806 and the value of her manufactured products exceeded that of any other Iowa city. Dubuque ranked third in population and second in the number of laborers engaged in manufacturing, while

⁴¹ *Journal of the Senate*, 1890, pp. 21, 86, 213, 277, 278, 481, 510, 512, 524, 586; *Laws of Iowa*, 1890, Ch. 45.

⁴² Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. VI, pp. 389, 398, Vol. VII, pp. 73, 237, 462-463. It was Governor Boies's privilege to issue the first four Labor Day proclamations. On August 25, 1894, Governor Frank D. Jackson urged Iowans to show their appreciation of the laboring man's "industry, fidelity and continued devotion to duty". Governor Drake in 1897 hailed labor as the "foundation of wealth" and the "creator of capital" which abundantly deserved the recognition of Labor Day. In 1900 Governor Leslie M. Shaw urged: "The last Labor Day of the nineteenth century should be made auspicious of more friendly and congenial relations between citizens and of the obliteration of all class distinctions."

Davenport stood first in the number of industrial employees and fourth in population.⁴³

The new holiday was "grandly celebrated" at Davenport where the "industrial masses" of the Tri-Cities were joined by farmers from both sides of the Mississippi. Factories, sawmills, and stores all shut down in Davenport and the schools were closed. The city was decked out with flags, bunting, and appropriate designs. The morning feature was the parade, headed by several hundred delegates from the Farmers' Alliance. Then came the military divisions, composed of State militia, the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Sons of Veterans. These were followed by representatives of the German charitable institutes, the singing societies, and the Turners. All these prefaced the real parade, which included members of trade unions of the three cities. The employees of the Rock Island Arsenal, iron moulders, printers, painters, tailors, stone cutters, and members of other organizations followed, including 200 commercial travelers. The industrial section was made up of four hundred floats, showing the various lines of goods manufactured. There were more than 5000 men in the column, and two hours were required for them to pass a given point. In the afternoon thousands were welcomed by Mayor Charles A. Ficke at Schuetzen Park where Governor Horace Boies gave a bold and courageous Labor Day address. The Governor expressed opposition to the dismissal of faithful laborers by arbitrary employers at the same time that he inveighed against strikes. He believed the relations between capital and labor could be regulated by law.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Iowa Official Register*, 1892, pp. 149-151; *Compendium of the Eleventh Census*, 1890, Part II, pp. 756, 757, 794, 795, 800, 801, 804-807, 992, 993.

⁴⁴ *Iowa State Register*, September 2, 1890; Charles A. Ficke's *Memories of Fourscore Years*, pp. 244, 245; *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. XXI, p. 501.

At Des Moines the laboring men themselves made the day memorable by giving the finest daylight parade Des Moines had seen for many years. It was State Fair Week and thousands of visitors swelled the downtown multitude. The parade opened with a platoon of policemen "walking along with the dignity that seems to be vouch-safed only to the guardians of the public peace." Then came the 35-piece Iowa State Band, dispensing the "best music any band west of Chicago" could execute. Next came the mayor in a carriage and beside him Walter McHenry, one of the orators of the day, "nervously chewing the end of his reflections and thinking of his speech." Opposite them rode P. S. Evans, President of the Trades Assembly, and C. W. Phillips, the other orator. Then came the laboring men proper.

According to a local editor: "People were not prepared to see such a large turn out of fine looking, well-dressed, intelligent men, marching in such perfect order, and representing so completely the people in the city who work with their hands." The 150 gaily decorated wagons of the Teamsters' Union made an imposing sight. The procession closed with Jones's grading outfit composed of wagons and scrapers, last but not least of which were Mike King's mules, looking "none the worse for their hard summer's tussel with the capitol hill". This first Des Moines Labor Day parade was a mile long and required nearly two hours to traverse the route. The streets were lined by interested spectators.

A Des Moines editor was pleased with the great interest shown in the first Labor Day celebration by both citizens and workingmen. "That Labor Day has come to stay and that it is and will be one of our best observed and most valuable holidays is perfectly evident", he wrote in the *Iowa State Register*. "Labor Day should be generally ob-

served in recognition of those who build, produce, expand, and support the business of the world."⁴⁵

This same general attitude was exhibited at Labor Day celebrations throughout Iowa. Keokuk staged a monster parade which was followed by a picnic at which J. R. Sovereign, State Labor Commissioner of Iowa, was one of the principal speakers. At Fort Dodge a large crowd jammed the Opera House where ten-minute speeches were made with all the Fort Dodge ministers participating. The bulk of the wage-workers of Sioux City attended a big Labor Day celebration, while at Smithland in Woodbury County the Farmers' Alliance held a picnic attended by fully five thousand people.⁴⁶

The first Labor Day celebrations set the pattern for future holidays. In 1891 the Keokuk celebration was pronounced a "great success", surpassing anything ever seen in the Gate City. The beautiful parade and handsome appearance of the men "called out enthusiastic cheers all along the line of the march." Governor Horace Boies spoke at the picnic in Rand Park.⁴⁷

Labor Day took on a particular significance during exciting presidential elections. The election of 1896, for example, was highlighted by the oratory of William Jennings Bryan, who closed his famous "Cross of Gold Speech" with the challenge, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."⁴⁸ Iowans took a keen interest in this campaign and politicians took advantage of the large Labor Day crowds that gathered every-

⁴⁵ *Iowa State Register*, August 31, September 2, 1890. The editor opposed efforts on the part of office seekers to "introduce politics" in their Labor Day speeches and believed most laboring men would concur in this opposition.

⁴⁶ *Iowa State Register*, September 2, 1890.

⁴⁷ *Des Moines Leader*, September 10, 1891.

⁴⁸ Henry Steele Commager's *Documents of American History*, pp. 174-178.

where. At Oskaloosa more than five thousand persons, representing every county in the Sixth District, witnessed a colorful parade and heard James B. Weaver and John F. Lacey debate in the park. One enthusiastic Iowa bard, D. F. Peffley of St. Charles, penned the following parody to the tune — “Marching Through Georgia”:

Hear the good old whistle blow! the smoke rolls from the stack;
 McKinley now is president, protection's coming back;
 Starvation's spectre haunts no more, for work we do not lack,
 And we're paid in honest dollars.
 Hurrah! Hurrah! Now is our jubilee!
 Hurrah! Hurrah! Protection makes us free!
 So we'll sing the chorus from Nebraska to the sea —
 Singing for work and honest money.⁴⁹

In the second stanza the farmers sang for fair prices and in the third all joined hands and sang for the full dinner pail and fair prices. It would be difficult to assess the influence of such songs, or of Labor Day speakers. Despite the fear of some editors that politicians were using the day to stir up the masses the vote in Iowa would scarcely bear this out. When the ballots were counted McKinley received 289,293 votes to 223,741 for Bryan.⁵⁰

In 1912 Labor Day afforded Iowa politicians their usual opportunities with one new feature added — Labor Sunday. As early as 1905 the Presbyterians had observed the Sunday preceding Labor Day as Labor Sunday. In 1910 the A. F. of L. in session at Toronto adopted the following resolution:

That the Sunday preceding the first Monday in September be designated by the American Federation of Labor as Labor Sunday, and that the churches of America be requested to devote some part of the day to a presentation of the labor question.

⁴⁹ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), September 6, 8, 1896.

⁵⁰ *Iowa Official Register*, 1897, pp. 247-249.

In response to this plea the Commission on Church and Social Service of the Federal Council of Churches issued a leaflet containing suggestions for special Labor Day hymns, scripture readings, and sermons. These suggestions were readily adopted by some 20,000 preachers in the United States, including hundreds of Iowa ministers.⁵¹

At Cedar Rapids the Federation accepted Rev. E. S. Shedd's invitation to attend Union services at the Sinclair Memorial Church to hear a sermon on "The Reign of Man". Mr. Shedd observed that the strong had always sought to dominate the weak. Although conditions had improved over the past century there were still many things to do: child labor must be eliminated, shorter hours won for women, a six-day week gained for all, and shorter hours and better pay secured in many occupations. Unions were urged to think in terms of both the employer and society as well as themselves. In his sermon on "The Law of Labor" the Rev. A. R. Paul told members of the United Presbyterian Church that toilers would "protest and demand justice and right" as long as owners and operators became "enormously rich" while the laborer who made his wealth got barely enough to live on.

A Cedar Rapids editor felt that Mr. Lockwood had expressed a "wholesale truth" and urged the church to take a more aggressive stand in gaining better working hours for the laboring man. "Organized labor", he declared, "has done much toward giving the bread winners a chance to enjoy the comforts of home by declaring that the men under its protection shall work only certain hours. These men, as a rule, have ample time for church going, and in Cedar Rapids at least, we believe most of them take advantage of such opportunity. It is to the great army of

⁵¹ Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 438-440; *The Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids), August 31, 1912.

the less fortunate ones that the church should turn its attention and by coöperation with those who enjoy their one day of rest a week, demand that rule become general."⁵² A study of sermons and editorials throughout Iowa in 1912 would do much to explain the relation of capital, labor, and the church at that time.

The adoption of Labor Sunday illustrates the growing influence of Labor Day in crystallizing public interest in, and appreciation for, the labor problems. Between 1897 and 1917 the American Federation of Labor grew from 272,000 members to 2,500,000 members while the total number of names enrolled in all trade unions rose to 3,100,000. This was a period of unusually prolonged prosperity in which the gains of labor were marked by such important measures as the 8-hour day, the 44-hour week, the right to organize, recognition of unions, collective bargaining, educational opportunities for all, adequate compensation, child labor laws, health and sanitation laws, and the creation of departments of labor in the various States. A separate Department of Labor in Washington to "foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners of the United States" was created in 1913.⁵³

In 1924, forty years after Labor Day became a national holiday, Union leaders throughout the country looked back with calm reflection on the significance of the holiday. Just a few months before his death in 1924, Samuel Gompers wrote in his last Labor Day editorial:

Labor Day was set apart as a holiday because Organized Labor demanded it. It was a recognition of Labor's right to celebrate its victories and to carry to all of the people its great message of hope and freedom.⁵⁴

⁵² *The Evening Gazette* (Cedar Rapids), September 2, 3, 1912.

⁵³ Chester W. Wright's *Economic History of the United States*, pp. 748-750; Hugh Frayne's "Labor Day, Past, Present and Future" in *The American Federationist*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 718-720.

⁵⁴ Wright's *Economic History of the United States*, pp. 750-752; Samuel

Iowa-born John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America declared: "As long as men toil for their daily bread there will be a Labor Day in America." Calling upon all laborers to fill the streets with parading men and women, William H. Johnston, president of the International Association of Machinists declared: "It is good to have one day set apart to honor labor. . . . By Labor we live. By Labor we learn. By Labor we grow and prosper. By Labor we may prove all things and be free. Then, why not a holiday, if not a Holy Day in Labor's honor?"⁵⁵

In August, 1924, the cover page of the *American Federationist* showed an A. F. of L. member with his arm around a thoughtful farmer saying "You'll have to organize in the way I did!" The following month the Johnson County Farmers' Union joined hands with the Iowa City Trades and Labor Union in a Labor Day celebration at the city park. "The morning will be given up to pleasant pastimes; the noontide to feasting; and the whole day to picnic and reunion pleasures", the *Iowa City Press-Citizen* reported. "The afternoon will be featured by athletic contests, including races for lads and lassies; and a tug of war between the farmers and those technically known as laborers — although the word cannot literally exclude the honest tillers of the soil, themselves."⁵⁶

Labor Day took on a new significance in 1930, for the radio made it possible to broadcast a national ceremony in which workers and all other citizens could participate

Gompers's "Labor Day, 1924" in *The American Federationist*, Vol. XXXI, p. 741.

