Government Bounties

From an early date the various States and Territories offered bounties for wolf scalps as well as for the skins of other destructive wild animals. These bounties varied greatly, apparently depending upon the number of wolves that infested an area and the ability of the community to pay. When Estwick Evans made his "Pedestrious Tour" in western New York during the winter and spring of 1818, he found wolves so destructive that some counties offered bounties as high as ninety dollars for each wolf destroyed.

As the frontier line moved westward the pioneers carried with them their customs and traditions. Thus we find that county officials — from commissioners and supervisors to judges and treasurers — were faced with the problem of wolf bounties. Considerable latitude was allowed the county officers in the payment of bounties. Since modern officials have been known to refuse to pay a bounty, it is not surprising that the poorer pioneer communities often found themselves without the funds necessary to pay the bounty on wolf scalps.

During Territorial days the county commissioners doled out wolf bounties sparingly from

their all too slender purses. On April 1, 1841, the Johnson County commissioners allowed John S. Holler four dollars for the four wolf scalps he had taken. Herman W. Shaft presented two wolf scalps and John Aslein brought in three more. In the ensuing months Nathaniel McClure, George Fry, George Wein, and Joseph Stover all received wolf bounties. During the following January, eight men put in claims for twenty-nine wolf scalps: Jacob Stover had taken nine wolves while Pleasant Harris had killed six.

The drain on the resources of some of these sparsely settled counties was extremely heavy. Despite the fact that wolf scalps brought only fifty cents in Mahaska County, records of ten or more dollars in bounty payments are found at each meeting of the commissioners. The Mahaska County treasury was so depleted that on July 7, 1845, the county commissioners stopped paying wolf bounties.

Bounties continued to be paid by counties after Iowa achieved Statehood. When the Jefferson County commissioners met in January of 1847, they were confronted with a large number of wolf hunters. The first day was devoted almost entirely to the examination of wolf scalps and the subsequent payment of premiums to those who had killed wolves. Fully two pages of the old journal were devoted to orders, of which the following are typical:

"1170. *Ordered,* That the Treasurer pay H. C. Ross $1 for one prairie-wolf sculp, as per certificate on file.

"1174. *Ordered,* That the Treasurer pay W. L. Hamilton, assignee of Joseph Scott, $3 for three prairie-wolf sculps, as per certificate on file."

Despite the fact that the winter of 1846-1847 was not considered a very good "wolf-sculping" season, the commissioners ordered $45 paid in bounties.

During the first decade of statehood, losses to sheep growers were so serious that action was demanded of the General Assembly. On December 12, 1856, Josiah B. Grinnell introduced a bill to "protect the wool growers from the destruction of wolves." The measure was read a first and second time and then referred to the Committee on Agriculture.

When the bill was returned to the Senate five days later, Jarius E. Neal of Marion County offered the following amendment:

> That any wolf or other voracious beast which shall feloniously, maliciously and unlawfully, attack with intent to kill, or do great bodily injury to any sheep, ass, or other domestic animal shall on being duly convicted thereof, be declared an enemy to our Republican institutions, and an outlaw, and it shall be lawful for the person aggrieved by such attack, to pursue and kill such beast wherever it shall be found, and if such beast unlawfully resist, the injured party may notify the Governor, who shall thereupon call out the militia of the State to resist said vora-

cious beast, and if the militia of the State should be overcome in such battle, then the Governor is authorized to make a requisition upon the President of the United States, for troops.

This amendment was speedily rejected by the Senate. Although the bill met strong opposition in the upper house, it was finally passed. It died in the lower house, however, when a motion to lay the measure on the table was carried and the bill was not taken up during the remainder of the session. The proposed bill of 1856 declared:

> Every person or agent for another, making application for a bounty, shall be required to appear before a Justice of the Peace in the township where such wolf or wolf's whelp was caught and killed, and produce the scalp of said wolf or wolf's whelp, including the ears of said animal or animals, and state, on oath, the time when, and place where, said wolf or wolf's whelp was caught and killed whereupon, the Justice of the Peace, being satisfied with the claimant's legal right to a bounty, shall disfigure the scalp or scalps so produced, by cutting off the ears of said scalp or scalps, and give such claimant a certificate, directed to the county Judge, for the amount due, and the county Judge shall give an order upon the county Treasurer for said amount, as provided for in section one of this act, which amount shall be paid to said claimant out of the funds of the county treasury.

