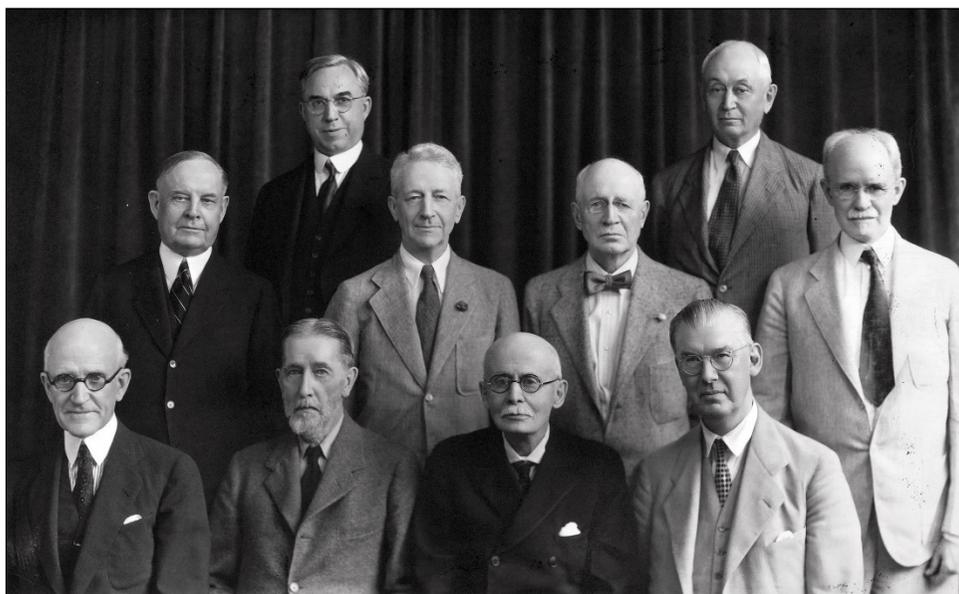


# The Annals of Iowa

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## In This Issue

PAUL PUTZ, a doctoral candidate in history at Baylor University, shows how, from 1908 to 1916, evangelical Protestant religious leaders in Des Moines organized and engaged in local elections under the Des Moines Plan's commission form of government because they believed that they were uniquely equipped to provide the moral impulse for an otherwise materialistic city-boosting movement.

JEFFREY T. MANUEL, associate professor in the department of historical studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, describes Iowa's first major debate over ethanol, a movement—known as the power alcohol movement—to legislate alcohol-gasoline blends in the 1930s, a time when power alcohol, like ethanol today, was the focus of vigorous debate in Des Moines and Washington, D.C., that pitted farmers and their representatives against gasoline consumers and oil companies.

## Front Cover

Members of the Prairie Club of Des Moines who have been members for 30 years or more pose in 1935. The Prairie Club provided a venue for Des Moines's religious leaders to build stronger relationships with the city's business leaders. For the role of Des Moines's religious leaders in municipal reform and electoral politics in the years under the Des Moines Plan's commission form of city government, see Paul Emory Putz's article in this issue.

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# Building a City on a Hill: Evangelical Protestant Men and Moral Reform under the Des Moines Plan, 1907–1916

PAUL EMORY PUTZ

ON APRIL 6, 1908, exactly one week after Des Moines held its first municipal election under the commission system popularly dubbed the Des Moines Plan, the *Des Moines Register and Leader* began its editorial section with the heading, “A City on a Hill.” Underneath the heading was an excerpt from the *Chicago Record-Herald*. “To all students of municipal reform, and especially of the commission plan,” the *Record-Herald* proclaimed, “Des Moines will be like a city set upon a hill for the next few years.”<sup>1</sup>

For readers today, the “city on a hill” phrase is a well-worn part of the American vocabulary, conjuring up images of Puritans and American exceptionalism. Yet, as historian Richard Gamble has shown, those connotations were not yet in place in the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> When citizens of Des Moines used the metaphor to describe their city, they drew not from the Puritans, but from the same source as John Winthrop had: the Gospel of Matthew. In that book’s account of the Sermon on the Mount,

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I thank three anonymous readers and the editor for their helpful comments on this article. I also acknowledge the State Historical Society of Iowa Research Grant that supported research for the article.

1. “A City on a Hill,” *Des Moines Register and Leader* (hereafter cited as *R&L*), 4/6/1908. *R&L* accessed via [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com).

2. Richard Gamble, *In Search of the City on a Hill: The Making and Unmaking of an American Myth* (New York, 2012).

Jesus tells his listeners, “Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. . . . Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”<sup>3</sup>

The biblical reference to a city as a model to bring glory to God fit naturally with Des Moines’s pioneering efforts in municipal reform. Following the logic of white Protestant leaders like Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong, many Americans believed that the nation’s salvation depended in part on the salvation of its cities. The cities, Strong had argued in his popular tract *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885), were “where the forces of evil are massed” and where “the need of Christian influence is peculiarly great.”<sup>4</sup> But despite attempts over the next two decades to eliminate such urban “forces of evil” as ward politics, corruption, and vice—problems usually associated with the growing number of immigrants and Catholics in the cities—by 1905 many white, English-speaking Protestants still considered municipal government to be a failure.<sup>5</sup> To reform Des Moines’s government carried with it the possibility that Des Moines could point the way forward for the rest of the nation’s cities.

Despite the biblical rhetoric surrounding the Des Moines Plan, its religious dimensions have not been fully explored. This is partly because scholars have focused most of their attention on the mechanics and structure of the commission form of government and on questions of capital and labor and how “progressive” the commission system really was. Partly, too, most studies of the plan do not cover the post-1908 elections.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Matt. 5:14–16 (American Standard Version).

4. Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (New York, 1885), 134.

5. Of course, as Paul Boyer highlights in *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), attempts by middle-class Protestants to reform cities had been ongoing since the antebellum era.

6. The most detailed accounts of the Des Moines Plan are John F. O’Connell, “Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government” (M.A. thesis, Drake University, 1975); Bradley Robert Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901–1920* (Austin, TX, 1977); and Robert E. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy: The Commission Government Contest in Des Moines, 1905–1908,” *Annals of Iowa* 58 (1999), 241–71.

Religion first became a central feature of Des Moines's city elections in 1910. Thus, although Des Moines's religious leaders did not lead the charge for the commission system, once it was approved the Des Moines Plan galvanized evangelical Protestants to exert their moral authority. They saw in the excitement of local electoral politics an opportunity for both self-preservation and service—the former because the masculine domain of politics served as an attractive recruiting tool for ministers increasingly distressed about the feminization of their churches; the latter because they believed that they were uniquely equipped to provide the moral impulse for an otherwise materialistic city-boosting movement. From 1908 until 1916 they organized and engaged in local elections as they sought to ensure that Des Moines would not gain the whole world—or at least an efficient government and expanding local economy—while losing its soul.

WHEN AGITATION for the commission system began in 1905, Des Moines was the largest city in Iowa, with a population of 75,628. Yet, as Iowa historian Dorothy Schwieder has observed, Iowa's cities in the early twentieth century had a strong agrarian tint.<sup>7</sup> Flora Dunlap, who moved from Chicago's famed Hull House to run Des Moines's Roadside Settlement House in 1904, remarked that her new environment "seemed almost like a country village."<sup>8</sup> Not only did Des Moines's size pale in comparison to other industrial cities in the region, such as Omaha, Chicago, and Kansas City, but Des Moines also had a relatively homogeneous population dominated by native-born, English-speaking Protestants. Even when compared to other Iowa cities, Des Moines was exceptional in this regard: of the state's eight cities with at least 20,000 people in 1905, Des Moines had the second-lowest percentage of foreign-born residents, at 12 percent. Related to this, Des Moines had only 3,658 Catholics; Protestant churches claimed six times as many communicants. The Jewish community, listed at 183 families, was small as well, and with

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7. Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames, 1996), 184.