⁵⁵ John L. Lewis's "Complete Organization the Goal", William H. Johnston's "Glorious Labor Day", Charles P. Bond's "Unloose the Bonds! Think!", and William Kohn's "Labor Day" in *The American Federationist*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 713, 717, 718, 722, 723, 732, 733.

⁵⁶ *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, August 30, 1924.

simultaneously. Nation-wide hookups brought the address of William Green and other great labor leaders into thousands of Iowa homes. The following year Green emphasized the peril of the nation in his Labor Day editorial. Pointing grimly to the "more than five million wage-earners without jobs" and to the "equal number working part time and forced to live upon a part income", Green declared it was "up to industry" either to provide jobs for men and women who did not ask for "charity or doles" or to "give way to another order."⁵⁷

Never before had Iowa witnessed such open discontent as that manifested in those grim and hectic hours of Labor Day, 1932. All sense of values seemed to be lost; everything seemed distorted and out of proportion. The banner line of the *Des Moines Register* on Labor Day read — JEAN HARLOW'S MATE KILLS SELF — and most Iowans avidly read the tragic details. Fewer Iowans, perhaps, paused to consider the deeper import of "Ding's" cartoon which was captioned — THE BEST 'LABOR' DAY HE COULD HAVE. It showed a laborer with his wife and three children, all hungry, bedraggled, unkempt, and down-hearted. The mother is ladling out broth from a public soup kitchen just as the door opens and the factory foreman arrives with a "Notice to Employees" stating "The Factory Will Start Regular Production Schedule Tomorrow".⁵⁸

The observance of Labor Day in 1944 marked the fiftieth anniversary of its celebration as a national holiday. It is still celebrated by parades and picnic, by speeches and nation-wide radio addresses; it is still the subject of editorial comment and cartoon portrayal. Labor is still extolled from the pulpit on Labor Sunday and praised by

⁵⁷ *Iowa Official Register*, 1929-1930, pp. 444, 445; *The American Federationist*, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 1049, 1050.

⁵⁸ *The Des Moines Register*, September 4, 5, 1932.

business and industry in full-page advertisements in the press each Labor Day.

ARMISTICE DAY

Armistice Day, the youngest of our legal holidays, recalls one of the most important and memorable events in American history — the close of World War I. Fully 65,000,000 men had been mobilized between 1914 and 1918 of whom more than 8,500,000 were killed in action or died of wounds or from disease, while almost 21,220,000 more had been wounded. Although the United States was not embroiled in the holocaust until April 6, 1917, the nation lost 50,510 men killed in battle and an additional 69,446 died from other causes.⁵⁹

The first World War came to an end at 11 o'clock A. M. on Monday, November 11, 1918. Overwhelmed by the crumbling of the Hindenburg Line, shocked by the mutiny within the Imperial German Navy, and apprehensive of revolution on the German home front, the German Kaiser fled to Holland leaving Dr. Frederick Ebert to send a peace delegation to Marshal Foch. At 10 A. M. on November 11th, President Woodrow Wilson issued his proclamation announcing that the Armistice with Germany would go into effect at exactly 11 o'clock. His message read:

The armistice was signed this morning. Everything for which America fought has been accomplished. It will now be our fortunate duty to assist by example, by sober, friendly council and by material aid in the establishment of just democracy throughout the world.⁶⁰

News of the signing of the Armistice was greeted with

⁵⁹ Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 561-563; *The World Almanac*, 1944, p. 43; *Dictionary of American History*, Vol. I, pp. 108, 109, Vol. V, p. 410. Useful also is A. P. Sanford and Robert H. Schauffler's *Armistice Day* (1927).

⁶⁰ *The Des Moines Register*, November 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1891; *The Telegraph-Herald* (Dubuque), November 10, 12, 1918.

wild rejoicing in Iowa. At Des Moines the "mad jubilation" that marked the return of peace presented a holiday scene "never equalled" in the history of the metropolis of Iowa. As the good news flashed from door-to-door, whistles commenced blowing and bells pealed forth joyously. Milling crowds jammed the downtown streets and all business was suspended. From early morning until late at night parades formed, marched, reformed, and counter-marched through scenes of "riotous abandon" whose "bedlam of deafening noise" mounted in intensity with each passing hour.⁶¹

At Sioux City the "greatest day in the history of the nations" was marked by an "unprecedented" holiday celebration. Banks, schools, the stockyards and other industries closed and tens of thousands swarmed the streets to proclaim their joy "over the downfall of the Hun by various methods and means, all of which had one common object—noise." A monster parade was staged at 11 o'clock but others constantly formed during the twenty-two hour celebration. Indians from a nearby reservation lent color to the Sioux City scene.⁶²

Dubuque witnessed the "greatest celebration" in the long history of the "Key City" of Iowa. It was a celebration of victory, more than of peace, but through it all ran the spirit of thanksgiving. "The greatest day in the history of the world—that's what today has been, and we are here to see it", declared one writer. "It took but a few seconds for the word to flash around the city that Germany had capitulated and hostilities were about to cease." In a twinkling the streets were filled with cheering crowds. Cannon, whistles, church bells, cowbells, cymbals, and dishpans added din, if not music, to the best ef-

⁶¹ *The Des Moines Register*, November 12, 1918.

⁶² *Sioux City Journal*, November 12, 1918, November 11, 1921.

forts of the Dubuque Military Band and Doty's Band. "To Hell with the Kaiser" signs were present everywhere. "By mid-day the celebration had become a conglomeration of a New Year's eve revel, a Fourth of July celebration and a revel of Bacchantes on Mount Olympus."⁶³

Other Iowa towns, large and small, were equally demonstrative. In staid Indianola thirty woodsheds provided tinder for a huge daylight bonfire. At night, while small groups met more formally in homes to express their thanksgiving, Simpson College students and members of the SATC held a rousing meeting in the college gymnasium. Bands, drum corps, bonfires, and parades were featured at Iowa City while at nearby West Liberty a monster bonfire and parade formed a part of a celebration that began early and continued late. Farmers from the surrounding countryside helped Oskaloosa celebrate while the mayor of the town headed a parade of ten thousand cheering marchers in Cedar Rapids.

The press of Iowa was filled with editorial comment. *The Des Moines Register* thought the war had ended in "unconditional victory" for America and her allies. "It is a peace of military victory, complete and indisputable, on which the peace of political victory, as complete, has yet to be built by the world's statesmanship." Having unburdened himself on the Allied "triumph" the editor penned a special editorial entitled "Monument of Folly". "In this hour of triumph what is so conspicuous as the stupendous folly of the militarists of Germany? When Germany was winning every victory of peace, when no people stood higher in the arts and sciences, in literature, in commerce, they threw it all away for what? If they could have won this war, still for what?"⁶⁴

⁶³ *The Telegraph-Herald* (Dubuque), November 10, 12, 1918.

⁶⁴ *The Des Moines Register*, November 12, 1918.

Just as Memorial Day is associated with the Grand Army of the Republic, so Armistice Day is associated with the American Legion. The idea of an American Legion was born in Paris, nurtured at a convention in St. Louis, and the bill to incorporate it was signed by President Wilson on September 16, 1919. The first national convention of the American Legion convened at Minneapolis quite appropriately on Armistice Day, 1919, just one year after the close of the war.⁶⁵

The first anniversary of Armistice Day was not observed uniformly in Iowa or the nation. The attitude of some Iowans is illustrated by Mayor James M. Bell of Burlington who declared that Armistice Day was "not important enough to warrant the issuance of a proclamation." The Burlington *Hawkeye* thought otherwise, pointing out that nine States had already proclaimed it a holiday and that 1919 would probably be the "last time" it would "pass unheralded and without suitable observance." A movement for the observance of Armistice Day, supported by the American Legion, led to an act adopted by the Iowa General Assembly on March 23, 1921. This made Armistice Day a legal holiday along with such days as the Fourth of July and Christmas.⁶⁶

It was not until November 4, 1921, that Congress passed a joint resolution making November 11, 1921, a special holiday, linking it with the burial of the unknown soldier in the Arlington National Cemetery, and it was not until June 4, 1926, that Armistice Day was added to the list of Federal holidays. The resolution of 1921 read in part as follows:

"Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is hereby authorized to issue a procla-

⁶⁵ Jacob A. Swisher's *The American Legion in Iowa: 1919-1929*, pp. 1-20.

⁶⁶ *Burlington Hawkeye*, November 11, 1919; *Laws of Iowa*, 1921, Ch. 62.

mation declaring November 11, 1921, a holiday, as a mark of respect to the memory of those who gave their lives in the late World War, as typified by the unknown and unidentified American soldier who is to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery on that day; and the President is respectfully requested to recommend to the governors of the various States that proclamations be issued by them calling upon their people to pause in their usual pursuits as a mark of respect on this solemn occasion."⁶⁷

President Warren G. Harding signed the resolution the same day and issued his proclamation. Governor Nathan E. Kendall of Iowa had anticipated Federal action by eleven days, issuing his Armistice Day Proclamation on October 24th, 1921. It read as follows:

Armistice Day 1921 presents a double significance; it commemorates the end of the most destructive war in all history, and it initiates a practical movement for perpetual peace in the future.

Iowa experiences infinite pride in her young men who achieved imperishable renown on the crimson battlefields of Europe. It is of the highest propriety that their incomparable heroism be suitably celebrated by public observance. As one of the fundamental things for which they fought in the great war was to end all war, the first step to effectuate their holy purpose is a radical reduction of military establishments everywhere. A sane humanity will not longer tolerate the adjudication of international controversies by the arbitrament of force. The Conference which is to convene on November 11th to consider limitation of armaments is of incalculable importance to the human race and the statesmen who shall constitute it, hold in trust the dearest interests of all mankind.

Now, therefore, I, N. E. Kendall, Governor of Iowa, do hereby designate Friday, November 11, 1921, as ARMISTICE DAY, and I enjoin that on the day indicated the people of the State recall with becoming gratitude the sacrifices suffered to rescue the world from the thralldom of tyranny, and that they devote serious and sympathetic thought to the momentous problems that are to be

⁶⁷ *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. XLII, Pt. 1, p. 211, Vol. XLIV, Pt. 3, pp. 1982, 1983.

submitted to the approaching Conference. I earnestly urge that in the schools, churches, courts and homes of the State the day be dedicated to solemn and impressive ceremonies, and that all citizens unite with the American Legion in rendering the occasion one long to be remembered in the patriotic annals of the State.⁶⁸

It was natural that Iowa should be conscious of Armistice Day in 1921. The National Commander of the American Legion was an Iowan — Hanford MacNider of Mason City. The Iowa Legion organization had enjoyed the largest membership growth in the nation — 41,541 members were recorded on August 28th, allowing the Hawkeye State to send 47 delegates to the national convention at Kansas City, tying Iowa with Ohio for fifth place. More than five thousand Iowa Legionnaires paraded in Kansas City in 1921, singing their “Iowa Corn Song” before Marshal Foch and General Pershing. Daniel F. Steck, of Ottumwa, destined to become United States Senator, was State Commander in 1921 and Frank Miles was the editor of a flourishing weekly called the *Iowa Legionnaire*.

