

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

AUGUST 1937

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### THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

### THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Weather

Scorched by a blazing sun in 1934, drenched with excessive rains in 1935, Iowans looked forward hopefully for more temperate weather in 1936. The opening weeks of January were mild, giving promise of an early spring. Suddenly the mercury fell! On January 18th Iowa entered the most severe and prolonged cold snap in 117 years according to various weather records in the upper Mississippi Valley.

On January 22nd the mercury plunged to 30° below zero at West Bend, but the thermometer at Cool indicated only 22° below zero. It was so cold at Davenport that factories were unable to sound noon whistles. Members of the Jasper County Board of Supervisors spent some uneasy hours as calls to open roads for the emergencies of birth and death kept the telephone jingling. The intense cold made frozen fingers quite in vogue: in Northwood sixty pupils were frost-bitten.

But the cold of those memorable days did not

stop all activity. In Des Moines a fat robin shrugged off the 21° below zero temperature. College and high school students continued going bare-headed. And Iowa's nature man, Willis Willey of Mount Ayr, took his usual walk over the trackless country roads, wearing only trunks and a pair of rubbers.

The cold wave continued with unabated fury the rest of January. A heavy blanket of snow from ten to twenty inches deep covered most of the State by the end of the month. Howling winds and continued snowfall paralyzed highway traffic, disrupted or cancelled railroad schedules, and forced the Highway Commission to battle day and night against almost insuperable odds. Snowfall averaged 19.4 inches which was approximately three times as much as the average. Thousands of dollars were spent and hundreds of men worked to clear city streets. The deep snow and severe cold exacted a heavy death toll of wild birds. Meanwhile, a coal shortage throughout the State began to assume serious proportions.

The reign of King Winter continued into February. By the end of the first week many an isolated community was in a dire plight. The coal supply of Radcliffe could be counted by lumps, and the precious fuel was rationed out like food to a starving garrison. The mayor ordered families

to stop heating extra rooms and stores were required to reduce their open hours. A few loads of cobs and wood were brought in by farmers able to reach town. The churches and the school and the indoor skating rink were closed. At last, when conditions were desperate, a shipment of coal arrived.

Just as people began to expect milder days, the weather man announced that a real blizzard was on the way, one that "they'll be talking about in generations to come." His prediction was correct. The "winter's worst blizzard" came roaring out of the northwest on February 8th. At Tipton the temperature dropped thirty degrees in sixty minutes. The swirling wind whipped clouds of blinding snow along the roads. In Marion County one farmer took care of twenty-eight marooned motorists. Two Charles City firemen froze their ears while answering a call. Trains were delayed for hours in huge drifts. Trucks, busses, and ambulances stalled in snowbanks that rose high above the cars. When the storm was over, the frozen snowbanks were so high at Randalia that Miss Dorothy Moore reported that the ears of a team of mules she was driving to a corner mail box continually touched the telephone wires along the route.

Powerful snow plows and paved highways proved of little value in the teeth of a howling

wind that piled up snow faster than the most modern equipment could remove it. For long periods of time only one-way traffic was possible in some places on the primary roads. Ordinary farm roads and many county roads were blocked for weeks. It has been estimated that more than half of the 212,376 farms in Iowa were without vehicular communication for a period of about seven weeks. In northern Iowa some towns were without railroad service for approximately three weeks.

As the end of February approached, Iowans looked forward hopefully to relief from the relentless winter. Not until February 22nd, however, did the cold spell finally break. During the three months ending with February, 42.9 inches of snow fell, the highest winter average during the forty-three years that State-wide snowfall records have been kept.

Most Iowans who endured the hardships of winter felt they had suffered enough from ruthless nature. But they reckoned without the summer — a summer that was to go down as the most prolonged heat period since records of the upper Mississippi Valley were begun in 1819.

The excess torridity began on June 25th. During the first few days of the drought which was destined to scorch the grain and bake the soil of the entire corn belt, the mercury climbed to the top

of the thermometer. Before the end of the month a scourge of hungry grasshoppers and chinch bugs added exasperation to worry, and farmers extended their calloused hands toward Washington for aid.

A committee was created to cope with the emergency. Secretary Henry A. Wallace toured the drought-afflicted area and formulated plans to help the farmers. The trouble became so acute that President Roosevelt decided to visit the parched region. On September 3rd he conferred with the Governors of Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas at the capitol in Des Moines, but the remedy for dry weather was not discovered amid the political distractions involved in the meeting of the rival presidential candidates.

During the seventeen days from July 3rd to July 19th, the temperature exceeded 100° every day. July was the hottest month on record during the sixty-four years for which detailed data is available. All records for sustained high temperatures were broken both for the State as a whole and at most of the stations. Corning had 100° readings or higher on twenty-five days while the entire State averaged seventeen days with temperatures of 100° or over.

Factories in Burlington closed early because of the heat. One man fixed the following sign on his

office door: "Closed for the afternoon, owing to the hellish heat. Home in the cellar, reading Dante's 'Inferno'." At Charles City the intense heat hatched two chickens in a pail of discarded eggs. A large thermometer at Preston burst when the mercury expanded to the top, and the empty tube, acting as a lens, set fire to the garage building of Nick Maybohn, the town fire chief. On H. F. Eicher's farm near Mount Pleasant 515 turkeys died of excessive heat.