8. Flora Dunlap, "Roadside Settlement of Des Moines," *Annals of Iowa* 21 (1938), 165.

African Americans constituting just 3 percent of the city's population, Des Moines was a bastion of white Protestantism.<sup>9</sup>

The "seven sister" Protestant denominations—the Disciples of Christ, northern Methodists, Presbyterians, Evangelical Lutherans, northern Baptists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians—stood at the forefront of Des Moines's informal white Protestant establishment. The Disciples of Christ, typically a more rural denomination, had an unusually powerful presence. Thanks in part to the presence of Drake University, a Disciples university founded in 1881, there were more Disciples in proportion to the total population in Des Moines than in any other American city except Lexington, Kentucky. Northern Methodists stood right behind the Disciples in membership count, followed by Presbyterians, northern Baptists, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Evangelical Lutherans.<sup>10</sup>

To speak of a "white Protestant establishment" in Des Moines is not to suggest a wholly united entity acting in concert and imposing its will. Rather, as historian William Hutchison suggests, it is best to think of the early twentieth-century Protestant establishment as a "group of denominations" and a "network of leaders in general connected with them."<sup>11</sup> In the early twentieth century that network identified itself as "evangelical," a descriptive term used at that time for all Protestant denominations that officially accepted the divinity of Jesus; Unitarians, Catholics, and

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9. *Census of Iowa for the Year 1905* (Des Moines, 1905), 687; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Part I (Washington, DC, 1910), 434. The one Iowa city with a lower percentage of foreign-born residents was Waterloo.

10. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, 434. In Des Moines, 6 percent of the population belonged to a Disciples church. For a brief description of the Disciples of Christ/Church of Christ in the early twentieth century, see David Edwin Harrell Jr., *The Church of Christ in the 20th Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2000), 3–9. The non-creedal nature of the Disciples movement helped the denomination earn citywide influence. Drake University did not require students or faculty to agree to any particular religious tenets, and the college reached out to the wider Des Moines community. Its original board of trustees included three prominent Des Moines citizens who were not associated with the Disciples. See Charles J. Ritchey, *Drake University through Seventy-Five Years: 1881–1956* (Des Moines, 1956), 41, 90.

11. William R. Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (New York, 1989), 3–4.

Jews could not claim the evangelical label, but Methodists, Presbyterians, Disciples, and even Episcopalians could. So, too, the leaders of the white Protestant establishment tended to assume that they possessed responsibility for the moral and spiritual well-being of their community and nation.<sup>12</sup> In Des Moines special occasions such as Good Friday or Thanksgiving provided opportunities for white Protestants to ritualize their privileged cultural place. On those days the leading pastors from each of the city's "seven sister" denominations gathered at one of the downtown churches for union services, with generous media coverage from the city's leading newspapers.<sup>13</sup>

In 1905 two of Des Moines's best institutional expressions of these establishment traits—of connected evangelical Protestants who felt a shared sense of responsibility for the moral state of their community—were the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Ministerial Association. Both confined their membership to evangelicals. The former, founded in 1868, focused on community uplift and character development but generally did not engage in political agitation. The latter, formed in 1872, provided fellowship and an occasional forum to speak out on such moral issues as prostitution, gambling, unregulated saloons, and immoral amusements.<sup>14</sup>

The evangelical ministers were no monolith. Some conservative ministers, such as John A. Wirt of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, resisted the Ministerial Association's attempts to get involved with moral reform. Wirt believed that clergy should eschew any engagement with "secular" topics while acting in their ministerial role.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, some liberals rejected the narrowness of the association's moral reforms;

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12. Edwin S. Gaustad, "The Pulpit and the Pews," in *Between the Times*, 21.

13. "Thanksgiving at Plymouth Church," *R&L*, 11/24/1905; "Seven Excellent Sermons," *R&L*, 3/30/1907. Bill R. Douglas discusses the importance of the Thanksgiving services in "Making Iowa Safe for Differences: Barnstorming Iowa on Behalf of Religious Tolerance, 1936-1943," *Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 247-49.

14. Johnson Brigham, *Des Moines: The Pioneer of Municipal Progress and Reform of the Middle West*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1911), 1:585-86, 353; "New Society of City Clergymen," *R&L*, 12/25/1903.

15. "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908; "Rev. John A. Wirt Dies Suddenly," *R&L*, 5/10/1908.

rather than regulating vaudeville shows, they wanted church leaders to take on issues like the relationship between capital and labor.<sup>16</sup> Controversy also arose from time to time over the association's exclusion of nonevangelicals, in part because the city's Unitarian church, led by the brilliant Mary Safford, had a number of influential and well-to-do members.<sup>17</sup> In 1903 two of Des Moines's leading evangelical ministers—Episcopalian rector J. Everett Cathell and Plymouth Congregational Church pastor Frank Hodgdon—departed the association because of its exclusion of Unitarians, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>18</sup>

Yet these divisions, personally rancorous as they may have been, remained relatively minor. Hodgdon and Cathell still participated in union church services, for example, and enjoyed the benefits of their establishment status. As for the Ministerial Association, when challenged for excluding nonevangelicals, its members claimed that they stood in "perfect accord with the great religious movements of the age" like the YMCA. They also claimed to stand for "the uplifting of humanity and the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ in the world," a task at which evangelical organizations had been successful precisely because they stood for "definite religious truth."<sup>19</sup>

As its rhetoric suggests, the Ministerial Association did not view its exclusion of nonevangelicals as reason to cede the ground of progressive religion. In its view, evangelical Protestantism stood at the forefront of progress. That was certainly the view of Harvey Breeden, pastor of the city's largest evangelical church, Central Christian, from 1885 until 1906. Breeden modeled a practical progressive evangelicalism that was committed to the superiority of evangelical Protestantism while remaining open to new methods, ideas, and relationships. In 1902 a writer

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16. "New Society of City Clergymen," *R&L*, 12/25/1903.

17. Among the influential Unitarian citizens were James Hanna and Johnson Brigham. Safford's leadership of Des Moines's Unitarian community (as well as that of her co-laborer, Eleanor Gordon) is featured in Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston, 1990).

18. "Rector Cathell Raises Storm," *R&L*, 12/26/1903. On the push by liberal Protestants for interfaith cooperation and inclusion at the turn of the twentieth century, see David Mislin, *Saving Faith: Making Religious Pluralism an American Value at the Dawn of the Secular Age* (Ithaca, NY, 2015), 63-89.

19. "Ministers Rise to Tell the Story," *R&L*, 12/29/1903.

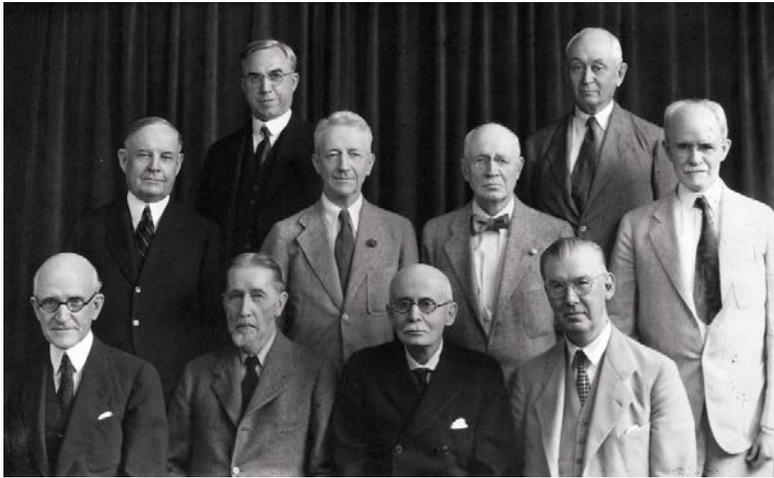
for a leading liberal Protestant journal, *The Outlook*, visited Breeden's church for a series on "Religious Life in America." The author came away impressed. Most of the elements that historians associate with early twentieth-century liberal Protestantism were present: social service activities, commitment to progress, and a pastor who embraced "modern developments of theological thought," including evolution and higher criticism of the Bible. But Breeden did not make his theological views a centerpiece of the church; in matters of theological opinion, congregants had "absolute freedom, except as to the divinity of Christ." Instead, Breeden fostered unity in action and efficiency, keeping church members busy and involved in Christian work in the city.<sup>20</sup>

