

The Web of Life

The hypothetical Average Iowan in 1934 talked about the weather and politics but he or she was primarily concerned with private affairs. Fortunately the Federal government proffered a helping hand to restore the normal standard of living. After several years of penury, some of the luxuries as well as the necessities of life were within reach. Telephones were being installed again: the sale of automobiles and radios increased. While the two houses of the General Assembly haggled bitterly over appropriation bills that differed by two million dollars, Iowans calmly spent that amount on dog biscuits. At the same time the Average Iowan probably contributed less to the church — at least the per capita contribution in the United States dropped from \$16.11 in 1933 to \$12.07 in 1934.

To illustrate the significance of religion, an Iowa historian once described the State as a "Corn and Bible Commonwealth". Despite reduced support, churches were stronger than ever in 1934. A survey of membership in the United States revealed a gain of 1,222,064 members for all denominations over the preceding year. In

Iowa as well as in the rest of the country the larger Protestant churches exhibited a general movement toward recovery in morale and a definite striving to make themselves more effective in their ministry. It was more and more evident that the church was serving a social as well as a religious function among people long oppressed by adversity.

Although the church in Iowa has made appreciable gains, many people saw hidden reefs ahead. A gloomy picture of the doom of the Protestant clergy was painted by Edward A. Steiner of Grinnell before a meeting of the Iowa Ministerial Association. He declared that a moron could get by a theological seminary and upbraided the church for its low standards, laxity, and general decay. Sermons, he asserted, were so dry they were almost brittle. To Oskaloosa came the Reverend Abram E. Cory, to address the State convention of the Disciples of Christ on the need for stronger clergymen and laymen. Iowa born and bred, Reverend Cory declared: "A great layman loves God, the church, and reform. We need fanatics in the church, fools for God. For churches to live, poker-faced preaching must end."

On the assumption that Iowa needed some regenerating influence, Aimee Semple McPherson

conducted a seven-day camp meeting at Fairfield. But A. R. Liverett of Indianapolis had no patience with those who felt Christianity was dying. Speaking before the Disciples of Christ at Oskaloosa, he declared: "Churches are the most live concerns to-day. Only one out of 2,400 churches have failed financially compared to one out of every six banks." Nearly 10,000 persons attended the first Church and Bible School Day at Marshalltown in June. A feature of the program was the huge parade of 2500 people, several bands, and thirty floats.

The problems confronting the various denominations are usually discussed in their national conventions. In 1934 world peace commanded the attention of the Disciples of Christ at their eighty-fourth convention in Des Moines. They condemned the war system, which included military training, the profit motive in the manufacture and sale of arms and munitions, and approved the rights of conscientious objectors. D. W. Morehouse of Drake University was elected president of the 1935 meeting.

Some measure of the culture of a people may be found in their appreciation of the arts. Few States have exhibited a deeper or more abiding interest in music than Iowa has. In 1928 Walter Damrosch described Iowa as "the most musical

State in the Union." Six years later Iowa was still demonstrating her right to such flattering distinction. The Cornell Music Festival, the Federated Music Clubs, the Cedar Falls Band Festival, and the High School Music Festival have played important rôles in stimulating an appreciation and love for good music. The latter, for example, attracted over five thousand young musicians to Iowa City in May. These were the finalists, the best among thousands who had practiced faithfully at home and in school for many weeks. No one was surprised that the judges rated 101 contestants "superior" and 124 "excellent" in fifty-one events. Mason City, Roosevelt of Des Moines, Iowa City, and Abraham Lincoln of Council Bluffs won the most distinction.

When the National High School Orchestra Association met at Ottawa, Kansas, the Mason City orchestra shared superior rating in Class A with Topeka and Joplin. Early in June five thousand high school musicians attended the National Band Contest at Des Moines. Arthur Pryor, Edwin Franko Goldman, and Captain Charles O'Neil served as judges. Again Mason City High School demonstrated its prowess by tying with Joliet, Illinois, and Harrison High of Chicago for "highly superior" honors. Roosevelt and North High of Des Moines were among the eight

schools that won a superior rating in Class A. Iowa City won a superior rating in Class B and Blainstown won the same distinction in Class C.

A hopeful aftermath to such musical accomplishments was reflected in the fact that one Des Moines music dealer sold more pianos in 1934 than he had sold in the preceding five years. Moreover, the guitar, the clarinet, and the accordion had supplanted the saxophone and ukelele as best sellers. It was claimed that youthful Iowans were tired of "canned" music and wished to play their own instruments.