When the weather goes beserk, people want to know all about it: how hot it is, how cold, what the forecast will be. "The weather bureau", protested Charles D. Reed, United States meteorologist, "is set up as a service to agriculture, transportation and commerce. Idle curiosity of a man sitting on his front porch in the summertime does not come under these." But the weather in 1936 was really something to talk about. Despite the fact that his department furnished readings hourly to Des Moines radio stations, Mr. Reed and his assistants received between 800 and 900 calls a day.

The blistering heat continued through the month of August, three-fourths of the stations registering the hottest August on record. The afternoon of the 18th was the hottest August afternoon ever endured in Iowa, the average maxi-



mum temperature of 113 stations on that date being 106.5°. When the heat wave finally broke the weather bureau revealed that there had been an average of 25.6 days with maximum temperatures of 100° or higher. This was the worst of any summer on record and 5.9 days more than in 1934. The hottest day the whole State experienced was July 14th, when the average maximum temperature at 113 stations was 108.7°.

The average rainfall during the three summer months (June, July, August) was 6.84 inches, or 4.91 inches below normal. In addition to intense heat the summer of 1936 ranked fourth among the dry summers for which records have been kept. The corn crop was reduced to 173,000,000 bushels by the heat and drought of July.

Only the good crops of small grain harvested early in the summer prevented the great drought of 1936 from turning into catastrophe. Because of the ordeal of fire through which Iowa passed, the tall-corn State lost the leadership of the nation in maize production. The President of the United States might call a drought conference and perspiring politicians might promise the moon, but King Sol reigned in the heavens. And it was the sun that ruled the destinies of Iowa in 1936.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## The Political Scene

Party lines were sharply drawn on the Iowa political front in 1936. Basking in the popularity of Roosevelt and the New Deal, Democratic candidates had been swept into office by the two preceding general elections. The Republicans, meanwhile, had suffered in prestige and some people thought the Grand Old Party was dead. But unsuccessful campaigning is not the primary cause of partisan mortality. Encouraged by the adverse decisions of the United States Supreme Court regarding New Deal measures, abetted by the Liberty League, heartened by better times for agriculture and industry, confident in the results of several polls of opinion, the Republicans prepared to resume the rôle of the governing party in 1936.

The first shot in the political campaign was fired as early as January when Lieutenant Governor Nelson G. Kraschel announced that he would run in the primaries for the office of Governor. Governor Clyde L. Herring followed almost immediately with the statement that he would seek the seat in the United States Senate occupied by Lester J. Dickinson. "We are glad", the *Siourney News* announced, "that Herring and

Kraschel finally got their political ambitions threshed out so that they won't tangle in the forthcoming Democratic primary campaign". But the Decorah *Public Opinion* declared that the candidacy of either Herring or Kraschel for a State office was "an insult to the voters of Iowa".

Presently many Iowans began to throw their hats into the political ring: approximately 579 Republican, Democratic, and minor party candidates entered the primaries to seek endorsement for various congressional, state, and local offices. Eleven men sought to become United States Senators and fifty-one were ambitious to hold a seat in the national House of Representatives. Six aspired to be Governor: thirty-seven hoped to be successful in their quest for the seven other elective State executive offices. With such a scramble among the politicians it is rather surprising that a spirit of apathy should have characterized voting at the primaries.

Although cryptic remarks appeared from time to time in the press, it was generally considered that the 1936 primary was the "dullest" in years. One cause of this apathy was the uncertainty of either party winning the general election. Before 1932 the Republicans had always fought a fierce primary battle because nomination almost assured election, while the Democrats had to induce some-

body to "accept the hopeless job of keeping the party alive by running for office, knowing in advance he was going to take a licking."

The State primaries were held on June 1st. Governor Herring carried eighty-four counties to win the Democratic nomination for United States Senator from Congressman Hubert Utterback. "Iowa will never feel ashamed of Clyde Herring", the Knoxville *Express* declared. The Anamosa *Journal* was equally cordial to the nomination. "If the voters of the state send Governor Herring to Washington they may rely upon him to be always for Iowa regardless of whether it advances his standing with the special interests."

Lieutenant Governor Kraschel was victorious over Richard F. Mitchell for the Democratic nomination for the Governorship. The astute livestock auctioneer from Harlan was described as "one of the best salesmen, both of himself and his party, in the Democratic party in Iowa." In choosing Herring and Kraschel, the Democrats endorsed their administration and entered ardent New Dealers in the race for the two highest offices the voters of the State can fill.

There was more confusion of candidates and issues among the Republicans. Smith W. Brookhart, Guy P. Linville, and Edwin C. Manning each strove hard to win the party nomination for

United States Senator from L. J. Dickinson. Speeches and press comments about all of them were decidedly acrimonious. The *Belle Plaine Gazette* felt that Dickinson would make a fine Senator from an eastern State. "While we are not particularly friendly to Senator Dickinson we resent Manning's tactics", the Coon Rapids *Enterprise* declared. "Are we going to be subjected to this Brookhart affliction, after such a hard winter?" queried the *Manchester Press*.

The opinion of the *Rolfe Arrow* was endorsed by many papers and reflected in the final vote. "If Iowa wants a Republican standpat senator", the editor announced, "Dickinson is as good as any one." Dickinson won all but twelve of the ninety-nine counties!

The Republican campaign for Governor ended in victory for George A. Wilson of Des Moines over John M. Grimes of Osceola and George R. Call of Sioux City. Wilson won almost two-thirds of the Iowa counties.

While the Republicans had cast almost twice as many votes as the Democrats, the Republican primary vote was 80,000 less than in 1934. The Democrats, however, retained their maximum primary strength. Candidates in the primaries spent \$71,093.84 in their campaigns, ranging from three cents by State Representative J. W. Frizzell of

Brooklyn to \$4,649.08 by Senator Dickinson. Ninety-one candidates failed to file their report of expenses within the legal time.

Seasoned political observers, according to C. C. Clifton, were happy over the nominations because the "most aggressive" candidates had been nominated for major offices. It was generally conceded that the defeat of Dickinson or Herring would have been a severe blow to either party. A cynical view of the nominations, however, was expressed by the *Lakota Record*. "In looking over the results of the recent primary election in this highly touted state of Iowa, one can easily surmise that there is still an ample smattering of first class dumbbells masquerading as perfectly normal citizens. They hurry into the polling booths, chalk up votes for the first names on the ballots and hurry off to their fumadiddling, smugly certain that they have done their duty."

With the primaries out of the way both parties planned their State conventions. The Republicans met at Des Moines on July 10th. Square-jawed Berry F. Halden of Chariton was keynoter and set the tempo of the convention when he shouted, "There will be no pussyfooting. We shall not hide in the storm cellar to escape the big wind that blusters out of the egotistic citadel on the Potomac." The representatives of "a typical prairie

State" pledged support to the constitution and the Supreme Court, urged "disclosure of graft and corruption in high places", favored social security, demanded administration of relief by local authorities, denounced reckless extravagance, deplored a sales tax, endorsed the 1936 national Republican agricultural plank, pledged support of farm-to-market roads, proposed to foster Iowa industry, and commended the "homely virtues of initiative, courage, industry and thrift exemplified" by their presidential nominee.

The Democrats assembled in Des Moines on July 23rd. As keynoter of the convention Lieutenant Governor Kraschel fired the opening blast at the opposing party. "If the Republicans of Iowa wish to destroy themselves by fighting the farmers' program, it is their privilege", he roared. "Hoover, Landon, Hearst, the Liberty League, Spangler, Dickinson, and Wilson have at no time been an inspiration for those hard-pressed citizens who have been victimized and enslaved by the reactionary program of greed." The party platform commended the Herring administration and pledged "continued co-operation" with Roosevelt and his New Deal.

At their State convention the Democrats chose John H. Mitchell of Fort Dodge to oppose Republican Harold E. Davidson of Clarinda for the of-

office of Attorney General. The tragic death of Senator Louis Murphy left his post open at Washington and Guy M. Gillette of Cherokee was nominated to fill the unexpired term. A little later the Republicans called a special convention to nominate Berry F. Halden to oppose Gillette.

Meanwhile, the weather became an issue in the political campaign. "Up to date", said the *Sac City Sun* sarcastically, "the governor has not claimed credit for the fine rains we have been having, but the campaign is young." The *Bellevue Herald* thought it would be interesting "to note what effect the great drought in the corn and grain belt will have on the coming national election." The *Knoxville Express* introduced a new plank for politicians to run on: "Any legislative candidate who will pledge himself to introduce and work for a law limiting summer temperature to 80 degrees and winter temperature to 0 will get a lot of support from people who are tired of talk and want something done."

That Iowa was regarded as a pivotal State in the presidential campaign is attested by the efforts of both parties to win the eleven Hawkeye electors. Roosevelt crossed Iowa from Burlington to Council Bluffs, making sixteen stops in Iowa. In three trips during August and September Landon made a score of stops. His running mate, Colonel



Frank Knox, spoke at Red Oak and Ottumwa, besides making rear-platform addresses at six other cities. Probably the most dramatic incident of the whole campaign was the meeting of Roosevelt and Landon at the capitol in Des Moines during the drought conference. William Lemke, leader of the Farmer-Labor party, also came to Iowa. James W. Ford, negro candidate for Vice President on the Communist ticket, just missed having a rendezvous with Father Coughlin who assailed Roosevelt's "broken promises" and his association with "Communist lovers" in a speech at Des Moines in September.

Roosevelt's victory was overwhelming, and his popularity contributed much to the success of the Iowa Democratic candidates for the Senate. Voting was heavy. In Iowa 1,142,737 ballots were cast for President, which was approximately seventy-seven per cent of the total number of qualified voters. Iowa was one of the few States in which the Republican vote was larger in 1936 than in 1932. President Roosevelt also gained, but proportionately less than his opponent.

In general, however, the electorate was not as generous with the Democrats as in 1932. The Republicans succeeded in electing four Representatives in Congress. They gained a majority in the State Senate and won sufficient strength in the

House to tie the hitherto Democratic majority. Furthermore, although the Democrats won all the State executive offices, many members of the party cast their votes for the Republican gubernatorial candidate. Kraschel in a total of over one million votes had a plurality of only 2431.

The 1936 political campaign was by far the costliest of any in Iowa history. Fully \$400,000 was spent by the political parties. Candidates contributed about one-fourth of this sum, which was about fifty per cent higher than usual. State central committees were lavish — the Republican expenditure being \$66,000, or nearly three times as much as in the 1932 campaign. Contributions totalling \$10,000 from the du Pont family of Delaware and \$3,500 from Alfred Sloan, Jr., were calculated to make Iowa safe for the Liberty League.

After the "tidal wave that gave the New Dealers the most sweeping victory ever won", the *Decorah Public Opinion* claimed it was "still a Republican paper — but very still." There was no comfort for the *Manchester Press*. "Never, at the lowest ebb of her fortunes, has this state fallen to such depths of ignominy and disrepute. It is the crowning infamy of a disaster which spreads from sea to sea, a sad commentary upon popular discrimination and loyalty to good government." The *Marshalltown Times-Republican* observed

that "those who opposed the presidential succession and the policies of his administration are of the same mind as when the battle was on. Neither success nor failure change established and fundamental convictions."

The Democrats viewed the future through rose-colored glasses. "Iowa farmers", observed the *Iowa Falls Citizen*, "have declared themselves in no uncertain terms as being in favor of an agricultural program which comes close to home." The *Sigourney News* felt there was no question but that the people "enjoyed their 'New Deal' and want some more of it." Jubilantly the *Ringsted Dispatch* prophesied, "We can now look to even bigger things in the way of agriculture for our state with two senators who are truly Iowans." The *Fort Dodge Messenger* expressed the principle that must prevail in a democracy: "The plain truth is that the overwhelming majority of Americans in virtually all sections have given the Roosevelt administration a tremendous endorsement. And we live in a country where the majority is king. All Americans are going to accept the verdict in the true American spirit. Republicans will wholeheartedly endorse the sentiments expressed by Governor Landon in his congratulatory telegram to President Roosevelt."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## Agriculture and Industry

As the year 1936 faded into history a number of nationally famous economists were asked to express their opinion of the place of those 366 hectic days in the flow of time. Glancing backward these professional surveyors of welfare observed that the worst of the depression was over, that the first permanent steps toward stability had been taken, and that the psychology of hope was replacing despair. True, some saw flaws in the business picture and some were critical of the political devices to control economic forces. Almost all were agreed, however, that the year 1937 would have the "flavoring of a boom".

Iowa stood high in the ranks of convalescing States. During the year 1936 the national government had continued to pump subsidies into the pockets of tens of thousands of Iowans. While these steady transfusions into the economic bloodstream of the body politic had diminished in amount compared with previous years, the State continued to receive generous aid.

Despite the record breaking drought, Iowa enjoyed its first half-billion-dollar farm income since 1930. A golden harvest of \$561,431,000 was

reaped by Iowa farmers during 1936. This was more than double the farm income of 1932 and \$67,000,000 greater than that of 1935. Furthermore, it included only \$25,428,000 from the government, which was less than half the Federal subsidies in 1935.

Despite the drought and grasshoppers, most Iowa farmers made money. The net income on 781 typical farms scattered over the State was two per cent larger than for 726 farms on which similar records were kept in 1935. The average net farm income was \$2596 compared with \$2530 in 1935. But the income was very unevenly distributed. The east central and north central sections showed a considerable increase over 1935, whereas the western and southern areas suffered a decided decrease. The State averaged only 16.3 bushels of corn to the acre. While some farmers actually failed to harvest a crop, Guy Coulter of Grundy County had cause to be proud. He won the Four-County Corn-Growing Contest with a yield of 103.17 bushels to the acre on a measured ten-acre plot. It was believed that Coulter's record was the highest in the State for 1936.

Notwithstanding evidences of returning agricultural prosperity, as shown by mounting income and higher wages for hired men, the convalescent rural area was not entirely out of danger. Chronic

ills still beset the basic industry of tillage. Farm tenancy was one of the gravest problems. For a series of editorials in the *Des Moines Register* on this subject and its relation to the future of American civilization W. W. Waymack was honorably mentioned by the Pulitzer prize committee.

Despite mortgage moratoriums, rising farm prices, higher land values, and a tendency to return farms to the individual operator, corporations continued to take title to more and more Iowa farm land. During the years 1935 and 1936, companies added 381,000 acres to their holdings, bringing their total on January 1, 1937, to 3,813,000 acres or 11.2 per cent of the farm land in the State. Insurance companies alone owned 2,632,550 acres, which is the equivalent of 114 townships. The increase in 1936 represented only the net gain, for corporations actually acquired 996,000 acres but sold 615,000 acres of farm land. Great as this increase might seem, it was not nearly so large as that of the previous two years.

The *Des Moines Register* was impressed with the "tremendous effect the economic rehabilitation of agriculture" had had in restoring general business stability. Comparatively light losses in liquidating the joint stock land banks were particularly noteworthy. "Let nobody say", the editor concluded, "that the farmer is the only one who has

benefited from the climb of agriculture toward economic parity. Nearly everybody who owned an insurance policy or a bank account in 1933 has received substantial benefit from the betterment of the farmer's status."

By 1936 it was apparent that more and more Iowa farmers were turning to the government's rural electrification administration for aid in obtaining modern power and lighting facilities. On 30,000 farms it was no longer necessary to do the chores by flickering lantern light nor churn the cream by hand. But there were over 212,000 farms in Iowa, and the reservoir for expansion in electrical equipment had scarcely been tapped.

During 1936 business conditions and industrial production, almost without exception, enjoyed one comment in common — "best since 1929". The genial Iowa business prognosticator, George R. Davies, found that business and industry had enjoyed a moderate swing upward despite the withering effect of the drought. "Already the farmers' improved conditions have been a boon to the automobile, steel and other major industries", declared the *Sheldon Sun*. "We hope that the eastern press will soon see the light."

Iowans were pleased to learn from William J. Reilly of the *American Weekly* that the State ranked high as a market. He pointed out that

Iowa stood among the twenty-five States that have the most people with the most money to spend and the highest living standards. Evidence in support of his assertion was not hard to produce. Bank deposits in Iowa increased 190 million dollars between January, 1933, and June, 1936. Deposits in Iowa's 544 State banks increased \$61,080,613.68 during 1936 to a total of \$374,945,417.22. State Superintendent of Banking, D. W. Bates, thought the increase could be traced directly to "the continued improvement in farm conditions and to the increase in employment." He viewed with some concern, however, the steady increase in postal savings deposits, asserting that Iowa had more money than any other State in postal savings accounts.

The sale of ordinary life insurance dropped one per cent during 1936 but the total was three per cent higher than the national average. On July 31, 1936, there were 619,979 automobiles registered in Iowa, or more than two thousand ahead of the total 1935 registration. A travel bureau representative estimated that 3,343,000 tourists would spend \$31,621,000 in Iowa in 1936. This was a larger sum than the Federal government spent on its much-maligned agricultural program. Iowa retail sales climbed to \$694,326,000 for 1936 to exceed the 1935 figure of \$650,029,000 by 6.8 per



cent. Gains ranging from two to 18.5 per cent were registered in every major business. Lumber and building material dealers experienced the most spectacular gain while groceries without meat registered the least.

Typical of the Iowa cities that enjoyed returning prosperity was Waterloo. "Desire buying" which Waterloo business men explained as purchasing "what you want and not just the bare necessities of existence", increased remarkably. "Business conditions are materially better", observed the vice president of the John Deere Tractor Company. "I feel that in our business it is due almost entirely to the substantial increase in the farmer's income." A dozen others agreed that the improved condition of the farmer combined with the increase in employment were vital factors in the recovery.

There were many other evidences that Iowa was well on its way to recovery. By April, industries were employing 10.6 per cent more workers and paying 13.9 per cent more in total wages. College graduates looked forward to more and better jobs: prospects had improved tremendously in 1935 and were even better in 1936. Business training schools had more requests for graduates than they could satisfy. Teachers' salaries continued to improve for the third successive year, although the

index was still 25 per cent below pre-depression years.

The demand for domestic help in the larger cities mounted steadily during 1936. In Des Moines, housemaids could still be hired in 1935 for from two to four dollars a week. By 1936 it was often difficult to secure a good housemaid for less than five or six dollars. This condition existed despite the fact that housework was considerably easier in 1936: Iowa kitchens alone were graced with 21.6 per cent more new electric refrigerators during the first six months of 1936 than were purchased during the same period in 1935.

One persistent note of gloom, however, could be distinctly heard in the general paean of optimism. Hundreds of citizens were not able to earn their own living. The Iowa Emergency Relief Administration spent over three and a half million dollars. The hope of abolishing poverty, which had once seemed so close to realization, had faded completely, and the government frankly assumed the obligation of providing economic security for certain classes. Iowa's old age assistance plan was approved by the national government and State funds for that purpose were augmented by the United States treasury. In December the General Assembly at a special session hurriedly enacted a law to provide compensation for tempo-

rarily unemployed industrial workers. This act conformed to the Federal Social Security regulations and entitled Iowa to receive the benefit of the Federal unemployment insurance taxes collected in this State.

Conclusive proof of better times, however, was revealed in the tax receipts for 1936. Iowans contributed more revenue for the use of gasoline and spent more for motor vehicle licenses. Sales tax collections reached a new high level and the income tax returns were substantially above 1935. Insurance tax receipts were higher, cigarette smoking increased, and beer consumption rose. Only the inheritance tax showed a decline.

Agriculture and industry went hand-in-hand along the road to recovery. The year 1936 was one of genuine optimism throughout Iowa. Broiling weather and red-faced politicians may have been conspicuous features of the year, but the merry jingle of the cash register continued in spite of such temporary diversions and reached a hallelujah chorus in a lucrative Christmas trade. By that time most of the people could count 1936 as a year of economic fruitfulness.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## The Web of Life

*"Happy New Year! Where will you be 100 years from now?"*

Citizens of McGregor were doubtless startled by the inquiry that met their eyes on a church bulletin board. Iowa newspapers and radios flashed the greeting throughout the State. Most of the two and a half million residents, answering literally, would be in their graves. But there was at least one Iowan whose life had spanned a century. He was Edward Haskins, the last surviving Civil War veteran at Garner, born when Iowa was a part of Michigan Territory. He voted for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. A hundred winters had consumed his strength, however, and Haskins died on April 9th.

Most Iowans probably celebrated the advent of another New Year at home with their families and close friends. Thousands, however, disported raucously at the theaters, dance halls, road houses, and night clubs. Many sat in reverie before the radio to hear their favorite artists. There in imagination they watched the 1935 parade of events, and wondered what fate had in store for the coming twelve months. Each could expect to play

a part, large or small, in the 366 daily reels of the comedy and tragedy that would constitute the web of life.

Many hopeful couples decided that 1936 would be an auspicious year to join their lives in matrimony. The number of marriages increased. Maybe leap year was a contributing factor. More likely, however, the chorus of "I will" was a sign of better times ahead. Indeed, the marriage rate had steadily increased since 1932 when the clouds of the depression were darkest. Approximately 23,000 weddings were solemnized in 1936. On June 10th the Reverend William Kent, for six years pastor of the Little Brown Church in the Vale, performed his three thousandth marriage ceremony. Margaret O'Grier of Deep River and Floyd Knupp of Cedar Rapids were the happy couple.

At Roland, Iowa, a veritable patriarch on the subject of matrimony, spoke with the voice of experience. Ninety-three-year-old Askild Skromme, who had been married for seventy-two years, declared that trouble between husband and wife could be avoided if only one got angry at a time. His ninety-one-year-old wife agreed that a quick temper in one required an even disposition in the other.

Iowa can lay no claim to sensational birth rates.

During the decade ending in 1935 the number of children born in Iowa ranged from 15.9 to 18.9 per 1000 population. During the depression years the fewest births were registered but by 1936 the rate had returned to normal. Rural areas showed the largest increases. The presence of the University hospital gave Iowa City the highest birth rate among the cities.

Additions to the population were sometimes sudden if not frequent. Maynard Ferguson, a Fort Dodge taxi driver, started for the Lutheran hospital with two passengers and arrived with three — Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Umbaugh, and a daughter, born in the cab. The attending physician announced that the mother and daughter were “doing well” — father and taxi driver, “not so well”.

The death rate in Iowa remains fairly constant. During the decade ending with 1935 deaths fluctuated between 10.1 and 10.8 per 1000 population. Hard times had less effect upon death than birth. According to the United States Health Service, Iowa, next to South Dakota, had the lowest death rate (9.9 per 1000 population) of the twenty-five States surveyed in 1936. The average was 11.3 per 1000 population — the highest since 1930. Heart disease and cancer, as usual, showed an upward trend, while infectious diseases such as

typhoid fever, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, and tuberculosis continued to decline in fatality. Fifteen children in one family had the mumps; but only two persons in the whole State died of measles.

The pioneers were slowly fading out of the picture of Iowa life. Mrs. J. C. Vinton, the oldest woman in Washington County, died at the age of ninety-five. At Sioux City two brothers who came to Iowa with their parents in 1855, died within twenty-four hours of each other. Nashua's last surviving Civil War veteran, John G. Wright, died at the age of ninety-eight. His passing was another somber reminder that the Grand Army of the Republic was almost gone.

Three former Governors — George W. Clarke, Nathan E. Kendall, and John Hammill — died in 1936 while the political kettle was boiling. Former United States Senator Charles A. Rawson died in Des Moines and Senator Louis Murphy was killed in an automobile accident near Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Representative Bernhard M. Jacobsen died in a hospital at Rochester, Minnesota. Two farm leaders were removed by the Grim Reaper: Milo Reno, arch-enemy of the AAA and the New Deal, and Charles E. Hearst, warm supporter of President Roosevelt. Journalists mourned the loss of William P. Wortman of

the Malvern *Leader*, William G. Ray of the Grinnell *Herald*, and Clint L. Price of the Indianola *Tribune*. Johnson Brigham will long be remembered for his cultural influence and his service of thirty-eight years as State librarian.

Travel on the public highways was nearly as dangerous as war and much more constant. Hundreds of people were killed or injured because the drivers of automobiles were going too fast. Many of them had also been drinking intoxicants. In the campaign to reduce the hazards of highway travel, no one was more energetic than W. Earl Hall, president of the Iowa State Safety Council. His editorial in the Mason City *Globe-Gazette* on traffic law enforcement won the national Commercial Investment Trust Foundation award of \$500. In spite of concerted efforts, however, motor accidents became more frequent.

Among the tragedies were some instances of incredible heroism. For example, on July 28th, Mrs. Elick Hudson took her three children and little Edward Olson with her to buy supplies for a threshing crew. On the way back to the farm her car stalled on a railroad crossing four miles east of Webster City. With horror she saw a fast train thundering toward her. Seizing her three children she shoved them out of danger. The train was perilously close when Mrs. Hudson dashed back



for the neighbor boy. She was too late. "I think Edward was in her arms when the train hit them," her daughter Jean sobbed hysterically. "They were thrown an awful long distance away." Mrs. Hudson was killed but the boy lived.

While disaster rode the highway, calamity lurked in many unexpected places. Three boys out gathering butterflies were killed by a fast passenger train. The walls of a ditch caved in and smothered a man. Anson Riesland, who was helping a neighbor thresh, took a drink out of a beer bottle and died a few hours later. The authorities discovered that Riesland had drunk grasshopper poison, so deadly that five drops would kill a man. The poison had been distributed by the Harrison County Farm Bureau to farmers bringing their own containers. Accidentally Riesland picked up a beer bottle filled with poison.