Meanwhile, the ravages of coyotes and timber wolves continued unabated. Prior to 1858 the "multiplicity of Wolves" in Louisa County effectually prevented the importation of sheep. After that date the obstacle was virtually removed, but

the western counties still continued to suffer heavy losses in livestock. Accordingly, on February 2, 1858, Joseph Grimes of Delaware County introduced a bill in the House of Representatives of the Seventh General Assembly for "an act allowing a Bounty upon the scalps of certain Animals." Thomas Drummond of Benton County promptly offered an amendment that the act should not be construed "to apply to any President or Director of any Nebraska Bank found temporarily within the State." After this facetious thrust had been beaten down the bill was referred to the Committee on Agriculture. On February 24th it was read a third time and passed by a vote of 51 to 12. A few amendments by the Senate were concurred in and the measure was approved by Governor Ralph P. Lowe on March 15, 1858.

The first state law requiring the payment of bounties on wolves provided that the county judge was to allow $1.50 on the scalp of each prairie wolf, lynx, or wild cat, and $3.00 for the "large species of Wolves known as the Timber Wolf." Any person claiming a bounty was to produce the scalp before the county judge or justice of the peace of the county wherein such "wolf, Lynx, or Wild-cat" was killed within ten days after it had been taken. The officers were to "so deface the scalp" that it could not be used a second time. Usually this was done by removing the ears and allowing the claimant to keep the skin. No per-

son was to receive his bounty payment from the county treasurer until he had "sworn or affirmed" that he was legally entitled to the bounty. The following quaint legal formula from Mills County illustrates the working of the law:

This day personally appeared Adam Campbell and made oath before Zachariah Buckingham, a justice of the peace for Lyons township, in Mills county, State of Iowa, and produced the scelp of a wild cat, and also the scelp of a woolf that he cild, the wild cat and woolf in the bounds of Mills county, and in the limitation of ten days he is entitled to one dollar and fifty cents for each scelp out of the county treserry.

Given under my hand this the twenty-eighth day of November, 1859. Zachariah Buckingham, *Justice of the peace.*

The effect of this law was soon felt in many of the western counties. Farmers in Wayne County sent in a glowing report of their sheep herding activities in 1863. "In former years," the report declares, "sheep could not be raised here on account of the great number of wolves, which would destroy them nearly as fast as they could be brought; but now they have been killed or driven away, so that very few remain, and as the wolves have decreased, the sheep have increased."

Although clearly effective the bounty provided by the act of 1858 was apparently considered too high, for in 1860 the Eighth General Assembly fixed a flat rate of one dollar on the scalps of the wolf, the lynx, the swift, and the wild cat. Many

hunters and trappers believed this bounty of 1860 was entirely too low. In 1863 a committee consisting of D. B. Herriman, H. B. Hoyt, and E. R. Miller presented a resolution to the board of supervisors of Fayette County asking that an "extra bounty" of one dollar be allowed for each wolf scalp if it could be done legally.

The committee believed such action would be of "vital interest" to the State as well as to Fayette County, which was "infested" with these "most hateful" representatives of the canine race. "At the hour of midnight, when the senses of the shepherd are locked in deep sleep," the committee pointed out, "the wolf rushes from the bog and glen upon those neighboring sheepfolds, committing dreadful havoc upon those meek and lowly animals, as well as upon the junior members of the swinish multitude." The committee fortified its petition by the following cogent argument:

> The wolf, the enemy of sheep,
> Prowls about when we're asleep,
> And, despite of faithful dogs,
> They kill our sheep and junior hogs;
> Which robs us of our wool and bacon
> By one of the imps of old Satan.
> Hence I pray this Board, in session,
> To pass an order to meet the question,
> And by a unanimous vote,
> Make his scalp a county note.

Despite this poetical outburst, and despite the committee's sworn promise to drag the last wolf

from his hiding place, the resolution was lost when put to a vote by the commissioners.

The General Assembly of the State of Iowa continued to legislate on bounties after the Civil War. When Dr. J. A. Allen visited Iowa in 1867 he found the coyote "quite numerous" although in some sections it had been nearly extirpated. The laws of Iowa from 1873 to 1892 continued to provide a one dollar bounty for "each scalp of a wolf, lynx, swift, or wild-cat."

The tendency of wolves and coyotes to increase or decrease in numbers according to the amount of bounty paid appears natural. Other facts, of course, have played a part in the story. According to Frank C. Pellett: "From that time [1867] on until 1890, coyotes steadily decreased in numbers, until, apparently, they were all but exterminated. The survivors were extremely cunning, and an adult was seldom presented for bounty. During the last few years, a marked change is taking place. The country is now thickly settled and there seems little shelter for such large animals as Wolves, yet the coyotes are increasing in numbers."