Although Iowa towns, large and small, celebrated Armistice Day with patriotic fervor in 1921, the eyes of the State were focused on the momentous events occurring on the banks of the Potomac at Washington. The body of the “Unknown Soldier” had been brought home from France aboard the *U. S. S. Olympia* for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. Governor Kendall sent three ex-servicemen who had been wounded and decorated overseas to represent Iowa at the burial ceremonies. They were John H. Wintrose of Winterset, Adolph N. Nelson of Soldier, and Arthur J. Goetsch of Walnut. These men watched Vice President Calvin Coolidge bestow the formal tribute in behalf of the nation, while Senator Albert B.

⁶⁸ *Iowa Legionnaire*, October 23, 1921. A copy of the official proclamation is among the Kendall Papers in the Library of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Cummins placed the floral tribute at the grave on behalf of the United States Senate.

Something of this spirit was caught by State Commander Dan Steck in his Armistice Day message to the Iowa Legionnaires:

Armistice Day is properly a day of rejoicing. Three years ago the guns were stilled, men ceased killing their neighbors, and turned from the business of war to pursuits of peace.

Yet, as we rejoice, let us not forget those who did not come back — who gave their all in the service of their country and of mankind, and let us pledge ourselves to that service for which they died. . . .

As we face the east today with bowed heads, let us all, service men and civilians alike, renew our faith and confidence in our country, and rededicate ourselves to its service.⁶⁹

Five years after the signing of the Armistice it was becoming evident that the "War to End Wars" had somehow failed in its major objectives. Iowans read disturbing accounts of unrest in Europe in the fall of 1923. The war had been fought to "Make the World Safe for Democracy", but democracy was being stifled in Italy by Mussolini, while dispatches from Germany told of a little-known rabble-rouser named Hitler who planned to march on Berlin.

During the five years ending in 1928 the world seemed to be drawing closer together. The signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact was stressed by many Armistice Day speakers in Iowa in 1928, but Japan gave only passing attention to Armistice Day that year because of the "extensive functions" honoring Emperor Hirohito who was enthroned in "great state" on November 10th. Most Iowans, like most Americans, did not associate record-breaking flights across

⁶⁹ *Sioux City Journal*, November 7, 9, 11, 1921; *Iowa Legionnaire*, November 4, 11, 1921.

the continent, around the world, or to the South Pacific with future wars.⁷⁰

Domestic problems predominated as Armistice Day drew near in 1933. Iowans read of such problems as the pegging of farm prices, the support of NRA, the repeal of the prohibition law, and the Brookings report on State reorganization. But the international scene also disturbed peace-loving Iowans as Armistice Day approached. With Adolph Hitler in power the German people voted endorsement of Nazi foreign policy on November 12th. Smith W. Brookhart pleaded for the recognition of Russia. Stalin meanwhile warned Japan against aggression in the Far East where the occupation of Manchuria was the first step in the Japanese "New Order" in Asia.

Faced by such conditions the *Des Moines Register* asked its readers frankly, "Is the Armistice about Over?" The editorial is worth quoting in part:

This fifteenth anniversary of the Great Armistice finds the world still groping for an accurate appraisal of the war's results. And there is discouraging evidence that this bloodiest of all wars in history was also the least successful in accomplishing its reputed objectives.

These objectives hardly need restatement, except to emphasize the extent of the failure to make them good. It was, we recall, a war to end war; to make the world safe for democracy; to stamp out Prussianism and Junkerdom; to crush militarism and lay forever the idea that might makes right. We have tried to believe from time to time that at least some of these were actually realized through the war — only to have our illusions fall one by one.

Major wars are still a threat; democracy today faces its greatest challenge of all, not from the old dynasties but from those new apostles of personal autocracy, the dictators; jingoism, again rampant in Germany, is either the cause or the excuse for similar nationalistic excesses in neighboring states.

Even the racial hatreds of 1918, which had softened wonderfully

⁷⁰ *The Des Moines Register*, November 1, 5, 6, 8, 10-12, 1928.

in a decade and a half, have been revived in the last few months. Germany, just on the point of being re-accepted in the community of nations, has become again, through false leadership, almost a pariah.⁷¹

But if Iowans thought international conditions were bad in 1933 they were infinitely worse in 1938 when greying Legionaires celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the ending of the first World War. Mussolini had crushed Ethiopia in 1935. The next year Il Duce and his Fascist "legions" had aided Generalissimo Franco in overthrowing the Spanish Republic. Nazi Germany had rearmed, taken over the Saar basin and Austria, and in September, 1938, had stripped the Czechs of their border lands.

Although Iowa forms a part of the so-called "Isolationist Middlewest" few newspapers in the country were more outspoken than the *Des Moines Register* in warning its readers of the bitter fruits of supine pacificism and appeasement. In an Armistice Day editorial in 1938, Harvey Ingham questioned if France and England had not lost something — the solidarity of democracies — when they sold the courageous Czechs down the river. On November 1, 1938, cartoonist Carlisle had held up to ridicule the typical American family that snoozed apathetically while the Hon. Obidiah Slingbull warned of the "Perils of Modern Civilization", yet fled in terror when they tuned in their radio and heard that 12-foot men from Mars had landed in New Jersey and were laying waste the countryside. On November 11th this same cartoonist pictured a giant helmeted ape striding roughshod through the graves of those who had died in 1918 to "Make the World Safe for Democracy". The headline above this cartoon informed Iowans there would be a 57-cent corn loan and news items reported that Nazi mobs were looting and burning synagogues.⁷²

⁷¹ *The Des Moines Register*, November 1-12, 1933.

⁷² *The Des Moines Register*, November 1-8, 11, 12, 1938.

The outbreak of World War II in 1939 was viewed with misgivings in Iowa and with good reason. Even the heated political campaign of 1940 and a third-term issue could not obscure such headlines as the surrender of Denmark, the conquest of Norway, Holland, and Belgium, and the pathetic fall of a once proud France. The "Battle of Britain" was won by a gallant Royal Air Force and a stubborn folk learned through "blood, sweat, and tears" that apathy and appeasement did not pay. Turning from the English Channel the Nazi hordes overran the Balkans and in June of 1941 attacked Russia. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, catapulted America into the second World War.

Armistice Day was deeply meaningful to Iowans in 1944. On the home front the day was observed with genuine solemnity. The large number of Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel lent a colorful military atmosphere in many communities. WACS at Des Moines and WAVES at Cedar Falls contributed to the picture. At Iowa City, Richard Nazette, a veteran of World War II, told his listeners that soldiers of this war would not be satisfied with a cessation of hostilities as the term armistice implies, but there must be guaranteed as lasting a peace as the "hearts and hands of men can build".⁷³

Meanwhile, a quarter million of Iowa's sons and daughters, engaged in World War II, observed Armistice Day in every continent and on every sea. As they paused in solemn tribute on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year, 1944, to pay tribute to their dead comrades, they must have echoed Richard Nazette's pledge that V-day must not be blackened by another Armistice. And this raises a question. What is to be the

⁷³ *The Daily Iowan*, November 11, 12, 1944; *The Des Moines Register*, November 11, 12, 1944.

significance of Armistice Day when the new peace is proclaimed? Will it continue to be associated with the dead of World War I or will it be supplanted by a new legal holiday commemorating V-Day?

THANKSGIVING DAY

Since the dawn of history man has offered thanks to his gods for abundant crops and for protection from adversity. The Canaanites celebrated the harvest season by feasting and drinking and the Hebrews observed the seven-day "Feast of Tabernacles" at the close of the harvest season. The harvest festival of ancient Greece was celebrated each November by the married women in Athens in honor of the goddess Demeter, whose fruitfulness was symbolized by poppies, ears of corn, baskets of fruit, and little pigs. The Roman festival of Cerelia was held on October 4th in honor of the harvest deity Ceres. In England the autumnal festival was called Harvest Home, a custom dating back to Saxon days.⁷⁴

Despite such precedents, Thanksgiving Day as it is observed in the United States is a purely American holiday. It stems from our Pilgrim forefathers of New England, those hardy, God-fearing souls who signed the immortal "Mayflower Compact" before stepping ashore at historic Plymouth Rock. The names of William Bradford and John Winthrop, of John Alden and Priscilla Mullins, of Samoset, Squanto, and Massasoit, are all associated with the beginnings of the Plymouth settlement. Felicia Hemans captured something of the spirit of the colony in "The Landing of the Pilgrims" while Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

⁷⁴ Robert H. Schauffler's *Thanksgiving*, pp. xi-xviii, 1-6; George W. Douglas's *American Book of Days*, pp. 587-591; William S. Walsh's *Curiosities of Popular Customs*, pp. 917-925; Florence Adams and Elizabeth McCarrick's *Highdays and Holidays*, pp. 269-280; W. De Loss Love's *The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England*.

portrayed the romance of the times in "The Courtship of Miles Standish".

The landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock occurred just a few days before Christmas in 1620. They remained aboard the *Mayflower* until the last of March while their homes were being built. The winter was extremely severe and the courageous little colony saw its numbers dwindle from 101 to 55 settlers because of cold, hunger, and disease. In the spring the survivors sowed their crops and watched with anxiety the progress of their plants, upon whose successful harvesting their very lives depended. In the fall their hearts were gladdened as they saw the granaries fairly bursting with grain. Thankful for the prodigal returns of a bountiful nature, Governor William Bradford ordered a three-day feast and celebration to which Chief Massasoit and his Indians were invited.⁷⁵

Many Americans like to trace the beginnings of Thanksgiving to this three-day festival of the Pilgrims in 1621. Others contend that the first religious thanksgiving services date back to July 30, 1623, when the colonists held a public service of prayer and thanksgiving following Miles Standish's return from a journey, bearing food for the hungry colonists and the good news that a ship had been sighted bearing in their direction. Be this as it may, in the years that followed Thanksgiving became more and more firmly entrenched in New England. According to one author:

Sometimes it was appointed once a year, sometimes twice, sometimes a year or two were skipped,—according as reasons for giving thanks presented themselves or not. Now the reason was a victory over the Indians, then the arrival of a ship with supplies or "persons of special use and quality," and yet again a bountiful harvest.

⁷⁵ Students and public speakers interested in various types of Thanksgiving proclamations may consult: T. B. Hough's *Proclamations for Thanksgiving*; James D. Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*; and Benj. F. Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*.