Although beset on all sides by conflicting religious, economic, political, and social beliefs, the church in Iowa continued to ride the rough sea of doubt and indifference. There were many evidences of its seaworthiness. The second annual countywide church and Bible school at Marshalltown, with the aid of thirteen bands, made a parade four miles long. Enrollment in the University of Iowa school of religion courses reached a total of 623 during 1935-36.

The Iowa Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Synod held its meetings at Stanton, Iowa, in April. Clergymen and laymen alike deplored the gambling, intemperance, and moral degeneracy of these times. The loss of the spiritual fervor of the pioneers as well as the use of the Swedish language in services were blamed for the lack of progress in the church. Speakers pointed to the New Sweden Church, the first Lutheran Church formed in Iowa in 1844. At one time it flourished with 500 members but in 1936 it had only fifty-six. Nevertheless, the cause was not hopeless: a new Lutheran congregation at Griswold obtained 140 members within six months.

About one thousand delegates attended the fifty-fifth annual convention of the Iowa synod of the Presbyterian Church at Ames in June. They represented some 375 churches with approximately 65,000 members. Sixty-four counties were represented at the seventy-first annual State Sunday School Convention at Newton in April. Actual registrations numbered 1057. But, according to the Reverend Paul E. Becker of Des Moines, "No state can claim to be fulfilling its destiny when but one-fourth of its population is recorded as church members."

Speaking before the Iowa-Des Moines Methodist Episcopal Conference, Mrs. Raymond Sayre

of Ackworth declared the rural church must be the vital factor in maintaining a balance between material and spiritual values in Iowa farm homes. Nevertheless, Dean J. C. Caldwell of the Drake University Bible College thought the handicaps of the rural churches were so great that they could not be expected to render the kind of religious leadership that is needed. The Reverend W. A. Winterstein of Iowa Falls lent statistical proof. In 1906 he had surveyed a township in northern Iowa. He found that 73 per cent of the 700 inhabitants were "vitaly" connected with a church. In 1935 he made an identical survey in the same township which then had a population of 675. Only 31 per cent of the people had vital church connections. Reverend Winterstein estimated that approximately 1000 rural churches had closed in Iowa since 1926 when a church census showed that there were 5349 churches of which 3913 were considered rural.

The day of the circuit riders in Iowa has apparently not yet passed. The Reverend John W. Zerbe of Eddyville reported he had walked 19,000 miles to preach during his eight years in Iowa. While he was located at Iconium he averaged about fifty miles a week. "One day I conducted nine services, travelled seventy-five miles and walked seventeen of them", he said.

And there were other evidences of religious pioneering. By working whenever they had spare time, members of the Bethel Lutheran Church at Parkersburg completed their new building in ninety days, just in time to celebrate the Christmas season. A little band of Open Bible followers at Toledo built a log-cabin church which they hope will become a wedding shrine.

While the church was barely holding its own in Iowa and the nation at large, attendance at motion picture shows advanced about ten per cent. In Iowa, the year opened with 413 theaters in operation and closed with 449. The principal of Abraham Lincoln High School at Council Bluffs changed the date of graduation in 1936 lest bank night might prove too great a counter attraction.

Seventy-five county, district, and regional fairs and expositions were held in Iowa in 1936. Thousands of people attended these exhibitions to see the fat hogs, sleek cattle, golden grain, luscious fruit, and the products of industry, home, and school. Two rainy days, combined with the drought conference in Des Moines, reduced attendance at the State fair slightly below that of 1935, but still substantially above that of the depression years. The Dairy Cattle Congress at Waterloo attracted record-breaking throngs: a crowd of 34,000 exceeding all previous single-day

attendances. Cedar Rapids inaugurated its first all-Iowa dairy and livestock show at Frontier Park in September.

Iowa was a strong contender for high honors at the International Livestock Exposition in Chicago. A trainload of 1350 fat cattle valued at \$175,000 left the little town of Schleswig. It was said to be the "largest consignment of its kind ever to be loaded out of a single shipping point in the United States." Cleo Yoder of Wellman missed by a narrow margin the distinction of winning the grand championship with a fat steer for the second consecutive year. Iowa State College placed first and second in the fat Shorthorn show of heavy animals. Lyle F. Edwards of Knoxville won the livestock-record contest in the 4-H show. Elliott Brown of Rose Hill won first place on his graded Angus herd.

The twenty-third annual Indian Powwow attracted large crowds to Tama. Politicians vied with bands but most people preferred to watch the dances, visit the Indian village, or study the display of "true and original American art". The Scandinavians also held their annual powwow. Three thousand gathered at the State Fairgrounds in Des Moines from many Iowa places to hear of the accomplishments of the Scandinavians in America. The first Hot Dog Day at Maquoketa

was described as a "howling success" when the visitors consumed 4200 free frankfurter sandwiches.

The twenty-ninth annual Pilot Rock plowing match attracted a big crowd in northwestern Iowa. A team of horses established a new State pulling record by hauling 3600 pounds a distance of twenty-seven and a half feet at the Adair County Fair. Hailed as the "world's greatest county fair", the attendance at the Clay County Fair at Spencer has more than doubled in ten years.

The annual rodeo at Estherville was held in commemoration with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the town. Other towns, ranging from Rochester and Washington, to Davenport and Council Bluffs held centennial celebrations in 1936. The thirteenth annual Sidney Rodeo opened in 108° heat with 8000 persons present to watch 157 cowboys perform. The next day more than 18,000 spectators attended.

In 1936 the one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the first newspaper in Iowa was observed. The *Du Buque Visitor* made its appearance on May 11, 1836. A century later, 48 daily, 512 weekly, and thirteen semi-weekly newspapers were being published in Iowa.

Although less than a year old, *American Prefaces*, University of Iowa Literary Magazine, was

listed by Edward J. O'Brien as the "most promising new magazine of the year". Stories by Karlton Kelm of Dubuque and Erling Larson of Cresco were reprinted in his 1936 collection of best short stories. Mrs. Winifred Mayne Van Etten of Mount Vernon quarreled with her husband about fox hunting. "There's no element of sportsmanship to it", she said. "It just seems like a dirty trick on the fox." To prove her point she wrote a book. *I Am the Fox* won the \$10,000 Atlantic Monthly prize for the "most interesting and distinctive novel" of 1936.

In the realm of sports the names of several Iowans were conspicuous. The baseball world was thrilled on August 2nd when a seventeen-year-old farm boy from Van Meter pitched in his first major league ball game with the Cleveland Indians and struck out fifteen astonished Saint Louis Browns. "Bob" Feller's feat was one short of the American League strikeout record. Three weeks later he established a new American league strikeout record for a single game by fanning seventeen Philadelphia Athletics.

Golf laurels in 1936 went to fifteen-year-old Edith Estabrooks of Dubuque. Brilliant playing won for her the Girls' Western Junior Open Tournament at Detroit in July. On August 1st she won her second straight Iowa women's golf cham-

pionship. Billy Hall, a quiet Boone boy of seventeen, won the Iowa amateur golf tournament at Waterloo. To Chicago went nineteen-year-old Sid Richardson to win the Western Junior golf title.

The University of Iowa won the Big Ten championship in swimming for the first time in twenty years of competition.

While most of the people were enjoying wholesome contests and entertainment, a few were preying upon society. Human wolves prowled about the cities and in isolated places: racketeers operated ingenious extortion schemes. Thieves, bandits, kidnappers, bigamists, and murderers filled the newspapers with their exciting activities. The murder of Dan Shine at Elkader was exploited in crime magazines and featured in *International Detective*.

As Highway Patrolman Oran Pape was driving along late in the afternoon of April 29th, he saw an automobile that had been used by bandits. At once he stopped the car, but when he approached to question the driver he found himself covered with a revolver. The outlaw ordered him to get in beside him and, with the gun leveled at Pape, started to drive away. The patrolman grabbed the weapon, but the bandit shot him in the abdomen. Though mortally wounded, Pape took the



revolver away from the assassin and killed him. A passing motorist rushed the patrolman to a hospital, but he died the next day.

There was also a brighter side of life in Iowa. Frank J. Iten continued to play Santa Claus to an ever expanding community with his colorful Christmas display at Clinton. At Marshalltown F. L. McCammand chose June as an appropriate time to play Santa Claus. Having sold his bottling business he wished to show his gratitude to his faithful employees and so he invited them to a banquet. Upon dipping into the ice cream each married man found a check for \$800 and his wife another for \$200. The single man uncreamed a \$525 check, and a part-time worker got \$75. "It was worth it to see those looks of surprise", McCammand chuckled. "The hilarity didn't start until every one got over being stunned."

An Iowa editor not long ago won the Pulitzer Prize for an editorial explaining the depression by saying that the people had spent their money. What did Iowans spend their money for in 1936? A careful analysis of the retail sales tax during the first quarter of that year showed that, next to food and general merchandise, they spent more for automobiles than any other tangible item. Food took 22 per cent, general merchandise 24.8 per cent, and 13 per cent went for automobiles and

accessories, while only 8.7 per cent of the expenditures, measured by the sales tax, was used for lumber and building material, 7.9 per cent for clothing, 7 per cent for services, 2.5 per cent for furniture, and 12.5 per cent for miscellaneous purposes. As the income of Iowans gradually crept upward the tendency to purchase more of the luxuries of life increased. Nevertheless, many families had no money to spend.

The skein which makes up the web of life in 1936 is as variable as the weather. Some Iowans like Bob Feller and Mrs. Winifred Van Etten enjoyed a meteoric rise to fame. Others like Oran Pape fell like shooting stars before their race had been half run. Not unlike the torrid heat of summer was the whirlwind romance of Robert Burt of Creston who was married five hours after a "blind date". Quite in contrast was the announcement of Arthur Franzen and Ellen Carlson that they had been married at Maryville, Missouri, in 1923. As constant as the sun in the sky was Charles Zwister during his fifty-four years of service on the railroad. As rich as a bounteous nature in its fruitful generosity was the spirit of F. L. McCammand. Deep and mysterious as the boundless sea was the unplumbed love and devotion of Mrs. Elick Hudson toward her children. In the lives of such Iowans is mirrored the story of Iowa in 1936.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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