

## The Web of Life

During 1953 Iowans, like other normal Americans, manifested a deep interest in a variety of things — the international scene, state and national politics, the price of farm products, the high cost of living, the huge public debt, the massacre on our highways, and juvenile delinquency — to mention a few. They were also interested in what was happening to their friends and neighbors round about them.

Culturally, Iowa attracted national attention in literature when one of her sons, Richard Bissell of Dubuque, wrote a best-seller with the intriguing title, *7½ Cents*. A convict serving a life sentence in the state penitentiary was the author of an autobiography, *In For Life*, which drew praise from New York reviewers. Sioux City, Fort Dodge, Cedar Rapids, and other Iowa cities opened television stations that brought entertainment and education to thousands of Iowa homes previously beyond the range of the magic electronic waves. The Des Moines Art Center acquired the Goya portrait of Don Manuel Garcia de la Prada at a cost of \$130,000.

Personalities made much of the news in Iowa during 1953. Ernest Lindquist, a paroled convict

whose case attracted national publicity, received a full pardon and thus escaped deportation to his native Sweden as a convicted alien. In July, Libuse Cloud, wife of a Sioux City resident, escaped from her native Czechoslovakia and rejoined her husband after a Communist-enforced four-year separation. Mrs. Donald K. Brown of Adel learned in December that her family in Czechoslovakia had made a similar break from behind the iron curtain, following her own example set in 1949. Both Mrs. Cloud and Mrs. Brown had married when their Iowa husbands were stationed overseas.

One Iowan who remained behind the Communist wall was the famous Swea City jet-ace — Captain Harold E. Fischer, Jr. Captain Fischer, reported missing in action shortly before the Korean truce began, was not returned with other American prisoners. The Chinese Reds claimed that he had been captured north of the Yalu River and held his case was not included in the armistice terms.

Meanwhile, the lives of scores of Iowans had been brightened by the return of prisoners. The first Iowan released was Corporal Richard O. Morrison of Burlington, and thereafter they came in a steady stream until mid-August. Their Communist captors reported that at least nineteen Iowans had died in confinement.

Transportation provided its share of significant

events in 1953. The new \$325,000 towboat, *Sioux City*, was put in service on the Missouri. Another span across the same river was opened near Crescent, the Mormon Pioneer Memorial Bridge, which crosses to the outskirts of Omaha. An ammunition truck collided with another semi-trailer vehicle near Malvern causing an explosion in its cargo of 105-millimeter shells that sent up blasts for more than two hours. The 1953 highway fatality toll stood at 618 lives, 56 more than in 1952. A record of seventeen lives were lost on the weekend of July 10-12. Only a few days earlier the governor had accepted a plaque from the National Safety Council which honored Iowa as the safest Midwest state.

Inevitably, 1953 produced news oddities. A Davenport family watched its television set, unaware that the upper floor of their house was ablaze until neighbors called the fire department. In Washington County a lady sued a circus after being clawed by a lion in the menagerie. Mrs. Elizabeth Hope of Fairfield learned that her brother, who was considered a man of little means, had left her an estate of \$250,000. Farmer Art Debban of Floyd paid \$100 to the city fire department even though the fire he thought he saw in his barn turned out to be the flickering of fireflies.

After Iowa Retail Grocers complained to him about the use of trading stamp plans, Attorney General Leo Hoegh ruled that the stamps were in

violation of a 1909 "gift enterprise" law. The trading stamp firms fought back, and the courts ruled in their favor. Senator Guy Gillette claimed high coffee was "rigged" by an international market but admitted that there were so many habitual coffee-drinkers in America that one really effective method of lowering prices — the boycott — was impossible.