The frequent appointments for the last cause finally made August the customary month. Beginning with 1684, the festival became a formal and annual one in Massachusetts. Her example was soon followed by all the New England colonies.⁷⁶

It was during the Revolutionary War that Thanksgiving first took on the earmarks of a national holiday. In 1777 the Second Continental Congress set aside Thursday, December 18th, as a day of "solemn thanksgiving and praise" for the "signal success" of the American troops in overcoming Burgoyne. The following year Congress directed its chaplains to prepare a report recommending that the several States set apart December 30th as a day of general thanksgiving throughout the United States for American victories and for the French alliance. In 1779 the second Thursday in December was set apart as a day of "general thanksgiving" for good health, abundant crops, and continued victories over Great Britain. In 1780, December 7th was designated as the day of "public thanksgiving and prayer", while in 1781 public thanksgiving was offered on December 13th. After expressing thanks for the victory at Yorktown, the 1781 proclamation asked for "wisdom and integrity" in the "speedy establishment of a safe, honorable and lasting peace". The following year Congress passed an act requesting the "several states" to provide that Thursday, November 28, 1782, should be observed as a day of thanksgiving and prayer. December 11, 1783, and October 19, 1784, were set aside for public prayer and thanksgiving in gratitude for the return of peace.⁷⁷

No specific day had evolved as Thanksgiving Day, but December was the favorite month. Only once, in 1782, did

⁷⁶ Walsh's *Curiosities of Popular Customs*, p. 919.

⁷⁷ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol. IX, pp. 851, 854, 855, Vol. XI, p. 641, Vol. XII, pp. 1110, 1138, 1139, Vol. XV, pp. 1170, 1171, 1191, 1192, Vol. XVIII, pp. 919, 950, Vol. XXI, pp. 957, 1071, 1074-76, Vol. XXIII, pp. 646, 647, 888, Vol. XXV, pp. 699, 989-990, Vol. XXVII, pp. 625-630.

Congress suggest the last Thursday in the month of November but this proposal was amended in its final form to read specifically Thursday, November 28th. During the next five years, independence having been won and peace established, Congress did not see fit to set aside a day for national thanksgiving.

George Washington issued the first presidential Thanksgiving proclamation on October 3, 1789, in response to a congressional request that he set aside a day of public prayer and thanksgiving. The "Father of His Country" wrote the following classic proclamation:

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness

to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.⁷⁸

It would be difficult to determine how many people in the United States carried out the spirit of this Thanksgiving Day proclamation. In his diary Washington himself recorded: "*Thursday, 26th.* Being the day appointed for a thanksgiving, I went to St. Paul's Chapel, though it was most inclement and stormy — but few people at Church."⁷⁹ Was the slim attendance responsible for Washington's failure to issue any other Thanksgiving Day proclamation during the remaining seven years he was in office? Or was it felt that the successful launching of the ship of state under the constitution alone merited such a proclamation?

John Adams issued only one such proclamation during his administration when he set aside May 9, 1798, as a time for "fervent thanksgiving" for prosperity, religious and civil freedom, and for the improvement of vexing foreign relations with France. James Madison, at the request of Congress, signed a proclamation on November 16, 1814, setting aside Thursday, January 12, 1815, as a day of prayer that the War of 1812 might soon be concluded and the blessings of peace be speedily and happily restored.⁸⁰ The Treaty of Ghent was actually signed on December 24, 1814, but news of its consummation was not received by the people of the United States in time for their Thanksgiving celebration.

No other national Thanksgiving Days seem to have been

⁷⁸ Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. I, p. 64 (1896).

⁷⁹ John C. Fitzpatrick's *The Diaries of George Washington: 1748-1799*, Vol. IV, p. 55.

⁸⁰ Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. I, pp. 268-270, 558.

proclaimed until Civil War times. One reason, perhaps, was the influence of Thomas Jefferson who firmly believed that the national government had no right to tell the people when they should attend church. He had expounded his views on the subject to a minister in 1808 when he declared:

I consider the government of the United States as interdicted by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises. This results not only from the provision that no law shall be made respecting the establishment or free exercise of religion, but from that also which reserves to the States the powers not delegated to the United States. Certainly, no power to prescribe any religious discipline, has been delegated to the general government. It must then rest with the States, as far as it can be in any human authority. But it is only proposed that I should recommend, not prescribe a day of fasting and prayer. That is, that I should indirectly assume to the United States an authority over religious exercises, which the Constitution has directly precluded them from. It must be meant, too, that this recommendation is to carry some authority, and to be sanctioned by some penalty on those who disregard it; not indeed of fines and imprisonment, but of some degree of proscription, perhaps in public opinion. And does the change in the nature of the penalty make the recommendation less a law of conduct for those to whom it is directed? I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its disciplines or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies; that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and the right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the Constitution has placed it.⁸¹

Perhaps the lion's share of the credit for the final acceptance of Thanksgiving Day as a national religious fes-

⁸¹ S. E. Forman's *The Life and Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, pp. 360, 361. The letter was written to the Rev. Mr. Miller in 1808.

tival should be attributed to a woman — Mrs. Sarah J. Hale.⁸² While editor of the *Ladies Magazine* between 1828 and 1836, Mrs. Hale began advocating the celebration of Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November. When she became literary editor of *Godey's Lady's Book* in 1837 she increased the tempo of her campaign for a national Thanksgiving Day, writing Presidents, Governors, and others in high office. Her final plea entitled "Our National Thanksgiving" appeared in the September, 1863, issue of *Godey's Lady's Book*. After quoting Nehemiah viii:10, and pointing out the "salutary effect of appointed times for national reunions" Mrs. Hale noted that in 1859 thirty States had observed Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November and concluded:

Would it not be a great advantage, socially, nationally, religiously, to have the day of our American Thanksgiving positively settled? Putting aside the sectional feelings and local incidents that might be urged by any single State or isolated Territory that desired to choose its own time, would it not be more noble, more truly American, to become national in unity when we offer to God our tribute of joy and gratitude for the blessings of the year?

Taking this view of the case, would it not be better that the proclamation which appoints Thursday, the 26th of November, as the day of Thanksgiving for the people of the United States of America should, in the first instance, emanate from the President of the Republic — to be applied by the Governors of each and every State, in acquiescence with the chief executive adviser?⁸³

Perhaps it was in answer to this, and more personal appeals, that President Lincoln issued his first national Thanksgiving Proclamation on October 3, 1863, setting

⁸² For a brief sketch of Mrs. Hale's life (1788-1879) see the *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VIII, pp. 111, 112. Frank Luther Mott gives an excellent account of her contributions to *The Ladies Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book* in his *A History of American Magazines*, Vol. I, pp. 349-351, 580-594.

⁸³ *Godey's Lady's Book*, Vol. LXVII, pp. 276, 277, Vol. LXXVII, p. 450.

aside the last Thursday in November as the day. Lincoln's proclamation read:

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequal magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and to provoke aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances

and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity, and union.⁸⁴

It was not until October 12, 1844, that Governor John Chambers issued the first Thanksgiving proclamation in Iowa. It read in part as follows:

At the request of many of my Fellow Citizens, I have deemed it proper to recommend that Thursday, the 12th day of December next, be observed throughout the Territory, as a day of general Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the many and great blessings we enjoy as a people and individually, and of prayer and supplication for the continuance of his mercy and goodness toward us; and for the prosperity, happiness and ultimate salvation of the American people.

We are told that, "righteousness exalteth a nation," and are taught by divine authority that the voice of thanksgiving and prayer is acceptable to our Father in Heaven. Let us then, on the day designated, unite our voices, in the humble hope that they will reach the Throne of Grace and obtain for us a continuation and increase of blessings.

If John Chambers deserves credit for issuing the first Thanksgiving Proclamation in Iowa, his successor, James Clarke, may be credited with setting the date on the customary last Thursday in November. At the request of many "highly respectable persons belonging to the several religious denominations of the Territory" Governor Clarke designated Thursday, November 26, 1846, as a day of

⁸⁴ Richardson's *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. VI, pp. 170-173. The victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg led Lincoln on July 15, 1863, to set aside August 6th as a "day for national thanksgiving, praise, and prayer".

Thanksgiving. The people of Iowa, according to Clarke, had many things for which to offer thanks, including victories in the Mexican War.⁸⁵

Ansel Briggs, the first Governor of the State of Iowa, issued his first Thanksgiving proclamation on November 1, 1847, designating the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving. Good crops, health, increasing immigration, rapid strides in education, commerce, and agriculture, and the important victories over the "semi-barbarous" Mexicans were blessings Iowans could count in 1847. No other proclamations have been found during the remaining three years of Briggs's administration or the four-year term of Stephen Hempstead. In 1855, James W. Grimes set the fourth (not last) Thursday as Thanksgiving Day. Since 1857, Iowa Governors have, with two exceptions, consistently appointed the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day.⁸⁶

Presidential and gubernatorial Thanksgiving proclamations were subjected to editorial comment, both pro and con, facetious and serious. In 1859 the Democratic *Dubuque Herald* ripped Governor Ralph P. Lowe's proclamation to shreds on the basis of its literary style.⁸⁷ In 1864 a Council Bluffs editor commented on the day of "fasting and prayer" set aside by "Father Abraham": "We notice the *fast* part was well observed, *fast* men, *fast* boys, and *fast* women, riding behind *fast* horses, going at very *fast* gaits, could be seen every moment dashing through our

⁸⁵ Benj. F. Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 309, 310, 361. See also the *Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), November 11, 1846. The pioneers of Iowa, as well as elsewhere in the nation, did not seem to agree on a special date.

⁸⁶ *Iowa Standard*, November 24, 1847. Iowans can find most of these Thanksgiving proclamations in Shambaugh's *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa*, Vol. I, pp. 417, 418, Vol. II, pp. 102-104.

⁸⁷ *Dubuque Herald*, November 9, 1859.

streets; and to conclude the *fast* day, Mynheer Koppes gave a *fast* ball in Street's hollow, to which nearly all the *fast* people, including Brick Pomeroy, No. 2, with that 'still small voice' of his, went as *fast* as they could go."⁸⁸

Bitter partisan politics was in large measure responsible for many of the barbs aimed at the holiday during Civil War and Reconstruction days. At Dubuque the leading Democratic editor looked with foreboding upon the attitude of most ministers of the Gospel. "Thanksgiving day", he declared, "afforded a splendid opportunity for the display of diabolical piety by the Bloodhounds of Zion. Among the lesser lights of the political pulpit this display was made with remarkable unanimity, but they confined themselves principally to the usual invocation of John Brown's peregrinating soul, and diatribes upon the blessings wrought by the slaughter of thousands of white men and the elevation of negroes." The Thanksgiving sermon of the Chaplain in Congress was so vindictive that the editor felt sure the "Blessings promised to peacemakers will not enter largely into the awards of this fellow in the future world." As the years passed editors refrained from such lapses into political partisanship.⁸⁹

Iowans took warmly to Thanksgiving, for nowhere else could the "Harvest Home" be more appropriately observed. Here was the richest agricultural land in the entire United States. Here Indian maize quickly became the emblem of the State. Here wheat, oats, and rye grew in profuse abundance. Here luscious golden melons (especially Muscatine melons) won nation-wide attention. It was of Iowa, surely, that the poet sang:

⁸⁸ *Council Bluffs Bugle*, August 11, 1864. This was the copperhead sentiment whereas the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* of November 26, 1864, declared of Lincoln's and Kirkwood's Thanksgiving Proclamations: "It will be observed in a proper manner throughout the entire country."

⁸⁹ *Dubuque Herald*, December 20, 1865.

Cart-loads of pumpkins as yellow as gold,
 Onions in silvery strings,
 Shining red apples and clusters of grapes,
 Nuts and a host of good things,
 Chickens and turkeys and fat little pigs,—
 These are what Thanksgiving brings.⁹⁰

In 1870, a Des Moines editor printed the Thanksgiving menu of the Savery House. After observing that it was not customary to print such menus, he reminded readers that the "high reputation" of the Savery House was so "universally known" that nothing could be said to add to its reputation. In these days of ration points for meat this menu⁹¹ sounds like a fairy tale, but it appeared in print as follows:

SOUP — Oyster

FISH — Mackinaw Trout, with fine herb sauce

BOILED — Tongue; Ham; Leg of Mutton; Corned Beef; Turkey, with oyster sauce; Chicken, with Marrinaise sauce

ROAST — Prairie chicken, with currant jelly; Turkey with giblet sauce; Veal, with dressing; Ribs of Beef; Sirloin of Beef; Mutton; Lamb; Saddle of Venison, with cranberry jelly; Sirloin of Buffalo; Goose, with apple sauce; Mallard Duck a la Creole

COLD — Corned Beef; Tongue; Mutton; Chicken Salad; Lobster Salad

ENTREE — Broiled Quail, with toast; Buffalo Steak, a la Maitre d'Hotel; Braized Teal Duck, with olives; Wild Goose, a la Regent; Pork and Beans, baked Boston style; Fillets of Chicken, a l'Anglaise; Belle Fritters, vanilla flavor; Haricot of Venison, with pastry

VEGETABLES OF THE SEASON

RELISHES — Pickled Beets; Worcestershire Sauce, Pepper Sauce, Chow Chow, French Mustard, Sliced Tomatoes, Tomato Catsup, Boston Pickles, Cheese, Walnut Catsup

⁹⁰ Quoted from the *Youth's Companion in Special Day Annual: 1908-1909*, p. 6. This useful tool for Iowa teachers was printed annually and biannually by the Department of Public Instruction.

⁹¹ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), November 24, 1870.

PASTRY — Mince Pie; Old Style Yankee Pumpkin Pie; Steamed Apple Pudding; Lemon Sauce

DESSERT — Pound Cake; Sponge Cake; Swedish Pound Cake; French Cream Cake; Jelly Cake; Jumbles; Rum Jelly; Doughnuts; Blancmange; German Meranges; Kisses; English Walnuts; Filberts; Almonds; Raisins; Apples

TEA AND COFFEE

WINES — From the Savery House cellars

Sometimes Iowans partook too heartily of the bountiful Thanksgiving dinners placed before them. In 1874 a Keokuk paper reported that a physician was called to treat a young man who "worries hash at a fourth class boarding house" but who had accepted an invitation to dine out on Thanksgiving Day. The doctor requested his patient to tell what he had eaten. The young man, so the story ran, repeated the bill of fare as nearly as he could recollect, the following being an alleged inventory of the food encompassed: "Three dishes of oyster soup, two plates of fish and two of turkey, two dozen fried oysters, and a dozen raw; some gerkins, four slices of roast pig, a quart of Cole slough, two cups of coffee, four stalks of celery, a liberal supply of boiled cabbage, six hard boiled eggs, some turnip, a glass of milk, apple dumpling, a bottle of native wine, two dishes of plum pudding, two mince pies, some fruit cake, and three dishes of ice cream." The physician, it was said, listened patiently through the recital of all this, then pronounced the case a hopeless one, recommended that a minister be called in, and went off to consult with the undertaker.⁹²

To many Iowans, the large turkeys of pioneer days proved a real problem. "I protest against so much Thanksgiving", said one housekeeper. "Here we had that turkey for dinner last Thursday. Every day since we have had his carcass for dinner, and warmed up turkey for

⁹² *The Weekly Gate City* (Keokuk), December 2, 1874.

breakfast and supper. Dressing has become a burden; gravy occasions weariness of the flesh; white meat and dark meat are alike unsavory." Two generations were to pass before the Americans learned to raise turkeys of a size that could be handled by the average family, even when augmented by Thanksgiving homecomers.⁹³

Many Iowans, especially college students, have at times been unfortunate enough not to be able to go home for Thanksgiving. In 1867, the students at the State University of Iowa spread a festive board in the old chapel to make up for their absence from the home circle. According to a local editor the first part of the evening was spent in conversation while promenading around the new chapel. Shortly after 9 o'clock the whole crowd proceeded to the old chapel where an abundant Thanksgiving repast was served by the committee.

The report of the affair included the following comment: "After the feast came toasts and responses, but these ran to so late an hour we did not stay to hear them. The remains of the feast were distributed to the poor and needy — the cake to the editors, the cold chicken to the bachelor members of the faculty. A fine sense of the fitness of things was shown in this distribution. Editors are always poor and in need of supplies, and bachelors require all the comfort that can be derived from cold chicken, munched in solitude."⁹⁴

Many persons attended church on Thanksgiving and editors often reported on the sermon to their readers. When the Rev. Mr. Magoun preached on "The Blessings of Hard Times" in 1857, several of Davenport's "most intelligent citizens" expressed a desire that the sermon be published. At Sioux City in 1859, religious services were

⁹³ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), December 6, 1876.

⁹⁴ *Iowa City Republican*, November 20, 1867.

held in the Presbyterian Church in the morning and at the Methodist Church in the afternoon. The following year Sioux Citians held a Union service in the Methodist Church on Thanksgiving Day.⁹⁵

Keokuk churches held both separate and union meetings in 1868. The Civil War was over, the negroes freed, Reconstruction was in progress, Andrew Johnson had been acquitted, and U. S. Grant elected President. The Reverend J. R. Effinger of the Unitarian Church considered the granting of negro suffrage in Iowa the chief cause for Thanksgiving in 1868. Although grateful for abundant harvests, Mr. Effinger was especially thankful for the great strides made in education. He praised the State University of Iowa with its "earnest and determined young men and women" who would return into the interior of Iowa "to make homes more beautiful and life more noble". He was equally thankful for that newly-established "Frontier University" known as "Iowa Agricultural College" which already had attracted young men and women from twenty-three counties, and he praised the fine work of Cornell College and similar "centres of instruction".⁹⁶

At the union services in Des Moines in 1870, the Reverend J. V. Schofield pointed out that some people placed their trust in science, others in knowledge, still others in reason, in philosophy, in wealth, in morality, in standing armies, or in government, but the Christian placed his trust in God. "A Christian people can thank God — as we do to-day — for a free government, no more slavery agitating our peace, and threatening ruin. We can render thanks for a growing unity in all sections, commercial prosperity, for decreasing national debt, credit and peaceful relations

⁹⁵ *Davenport Gazette*, December 3, 1857; *Sioux City Register*, November 19, 26, 1859, November 24, 1860.

⁹⁶ *Weekly Gate City* (Keokuk), December 2, 1868.

abroad with most nations. As a State we can render thanks for Iowa, the Indian name for beautiful land." Thanks could also be rendered, he thought, for Iowa's thirty-five million acres of rich, productive land, and for the position of leadership the State had taken in education. After pointing proudly to Iowa's 6079 school buildings and 12,000 teachers, her 53 colleges and academies with over 4000 students, Mr. Schofield turned to the 19 daily papers and 246 weeklies and to the railroads which crossed the State at many points. Finally, thanks were given for Iowa's almost unrivalled reputation for patriotism, integrity, temperance, and morality.⁹⁷

In addition to recording sermons editors frequently wrote thoughtful Thanksgiving editorials. In 1890 a Clinton editor wrote:

Very few people but feel like giving thanks for something. The living are thankful they are not dead, that is, if they don't wish they were dead. The sick are thankful they are not sicker. The rich are thankful for riches and the poor are thankful they are not poorer. The good are thankful they are not bad, and the bad are thankful they are no worse. Americans are thankful they were not born in Africa, and Africans are thankful they were born at all. The newly elected members of congress are thankful they were not defeated, and the defeated candidates are thankful they are permitted to live. We all should be thankful to the Lord for His many mercies and loving kindnesses. Let no one forget today that God rules and holds the destinies of nations in the hollow of His hand.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *Iowa State Register*, November 27, 1870.

⁹⁸ *Clinton Weekly Age*, December 5, 1890.

An undertone of bitterness marked many Thanksgiving editorials. A writer from New Hartford who signed himself "Observer" expressed his opinion of the railroad monopoly by writing, "we are thankful that we live on a line of railroad that furnished unequalled facilities for getting rid of any stray dimes we may chance to be burdened with; thankful that our stock can be run over and killed, and that we can take what the company chooses to pay, or nothing; thankful that its trains connect with the trains of no other road but the *air line* to the 'infernal regions'; thankful that our grain merchants can't ship

It is the family dinner following church services that most nearly typifies Thanksgiving. In 1890 a Des Moines editor quoted the following from *Harper's Bazaar*:

Soup, fish, salad, and *entrees* may be appropriate and elegant on 364 days in the year, but on the 365th let them be banished, and let the traditional turkey and his vegetables satellites, the toothsome chicken pie, and all the triumphs of the Yankee housewife, reign supreme. Let that national holiday be kept with national dishes, and let there be a joyful and honourable pride in them, with never a tinge of shame that their palatableness is not hidden behind French names.⁹⁹

The spirit of the family circle has been immortalized by Lydia Maria Child in her poem — Thanksgiving Day.¹⁰⁰

Over the river and through the wood,
To grandfather's house we'll go;
The horse knows the way,
To carry the sleigh
Through the white and drifted snow.

One Iowa editor felt the very mention of Thanksgiving brought back nostalgic memories of roast turkey, cranberry sauce, and hot pumpkin pie. "What a beautiful season it is with its home comings and its family gatherings!" he declared. "What tears of joy well up to the aged mother's eyes as she clasps to her heart one whom she has not seen

for want of cars, with the switches full of 'empties' from Cedar Falls to Dubuque; thankful that farmers can take their grain home, with our warehouses full. All this are we thankful for, and more too had we the capacity." — *Cedar Falls Gazette*, December 6, 1872.

On November 24, 1870, the editor of the *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines) wrote: "To be thankful does not mean to be sanctimonious and sad, and though sermons are preached and prayers — fervent and heartfelt prayers — are said on this day, it does not follow that we should make Sunday of it. Prayers of thankfulness should be uttered by lips that are smiling."

⁹⁹ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), November 26, 1890.

¹⁰⁰ *Manual for Special Day Exercises: 1901*, p. 84.

for so long, always her 'boy' though the snows of sixty years have whitened his head. What memories rise in the loving daughter's heart, as she lies down to rest again, after her long absence, in the room where she dreamed her girlish dreams!"¹⁰¹

Nor should one forget the great work of our public schools in fostering the observance of Thanksgiving Day. Songs and essays, poems and plays, all formed a part of a moving pageantry whose stage setting was formed by the deep orange of the pumpkin, the red and yellow of luscious apples, by shocks of golden grain and stalks of corn. Sometimes the President's or Governor's Proclamation was read. Teachers were aided in the preparation of such programs by a manual for special days issued by the Department of Public Instruction. In 1901 the following "Program For Higher Grades" was suggested:¹⁰²

Song	"Thanksgiving Hymn"
Roll Call	"Response with Quotations"
Reading	"Proclamation by the President or Governor"
Reading	"Address to the Pupils of the Public Schools of Iowa"
Recitation	"Pen Picture of the First Thanksgiving Day"
Essay	"The History of Thanksgiving Day"
Recitation	"The Landing of the Pilgrims"
Reading	"The Founders of the Republic"
Recitation	"The First Thanksgiving"
Recitation	"The Turkey's Soliloquy"
Reading	"The Harvests of Iowa"
Recitation	"The Pumpkin"
Recitation	"The Difference"
Reading	"America's Public Schools"

¹⁰¹ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), November 25, 1890.