A contributing factor in the decrease in numbers of wolves and coyotes during the waning years of the nineteenth century was the five dollar bounty given in 1892 for the skin of an adult wolf and two dollars for that of a wolf cub. This five dollar bounty came about largely

through the efforts of the State Sheep-Breeders and Wool-Growers Association which had gone on record demanding a "liberal State bounty for wolf scalps, with a view to the speedy extermination of wolves in Iowa."

The attitude of the organization was perhaps most ably expressed by A. J. Blakely of Grinnell, a prominent breeder of Merinos. In the words of Mr. Blakely:

> The wolf, not merely figuratively, is at the door of many an Iowa farmer, but the real wolves, large wolves, prowl over the Iowa farms in increasing numbers, seeking what they may devour. No census like that of their cousins, the dogs, has ever been made. Like the flea, when you put your hand on them they are not there. But their name is legion. Much of the best sheep lands of the State, the bluffy, bushy portions along the streams and adjacent to timber belts, can not be pastured with sheep. . . . Sheep can't live there now on account of the wolves. Pigs can't be raised there on account of the wolves, and chickens and turkeys must every night roost very high, as though Thanksgiving day were to follow. Really it is a stain, a foul stigma, on the civilization and the enterprise of the people of Iowa that these wolves remain and are frequently seen crossing the best cultivated farms, and even near the best towns in our State.
>
> What is the remedy, do you ask? Wipe out all trifling and unequal bounties and induce the legislature to provide a State bounty of $20 for the scalps of the old wolves and $5 for the young ones. The boys will then arm themselves with the best rifles of long range, will watch and hunt for the game, and speedily exterminate the lupine race.

Small wonder that with such intense arguments and activity, the wolf bounty should be raised from one dollar to five dollars. This act of 1892 was introduced by Senator B. R. Vale of Van Buren County. It also allowed a one dollar bounty on the lynx and the wild cat. The law further provided that any person "who shall demand a bounty on any of the above mentioned animals killed or taken in another state or county, or on a domesticated animal, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined not more than one hundred nor less than fifty dollars."

Some amazing and unlooked for developments resulted from the increase in the wolf bounty. Witness the charges of *The Iowa Homestead* — a farm journal printed in Des Moines which employed the trenchant editorial pen of "Uncle Henry" Wallace.

There are a lot of farmers scattered up and down the prairie streams who are engaged in wolf farming. There is less cash outlay and more clear income in wolf farming than any other kind of farming we are acquainted with. The ranchman feeds his stock on the Government lands free of charge, the wolf farmer allows the wolf free range among his neighbor's sheep, chickens and pigs. He harvests his crop each spring in the shape of a litter of cubs whose scalps he takes with the greatest regularity to the county seat and draws the bounty. If the adjoining county pays more bounty than the one he is in, it is no difficult matter to take them across the county line and kill them

so as to make them citizens of that county, duly taken as provided by law. Under these conditions wolves are increasing in Iowa, and we do not doubt, in other prairie States where similar inducements are held out to wolf farming.

With a five-dollar bounty on its scalp the wolf should have been virtually exterminated in Iowa by the turn of the century. Unfortunately this was not the case. Maybe wolf farming *was* a contributing factor! At any rate an increasing number of coyotes were observed in western Iowa. The lean, gaunt timber wolf seemed on the increase in eastern Iowa, too. Their ravages became so great in 1913 the bounty was raised to the unprecedented figure of $20 on mature wolves and $4 on the wolf cubs. And still their depredations continued.

During the spring of 1914 packs of timber wolves were attacking sheep in Lee and Henry counties. "The wool marauders don't run in large bands, seldom more than four or five to the pack, yet hardly a day passes but what they take their toll of the flocks," the *Keokuk Gate City* declared. Ed Lee, a wool-grower who pastured sheep in both Lee and Henry counties, was one of the heaviest sufferers. "We've got to do something about it," Lee urged. "The sheep business has held up wonderfully in the last two years, but if the wolves keep on getting into our flocks like they have lately, why, I don't see how we can

stand up under the loss. The trouble is, the wolves have been breeding thicker and thicker every year. The sheep growers kill one once in a while, but it don't seem to have much effect. The dogs keep the wolves on the run, yet they very seldom run them down, the result is that the packs are driven away from the vicinity of one flock to that of another flock. Then the killing begins all over again."