Breeden's practical progressivism had influence beyond the bounds of his congregation, pointing to one final trait of the white Protestant establishment in Des Moines: its connection to business and professional elites. In 1890, for example, Breeden founded the Prairie Club. Intended for intellectual discussion and fellowship, its meetings featured paper presentations and discussions on a variety of topics, ranging from literature and art to religion and politics. The club's records show that members were decidedly middle- and upper-class, with occupations including lawyers, physicians, judges, editors, clergymen, professors, and business owners. An impressive array of religious leaders claimed membership, including Jewish, Catholic, Unitarian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, and Disciples of Christ clergymen. Rallying around shared cultural values and socio-economic exclusiveness, the club provided an important way for the city's religious leaders to build stronger relationships with business and political leaders.<sup>21</sup> In organizations like

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20. Ernest Hamlin Abbott, "Religious Life in America IX: The Eastern West," *Outlook*, 6/14/1902, 459; A. T. DeGroot, ed., *Central of Des Moines: The Story of Central Christian Church* (Des Moines, 1945), 63–81. While in Des Moines Breeden mentored Charles Clayton Morrison, who would go on to become the editor and publisher of the *Christian Century*, the most important liberal Protestant journal in the United States. See Elesha Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York, 2013), 15–17.

21. Prairie Club Minutes, 1890–1917, folder 1, box 1, Prairie Club of Greater Des Moines Records, 1890–1993 (hereafter cited as PCGDMR), State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM). See also Prairie Club Minutes, Sept. 1933–May 1945, folder 4, box 1, PCGDMR. The various occupations of members were listed in the Card Index Record of 1890–1941,



*In 1935 the Prairie Club of Des Moines celebrated its members of 30 years or more. Front row (l to r): James B. Weaver, James C. Hume, Johnson Brigham, Henry S. Nollen; middle row: Gardner Cowles Sr., H. H. Stipp, James C. Davis, F. I. Herriott; back row: Jesse A. Miller, Harvey Ingham. Photo from State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.*

the Prairie Club, then, Des Moines's white Protestants could embrace interreligious cooperation while at the same time using the Ministerial Association and other Protestant-only organizations to ensure that interreligious cooperation did not impinge on white Protestant claims for primary moral authority within the city.

MUNICIPAL REFORM had been the subject of discussion at Prairie Club meetings since its founding in the 1890s.<sup>22</sup> By 1905, however, municipal reform was more than a discussion topic in

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box 13, PCGDMR. Although its membership was limited to 30, the rules allowed members to bring guests, and nonactive members were rotated out in order to open up space for those who could participate in the monthly meetings. Prominent members included Albert B. Cummins, James Berryhill, Henry Wallace Sr., Gardner Cowles, and Harvey Ingham.

22. Prairie Club Minutes, Sept. 1933–May 1945, p. 3, folder 4, box 1, PCGDMR. (The minute book for 1933–1945 includes an insert at the front of the book with a brief history of the club and a list of the speakers and speaker topics since the club's inception.)

Des Moines. Dissatisfaction with city government intensified among business and professional men who believed that corruption and inefficiency burdened Des Moines's government. Using the Commercial Club as a base, these men began to agitate for a new city government that would be more conducive to economic growth and efficiency.<sup>23</sup>

While many individuals associated with the Commercial Club were also connected with the city's religious institutions, they did not act on behalf of the churches or frame their project in religious terms.<sup>24</sup> Rather, they framed their reform efforts as an attempt to apply business methods to city government. James Berryhill—a wealthy Des Moines businessman whose wife was a leading Unitarian—jump-started the reform campaign when he took a trip to Galveston, Texas. There Berryhill studied the commission form of government that Galveston had implemented in 1901 in the wake of the devastating hurricane that had largely destroyed the city the previous year. Unlike in the mayor-council system used by Des Moines and most other cities, under the commission system each elected official took charge of a single city department. That arrangement effectively merged the legislative and executive functions into one body while making it clear who was responsible for the day-to-day operation of the specific functions of city government. The commission system also eliminated ward-based voting in favor of at-large representation.<sup>25</sup>

Berryhill first presented his findings to the Commercial Club near the end of 1905. From that time until March 1907—when Iowa's state legislature passed a bill allowing Des Moines to vote on adopting a new charter—the pro-reform forces sought to consolidate support for the plan. They faced strong opposition from various quarters, including organized labor, city officials

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23. For the view that municipal government in Des Moines was not as bad as the businessmen believed, see Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 246–49.

24. For example, of the Commercial Club's 18 board members in 1908, the biographies of 12 are listed in volume 2 of Brigham's *Des Moines*. Of those 12, 8 are described as being associated with evangelical Protestant denominations: three Episcopalians, two Presbyterians, one Congregationalist, one Disciple, and one Methodist. The other four were one Catholic, one Jew, and two with no religious affiliation listed.

25. Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 34–51.

then in power, socialists, and public service corporations. The opposition had a geographical and class dimension. Most of those who championed the commission system lived in the affluent neighborhoods on the west side of the Des Moines River. Not surprisingly, the working-class population on the east side viewed the elite-led movement with suspicion.<sup>26</sup>

Supporters tinkered with the commission system in order to appease its critics. They arranged for nonpartisan elections to ease the minds of Democrats who feared irrelevance in a Republican-dominated city, and they responded to cries that the system was antidemocratic by adding initiative and referendum features. In 1906 they also linked their plan with a city-boosting movement spearheaded by the Greater Des Moines Committee, a group that had spun out of the Commercial Club. In November 1906 the Greater Des Moines Committee announced a slogan for its movement: "Des Moines Does Things." Proclaimed in the press and printed on buttons and the sides of streetcars, the slogan quickly became identified with the push for the commission system.<sup>27</sup>

As Des Moines's businessmen organized and led the campaign for the Des Moines Plan, the city's Protestant leaders mostly cheered from the sidelines. Some, however, caught the booster spirit, none more so than Frank Hodgdon, pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church. In a sermon delivered on February 3, 1907, Hodgdon interpreted the storm that had devastated Galveston and led to its commission system as "cleansing waters" sent by God, and he applauded the work of the Greater Des Moines Committee. Unlike past efforts for reform, in which "the best men said, 'We can't do anything' and 'Why not preach sermons that shall be balm to our souls,'" the booster movement had brought about a different attitude in Des Moines. "Men are saying, 'We can do it,'" Hodgdon declared.<sup>28</sup>

Not all ministers supported the Des Moines Plan as explicitly as Hodgdon did. Conservatives in the Ministerial Association remained timid about entering too fully into the realm of politics;

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26. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 256.

27. "Slogan for Des Moines Chosen," *R&L*, 11/7/1906; Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 38.

28. "Hodgdon Is for Galveston System," *R&L*, 2/4/1907.

at a May 1907 meeting the Ministerial Association censured Hodgdon for his outspoken agitation for the commission system.<sup>29</sup> Most evangelical ministers seemed to be sympathetic to the movement, however, and Des Moines's three west-side daily newspapers, united in support of commission government, amplified any supportive ministerial voices. On the last Monday before the special election the *Register and Leader* ran a front-page story stating that it was the "consensus of opinion among the ministers that moral virtue can be obtained for the city only through the Des Moines plan." The *Tribune*, an east-side daily newspaper launched specifically to combat the Des Moines Plan, agreed with the *Register and Leader's* assessment, although its attitude toward ministerial support was decidedly negative. The ministers' willingness to support the Des Moines Plan and thereby join the "assault upon popular government," a *Tribune* editorial declared, would not be forgotten when the ministers "appear before the great white throne."<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that the white Protestant establishment did not hold a monopoly on appeals to religious morality. Those sympathetic to the cause of working people pointed out that the Des Moines Plan was conceived largely by the city's elites.<sup>31</sup> Standing within a long tradition of working-class Christianity that cast suspicion on wealth and empathized with the "common man" over the upper classes, this group appealed to the Bible as they argued that the Des Moines Plan would hinder democracy by concentrating power in the hands of a privileged few.<sup>32</sup> Leonard Brown, an economic populist and longtime resident of Des Moines, blasted the idea of running a city government on the basis of business principles. Drawing on a biblical

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29. "A Stir Among Ministers," *R&L*, 5/7/1907.