Education has always been dear to the hearts of the people of Iowa, yet during the depression schools suffered from reduced appropriations, heavier enrollment, inadequate facilities, and under-nourished students. The plight of education was discussed at the Thirty-eighth National Congress of the Parent-Teachers Association which met in Des Moines in May. John W. Studebaker, then superintendent of the Des Moines school system, struck the keynote of the convention when he declared: "The saving of the democracy of free learning is the most important problem before the nation to-day."

The salaries of Iowa's 24,631 teachers had been reduced to pitifully small amounts. Mrs. Bertha Jorgenson continued to teach without pay

while two Fremont County townships quarrelled over which was responsible for paying her. In contrast to such conditions was Herbert Hoover's praise of his boyhood teacher, Mollie Brown Carran, who died at West Branch on May 16th: "Especially did she represent that noble service of the country school teacher whose contribution to the national welfare is daily manifest, and, although that appreciation is perhaps unexpressed, it is still deep in the hearts of millions of our people."

For many years Iowa has led the nation in literacy. During the school year 1933-1934, 424,568 of the 461,890 children between the ages of seven and sixteen were enrolled in school. At the same time 547,574 of the 721,932 between the ages of five and twenty-one were enrolled in elementary and high schools. With such a large attendance it is not surprising that 99.2 per cent of the population can read and write. No other State has less than one per cent of illiteracy, the average for the nation is 4.3 per cent, and one State, South Carolina, has 14.9 per cent.

Early in May 53,000 pupils in 281 high schools took one or more of the standard examinations in seventeen different subjects. About 1100 of the best then competed for individual honors in scholarship at Iowa City under the auspices of

the State University. Fifteen-year-old Florence Green of Red Oak was first in Latin, American government, American literature, and second in eleventh-grade English correctness. She had previously won similar academic championships in 1932 and 1933.

Reminiscent of pioneer days was the State Spelling Bee, which was won by ten-year-old Richard Ovington of Council Bluffs. At Washington he succeeded in placing fourth in the national match.

Institutions of higher education continued to do effective work although with greatly curtailed budgets. President Eugene A. Gilmore, newly appointed President of the State University of Iowa, may have been gratified to learn that his university was ranked tenth among the great schools of the country by an educational expert. College enrollment increased, which was partly due to financial aid given to 6522 students by the Federal government.

Iowa has always ranked high in the field of journalism but 1934 proved to be a banner year. On May 8, 1934, Edwin Percy Chase, fifty-four-year-old editor of the *Atlantic News-Telegraph* won the \$500 Pulitzer Prize with an editorial on the subject: "Where Is Our Money". A few days later the School of Journalism of the Uni-

versity of Missouri tendered the Melbourne (Australia) *Argus* and the Des Moines *Register and Tribune* an award "for distinguished journalism". The owners and editors of the Des Moines papers were praised for their "professionally sound and socially constructive service" to Iowa. The Iowa Press Association awarded silver plaques to four Master Editors and Publishers of Iowa for "pre-eminence in newspaper work": W. C. Jarnagin of the Storm Lake *Pilot-Tribune*, W. P. Wortman of the Malvern *Leader*, F. A. Moscrip of the Marshalltown *Times-Republican*, and Grant L. Caswell, managing director of the Iowa Press Association.

From work the Average Iowan turned occasionally to play. Sports, pictures, parks, music, news, and literature beguiled the leisure hours. A single Iowa newspaper, read in the homes of a quarter million Iowans, must have had a powerful influence upon public opinion. The radio seems to have become an almost essential part of the Average Iowan's home: there were 71,467 receiving sets on Iowa farms on January 1, 1934.

More than 25,000 miles of surfaced highways made pleasure haunts accessible by automobile. Thousands of Iowans flocked to the State parks to enjoy the recreation which these scenic or historic spots afford. It took the Mormons five

months to cross Iowa in 1846: it would have taken only that many hours for the 592,350 automobiles registered in Iowa to transport the entire population out of the State in 1934. But city dwellers would have been obliged to help the country folks because only 195,107 motor cars were owned on Iowa's 213,769 farms. Such mobility must affect the life of any people.

County fairs were well attended. The Iowa State Fair opened officially with an attendance of 59,460, half of whom were children admitted free. A crowd of 12,000 saw the Sidney Rodeo during August, while the Silver Jubilee of the Waterloo Dairy Cattle Congress attracted 138,000 visitors.

Athletics of all kinds — football, baseball, basketball, track, tennis, and golf — found favor with Iowans. Fully 53,000 swooped down to the Iowa stadium on October 27th to watch Minnesota defeat the University of Iowa football team by a score of 48 to 12. The week before, over 18,000 had seen the State College football team humiliate the State University by a score of 31 to 6, the most crushing defeat the Hawkeyes had ever received at the hands of the Cyclones. Decked in gay and summery attire, another 18,000 attended the Drake Relays — the largest crowd that ever witnessed Iowa's premier track meet.

