

Highlights of 1950

Iowa's mid-century was ushered in with the usual New Year's Eve observances. For the gay, there were parties, theaters, and night clubs; for the serious, "Watch Night" services in the churches. As the New Year dawned, the usual number of "firsts" was recorded.

Keokuk's first baby, born a few minutes after midnight, weighed but six ounces — a "robust" male muntjac, a rare species of dwarf deer imported from Java. Tragedy struck first in 1950 at McGregor; Raymond Boyle's car crashed into the steps of the Catholic Church there; two days later his funeral was held from the same church.

On January 7 a fire in the mental ward of Mercy Hospital at Davenport took the lives of forty-one elderly women, and a nurse, Mrs. Anna Neal, who died trying to rescue some of her charges. In Cedar Rapids, Dr. Byron H. McKeeby died at the age of eighty-two. His name might have meant little to most Iowans, but his face — that of the farmer in Grant Wood's famous "American Gothic" — was familiar to everyone in the state.

Roy Rogers is popular with many young Iowans; on January 17 two admirers, Rex Carter and Irvin Birkenholz, twelve and thirteen years

old, made up their minds to "go west" and become cowboys. They set off from Knoxville, armed with a can of spaghetti and plans for killing wildcats along the way, to eke out their food supply. Their sense of direction was faulty, however; they were heading north through Ankeny when apprehended by anxious authorities. Another reminder of the "wild west" was a raid by cattle rustlers on a farm at Honey Creek near Council Bluffs — they made off with \$1,300 worth of cattle.

Iowa's musical fare ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous on January 23. In Des Moines, the great Negro singer, Marian Anderson, sang to an audience of 1,600. Simultaneously, television audiences were treated to a concert by "Midnight," the singing mouse, who had been trapped by Mrs. Ella Rausch after she heard him "singing" in her home at Cherokee.

In 1949 Iowa's first television station, WOC-TV at Davenport, had begun operation. On January 24, 1950, a second station, WOI-TV at Ames, began its first day of test pattern telecasting. The Ames station, the one hundredth to be opened in the nation, is the first to be sponsored by an educational institution.

The sporting world was surprised on January 28 when the University of Iowa's head football coach, Dr. Eddie Anderson, announced his resignation. He was replaced in February by Leonard Raffensperger, former head football coach at East

Waterloo High. Hardly had this sporting news become history before the University announced the dismissal of Lawrence Harrison, head basketball coach. Rollie Williams replaced "Pops" Harrison.

Basketball is always the leading sports interest in Iowa in the winter. In addition to the big college games, the girls' and boys' high school championship tournaments draw huge crowds. Fifteen thousand gathered in the University of Iowa fieldhouse to watch Davenport defeat Ankeny in the boys' finals; at Drake, in Des Moines, 6,700 saw the girls from Slater defeat Kamrar.

Some of the best wrestlers in the nation are Iowans. Six of the ten first-team positions on the Third Annual All-American wrestling team went to men from the Hawkeye State. Bill Nelson of Iowa State Teachers College was selected as the "outstanding amateur wrestler in America for the 1950 season."

Mail has been delivered to Iowans in many ways over the years. From the pioneer days of river boats and stagecoaches to present-day railway mail cars and airplanes is a long way. In 1950 another type of "mail man" was introduced — the highway bus. On March 11 two 18,000-pound red, white, and blue buses left Des Moines for Muscatine and Shenandoah, on runs which serviced some forty towns.

The state of Iowa lost one of its outstanding

figures on March 13 when William R. Boyd, for forty years finance chairman of the State Board of Education, died at Cedar Rapids.

Every ten years Uncle Sam counts his children. On April Fool's Day some 2,700 people began taking the seventeenth decennial census in Iowa. It was July before the results of their work were announced. In 1950 Iowa had 2,621,073 people, an increase of 2.9 per cent over 1940. For several decades, in Iowa and in the nation, one fact has been evident. The rural population, long dominant, is declining as compared with that of the city-dwellers. There were 4.2 per cent fewer farmers in Iowa in 1950 than in 1940.

A new bishop of the Iowa Diocese of the Episcopal Church was consecrated in April at an impressive ceremony in Des Moines. The Rt. Rev. Gordon V. Smith succeeded the Rt. Rev. Elwood L. Haines, who had died in October, 1949.

In January Iowans had a "singing" mouse; in May, they had a "rocking" chair. An eight-year-old platform rocker, belonging to the Floyd Holladays of Muscatine, had started rocking, "all by itself," in March. Inevitably, offers for television programs came; in May the chair was taken to New York where it "rocked vigorously" for a large audience. The trip was too much for the now-famous chair, however; by August 25 the Holladays announced that "for all practical purposes" the chair had stopped rocking.