30. "Pastors Plead for Better Conditions," *R&L*, 6/17/1907; "The Pulpit and Press," *Des Moines Tribune* (hereafter cited as *DMT*), 6/21/1907; O'Connell, "Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government," 82-87.

31. Of the Committee of 300—the group that organized to boost the plan—253 were from the west side, while only 28 were from the east. See O'Connell, "Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government," 60; Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 256.

32. On nineteenth-century expressions of working-class Christianity, see Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York, 2015).

passage from Isaiah 3:5, Brown argued that in practice “business principles” equated to “grinding the faces of the poor.”<sup>33</sup>

Some Catholic and Jewish leaders supported working-class Christians in the fight against the Des Moines Plan. Leaders in those communities likely understood that citywide elections would favor the white Protestant majority in the city. Thus, the Hebrew Republican Club and Catholic priest Joseph F. Nugent went public with their opposition to the “anti-democratic” features of the Des Moines Plan.<sup>34</sup> Des Moines’s west-side newspapers tended to downplay the religious arguments used by non-Protestants and working-class Protestants, choosing instead to portray white Protestant ministers as the dominant voice of moral authority.<sup>35</sup>

Voters approved the Des Moines Plan on June 20, 1907. The push for a commission system had been spearheaded by businessmen and framed as the application of efficient business principles to city government. But once the plan passed, Des Moines’s Protestant establishment seized the moment and began to co-opt the “Des Moines Does Things” booster spirit for the purpose of moral reform. For many of Des Moines’s ministers, the slogan fit perfectly with their hopes for a Christianity that could remain relevant to modern life by appealing to “masculine” action rather than the supposedly outdated emphasis on dogma and private piety. At the same time, it resonated with their longstanding belief that they served as moral guardians for the communities in which they lived and worked.

LIKE MANY PROTESTANT LEADERS in the early twentieth century, Des Moines’s Protestant ministers feared that their brand of religion had become feminized. They were right to recognize

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33. Leonard Brown, *Our Own Columbia That Is To Be* (Des Moines, 1908), 353. Brown’s criticisms of the Des Moines Plan are featured on pages 339–65. For more on Brown, see Luella M. Wright, “Leonard Brown, Poet and Populist,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 46 (1948), 227–65.

34. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy,” 255; O’Connell, “Des Moines Adopts the Commission Form of Municipal Government,” 91.

35. On Des Moines’s Jewish community, see Frank Rosenthal, *The Jews of Des Moines: The First Century* (Des Moines, 1957). On Catholics in Des Moines at the time, see Charles Blanchard, “Religion in Iowa—The Catholics,” *Annals of Iowa* 36 (1962), 392–94.

that women tended to be more involved in church activities than men. Within the evangelical Protestant denominations in Des Moines in 1906, the percentage of male communicants ranged from a low of 34.7 percent (Congregationalists) to a high of just 38.4 percent (Disciples of Christ). For Des Moines's Catholics, on the other hand, 47.2 percent of communicants were men.<sup>36</sup> That disparity had long been true for American Protestants, but it took on new urgency at the turn of the twentieth century as women became increasingly involved in public life. In response, many ministers sought to refashion themselves and their congregations in masculine hues. "It is more or less true that there are three genders, the masculine, feminine, and ministers," Methodist minister E. T. Hagerman remarked at a meeting of Des Moines's Ministerial Association in late 1907. "What we need is men."<sup>37</sup> Believing that men would reject an overly emotional or sentimental religion, ministers shifted toward preaching a more practical message, and they increasingly brought their church structures into conformity with the masculine business world. Furthermore, believing that action appealed to men, they launched numerous social service and reform initiatives.<sup>38</sup>

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36. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1906*, Part I (Washington, DC, 1910), 434.

37. "Need More Vitality in Pulpits Everywhere," *R&L*, 12/24/1907. Hagerman's comments were in response to a paper presented by Harvey Ingham to the Ministerial Association. Ingham had first presented his paper at the Prairie Club and was then invited to share it with the ministers. See Prairie Club Minutes, 1890-1917, p. 32, folder 1, box 1, PCGDMR. Ingham's paper, titled "Art a Symbol of Decadence," was an "arraignment of the idea and practice of Art for Art's sake."

38. Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41 (1989), 440-41; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 78-83. In truth, women in organizations like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had pioneered militant reform tactics in the late nineteenth century. But reflecting the reaction against "feminization," after the turn of the twentieth century male-led organizations like the Anti-Saloon League increasingly became the new public face of Protestant moral reform. See Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 84-88, 170-74, 190; and K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven, CT, 1985).



A racial and nationalistic component underlay the urgent call for men as well. In the age of Teddy Roosevelt's "strenuous life," white Americans feared the emasculating tendencies of "over-civilization" and linked manliness with white racial supremacy and national progress.<sup>39</sup> For American evangelical Protestants

39. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1996), 184-214.

who perceived themselves as guardians of the nation's morality, the call for virile men to serve the nation's increasingly expansive global agenda was also a call for Protestant churches to make sure that America's virile men were moral men. Thus, the Progressive Era Protestant obsession with bringing men into church was not just about preserving the church; it was also about preserving the Protestant character and supposed moral superiority of the American nation.

The passage of the Des Moines Plan made the city a local staging ground for this larger national trend. Even before the plan passed, Des Moines's ministers had begun to discuss their potential responsibility. In October 1906, for example, Methodist minister Orien Fifer spoke to the Ministerial Association about the movement for a "greater Des Moines." Fifer urged ministers to provide the booster movement with a moral backbone by venturing "a little farther in our leadership and activity" and arousing church members "to their civic responsibilities."<sup>40</sup>

Less than two weeks after the passage of the Des Moines Plan, famed revivalist J. Wilbur Chapman (Billy Sunday's mentor) made a similar plea. While holding revival services in the area, Chapman applauded Des Moines's booster movement but cautioned that something was missing. "If you would make your city famous throughout the world," he implored, "you should organize a body to better the moral conditions."<sup>41</sup>

Polk County Sunday School Association president H. M. Whinery took Chapman's words to heart. In late July he organized a parade of Sunday School children to march through the streets of Des Moines "singing gospel hymns and waving aloft banners of Christianity." A newspaper reporter praised the event by linking it with the booster movement: "'Des Moines Does Things' had a new demonstration."<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, Charles Medbury, pastor of University Christian Church, served notice that Des Moines's evangelical ministers might turn to electoral politics in order to guide the city's moral progress. Nine months before the first election under the Des Moines Plan, Medbury

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40. "Team Work Needed among Ministers," *R&L*, 10/9/1906.

41. "Stall-Fed Pastors Don't Suit Chapman," *R&L*, 7/1/1907.

42. "Des Moines Children Make the World Take Notice," *R&L*, 8/11/1907.

urged the city's Protestant churchgoers to focus on moral considerations when choosing the first set of commissioners.<sup>43</sup>

For Medbury (and most evangelical ministers), the primary moral issues of the day involved alcohol consumption, prostitution, gambling, immoral amusements, and Sabbath breaking. Those concerns were not new; they had been a central part of Protestant moral reform efforts since the nineteenth century, and Des Moines's Ministerial Association had agitated for them in the past.<sup>44</sup> But the intensity and cooperation with which evangelical leaders pursued moral reform and the way they linked it with modern progress was new. With the commission system in place, Des Moines's evangelical leaders sought to consolidate their forces and launch a moral campaign on an unprecedented scale befitting a pioneering progressive city.