It was one thing to report wolves decimating flocks of sheep in the country; it was quite another to chronicle them prowling the streets of populous cities. Early in February of 1915 a citizen of Keokuk saw a large gray wolf "making tracks" across a vacant lot on Fifth Street between Bank and Timea streets. It was believed the animal had been chased across the Mississippi from Illinois where many wolves were said to be running at large. Later that morning the wolf attempted to raid a chicken coop near Tenth and Exchange streets but was scared off by some people when the chickens commenced making a disturbance. According to the *Keokuk Gate City*: "The wolf was followed in his flight by a squad of boys and men armed with whatever weapons were close at hand. The wolf darted down South Tenth Street when driven away from his breakfast of chicken. The animal is said to be as big as a good sized dog, and is evidently trying to make its way into the timber on the outskirts of town." There was

general rejoicing when the wolf was killed in West Keokuk that very noon. The wolf bounty in Lee County was then twenty dollars.

Wolves were still being killed in the more westerly counties also. In 1920, on his farm in Clarke County, Archie Neal discovered a large timber wolf skulking through the tall grass near where he was gathering corn. Calling his large bull dog Mr. Neal precipitated what was described as one of the "most vicious fights" ever witnessed in Iowa. Snarling and snapping viciously at each other, the infuriated animals whirled round and round until the bull dog got his "favorite hind-leg hold" on his adversary. Meanwhile, the wolf slashed the bull dog's tough hide with every snap of his sharp teeth. The outcome of the battle was still in doubt when farmer Neal ended it with a well directed blow at the wolf's head.

The twenty-dollar wolf bounty lasted only six years — from 1913 to 1919. During this period, however, the State spent almost one hundred and fifty thousand dollars on wolf scalps — $29,718 in 1915 alone. In a single year (1914) Harrison County paid $2,294, Monona County $1,994, and Woodbury County $1,452 on wolf scalps. During this same period upwards of a half million dollars were expended for damage done to live-stock and poultry by dogs and wolves. Illustrative of such damage are the following figures for 1914 from Union County.

For 97 sheep and lambs killed or injured .	$467.20
For 3 horses injured	137.25
For 6 heifers and calves killed	158.25
For 15 hogs and pigs killed	98.61
For 43 ducks killed	21.42
For 4 goats killed	10.80
For 10 geese killed	9.00
For 2 turkeys killed	6.66
Total warrants issued during the year 1914	$909.19

Such heavy expenditures resulted in considerable opposition in the state legislature and in 1919 the bounty was reduced to ten dollars for mature wolves. The bounty for a wolf cub remained unchanged — standing at four dollars. Even at this reduced figure the bounty expenditures were very large, amounting to slightly over one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the thirteen years from 1920 to 1932 inclusive. During 1924 fully $18,-109.75 was paid by Iowa counties on wolf bounties — the largest for the period.

Since 1933 there has been an appreciable falling off in the total amount of money expended for wolf scalps in Iowa. In that year the bounty was reduced to five dollars, wolf cubs commanding only two dollars. The General Assembly considered the bill of such "immediate importance" that it provided that the act should go into "full force and effect after its passage and publication" in the *Red Oak Express and the Glenwood Opinion*.

But the lean, rough-coated canines were by no means exterminated. On December 29, 1935, thousands of Iowans read a dispatch from Winnipeg, Canada, stating that ravenous packs of lean and hungry wolves from the far northern Canadian wastes were stalking their way into Manitoba in search of food. Undoubtedly many Iowans breathed a sigh of relief that mighty Minnesota lay between them and the wolf packs of Manitoba. Scarcely a month later farmers in southeastern Palo Alto County reported killing several foxes and wolves during the sub-zero weather. Early in February, 1936, Ervin Eddy trapped a large male wolf near Creston. The prime pelt was said to measure six feet from muzzle to tail tip. That same month a cafe owner at Garner, Iowa, was followed home by three howling wolves. It was thought that the hungry animals had entered the town in search of food.

In maintaining this unequal struggle against man the wolf has amply demonstrated his keen sagacity and innate craft against almost overwhelming natural odds. For the twenty years ending 1937 one-third of the ninety-nine counties (35) had paid bounties each year while exactly two-thirds of the counties had paid sixteen or more times out of a possible twenty years. An average of seventy-two counties have paid bounties each year during the 1930's.