Native-born and visiting celebrities left their imprint on the 1953 chronicle. Queen Frederika of Greece had to console a Cedar Rapids youngster when the excitement at her reception there proved too much for him. Admiral Arthur W. Radford, a native of Grinnell, was named chairman of the joint chiefs of staff by President Eisenhower. Lieutenant Colonel Irene O. Galloway, born and reared in Carroll County, became director of the Women's Army Corps — making her the top commander of the WAC. Major William W. Thomas of Marion was chosen by President Eisenhower as his personal pilot for the Presidential airplane, the "Columbine." Dr. George Gallup, the public opinion expert, came back to Jefferson for a homecoming celebration.

Men who wrote the news also made it in 1953. Wallace E. Sherlock, retired from the *Fairfield Daily Ledger* after 56 years as an editor. A. L. Frisbie of the *Grinnell Herald-Register*, Lee P. Loomis of the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, John Vanderwicken of the *Grundy Center Register*,

and Don J. Reid of the Iowa Press Association received "Master Editor-Publisher" awards for their services to Iowa journalism. The oldest weekly newspaper in Iowa, the *Tipton Advertiser*, completed a century of service on November 11.

Coinciding with the medical report from New York that smoking could cause lung cancer was the revelation that Iowans bought more than 100,000,000 packs of cigarettes in 1953. Tax officials were concerned over whether Iowa smokers were bringing cigarettes into Iowa from states with less or no tax on them. A road block was set up south of Keokuk early in June, dozens of incoming cars were halted, and officers searched the automobiles for untaxed cigarettes. Seven arrests resulted from this action, bringing fines and reprimands to residents of Davenport, Fort Madison, Keokuk, and Burlington.

Iowa was blessed with relief from the tragic polio epidemic which had struck hard in the Sioux City area in 1952. Late in September, when the danger period had passed, only 421 cases had been reported compared with 2,237 at the same time in 1952. Heart disease, cancer, and cerebral hemorrhage remained the chief killers in Iowa, according to the state division of vital statistics.

Dr. Frank R. Peterson, of Cedar Rapids, former head of surgery at the University of Iowa, told his colleagues that public education was reducing the danger of cancer. An influenza epidemic struck

Iowa during the winter months. The epidemic was attributed to a virus, but the number of victims in Iowa did not compare with those in nearby Illinois and in the Southwest.

Doctor shortages still plagued some Iowa communities. The only doctor living in Adel moved away, so citizens took matters into their own hands and renovated an office, painted and modernized it, and offered it rent-free to any doctor who would come to their community. Conscious of their good fortune, residents of Deep River honored Dr. L. Frank Cain and his wife, Dr. Mattie M. Cain, at a community banquet in recognition of their fifty years of practice.

In their poll of Iowa's top news stories for 1953, Associated Press editors chose three crime items. These concerned an eighteen-year-old Marine from Valley Stream, New York, who was arrested in Dubuque after leaving a trail of five murders between New York and Illinois; a double slaying near Iowa City that was not completely solved; and the acquittal of a New Mexico rancher charged with murdering an Iowa farmer.

Attorney General Hoegh ordered a strict enforcement of the liquor laws that led to indictments in several communities for beer-buying teen-agers. A fourteen-year-old Des Moines youngster showed officers how he had broken into a bank without setting off the burglar alarm system, although he failed to open the bank safe "like

they did in the movies." Juvenile thieves also stole 27 pounds of lemon drops and 400 candy suckers from a Davenport candy warehouse.

Some concern was expressed during 1953 regarding a drop of 5 per cent in the state's population. Official sources said about 500 persons moved out of Iowa each week, many to California. "It is hard to swallow," commented the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, "but the census bureau's facts show that native Iowans living in California number approximately one-tenth of the number of persons [now] living in Iowa." The *Gazette* suggested a serious study of the problem, "Why we aren't keeping our Iowans in Iowa?" An Iowan in California had one answer. At the annual Iowa picnic held in southern California, Dean L. Dale Coffman of the UCLA law school told an estimated 75,000 former Iowans that they had moved to California because of their "essential restlessness of spirit."

Some of this restless energy was expended in outdoor sports. The first legal deer hunting season in 75 years brought out thousands in pursuit of the estimated 13,000 animals in forty-five counties. Herb Klontz, Jr. of Cedar Rapids won the Iowa Amateur golf title, and Mrs. Fred Nydle of Ottumwa became Women's Golf Champion.

In collegiate sports the 14-14 tie in the Notre Dame-Iowa football game at South Bend was notable. The previously unbeaten Irish scored

both touchdowns after their players allegedly feigned injuries to stop the clock and permit time for the scoring plays. Despite heated national debate Iowa Athletic Director Paul Brechler said "there has been no Iowa complaint," and Coach Forest Evashevski was offered a new ten-year contract at Iowa a few weeks later. In a nationwide poll, sports writers voted the incident the top sports oddity of 1953.

The first case under the recently enacted Iowa sports bribery law came up late in December when a Des Moines businessman was accused of attempting to "fix" an Iowa State-Drake basketball game.

The State Conservation Commission reported that the pheasant's deadliest enemy was no longer the hunter's shotgun, but rather the modern power mowers which were destroying hens nesting in hayfields. The Iowa prairie chicken, or pinnated grouse, had become almost extinct even though the last legal hunting season was held in 1917. State trappers caught over a half million fur-bearing animals during the previous year, with muskrats furnishing most of the pelts.

Civil defense, a problem of magnitude only lately created by the development of atomic and hydrogen bombs, was claiming the hours and dollars of Iowans in 1953. Kirkwood was the first Des Moines school to perfect its civil defense drills with various methods used for "flash at-



tacks," "atomic bomb attacks," and "attacks with (and without) warning."

"Operation Snowdrift" was conducted by the Air Defense Command in January to test efficiency of Iowa's ground observation posts. A scheduled 24-hour vigil was called off after eleven hours, and Captain John Bedar of the Air Defense Filter Center in Des Moines said the exercise was "fairly successful."

Fort Des Moines, the old army post near the capital, was tossed back into the Federal lap after the state decided it was not worth owning. The 3.5 mile Tama & Toledo Railroad, shortest in the state, was abandoned after more than fifty years of service. And some Tama Indians joined in a suit against the Federal government, claiming that land taken from them over a century ago was paid for in a niggardly fashion.

The vanishing coal mining industry gave fresh evidence of the hardships it imposes on men in 1953. Five miners died because of an explosion in a mine near Lovilia. Two of the victims had been trapped in the mine as shot firers, while three other miners died when they entered the shaft to investigate the blast and were overcome by deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Gases in an abandoned mine near Centerville also took the lives of three boys playing in the shaft.

Death took its annual toll of men and women who had contributed richly to the commonwealth.

The deceased included Dr. Harlan Updegraff, former president of Cornell College; Phil Hoffman, Oskaloosa editor and publisher; Bertha M. H. Shambaugh, authority on the Amana colonies; Dr. Nathaniel G. Alcock, widely-known urologist at the State University medical college; Wallace M. Short, former mayor of Sioux City and a founder of the Iowa Farmer-Labor party; Dr. Frank Cole, former secretary and vice-president of Cornell College; George A. Wilson, former governor and United States Senator; John B. Brown, recognized Aberdeen-Angus authority; Eugene A. Gilmore, president-emeritus of the State University; and Seth W. Richardson, former assistant United States attorney general and chief counsel for the Pearl Harbor investigating committee. Former state legislators who died in 1953 included Nelson J. Lee, Earl W. Vincent, Harry M. Greene, John S. Heffner, Stephen R. Emerson, Joseph H. Anderson, and Edward McMurray Smith.

As Iowans worked out their destiny in 1953 there was no set trend or pattern in their lives. Like other Americans, they looked forward to a better life for themselves and their children. If that search for better living entailed some anxiety and fear regarding wars and nuclear weapons, Iowans knew also that 1953 had been dotted with both tragedies and triumphs. Fortunately, the year would be remembered mostly for its triumphs.

ROBERT RUTLAND