In late 1907, a few months before the 1908 city election, Des Moines's ministers found an opportunity to test their new assertive political approach. At issue was the Mulct Law, a compromise bill passed in 1894 to limit the scope of the 1884 statewide prohibition on alcohol. The law, historian Herman Bateman explains, "retained prohibition" but "permitted carefully regulated saloons to operate in counties where a majority of voters approved."<sup>45</sup> Anti-liquor forces in the state responded by carefully monitoring saloons for violations and hounding local officials to shut down offenders. But in counties with popular support for alcohol, local officials often declined to enforce the regulations. That infuriated the dries; in 1905 they began urging Governor Albert Cummins to use his power to make sure that recalcitrant officials enforced the law. Cummins did not have the authority to follow the dries' wishes, but criticism from ardent prohibitionists continued.<sup>46</sup>

Cummins shared many of the cultural assumptions of his fierce anti-liquor antagonists. A lawyer in Des Moines before

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43. "Opposes Brewery," *Iowa Unionist*, 8/16/1907. *Unionist* articles accessed via [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com).

44. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 47-117.

45. Herman E. Bateman, "Albert B. Cummins and the Davenport 'Riots' of 1907," *Arizona and the West* 18 (1976), 111-24.

46. Albert B. Cummins to Charles A. Parkin, 6/30/1907, box 9, Letter Copy Book, vol. 20, Albert Baird Cummins Papers, SHSI-DM.

his election as governor, Cummins was cozy with the white Protestant establishment. He spoke to Sunday School classes, supported the YMCA, and saw churches as a "potent ally of good government."<sup>47</sup> In general he sought to limit the consumption of alcohol and such vices as prostitution and gambling. But he did not match the zeal of many of the evangelical ministers. He was, as he explained in one letter, "connected with the Congregational denomination" but was not a church member; so, too, he did not support statewide prohibition at the time, believing that the Mulct Law was more effective.<sup>48</sup> For these reasons evangelical moral reformers in Iowa viewed him with suspicion.

In October 1907 the simmering controversy over Mulct Law enforcement boiled over when wets in Davenport accosted a prohibitionist and his lawyer. Word of the Davenport "riots" quickly spread. Seeing an opportunity for manly Christian action, the Des Moines Ministerial Association threw itself into the fray, adopting a resolution that urged Governor Cummins to enforce the Mulct Law. Cummins, with an eye toward positive publicity, responded by inviting the ministers to meet with him and offer advice "respecting the power of the Governor." Des Moines's ministers faced a conundrum. Passing a resolution was one thing; to meet collectively and publicly advise the governor was quite another. After debating the governor's invitation, Des Moines's ministers ultimately agreed to attend. Their meeting with Cummins was cordial and mostly uneventful, but it was also symbolically important: it represented a new willingness on the part of Des Moines's ministers to engage collectively and more openly in political agitation. C. H. Gordon, a professor at Highland Park College and an ardent prohibitionist, described the meeting as historic and concluded that it proved that "Des Moines ministers does [sic] things."<sup>49</sup>

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47. Albert B. Cummins to D. J. Lenehan, 3/13/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 19, Cummins Papers.

48. Albert B. Cummins to F. E. Heavox, 10/25/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 21, Cummins Papers.

49. Albert B. Cummins to the Ministerial Association of Des Moines and Polk County, 10/30/1907, Letter Copy Book, vol. 21, Cummins Papers; "Ministers Debate Cummins Reply," *R&L*, 11/5/1907; "Squiblets," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/8/1907; "Governor Meets the Ministers," *R&L*, 11/12/1907; "Clergymen Thank Governor of Iowa," *R&L*, 11/14/1907; "The Other Side," *R&L*, 11/20/1907. Cummins pri-



right to vote in Iowa until 1919—ministers could project a masculine image and potentially recruit men to join their cause. At the same time, by electing candidates sympathetic to the preferred moral safeguards of the evangelical Protestant establishment, ministers could attempt to inculcate morality in men previously unreached by their Christianizing influence. Evangelicals often framed these safeguards as a way to protect women, of course, but increasingly in the early twentieth century they also portrayed them as protecting men from corrupting influences that, according to First Baptist pastor Howland Hanson, “destroy manhood.”<sup>50</sup>

CITY ELECTIONS under the Des Moines Plan worked as a two-step process: a primary election narrowed the candidates for city council down to ten; a general election two weeks later selected five men (one mayor and four councilmen) for office. Each elected official would be assigned to one of five city departments. The simplicity of the arrangement helped build enthusiasm for the election. With clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, voters felt that they could hold elected officials accountable for their assigned duties. That sense, in turn, heightened the responsibility voters felt to elect candidates who could do the job well.

The groups that had united behind the Des Moines Plan struggled to decide which candidates to support. Eventually a committee selected by the Commercial Club settled on a slate of five candidates: Eugene Waterbury, Harry C. Evans, James R. Hanna, Buffon S. Walker, and Charles S. Worth.<sup>51</sup> Deemed the “Des Moines Plan Ticket” by its supporters and the “silk stocking” slate by its detractors, these five represented the supposed consensus of Des Moines’s “best men.” But the consensus had fractured. One of the three west-side dailies, the *News*, refused to back the slate, in part because it did not include controversial former mayor John MacVicar, who had returned to Des Moines from a New York-based stint as secretary of the League of

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50. “Children in Beer Wagon,” *R&L*, 9/14/1908.

51. The religious affiliations of all but Worth are listed in Brigham, *Des Moines*, 2:48, 223, 649, 972. Two were Presbyterian (Waterbury and Walker), one a Methodist (Evans), and one a Unitarian (Hanna).

American Municipalities. MacVicar was sure to draw support not only from business and professional men but also from working-class voters who remembered that he had championed municipal ownership of public utilities.<sup>52</sup> A Methodist, MacVicar saw his evangelical Protestant credentials bolstered by the support of his confidant John J. Hamilton, a prominent Presbyterian layman. In late 1907 Hamilton recognized the growing evangelical political interest in Des Moines, urging MacVicar to get "right on the fundamental moral issues" if he wanted to win in 1908.<sup>53</sup>

As the city election approached, a group within the Ministerial Association pushed to make moral reform a central part of the campaign. They wanted to force all candidates to go on record on two issues: strict enforcement of the Mulct Law and elimination of the "segregated vice" system within Des Moines.<sup>54</sup> The latter, common in many cities throughout the United States, confined businesses engaged in vices like gambling and prostitution to specific parts of the city and subjected them to regular fines. Proponents of the segregated vice system argued that it was better to regulate gambling and prostitution and keep it geographically contained than to outlaw it outright and allow it to flourish underground. Opponents, on the other hand, believed that the system effectively provided government sanction and protection for sinful activity that harmed the community. Further, they claimed that it bred corruption, enslaved women, and did not effectively segregate the vice since gambling and prostitution still occurred elsewhere in the city.<sup>55</sup>

Members of the Ministerial Association generally agreed that the segregation system needed to be eliminated. But in 1908 they decided against seeking pledges or putting candidates on

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52. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 246, 263-68.

53. John J. Hamilton to John MacVicar, 11/30/1907, John J. MacVicar Papers, SHSI-DM; "Des Moines (Ia.) Notes," *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, 4/19/1916, 406; YMCA circular letter to A. J. Mathis, 4/10/1909, box 1, A. J. Mathis Papers, SHSI-DM.

54. "Objects to Gag Rule," *R&L*, 2/26/1908; "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908.

55. George Kibbe Turner, "The New American City Government," *McClure's Magazine* (May 1910), 102-3.

record. Most ministers reasoned that the survival of the Des Moines Plan should be secured before moral issues could come to the forefront of local elections.<sup>56</sup> Although Des Moines's evangelical ministers decided not to engage in collective political action, the city's Christian Endeavor societies (an evangelical young people's group) sent questionnaires to the candidates asking for their positions on five issues: Sunday theater, Sunday baseball, unregulated saloons, the segregated vice system, and whether they had signed the Brewery Petition (which would have indicated approval of bringing a liquor-related business to the city). The letter warned that failure to respond to the inquiry would lead the society to "consider that your views on the subjects are such that a Good Citizen should not support you for the office to which you aspire."<sup>57</sup> The effort did not go unnoticed. The *Tribune*, continuing its anti-Des Moines Plan activism by opposing the "silk stocking" candidates, suggested that Christian Endeavor members should "keep out of politics and keep on endeavoring to be Christians."<sup>58</sup> Although the group did not have the clout to make a dent in the election outcome, its activities portended a more politically active evangelical establishment.

So, too, did the sermons preached by evangelical ministers during election season. From March 15 (the Sunday before the primary election) through April 5 (the Sunday after the general election), Des Moines's Protestant leaders proclaimed a new era of political interest and manliness from the pulpit. "It is time for the church to become aroused and come into her own in the control of the city's affairs," asserted O. C. Luce of North Des Moines Methodist Church. Howland Hanson of First Baptist Church saw in the election evidence of a "new manhood" and envisioned God declaring, "'Behold, I will do this thing in Des

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56. "No Pledges Asked from Candidates," *R&L*, 3/3/1908; "Moral Issues in the City Campaign," *R&L*, 3/8/1908; "Ministers Will Not Act," *R&L*, 3/17/1908.

57. E. B. Devore to A. J. Mathis, 3/10/1908, box 1, Mathis Papers, SHSI-DM; "Must Declare Themselves," *R&L*, 3/17/1908. In the 1890s Christian Endeavor societies had begun a "Good Citizen" program, which encouraged young people to align themselves with evangelical Protestant moral values. See Foster, *Moral Reconstruction*, 115.

58. Untitled editorial, *DMT*, 3/13/1908, 4.

Moines.'” Finis Idleman, Harvey Breeden’s successor at Central Christian Church, appealed to an unlikely hero while expressing similar sentiments: “Savonarola declares that Jesus had a right to rule Florence. So he had. So has he a right to rule Des Moines.” Charles Medbury, meanwhile, urged “men who count the moral issues supreme” to stand together at the ballot box.<sup>59</sup>

The moral issues that Medbury referred to were, of course, the problems of gambling, alcohol, prostitution, and immoral amusements. But on election day Des Moines’s voters seemed to vote on behalf of another moral issue: that of the concentration of wealth and power in the upper classes. Repudiating the “silk stocking” slate entirely, voters selected A. J. Mathis, John MacVicar, John Hamery, Wesley Ash, and Charles Schramm. All except MacVicar had received favorable comments from Des Moines’s leading labor weekly, the *Iowa Unionist*, and two (Hamery and Ash) had been endorsed by Des Moines’s labor leaders.<sup>60</sup>

If Des Moines’s ministers were disappointed with the results, they quickly recovered. In a post-election sermon, Howland Hanson drew on a New Testament parable to declare that Des Moines faced two options: the narrow road or the broad road. The latter, Hanson argued, would lead to a “wide-open” town that “gives free rein to every animal passion of life” and is “lined with saloons, brothels, opium joints, barbarism, death, and the soul of man partakes of the body’s doom.” The former was the way of “strict law enforcement for the city”; it would lead to “homes, schools and business, churches, life.”<sup>61</sup>

With responsibilities clearly delineated in the new city council, the forces of evangelical Protestantism could monitor the new city government for its adherence to the evangelical moral agenda. They had their eye on two officials in particular: the commissioner of public safety (who oversaw the police department) and the mayor.<sup>62</sup> Employing pulpit and press, they

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59. “Qualifications for Officials,” *R&L*, 3/16/1908; “Preachers on Event Today,” *R&L*, 3/30/1908; “Des Moines Decides Today,” *R&L*, 3/16/1908.

60. Bionaz, “Trickle-Down Democracy,” 269; “The Labor Vote,” *Iowa Unionist*, 3/21/1908.

61. “City’s Election Is Theme of Sermons,” *R&L*, 4/6/1908.

62. On the structure of Des Moines’s police system, see Douglas Wertsch, “The Evolution of the Des Moines Police Department: Professionalization and the

planned to exert public pressure on those two officials to lead the city down the narrow path. And if officials failed to follow that path, an election in 1910 beckoned.

As an omen of the increased political involvement to come, John A. Wirt, a dogged defender of a nonpolitical pulpit, died suddenly less than two months after the 1908 election. Fittingly, Wirt's companions in the Prairie Club remembered him as a man "possibly inclined to dogmatism" who did not believe "in certain kinds of [ministerial] activity in public affairs."<sup>63</sup>

THE FIVE MEN elected to office in 1908 represented a rejection of the very forces that had pushed for the Des Moines Plan. Indeed, the newly elected mayor, A. J. Mathis, had originally opposed the commission system. But the elected officials were not antibusiness radicals. They won not just with a strong showing among working-class voters but also with the support of middle-class voters who rejected a Des Moines Plan slate that seemed forced upon them. In some ways the election results were the best thing that could have happened to ensure city-wide support for the plan, because it invested working-class voters in the success of the commission system.<sup>64</sup>

Because of his experience and skill in politics, John MacVicar was the leading personality in city hall.<sup>65</sup> Mayor Mathis and newly appointed commissioner of public safety John Hamery stood next in importance and attention. The genial 64-year-old Mathis had friends far and wide in Des Moines, but some evangelical voters had their suspicions. A Democrat from the east side, Mathis had earned a reputation for lenient sentencing when he served as a police judge. Although an evangelical Protestant who personally abstained from alcohol—Mathis was a deacon at Calvary Baptist Church—he did not support statewide prohibition. Mathis's unorthodox views on moral reform became

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Decline of Public Disorder Arrests in the Twentieth Century," *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1987), 436–37.

63. Prairie Club Minutes, 1890–1917, p. 39, folder 1, box 1, PCGDMR.

64. Bionaz, "Trickle-Down Democracy," 269–71.

65. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 1:404.

an issue late in the 1908 election, leading the *Tribune* to defend him as “a good Christian man.”<sup>66</sup>

As for Hamery, he was more of a wild card. Elected as an alderman in 1906 under the old city government system, he remained relatively unknown to Des Moines’s business, professional, and religious elites. Upon assuming office, however, he ingratiated himself with Des Moines’s white Protestant leaders by zealously enforcing the law. Hamery especially earned their trust when, on September 15, 1908, he shut down Des Moines’s red light district, located at the time at East Court Avenue. In years past the red light district had been temporarily shut down but always with the knowledge that the brothels would eventually return or relocate. Hamery’s order proved to be permanent.<sup>67</sup> If evangelical leaders had not known Hamery before the election, they quickly came to view him as an ally.

Leading observers in Des Moines were cautious about proclaiming Hamery’s plan a success. They worried that prostitution would simply spread unchecked throughout the city if not confined to a regulated district. But within a year even Mayor Mathis, who had supported the segregated vice system, came to support Hamery’s plan. “Until lately I had not believed the experiment would prove a success,” Mathis wrote to an inquirer in October 1909, but it “seems to be bringing much better results than segregation.”<sup>68</sup>

Mathis’s rosy assessment of Hamery’s reform reflected an emerging consensus that the Des Moines Plan was a smashing success. With the city’s finances, services, and morality apparently improved, the press lavished praise on the new government. In November 1909 the *Register and Leader* published a feature article under the splashy headline “Eyes of Whole World

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66. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 2:553–54; Records 1872–1918, pp. 40–45, box 1, Calvary Baptist Church Records, SHSI-DM. For the *Tribune*’s defense of Mathis, see “Who Is John J. Hamilton?” *DMT*, 3/24/1908; “Judge Mathis’ System,” *DMT*, 3/28/1908; and “Unfair Criticism,” *DMT*, 4/2/1908.

67. Turner, “The New American City Government,” 102; “Tenderloin Ends Tonight,” *R&L*, 9/15/1908; “Lid Goes Down and All Is Still,” *R&L*, 9/16/1908. On prostitution in Des Moines, see Hope C. Mitchell, “Sacrificing Our Daughters: Changing Perceptions of Prostitution in Iowa, 1880–1915” (M.A. thesis, Iowa State University, 2014).

68. A. J. Mathis to B. S. Steadwell, 10/11/1909, box 2, Mathis Papers.

Are on Des Moines, 'The City on a Hill.'" Noting with pride the thousands of letters that had poured into Des Moines asking about the plan, the author declared that despite nearly two years of intense scrutiny "a big flaw is yet to be found."<sup>69</sup> In 1910 the popular muckraking monthly *McClure's* agreed, publishing an essay that praised the Des Moines Plan for marking "an advance of our civilization at the point where, in many ways, it has been at its lowest—the modern city."<sup>70</sup>

Such glowing reviews might lead one to believe that Des Moines's voters would reelect the five incumbents in a landslide. Certainly the city's evangelical establishment should have been pleased with Hamery's elimination of the segregated vice system. Yet the widespread acclaim for the city only heightened the responsibility that its evangelical leaders felt. If the whole world was indeed watching, the city's guardians of morality could not rest content.

As the 1910 city election approached, evangelical leaders clamored for change, directing most of their ire at A. J. Mathis. The *Tribune* had defended him in 1908, but by 1910 it had been bought out by Gardner Cowles, owner of the *Register & Leader*. It continued publication but was no longer a staunch defender of Mathis.<sup>71</sup>

Although Mathis had come around to support the elimination of the red light district, he did not share his evangelical Protestant counterparts' zeal for moral reform. They wanted a champion who believed that white Protestant moral causes were right for the whole city; Mathis seemed uncomfortable with their triumphalist reform initiatives. In early January 1910, for example, even though prize fighting was illegal in Iowa, Mathis welcomed professional boxer James Jeffries to Des Moines, greeting him at the train station and offering him the

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69. "Eyes of Whole World Are on Des Moines, 'The City on a Hill,'" *R&L*, 11/28/1909. John MacVicar, serving as one of the five elected commissioners in 1909, included the article as a clipping in his scrapbook. See Scrapbook 3, pp. 20-21, MacVicar Papers.

70. Turner, "The New American City Government," 108.

71. "The Retiring Mayor," *DMT*, 4/4/1910. The *Tribune's* change in ownership is covered in William B. Friedericks, *Covering Iowa: The History of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company, 1849-1985* (Ames, 2000).

"freedom of the city." Des Moines's ministers censured Mathis. His own pastor, J. W. Graves of Calvary Baptist, issued a statement on behalf of the Ministerial Association denouncing prize fighting as illegal and degrading to public morals. Other ministers called out the mayor by name. Thomas Sykes, pastor of Sixth Presbyterian Church, described Mathis's warm welcome for Jeffries as "an insult to all decent citizens." He urged church members to ensure that such a disgrace would never happen again. With a city election in March and Mathis up for reelection, Sykes's implication was clear.<sup>72</sup>

In 1908 the Ministerial Association had mostly refrained from endorsing particular candidates or launching a coordinated campaign. For the 1910 election, however, they openly named and denounced candidates. Following their denunciation of Mathis, councilman Wesley Ash came in for a tongue-lashing when he admitted that he occasionally drank bourbon. The Ministerial Association passed a resolution expressing regret that "a candidate for the office of commissioner under the Des Moines plan" should openly admit to immorality and thereby "cast a reproach upon the fair name of our city."<sup>73</sup>

The Ministerial Association was reinforced by the formation of the Laymen's Civic Union (LCU).<sup>74</sup> Organized in early February, the LCU took up the idea discarded by the Ministerial Association in 1908: to force candidates to state their positions on pressing moral issues. The LCU identified four such issues: opposition to gambling, the strict regulation of saloons, continuation of the effort to abolish the red light district, and the suppression of "immoral amusements." In order to achieve its aims, the LCU vowed to investigate and make public the "character and qualifications of candidates" regarding "law enforcement

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72. "'Big Jeff' Is Welcomed by a Throng," *DMT*, 1/3/1910; "Jeffries Balked by John Hamery," *R&L*, 1/4/1910; "Pastor Praises Public Officials," *R&L*, 1/5/1910; "Minister Flays Mayor," *R&L*, 1/10/1910.

73. "Ash Retains First Place," *R&L*, 3/16/1910.

74. Brigham, *Des Moines*, 1:626-27; John J. Hamilton, *Government by Commission: The Dethronement of the City Boss* (New York, 1910), 164-68. See also an undated clipping from the *Des Moines News* (probably from February or March 1910) titled "Report of the Laymen's League Given Public," located in Scrapbook 3, p. 158, box 3, MacVicar Papers. The LCU was called the Laymen's League in some newspaper reports.

and civic morality” and to work for the election of candidates who met with the league’s approval. Aiming to unite Des Moines’s Protestant churches for moral action, the LCU sought representation from all evangelical churches in the city. Frank Dunshee, an elder at Central Presbyterian Church, served as president. John Hamilton, MacVicar’s confidant, also played an active role.<sup>75</sup>

The LCU’s efforts to secure pledges or statements from candidates met with ridicule from some quarters and intransigence from many of the candidates.<sup>76</sup> But members cobbled together information from their own investigations and the statements submitted by candidates to issue a report one week before the primary election. Although they did not explicitly endorse a particular candidate or group of candidates, it was clear from the language of the report whom they backed. For mayor, James Hanna earned the most vigorous support and A. J. Mathis the most criticism. Among council candidates, the LCU praised Hamery and offered relatively positive assessments of John MacVicar and Charles Schramm. Wesley Ash, W. H. Brereton, and Zell Roe, on the other hand, received subtle rebukes.<sup>77</sup>

Although the LCU worked toward the same Protestant establishment ends as the Ministerial Association, not all evangelical pastors fully endorsed the LCU’s methods. Howland Hanson, for example, preached a sermon urging Des Moines churchgoers to mobilize in order to provide the city’s booster movement with a moral center. “We rejoice in a Greater Des Moines,” Hanson declared, “but must not forget the relation of civic spirituality to true greatness.” Yet he explicitly rejected the LCU’s tactics. Instead of pressuring candidates for pledges, Hanson urged the “moral minded people . . . gathered in the churches” to repent of “civic indifference” and to strive together for new “ideals of manhood.” Orien Fifer of Grace Methodist Church,

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75. “Laymen Take Hand in City Campaign,” *R&L*, 2/7/1910; “Review Records of Candidates,” *R&L*, 3/6/1910; “Laymen Make Inquiry Report,” *DMT*, 3/7/1910. A newspaper report also lists the presence of Johnson Brigham, a Unitarian, at one of the LCU’s meetings. See “Mathis Is Target for Roe’s Words,” *R&L*, 3/21/1910.

76. “Hard Jolt Handed Laymen,” *R&L*, 2/18/1910; “Schramm Slaps Laymen,” *R&L*, 2/21/1910.

77. “What Laymen’s Inquirers Say about Candidates,” *R&L*, 3/6/1910.

on the other hand, praised the work of the LCU, arguing that it represented a much-needed effort by Christian men to get involved in city government. "The one conspicuous failure of America has been her government of cities," Fifer said. He blamed that failure on the "teaching of the devil that Christian men and churches have no business in city politics."<sup>78</sup>

Whatever their differences of opinion regarding the LCU's methods, by the eve of the general election Des Moines's evangelical pastors joined their lay counterparts in support of two candidates: James Hanna for mayor and John Hamery for city council. Just as vigorously, they opposed three candidates: A. J. Mathis, Wesley Ash, and William Brereton. The ministers viewed Hamery's election as crucial: a rejection of Hamery would signify a rejection of his anti-vice policies. "The crisis before us tomorrow is a moral crisis," asserted Charles Medbury. Medbury had the backing of his congregants: the *Register and Leader* reported that when Medbury mentioned Hamery's name, the walls of the church resounded with applause and cheering. A. J. Mathis, on the other hand, came in for rebuke from the ministers, who reminded their congregants of his "disgraceful" act of welcoming Jeffries and pointed out his friendliness with supporters of the saloon. "Let us be men," W. R. Coventry of Clifton Heights Presbyterian declared after denouncing Mathis, "and vote with our conscience and upon Christian principle."<sup>79</sup>

In the eyes of many evangelical Protestant ministers and laymen, the moral issues seemed clear. To be sure, they recognized other election issues at play besides the suppression of vice. Perhaps most prominent was the debate over city ownership of public service corporations. But Des Moines's evangelicals managed to link even that issue to their moral agenda, urging the city to take control of public service corporations in part because such corporations were supposedly in a political alliance with saloon and gambling house owners.<sup>80</sup>

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78. "Pays Little Heed to Rash Promises," *R&L*, 2/21/1910; "Lauds Work of Laymen's Union," *R&L*, 3/14/1910. See also "Pastors Give Advice to Congregations," *DMT*, 3/14/1910.