College football and track attracted thousands during 1934 but the attendance at basketball was the most remarkable of all. The average attendance at the six Big Ten basketball games at Iowa City was 10,233. A record-breaking crowd of 13,200 saw the Iowa-Purdue game — a number which caused provincial New Yorkers to gasp in astonishment. East Sioux City High won the State basketball championship and Wellsburg High School won the girls basketball championship.

National attention was won by Marvin Nelson of Fort Dodge in the fifteen-mile Canadian National Exhibition Swim. Despite the cold and choppy waters of Lake Ontario, Nelson outswam eighty-nine rivals to finish in seven hours and forty-six minutes. Another Iowan, Mack Garner, a veteran jockey from Centerville, rode Cavalcade to victory in the famous Kentucky Derby for a purse of \$28,175. Early in 1934, Urban "Red" Faber of Cascade, Iowa, announced his retirement after twenty years with the Chicago White Sox. While Faber was ending his career, Harold "Hal" Trosky, of Norway, Iowa, made his debut in the major leagues with the Cleveland Indians. The colorful slugger hit thirty-five home runs his first season — three of them in one day. Batting .330 in 1934, Trosky scored 117 runs on 206 hits

that went for 374 bases. Dick Crayne of the University of Iowa was voted the outstanding Iowa amateur athlete for 1934, receiving almost double the number of votes cast for Lucille Robinson and Floyd DeHeer.

A new era in transportation history was inaugurated by the railroads in 1934. Following its exhibition at the Century of Progress, the new Union Pacific streamlined train passed westward through Iowa in February to be put into service. This epoch-making invention attracted an audience three hundred miles long: ten thousand craned their necks at Cedar Rapids, fifteen hundred looked on in wonder at Marshalltown, and two thousand surrounded the train upon its arrival at Boone.

In the afternoon of May 26th the Burlington *Zephyr* raced across southern Iowa on its non-stop record run of 1015 miles from Denver to Chicago. Pacific Junction, Iowa, 542.61 miles out of Denver, was reached in seven hours and six minutes. The articulated train whizzed across the 274 miles of track between the Missouri and the Mississippi rivers in three hours and thirty-two minutes, averaging 73.3 miles an hour. A speed of ninety-two miles an hour was attained between Villisca and Corning. At 7:09 in the evening the *Zephyr* glided triumphantly into Chicago, having

completed the trip in thirteen hours and five minutes.

Not to be eclipsed by this feat, the Union Pacific sent its crack Diesel-engined train scooting out of Los Angeles for New York in October. This swift streamlined phenomenon made the run of 2364 miles to Chicago in thirty-nine hours and finished the coast-to-coast trip in fifty-six hours and fifty-five minutes.

An unusually large number of railroad accidents occurred in Iowa in 1934. Early in March a head-on collision between two Milwaukee trains ten miles north of Dubuque killed two and injured four persons. A memory of horror and suffering followed the wreck of a Milwaukee passenger train a few miles below Guttenberg — four being killed and eighteen injured. The derailment of a crack Milwaukee flyer west of Spencer in November resulted in the injury of three persons. On May 7th one man was killed and five injured when fourteen Rock Island freight cars piled up seven miles east of Muscatine. In October another Rock Island train wreck a short distance east of Iowa City killed two and injured eight.

Casualties on the railroads seem insignificant, however, in comparison with automobile accidents. Thousands of people were hurt in motor traffic on the highways. The number of automobiles and

the speed at which they travel have quite out-distanced the care and ability of drivers. Through negligence or incompetence 374 Iowans lost their lives in automobiles. Aviation was relatively safer, though several tragic airplane crashes occurred. Five persons were killed at Saint Ansgar on a Fourth of July excursion flight.

Altogether, accidental deaths increased thirty-nine per cent during 1934! Falls accounted for 400 fatalities or an increase of eighteen per cent. Automobiles took a toll seventeen per cent above 1933. Heat was responsible for the loss of 300 lives which represented an increase of eleven hundred per cent. Many drownings occurred as Iowans vainly sought relief from the broiling sun. At Pillsbury Point on Lake Okoboji four Orange City girls and their chaperon were drowned while wading.

During 1934, the birth rate far exceeded the rate of mortality. There were 42,500 births compared with 26,799 deaths. This excess of births over deaths was aided and abetted by the advent of quadruplets to Mr. and Mrs. Larry R. Wycoff of Sac City on June 9, 1934. The four children were born in the Wycoff home within thirty minutes of each other. It has been estimated that quadruplets occur only once in 512,000 births, hence the incident attracted State and even

nationwide attention. The whole community took an active interest, nurses were provided, presents came from near and far, and everything was done to aid the bewildered parents. Unfortunately one of the four died in August. The heaviest toll of life in Iowa was taken by diseases of the heart, cancer, cerebral hemorrhage, accidents of all forms, and pneumonia. Davenport, which lead all American cities in 1932 and 1933 in suicide rate, took a turn for the better in 1934.

Iowa again won distinction as a producer of health champions when Clista Millspaugh of Mount Pleasant, National 4-H Club Health Champion in 1933, was judged the healthiest girl in the United States at the Century of Progress. A blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked blond, Miss Millspaugh stood five feet and five inches in height, weighed 127 pounds, and attributed her health to "plenty of sunshine" and "loads of vegetables and milk". In December of 1934, Doris L. Paul, fifteen-year-old Muscatine County girl, was selected as the National 4-H Club Health Champion for 1934. A month later Miss Paul came down with the measles. In the thirteen years Iowa entrants have competed, they have six times won or tied for the national championship and failed only once to receive honorable mention.

Not since the days of Jesse James have outlaws

and hoodlums played such a conspicuous rôle in Iowa history. In a desperate gun battle on January 6th, Chicago police killed "Handsome Jack" Klutas, believed to have been the murderer of Sheriff Fred Sweet and Marshal Aaron Bailey of Washington, Iowa, on June 26, 1930. On March 13, 1934, seven bandits, one of whom was identified as John Dillinger, staged a sensational daylight bank robbery in Mason City. The bandits gathered up \$52,244 behind sputtering machine guns and fled with twelve hostages to protect them from police fire. On June 7, 1934, Tommy Carroll, a Dillinger henchman, was shot five times and died in a Waterloo hospital. Carroll was identified as one of the Mason City bank robbers. Iowans breathed a sigh of relief when Dillinger was trapped and killed in Chicago in July.

But the end was not yet. Early in October, officers surprised "Pretty Boy" Floyd on a farm near McIntire, Iowa, but he and his two companions escaped, only to be mowed down by Federal men ten days later on an Ohio farm. On November 27th, Herman E. Hollis of Des Moines, an agent of the United States Department of Justice, was slain by "Baby Face" Nelson in a fierce duel. Nelson's body was found the following day riddled by seventeen bullets. Probably the worst burglary was the looting of the Sheaffer

Pen Factory at Fort Madison of \$100,000 in October.

In Guthrie Center lived a venerable old gentleman named John Motz. The seventy-eight year old pioneer had developed an intense dislike for automobiles. On two occasions he had been struck by cars — incidents which only served to kindle his hatred. When his wife died, Motz insisted that she be borne to her grave in a horse-drawn hearse. After considerable search such a vehicle was located at Bayard. In December, 1934, Motz was struck for the third time by an automobile. The injuries he sustained proved fatal and he died two weeks later. He, too, was carried to his final resting place in the old horse-drawn hearse that had borne his wife to her grave three years before.

In Mahaska County lived a seventy-seven year old Iowan named William Swartout who loved automobiles. In 1909 he had bought a Chalmers. In 1934 he drove his "Pride of Barnes City" all the way to Des Moines. Passing motorists in high-powered, streamlined cars slowed up to gaze at the archaic machine. When he stopped at a filling station along the way a curious crowd gathered about his car. Wherever he drove in Des Moines the traffic was sure to be jammed as crowds gathered to marvel at the ancient vehicle.

"How fast will she go?" inquired one onlooker.

"They tell me she'll do forty", Swartout declared. "Course you'd have to take her top down."

John Motz and William Swartout represent contrasting types among the older generation of Iowans. They hark back to the days of the livery stable, the covered bridge, and the dusty, winding roads, thickly studded on either side with golden rod, sumac, cat tails, brown-eyed susans, daisies, and clover. Paved highways and graveled roads, concrete bridges and viaducts, screaming billboards and hot dog stands, afford an entirely different atmosphere to the present generation. The Iowan of 1934 had become familiar with radio and television, streamlined locomotives and automobiles. Airplanes roared over his head. In 1934 he read about wirephoto, little realizing how quickly the new year would usher in this novel invention. Some are happy in this speed-crazed age; others long for the comfort and quiet of the old mill stream. The year 1934 seems to have struck a dominant note of progress. But what will be the shape of things to come?

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