The payment of wolf bounties by individual

counties during the twenty years from 1918 to 1937 reveals some interesting facts. If we omit Hardin, Keokuk, Lucas, and Osceola counties, for which only incomplete returns are available, we find the total bounties for the twenty year period ranging from $238.25 in Wapello County to $14,555 in Monona County. The largest number of wolves are taken along the Missouri River. The lower Des Moines and Skunk River counties contain the fewest wolves. Van Buren County is an exception to this statement, paying $1,018 in wolf bounties during the same twenty years. Each of the Mississippi River counties above Des Moines County had paid over one thousand dollars in wolf bounties during this period, ranging from $1,025 in Clinton County to $5,928.50 in Allamakee County. Seven out of eight counties in the double tier of northern counties between Winneshiek and Kossuth had paid less than one thousand dollars in wolf bounties during the twenty years prior to 1938.

According to these figures hunters on the Missouri River slope invariably found wolf-hunting particularly good. Nine out of ten leading wolf counties in Iowa were located in this area. Monona County had spent $14,555 on bounties during the period from 1918 to 1937, inclusive. Woodbury County had spent $13,371.30 and Harrison County $12,411.50 in this same period. The next seven counties in the order of wolf bounty pay-

ments were: Pottawattamie, $9,378; Plymouth, $6,096; Fremont, $6,038; Allamakee, $5,928.50; Mills, $5,319; Crawford, $5,059; and Guthrie, $4,879. Only Allamakee in northeastern Iowa lies outside the Missouri River slope, although Guthrie County lies on the watershed between the two systems. With the exception of Mills and Fremont, all of these counties paid bounties every year between 1918 and 1937. The yearly average of Monona County between 1918 and 1937 was $727.75 while Guthrie County averaged only $243.95 during the same period.

If the cost of the bounty system appears large it must be remembered that the destruction of livestock by wolves and dogs is very great — fully $3,554,724.13 being expended in payment of damages to farmers in the twenty-seven years between 1909 and 1937 inclusive. During the same period a total of $5,787,508.04 was received in Iowa from the dog tax, the funds of which were used to pay the damages to domestic animals.

More than a century ago an American artist, George Catlin, foretold the heavy losses in livestock which future generations must suffer. Catlin decried the wanton destruction of the buffalo: almost 200,000 buffalo robes were annually jerked from these "useful animals," leaving the carcasses to be devoured by the wolves. After pointing out that the buffalo was a vital necessity to the Indian, Catlin wondered who would "resist the ravages

of 300,000 starving savages; and in their trains, 1,500,000 wolves, whom direst necessity will have driven from their desolate and gameless plains, to seek for the means of subsistence along our exposed frontier?"

Catlin believed that the problem was destined to become an extremely acute one within ten years, or before Iowa achieved Statehood. The Indian was taken care of by the reservation system but the wolves were still present in Iowa a hundred years later. Moreover, the coyote is now expanding eastward into land which had never been its habitat. The losses to domestic animals in Iowa and adjoining states is still a serious problem.

The thrill and excitement of the circular wolf hunt is known to present-day Iowans. On November 19, 1939, eighty Remsen sportsmen from town and rural territory gathered at the office of Homan & Daldrup for their first wolf and coyote hunt of the season. These wolf hunters started out on Sunday morning at 10:30 and returned in mid-afternoon with their trophies — two large gray wolves that would have "thrown terror into the heart of many a pedestrian had he encountered them alone and unarmed."

In pioneer Iowa the circular wolf hunt was a vital necessity for the protection of livestock. In 1939 the sturdy Plymouth County sportsmen made a genuine social event of their wolf

hunts. "The hunters," declared the *Remsen Bell-Enterprise* of November 22, 1939, "will collect the customary bounty from the county and sell the pelts, retaining the money as usual until the end of the season after which the total in the treasury will go toward expenses of a party or parties, depending on the extent of the proceeds."

Since hundreds of wolves and coyotes are still being bagged each year in Iowa it is likely that the circular wolf hunt will continue to be a colorful spectacle for many years to come. In 1958, for example, wolf scalps still brought ten dollars and cub scalps four dollars. Monona County remained the favorite home for his wolfship, fully $2,072 being paid in wolf bounties in 1958. Pottawattamie County actually paid out more than Monona but unfortunately it lumped its $3,644.75 for "coyotes, gophers, foxes, etc." Plymouth doled out $194 for "coyotes" while Madison County in central Iowa expended $192 in wolf bounties. Despite the wiliest schemes of man the grey, gaunt, and ferocious wolf still roamed the wilder, more isolated portions of Iowa in 1960.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN