

## 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.

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