On May 31, at Harlan, sixty-five young people graduated from high school. The commencement speaker made a plea for safe driving. An hour later, five young people, two of whom had just received their diplomas, were dead. Their car, with the speedometer jammed at 92 miles an hour, was a crumpled mass of wreckage. But even this tragedy did not stop the fearful toll of highway accidents. By the end of the year the records showed that 1950 was Iowa's second worst year for death on the highway: 607 lives had been sacrificed to speed and carelessness.

The world was becoming more and more conscious of the Communist threat to peace in 1950. In an effort to illustrate the workings of Communism, the town of Hartley, Iowa, decided to stage a full-scale Communist attack on its citizens. The enthusiasm of the "Communists" was somewhat dampened by a heavy rain and by the lack of interest of the townspeople, one of whom threatened to "sic" the dog on them if they came near his house. However, forty "guerrillas" took over the government, "executed" the officials, lined people up for ration books, and seized and burned "capitalistic" books in the library.

Only a few days after this attack, Americans awoke to find that the real thing had begun in far-away Korea. When American troops were sent to aid the South Koreans, and when draft boards swung back into action, the "war" was brought

home to many Iowans. In July Brigadier-General Charles H. Grahl called for 344 men as the first quota from the state. Two Iowa marine units were ordered to active duty: the 21st Engineer Company in the Quad Cities area, and C Battery of the 6th 105 mm Howitzer Battalion of Waterloo. Enlistments in the army, navy, and air force increased rapidly, while the recall of Iowa enlisted reservists reached 2,000 by September. In August the first organized army reserve unit had been alerted: the 339th MP prisoner-of-war processing company of the Dubuque-Guttenberg area. By December the fifty-million-dollar Burlington Ordnance Plant was back in operation, with 1,900 employees. Iowa was again "at war."

The Fourth of July was marked with an unusual ceremony in Des Moines. The Liberty Bell came to Iowa, not in person it must be admitted, but in the shape of a 2,000-pound replica. The Bell, given to Iowa by the United States Treasury Department, was received by Governor Beardsley; it will be permanently housed in Des Moines. A symbol of the Independence Drive to encourage the purchase of savings bonds, the Bell had been touring Iowa since May 15, covering 4,503 miles in 80 counties.

On July 24 one of the University of Iowa's most distinguished alumni, S. Joe Brown, died in Des Moines at the age of seventy-five. Mr. Brown was the first Negro to graduate from the University,

and the first of his race to be elected to the chapter of Phi Beta Kappa there. During his lifetime he had been a leading attorney in Des Moines.

August is "Fair Month" for Iowa. People come from all over the state "to the Fair." Gerry and Kent Vandervelde probably chose the most novel mode of transportation: rowing almost 200 miles down the Des Moines River from Emmetsburg; on reaching the Fair the first thing they did was take a boat ride at the "Old Mill Stream." One feature of the Fair which attracted large crowds was the Iowa Crusade for Christ revivals, one of which was addressed by "Ma" Sunday, still vigorous at the age of eighty-two.

This Crusade was continued in September with a series of revivals on the statehouse grounds in Des Moines; over 30,000 persons filled a huge "canvas cathedral" to hear the speakers, one of whom was Dr. Charles E. Fuller, director of the radio "Old Fashioned Revival Hour."

In October the oldest living member of the Meskwaki Indians at the Tama reservation died: Jim Poweshiek, a great-grandson of Chief Poweshiek, was ninety-seven at the time of his death. In Des Moines Louis C. Kurtz, businessman and politician, died on October 1. Mr. Kurtz had begun his political career as campaign manager for Albert B. Cummins in his senatorial campaign of 1908.

A year-long political squabble in the Democratic party was healed when President Truman,

on November 29, appointed William F. Riley of Des Moines to the federal bench of the Southern Iowa Judicial District. The judgeship had been filled, over the protest of Senator Guy M. Gillette, by Carroll O. Switzer since late in 1949; but Switzer's appointment had never been confirmed by the Senate. When the Senate agreed to accept Riley, political jokesters at once reported that for a year Switzer had been "living the life of Riley."

In the last months of 1950 death claimed many prominent Iowa political figures. Daniel F. Steck, the state's first Democratic Senator since pre-Civil War days, died on December 31. He had served the state in Congress from 1926 to 1931. E. H. Birmingham, Democratic State Chairman from 1935 to 1941, died in November. Others were John K. Valentine, the last Democratic Lieutenant Governor of the State; Justice Oscar Hale, a member of the Iowa Supreme Court since 1938; and "Dad" A. H. Avery, beloved Iowa legislator, who had served in the House from 1931 to 1949.

At Exira, "Grandma" Mary Kilworth, probably the oldest living person in the state, celebrated her 109th birthday on December 18. Ten days later, Iowa, five years younger than "Grandma" Kilworth, observed, without ceremony, her 104th birthday. Three days later the year 1950 bowed out and Iowans cheerily greeted the arrival of the young man who ushered in 1951.

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