¹⁰² *Manual for Special Day Exercises: 1901*, p. 79.

Concert Recitation "We Offer Thanks"
 Song "Nearer My God, to Thee"

Although participating in and gaining much inspiration from school programs, children particularly enjoyed the sports afforded by a snowy Thanksgiving. "Jack Frost has no terrors for young blood," a Des Moines editor declared. "Probably chillblains or possible sore throats annoy them not. All day they thronged the streets with sleds and skates. . . . The sight of the many coasters was enough to 'stir a fever in the blood of age', although there will be many nights of watching by sick beds to follow their sport."¹⁰³

Many parents, however, were concerned over the disastrous practice of over-stuffing on Thanksgiving. In 1876 a mother urged the Des Moines Board of Education to return to the "former practice" of making Friday as well as Thanksgiving a holiday in order to allow school children as well as teachers ample opportunity to recover from "fearful" headaches and stomach aches. The logic of this argument apparently was recognized. In 1890, East Des Moines high school students gave school programs, offered presents which were distributed to the needy, and received Friday off.¹⁰⁴

Much of the general Thanksgiving activity depended on the state of the weather. In 1857 the day was delightful in Davenport although walking was "juicy" for pedestrians; in 1864 the holiday was ushered in at Oskaloosa with temperatures that plummeted to 13° below zero. In 1874 a heavy Thanksgiving Day snowstorm in Jones County brought out cutters and sleds in Anamosa while "several hundred urchins yanked flyers around promiscuously

¹⁰³ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), December 2, 1876.

¹⁰⁴ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), November 28, 1876, November 26, 1890.

among foot passengers". In 1890 the weather at Clinton was so mild that lawn tennis, football, and hoop-rolling were common sports. Contrast this with 1876 when the weather was so "bitterly cold" in Des Moines that sleigh-riders withdrew from the streets leaving the capital city thoroughfares almost deserted. "John and Jenny", a kindly editor observed, "can't sit close enough together outside to keep warm on such a night as that was, and so they snuggled down by the fireside or hurried to some entertainment indoors."¹⁰⁵

There were plenty of indoor Thanksgiving activities for all the Johns and Jennys living in Des Moines in 1876. The Hawkeye Hose Company gave a dance at Turner Hall while the Centenary Church chose Thanksgiving for a colorful fair and festival. The colored Masons were not left behind, celebrating Thanksgiving by making merry in their lodge rooms. The "finest masquerade ball ever given in Des Moines" took place at the home of the Hon. John A. Elliott. The gay assemblage was clad in the costumes of all ages and included such personages as Little Red Riding Hood, the Daughter of the Regiment, and Henry VIII, Uncle Sam, Boss Tweed, and Buffalo Bill. At 12 o'clock all unmasked and repaired to the dancing hall above where merriment, laughter, and pleasure ruled until early morning.¹⁰⁶

CHRISTMAS

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
 Their old, familiar carols play,
 And wild and sweet
 The words repeat
 Of peace on earth, good-will to Men!

¹⁰⁵ *Davenport Gazette*, December 3, 1857; *Weekly Oskaloosa Herald*, November 24, 1864; *Anamosa Eureka*, November 26, 1874; *Clinton Weekly Age*, December 5, 1890; *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), December 2, 1876.

¹⁰⁶ *Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), December 2, 1876.

Christmas is the most important festival in the whole Christian calendar and since the United States is a Christian nation it is without a doubt the most important holiday Americans celebrate. The spirit of Christmas is all-pervading, reaching men of high and low estate. Its foundations are laid in that eternal precept that men should love one another. It commands all Christians to remember the words "It is more blessed to give than to receive". Since the spirit of giving forms its very keystone, merriment and joy are more likely to prevail at Christmas than at any other time.¹⁰⁷

The story of the birth of Christ is best told in the gospel according to St. Luke. There, simply but beautifully narrated, we find Christ in the manger, the Star of Bethlehem, the shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night, and the Angels appearing in the heavens singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". Painters and sculptors, writers of prose and poetry, and famous composers have put forth their best effort to recreate the story of the nativity. The birth of Christ inspired Handel to compose "The Messiah" and set to music Rev. Isaac Watts's "Joy to the World!". It inspired Charles Wesley to write "Hark the Herald Angels Sing!" in 1739, a classic which Mendelssohn set to music in 1840. How Franz Gruber composed "Silent Night, Holy Night" in 1818 is one of the inspiring Christmas stories.

The anniversary of the birth of Christ is likewise the most revered of all Iowa holidays, a fact readily demonstrated by its antiquity as well as its universal popularity. Christmas was observed by the first pioneers in the Black

¹⁰⁷ The following references contain much Christmas material: May L. Becker's *The Home Book of Christmas*; Alice Dalgliesh's *Christmas: A Book of Stories Old and New*; *Uncle Toby's Christmas Book*; Robert H. Schaufler's *Christmas*; Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, pp. 625-633.

Hawk Purchase. Christmas was one of the first three legal holidays recognized by the General Assembly. It is observed in churches and schools, by lodges and clubs, in town and country, and by relatives and friends around the family hearthstone. It is celebrated by rich and poor, by young and old, by men of all creeds, colors, and nationalities — both native born and foreign. The Germans of Amana, the Dutch of Pella and Orange City, the British of Le Mars and the surrounding countryside, the Mennonite communities of Iowa, the Bohemians of Linn and Johnson county, the Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, Germans, and Irish scattered throughout the State, all have contributed something to the observance of Christmas as we know it in Iowa today. The first American settlers in Iowa, whether they came from New England, the Middle Colonies, the South, or the Old Northwest, brought with them the customs and traditions that had prevailed among their friends and relatives back home. The observance of Christmas in Iowa has thus become a blending of the best traditions and customs of the Old World and the New World.¹⁰⁸

Simple though they were, the pioneer Christmas celebrations often left an indelible impression upon their participants. In 1924, Mrs. Mary Miller, who was born in Clinton County in 1837, described the first Christmas she could remember. This was in 1842, only nine years after the white settlers entered the Black Hawk Purchase and four years before Iowa became a State. Her home was a log cabin erected in a clearing near the Mississippi on the present site of Clinton. A soft blanket of snow covered the ground outside on Christmas Eve. "We all hung up our stockings", Mrs. Miller recalled. "Next morning we were gleeful at finding in each stocking a nice fat, brown

¹⁰⁸ William J. Petersen's "Christmas in Iowa" in *The Palimpsest*, Vol. XVI, pp. 373-378.

doughnut and some pieces of gaily colored calico. I was very happy because I knew that my elder sister would make and dress a rag doll for me, just like the one with which she played."

Breakfast over, the children bundled up and scampered outside to play in the snow, for the busy mother needed plenty of room to prepare the Christmas feast. Game was plentiful and the father had had no difficulty shooting a large wild turkey in the woods. Maple sap had been gathered on an island in the Mississippi. The frugal housewife baked mince pies in her Dutch oven. The berries had been gathered in the summer and dried. The home-rendered lard for the crust was crisp, white, and flaky. As Mrs. Miller related: "After we had stuffed ourselves with turkey and roast venison and roast pork, potatoes, nuts and maple sugar, we sat in front of the fireplace and listened to stories. They were stories of other Christmas days, way off in Indiana, from which my father and mother had come in an ox cart."¹⁰⁹

A resident of Madison County believed the Christmas spirit was as hearty among the pioneers as it is now. "Our Christmas was very different from the children of today. But I believe what was given us gave us as much pleasure and was of lasting benefit to us. We were not taught to believe in Santa Claus, but on Christmas Eve, mother would tell us the stories of The Babe in the Manger, The Star in the East and The Visit of the Wise Men. Next morning, she would be awake first and would wish a 'Merry Christmas and Happy New Year', and often we would find an apple or a stick of candy in our stockings and some needed article like mittens of her own knitting, handkerchief, slate pencil or other practical gift."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ *Clinton Herald*, December 15, 1926; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, December 19, 1926.

¹¹⁰ *Winterset Madsonian*, December 11, 1924.

The pioneers of Boone County had a unique way of celebrating Christmas. On Christmas Eve a number of men would get together, elect one of their number captain, and set out to visit many of the homes in the neighborhood. "On arriving at a house," an eye-witness related, "the captain would call out the name of the owner in a stentorian voice and then order his men to fire. The noise produced shook the house and reverberated among the hills. When the noise subsided the man of the house would open the door and invite the men to come in. His hospitality was accepted with pleasure, and there were hand shakings and congratulations, joking and laughter. The good woman of the house would then set out pies and cakes and serve warm coffee, which was partaken of with a relish."

The merry company would then reload their guns and set out for the next house. Sometimes upon departing some one would start a familiar hymn and all of them would join in singing it. Again the party might call upon a home where a small group was gathered for devotional purposes. On such occasions the men would tarry for a while, get down on their knees when prayer was offered, and join in the singing. These visits were kept up until midnight, when Christmas was ushered in and the men returned to their homes.¹¹¹

Not all Iowans hovered around the family hearthstone on Christmas Day. Coasting, skating, and sleighriding attracted many youngsters and not a few of their elders. Hunting had its devotees on Christmas Day. Dances and balls were frequently given on Christmas night and many gay young folks could be found in attendance. In 1857 some of the younger set in Hamilton County drove a four-horse sleigh from Saratoga to Rose Grove for a Christmas Eve dance. Near Kamrar they were set on by a pack of a

¹¹¹ *Madrid News*, December 8, 1921.

hundred prairie wolves but reached Rose Grove in safety. The perils of the wintry prairie were soon forgotten in the whirls of the dance. "At twelve o'clock," one of the merry-makers related, "our landlord called us to supper. The meal consisted of deer, elk and buffalo meat, corn bread baked on an iron griddle, fried cakes and pumpkin pie. After doing it ample justice we danced on till morning. . . . The wind did blow and the snow drifted and filled our tracks, and it was bitter cold the next day when we ate our breakfast and started for home. Our bill for the fun we had, was one dollar per couple."¹¹²

In 1864 some of the "young bloods" of Iowa City seemed "quite far gone with congestion of the brain" and a local editor hoped they would "wake up better and wiser men". In Appanoose County in 1847 a party of "boys" drank themselves into oblivion on Christmas Day. During the night they slept on buffalo robes and deer skins placed on the muddy tavern floor. The weather turned cold and the following morning each "reveler" was "snugly frozen to his earthen bed" and had to be "thawed out" before returning to his home.¹¹³

In the larger towns Iowans frequently enjoyed a performance at the local theater or opera house on Christmas Day. Professor Nickle, the "world renowned illusionist", gave a Christmas Day matinee of his "wonderful art" to Sioux Citians in 1872. A family of six could gain admission for only one dollar. A "large variety of valuable presents" were given those holding the lucky tickets. In 1874 a matinee performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin was presented on Christmas Day at the opera house in Winter-set. Apparently it was a fairly common practice to offer

¹¹² *Webster City Freeman-Tribune*, July 23, 1913.

¹¹³ *The State Press* (Iowa City), December 28, 1864; *History of Appanoose County, Iowa* (1878), pp. 361, 362.

special inducements to Iowans to leave the family hearth on Christmas Day.¹¹⁴ On December 31, 1891, the *Fort Dodge Messenger* declared: "At the Christmas matinee at the opera house George Brownell won the first prize of \$3 offered to the person handing in the longest list of words made out of the letters in the name "May Bretonne". The number of words was 520. Maud Patterson was second on the list with 506 words. Tom Farrell captured the children's prize with 300 and odd words."

As the population of Iowa grew and congregations became well established Christmas church services featured Sunday school programs — children singing Christmas songs, giving recitations, and portraying through pageantry the story of the nativity. At McGregor in 1863 the editor of the *North Iowa Times* made the rounds of the churches. He found the Baptist building filled with happy children and interested adults enjoying the Christmas music and plays. Three "elegant" Christmas trees loaded with presents for the scholars and teachers adorned the brick Congregational Church. The singing and recitations were "exceedingly well done" and the editor only regretted he lacked space to name the "Little orators and oratresses". Another fine tree loaded with presents was the center of admiration for "anxious little eyes" at the German church where singing was in order. At the altar were miniature replicas beautifully suggestive of Christ in the manger and the shepherds of old.¹¹⁵

The Cumberland Presbyterian Sabbath School at Nevada held a joyous Christmas Eve festival in 1863. The little folks attacked the sweetmeats and cake with gusto, but were taken home at an early hour. The *Corydon Monitor* of

¹¹⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, December 21, 1872; *Winterset Madisionian*, December 11, 1924.

¹¹⁵ *The Weekly North Iowa Times* (McGregor), December 23, 30, 1863.

December 19, 1868, announced that the young ladies of the Methodist Church were preparing a fair and supper for Christmas Eve, the proceeds of which were to purchase a Sabbath school library. In 1874 three Sabbath schools at Belle Plaine celebrated Christmas Eve with handsome yule trees and Anna Bell got a gold watch and chain off the Methodist tree.¹¹⁶

Individuals and communities varied in their mode of celebrating Christmas according to their national, regional, or religious heritage. The Scandinavians, the Dutch, and the Germans, introduced St. Nicholas or Santa Claus. "Kriss Kringle will be here on next Wednesday, very early in the morning", observed the editor of the *Sioux City Weekly Times* on December 21, 1872. The Germans also introduced the Christmas tree with its toys, trinkets, figures of angels, and numerous little light tapers.¹¹⁷

At Anamosa in 1872 the arrival of Santa Claus at the Congregational Church was kept a secret from young and old alike, the committee in charge stressing the rendering of "The Shepherds" as the main feature. After this play there was more singing, and then came the unexpected event of the evening, "the arrival of jolly old Saint Nicholas, and that, too, in a big sleigh drawn by a golden caparisoned deer, with lofty antlers and shining eyes, and circled with jingling sleigh-bells. Out clambered Santa Claus with his North Pole snowshoes and shaggy coat, and made fast his beautiful steed to a convenient post. The children, and the old folks as well, were completely taken by surprise, for this part of the programme had very happily been kept a profound secret by those who had the matter in hand, and so the surprise was as complete as it was delightful."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Story County (Nevada) Aegis*, December 30, 1863; *Belle Plaine Union*, January 1, December 24, 1874.

¹¹⁷ *Belle Plaine Union*, January 1, December 24, 1874, December 23, 1875.

¹¹⁸ *Anamosa Eureka*, December 26, 1872.

Such tactics did not always have the desired effect. At an Onslow church in 1873 the unexpected arrival of Santa Claus caused the little folks to become "somewhat frightened". Santa accordingly made a short stay and the youngsters were soon quieted when the presents were distributed to the many waiting and anxious ones who were made happy and went away rejoicing.¹¹⁹

Santa Claus had become so well entrenched in the hearts and minds of most Iowans by the close of the Civil War that mature folks firmly opposed any deviation from the pattern laid down by the Rev. Clement C. Moore. In 1873 a citizen of New Hartford, Iowa, expressed his opposition to any modernizing of Santa Claus, particularly when he appeared as an "aristocratic gentleman of red-tape proclivities who with white kids, and immaculate shirt bosom, smiles benignly on the ladies, and daintily passes the presents from the tree to the eager expectants. No, this modern Santa is not ours; ours is fat, and merry, and sooty. His shirt bosom won't bear inspection, neither are his pants *a la mode*. His medium circumference directly after dinner, exceeds his altitude at noon-day."¹²⁰

Long before the dawn of the twentieth century the Christmas tree had become a chief center of the yuletide festival. Beautifully festooned with shimmering tinsel and sparkling icicles, girdled with endless strings of popcorn, cranberries, and paper chains, bedecked with colorful many-hued globes, prisms, reflectors, and other decorations, surrounded by a multitude of presents for all good boys and girls, the Christmas tree, lighted by flickering candles, served as a magnet for all to come and gaze upon. Farmers often bundled their families in their sleds and drove to

¹¹⁹ *Anamosa Eureka*, January 15, 1874.

¹²⁰ *Cedar Falls Gazette*, December 26, 1873. Clement C. Moore was the author of "The Visit of St. Nicholas".

town to see a Christmas tree. What Iowan cannot recall the following scene described by an Oskaloosa editor who visited the Congregational and United Presbyterian tree at the City Hall?

Christmas trees covered all over with beautiful presents, and streaming with light from hundreds of wax candles, made the scene resplendent with beauty and intensely interesting.

As the Superintendent read off the names of the scholars as marked on the presents, they rose in their seats and signified their presence, when the presents were carried to them and their little hearts swelled with love and happiness in thus recognizing the affectionate care and kindness of parents and teachers. The Superintendents and Pastors of the churches were not forgotten.

Presents of all kinds from a paper of pop-corn to a cast-iron bootjack — were distributed, amidst the very height of enjoyment.¹²¹

Music also had a part in Christmas observance. The pioneers of the Black Hawk Purchase enjoyed singing such old favorites as *Joy to the World!*, *O Come, All Ye Faithful*, and *Silent Night, Holy Night*. Mendelssohn composed the music to *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* in 1840; *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* appeared in 1850, and *O Little Town of Bethlehem* appeared soon after the close of the Civil War. By 1896 all these songs and many more besides were played on the chimes of St. Paul's Episcopal Church at Des Moines. They were equally popular in other church musical programs.¹²²

Once the church services were over and the presents distributed from the stockings or the Yule tree, Christmas was devoted largely to family reunions. The spirit of the old-fashioned Christmas reunion has been caught by Currier and Ives. Thousands of Iowans who have grown up on the

¹²¹ *The Oskaloosa Herald*, December 27, 1866.

¹²² *The Iowa State Register* (Des Moines), December 26, 1896; *Uncle Toby's Christmas Book*, pp. 160-171.

farm can recall with pleasure how the entire family was packed in the big sled and carried off swiftly to grandpa and grandma. Sometimes these family reunions were very large, fully seventy young and old being present at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Calkins at Clare in Webster County in 1887.

In 1896 a resident of What Cheer recounted how fifty years previously she had been "sandwiched" in with the rest of the family and driven off so fast that she thought the "trees and fences were moving" and not the sleigh. "We were there at last and amidst kissing and handshaking are hurried in to the great hickory wood fire, wraps taken off and we children warming ourselves, with a huge ginger cake in each hand. Sleigh after sleigh unloaded. Soon all are there when in comes Auntie with a basket of nuts and down go the children on the hearth to crack and eat them." The highlight of the day occurred when the children were called to partake of a Christmas dinner that was never forgotten.¹²³

The Christmas at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Shaffer in 1890 was most enjoyable because of the element of surprise. They were intending to eat roast turkey with their son Harry, but before they were ready to depart from home, they were greatly surprised to see all their children arrive with baskets filled with good things. "The girls took possession of the kitchen. The parents were left to enjoy themselves in the parlor until dinner time. Promptly at one o'clock they were invited into the dining room, where the sons presented the father with a nice fur coat, and the daughters presented the mother with a beautiful hanging lamp, after which they sat down to a bountiful Christ-

¹²³ *The Fort Dodge Messenger*, December 29, 1887; letter from What Cheer dated December 24th and reprinted in the *Iowa State Register*, December 26, 1896.

mas dinner" including roast turkey, vegetables, cakes, pies, sauces, and other eatables. After dinner the little folks had a good time eating popcorn, candy, and peanuts.¹²⁴

But there was more to Christmas than eating and receiving gifts; the spirit of Christmas giving was taught early to the youth of Iowa. In 1872 the Congregational children in Anamosa loaded "sundry packages of clothing, chickens, apples, sacks of flour, &c." into "capacious sleds" and whirled them away to the homes of the needy. "This", a local editor declared, "afforded genuine enjoyment to all — the givers, if possible, more than the recipients."¹²⁵

At Fort Dodge in 1890 the Methodist Episcopal Sunday School received a practical lesson in the precept "It is more blessed to give than to receive". All members were requested to bring some offering, no matter how small, to be given to the poor. An apple, or even a potato would do, but everyone was expected to do something — and some of the older pupils and classes promised and did something substantial. The children entered into the plan with a thorough appreciation of the good it would do. A mammoth evergreen arch was erected instead of the usual Christmas tree and the church was handsomely decorated. The school as a whole received a substantial present in the shape of \$75 worth of books.¹²⁶

In 1896 a little girl wrote the Des Moines postmaster expressing hope that the letter carriers would not pass her by while remembering others liberally. In response to this plea Postmaster Hunter ordered his carriers to seek out the needy. He originally planned to give toys but so many requests came in for shoes, clothing, hats, and underclothing, as well as groceries, coal, and other staples that plans

¹²⁴ *The Fort Dodge Messenger*, January 1, 1891.

¹²⁵ *Anamosa Eureka*, December 26, 1872.

¹²⁶ *The Fort Dodge Messenger*, December 25, 1890.

were promptly changed. Des Moines responded heartily by distributing 470 pounds of candy, 100 pounds of nuts, \$40 worth of groceries, 1 dozen turkeys, 10 tons of coal, 200 pairs of shoes, a dozen pairs of boots, 25 boys suits, 12 boys overcoats, 10 dozen boys caps, 12 girls cloaks, 10 dozen girls hoods, 500 yards of woolen dress goods, \$20 worth of children's books and toys, and sundry suspenders, neckties and handkerchiefs. As a general thing, Postmaster Hunter pointed out, the gifts had not come from the very wealthy, but from the men and women of medium means — "men and women whose hearts have not yet outgrown the longings and the sufferings of the poor. But that is always the way in this world." The editor was inclined to agree that Christmas offered men the best chance to reveal their better natures. "On this day we do not strive to get into heaven; we strive rather to make this day and this earth a heaven. . . . this happiest and holiest morning in all the year."¹²⁷

Most present-day Iowans associate Christmas as a time for busy shoppers to wrack their brains for appropriate gifts. This is not a new problem. In 1851 Davenporters were advised that gift books appearing under such titles as *Snow Flake*, *Friendship's Offering*, *Gift of Friendship*, *Amaranth*, *Hyacinth*, and *Remembrancer*, could be purchased. The works of famous poets could be bought in fancy bindings. Then there were writing desks, work boxes, portfolios, card cases, porte moneys, and dressing cases. Children would be delighted with such India rubber toys as balls, rattles, animals, and dolls heads. Games included backgammon boards, dominoes, dissecting pictures (jig saw puzzles), and the celebrated game of Tivola. Gold pens, silver pencils, paper mache folios, paint boxes, and glass paper weights were suggested. Egg boilers could be bought at especially low prices.

¹²⁷ *Iowa State Register*, December 24, 25, 26, 1896.

Guitars and melodeons were recommended for the ladies while flutes, fifes, accordions, and violins were suggested for men with musical tastes. Smith's Variety Store advertised gold breast pins and finger rings, butter knives and silver thimbles, bouquet holders and glass dishes, perfume boxes and pocket books. The stock of fancy purses, fans, landscapes, soaps, and dress goods was excellent while hair brushes, vest chains, medallions, gum toys, and a great variety of ribbons, handkerchiefs, muffs, and boas were also available.¹²⁸ Advertisers were always given strong support by the press. In 1863 the *Anamosa Eureka* advised folks who wished to buy presents to visit Dr. Skinner's Drug Store, Wilcox's, Alderman & Williams', Webb's, Hollenbeck's, and Wurzbacher's. In 1874 this same paper advertised "tons of tempting toys to tickle troops of tender hearted toy-smashers at L. O. Gale's."¹²⁹

A Council Bluffs editor urged his readers in 1864 to purchase Christmas presents at the Post-office Book Store. "Hopper has a large variety of presents," the editor declared, "but we call particular attention to his superb stock of Albums, which are unsurpassed for beauty and style in any city, and are just such presents as any young gent ought to present to his 'Lady fair'."¹³⁰

The Iowa Falls *Sentinel* urged its readers in 1873 to patronize local merchants and not be taken in by the "Shoddy" men who were attempting to reap a harvest in the Christmas trade. "At this season of the year peddlers infest our towns, offering their goods at prices that seem far below the regular prices of our merchants. When you take into account the swindles that have been perpetrated by these tramps, the robberies, the shams and trickery that

¹²⁸ *Davenport Gazette*, December 18, 1851.

¹²⁹ *Anamosa Eureka*, December 11, 1863, December 10, 1874.

¹³⁰ *Council Bluffs Bugle*, December 15, 1864.

people have suffered through them, it is a simple matter of economy and judgment to turn them away and patronize your home merchants. We do not believe it right to pay cash to tramping peddlers and let your merchants wait on you for goods he has sold you on credit. Be just to them, patronize your home traders and you will be better off and run no risk of being taken in and done for some of these days."¹³¹

Window displays came to be features of the Christmas trade. In 1890 the *Clinton Age* reported that Swirles Brothers had two fine show windows that attracted crowds all Saturday afternoon. The west window had Santa Claus at work at the fireplace. The east window contained a snow scene down which boys and girls coasted on sleds and toboggans in rapid and continuous succession. Occasionally a giant spider or a small animal would take a slide in front of the kodaks. Another Clinton merchant, C. E. Armstrong, had a circle railroad on which a little alcohol steam engine pulled a train of cars around, "puffing and snorting true to life, occasionally jumping the track, also true to life". Morey created a sensation in advertising by staging a fine display of fireworks that attracted immense throngs on Saturday night. The following Monday he gave away free popcorn to all the children who came to see his toys. Howes Bros. had a revolving Christmas tree and were searching diligently for a Santa Claus. "Will some patriarch step to the front at 50 cents a day?"

Delighted with the enthusiasm and spirit of merchants and people alike a Clinton editor wrote:

It is said that in some parts of Asia, where Christmas was once observed, the custom is dying out. No reason is assigned. Can it be because the priests and missionaries are striving to make it a holy day instead of a holiday?

¹³¹ Quoted in the *Anamosa Eureka*, January 1, 1874.

On this continent Christmas is observed more generally than any other holiday of the year. While some of the churches have religious exercises on this day, yet there is little or no influence in the pulpit to have the day considered purely for religious observance. . . .

There ought to be one holiday a month. A day when all business would be suspended, and the whole country take an outing.¹³²

That this festive spirit was abroad throughout Iowa could be easily demonstrated. There were many similarities in the Clinton and Fort Dodge holiday seasons of 1890. Both had special railroad rates, shoppers to Fort Dodge getting round-trip fares for only half the regular price on the Minneapolis and St. Louis, and the church societies served hot meals to the busy throngs that jammed the streets. Farmers shopping in Fort Dodge were invited to enjoy the fine New England dinner at Fessler's Opera House given by the Congregational ladies. A charge of 25 cents a plate was made for a repast including roast turkey, chicken pie, boiled ham, baked beans, brown bread, pumpkin pie, mince pie, apple pie, coffee, etc. The dinner was hailed a "big success" when the receipts were announced as \$41. Suppers were also served, and "real" oysters could be ordered all evening. The homemade candy and holiday goods offered for sale at "before the-McKinley-bill prices" kept throngs of shoppers milling around the Opera House all evening. A stage program consisting of vocal and piano solos, a recitation by Miss Dolliver, and plantation melodies by a popular colored quartet afforded entertainment to many tired shoppers.¹³³

Some idea of the place of the farmer in this Christmas bustle may be gathered from a dispatch from the *Dubuque Times* dated December 24th, 1896. "There was a splendid trade with the retail merchants every day thus far, but

¹³² *Clinton Daily Age*, December 12, 19, 26, 1890.

¹³³ *The Fort Dodge Messenger*, December 4, 11, 1890.

yesterday broke the record for a steady, heavy trade all day. The city buyers were out in full force, and the number was greatly increased by hundreds of farmers, who came in swarms from all parts of the country. Over 150 teams crossed the high bridge from Wisconsin and Illinois, all loaded with dressed hogs, poultry or some other products of the farm, which they sold. The other roads leading into the city were also lined with teams, and the farmers came in to buy goods, as they filled the stores and were seen going out with their wagons loaded with goods. A reporter for the Times made a tour of the big dry goods stores during the afternoon and found it almost impossible to gain admission, so great was the jam. The cash baskets kept up a hum as they were sent to and fro with bundles, and wagon loads of bundles were laid aside for later delivery. The same condition existed in the toy and notion stores, and with such another day today Dubuque merchants will have no reason to complain about a poor Christmas trade."¹³⁴

The custom of sending Christmas cards to one's friends originated in England in 1846, the very year Iowa was admitted into the Union. The custom had become extremely popular by the 1860's and spread to the United States in the late seventies when Marcus Ward & Company of London supplied the trade. In the spring of 1880 a Boston firm offered prizes for the best Christmas card designs. Nearly six hundred were submitted. In the years that followed Christmas cards became increasingly popular in the United States. In 1944 over a half million letters and cards, mostly Christmas greetings, were run through the Iowa City post office cancelling machine in the two weeks preceding Christmas.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Quoted in the *Iowa State Register*, December 25, 1896.

¹³⁵ Douglas's *The American Book of Days*, p. 632. The writer compiled sta-

As early as 1890 the *Fort Dodge Messenger* of December 25th noted that the "holiday boom" had struck the United States mails and prophesied that for the next week the "mail clerks will be the hardest worked men in the county". The Christmas rush in Iowa post offices rose to even higher levels when Congress inaugurated the parcel post service on January 1, 1913, chiefly because of its benefits to the rural sections. What Iowan has not stood in line at Christmas time to mail his Christmas presents? To avoid this congestion the Post Office Department endeavored with marked success to school the public in mailing Christmas packages early. In 1944 Iowans were meeting a mid-October deadline to ship presents overseas.¹³⁶

Newspaper editors frequently commented on the importance of Christmas — not only as a season of rest from the ordinary cares of the world and commercial activity, but also because of its social and religious significance. As early as 1838 a Dubuque editor emphasized the significance of the "sacred and hallowed" birth of Christ. Christmas, this editor declared, brought back to memory the joyous days of youth. "It carries us to our first recollection of its observance as a holiday: — it is the magic that re-enacts the scenes of earlier days — that unlocks the sepulchre, and calls forth the dead to assume their part in that play of life. But it brings hilarity of feeling; sectarian prejudice is forgotten, the distinction of wealth silenced — and all join in the wish of — 'A merry Christmas'." ¹³⁷

tistics from the Iowa City post office records. The personalized Christmas card, so popular today, was adopted by at least one Clintonian group in 1890 and was described in the *Clinton Weekly Age* for January 2, 1891.

¹³⁶ *Dictionary of American History*, Vol. IV, p. 214. Iowa newspapers and radios warmly cooperated with the Government in the "Mail Your Christmas Presents Early" campaign of 1944.

¹³⁷ *Iowa News* (Dubuque), December 22, 1838.

After tracing briefly the history of the "festal day" through Roman and medieval times, a Keokuk editor urged readers to observe Christmas as best might please them — whether as forms of worship, in prayer and mass and song, or as a more social observance.

We Americans, have, as a nation, entirely too few holidays. We are too much a money-getting people, and we allow our passion for speedy riches to absorb us so much that a day of social pleasure seems to us to be a day of loss. We should in this respect imitate our English cousins. They remember that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," and so all over England on Christmas Day, in hall and in cottage, in palace and hovel, in town and in country, rings out the sound of merriment and good cheer. . . .

Let Americans take one day, at least, of the three hundred and sixty-five, from the service of the almighty dollar, and devote it to the family, and our word for it, they will feel none the worse for the seeming sacrifice. Let them make home bright and pleasant, fill the stockings of the little ones heaping full of candies and nuts, and remember the older members with gifts. The presents need not be costly, but whatever they are, let them be given with gracious word and kind look, and that one day's happiness will compensate for many gloomy ones in the after year.

We are a fast people and we take our pleasures as we do our business in the extreme. Whenever we attempt to be happy, or jolly, or idle, we are too apt from the nature of our minds to get drunk. This is confounding abasement for pleasure, silliness for fun, and folly for happiness. Let us try to remedy this and remember that sober pleasures have no after repentances, and while in the home circle the egg flip may do no harm, yet the promiscuous drinking of men "down town" may cause Christmas to be remembered with a curse instead of a blessing.¹³⁸

The editor of the *Fort Dodge Messenger* rarely missed commenting on the Christmas season. In 1887 he reprinted an editorial from *Harper's Weekly* to support his own theories of the merry Yuletide. "Among all our holidays

¹³⁸ *The Weekly Gate City* (Keokuk), January 1, 1873.

Christmas is the happiest. Other days, like the Fourth of July and Decoration Day, have a patriotic association which is inspiring, and New Year's Day has an admonitory significance which is pathetic. But the tradition of Christmas is more universal and ideal than that of the other holidays, because it is the feast of fraternity, of human sympathy, and helpfulness. Not only is its sentiment glory to God, but its distinctive gospel is peace on earth and good will to man. It is the one day in the year on which selfishness is the most odious sin. Its peculiar observance is obvious, palpable, active thought of others. We all live under the general law of charity and of doing good. But this is the day on which we must make sure that our light shines so that men shall see our good works."¹³⁹

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA CITY IOWA

¹³⁹ *The Fort Dodge Messenger*, December 22, 1887.