79. "Ministers Plea Is a Clean City," *R&L*, 3/28/1910. See also "Hanson Picks Candidates," *DMT*, 3/25/1910.

80. "'Closed Town' Men Will Be Elected," *R&L*, 3/21/1910.

For many Des Moines residents, however, the moral issues were not as clear-cut as the evangelical establishment believed. *Iowa Unionist* editor D. H. Caldwell, for example, became a thorn in the side of the Ministerial Association, constantly challenging the ministers' claim to moral authority. Subverting the moral censures so often doled out by the ministers, Caldwell argued in August 1908 that the Ministerial Association itself was "one of the evils of our city" because it was narrow-minded and out of touch with ordinary citizens.<sup>81</sup>

In 1909 Caldwell's critiques of the evangelical establishment caught the attention of Howland Hanson, who wrote to the *Unionist* editor. Like many of Des Moines's leading ministers at the time—including Frank Hodgdon, Finis Idleman, and Orien Fifer—Hanson followed the path of Harvey Breeden in embracing progressive religious ideas, including more open support for the cause of labor.<sup>82</sup> Yet Hanson betrayed his moral priorities by spending most of his letter criticizing Caldwell for opposing Sabbath laws and for being friendly with saloon owners. "We do not need a criticism of those institutions which seek to advance public morals," Hanson implored, "while speaking in terms of semi-approval of institutions that break down morals."<sup>83</sup> True to form, Caldwell scoffed at Hanson's letter. He rejected a central tenet of the evangelical establishment—their guardianship of the community's moral well-being—writing that clergy could no longer "dictate and domineer" when it came to morality. The people, Caldwell claimed, had as much right to criticize the clergy as the clergy had to criticize others.<sup>84</sup>

Des Moines's African American citizens also followed a different moral calculation when deciding how to vote. For them, a moral city included not just suppression of vice, but also fair treatment of black citizens. Using that calculation John L. Thompson, editor of the *Bystander*, which represented the city's African American residents, endorsed Mathis over Hanna. He also re-

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81. "Our Ministerial Association," *Iowa Unionist*, 8/1/1908.

82. "Dr. Idleman Gives Des Moines Church His Farewell Message," *Christian Century*, 1/6/1916, 14; "Organizations Combine in Farewell to Fifer," *R&L*, 9/9/1913; "Element of Nerve Is Demand of Day," *R&L*, 6/24/1912.

83. "Rev. Hanson Has a Grievance," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/12/1909.

84. "In Reply to Reverend Hanson," *Iowa Unionist*, 11/12/1909.

fused to support John Hamery, the candidate so beloved by Des Moines's white Protestant leaders. Thompson would later describe Hamery as "too narrow, and too prejudiced to our race for us to consider him at all." Even in 1916, six years after Hamery's time as commissioner of public safety had ended, Thompson recalled that Hamery's department was the "worst department in treatment of colored people that we ever experienced in the history of Des Moines."<sup>85</sup>

A. J. Mathis, too, was unwilling to cede the moral high ground to his ministerial critics. When they denounced him for welcoming Jeffries to the city, he refused to apologize. "Everybody in Des Moines is not a church goer," he noted, adding that even "if they are they like a little sport." It was not that Mathis did not believe in the benefits of the evangelical faith; when a young acquaintance moved to Omaha, Mathis privately urged him to get involved with a church in his new city. But Mathis felt uncomfortable using coercion. "You can't legislate people into being good," he remarked when asked about the LCU's objectives.<sup>86</sup>

Although not everyone embraced the evangelical establishment's moral issues, they became a central issue in the 1910 election. Evangelical voters undoubtedly celebrated James Hanna's defeat of A. J. Mathis by 15 votes. Yet Hanna's victory was not necessarily a ringing endorsement for evangelical political agitation. John MacVicar, Wesley Ash, Zell Roe, and Charles Schramm claimed the four council seats; John Hamery, the evangelical coalition's favored candidate, finished sixth. Only in the First Ward, Des Moines's most affluent one, located on the far west side of the city, did Hamery poll in the top four. In all four working-class wards located near the river or on the east side, Hamery finished in seventh place. If, as his evangelical supporters claimed, a vote for Hamery was a vote for the preferred morality of evangelical Protestantism, Des Moines's voters had rejected it.<sup>87</sup>

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85. "Search Light on the Candidates," *Bystander*, 3/22/1912; "Primary Results," *Bystander*, 3/17/1916. *Bystander* accessed via [chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov).

86. "No Apology from Mathis," *R&L*, 1/11/1910; A. J. Mathis to W. A. Connolly, 11/17/1909, box 2, Mathis Papers; "First Candidate Files His Papers," *R&L*, 2/1/1910; "Two Big Meetings on Election Eve," *R&L*, 3/28/1910.

87. "New City Council and How It Was Chosen," *R&L*, 3/29/1910; "Official Canvass Makes No Change," *R&L*, 3/30/1910.

Given Hamery's tepid showing, it seems clear that Hanna did not win primarily from the support of evangelical moralists. Rather, Hanna owed his success to a broad campaign that emphasized his honesty and his support for municipal ownership of public service corporations. Employing that strategy, Hanna managed to win the approval of the Ministerial Association's antagonist, the *Iowa Unionist*, despite his support for the moral reforms preferred by evangelicals.<sup>88</sup> Although Hanna failed to outpoll Mathis in the four working-class wards, by appealing to a constituency beyond the white Protestant voters in Des Moines's affluent districts, he managed to win just enough votes across the city to put him over the top.<sup>89</sup>

There was some irony in Hanna's victory. His opponent, a Baptist deacon and YMCA member, had unquestioned evangelical Protestant credentials. Hanna, on the other hand, was a Unitarian, a member of a congregation led by a woman and denied a place in the Ministerial Association. But Hanna's Unitarian affiliation may have helped him avoid the pitfalls of the evangelical establishment. While evangelical leaders tended to think of themselves as the triumphant moral voice of the entire city, Unitarians had no delusions about their power. With fewer than 200 members, they were, as Johnson Brigham put it in 1905, simply a "little band . . . at the state capital" that "may not soon become the Church Triumphant."<sup>90</sup> Given Hanna's Unitarian affiliation and its status just outside the evangelical establishment, it is perhaps not so surprising that he managed to speak sincerely to the moral concerns of competing constituencies and win support from both the *Iowa Unionist* and the Ministerial Association.

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88. "James R. Hanna," *Iowa Unionist*, 3/18/1910.

89. East side residents cast 165 more votes in 1910 than in 1908, but Mathis earned 483 fewer votes on the east side than he had in 1908. Hanna earned 648 more east side votes than Eugene Waterbury, the "silk stocking" candidate for mayor in 1908. See "Mathis Victory over Waterbury," *R&L*, 3/31/1908; "New City Council and How It Was Chosen," *R&L*, 3/29/1910; "Official Canvass Makes No Change," *R&L*, 3/30/1910.

90. Johnson Brigham, "An Event of Deep Significance," *Old and New: A Journal of Liberal Religion* 13 (May 1905); Church Report for Year 1907-1908, oversize folder, First Unitarian Church Records, SHSI-DM.

HANNA would go on to serve three terms as mayor. In the meantime, the push for a more masculine church accelerated. In 1910, for example, Samuel Zane Batten, a nationally known proponent of the social gospel, accepted a position at Des Moines College, a Baptist school founded in 1865.<sup>91</sup> Batten supported a broad progressive moral agenda, with vice suppression a prominent part of his work. Soon after arriving in Des Moines, Batten helped form the Des Moines Citizens Association, serving as its vice-president. In late 1910 the group threw itself into the fight against the saloon, launching a drive to get signers of a saloon consent petition to withdraw their signatures (petitions were a Mulct Law requirement for saloon operators). The group worked with the LCU in subsequent years as they investigated vice, fought the saloon, and dispatched men to the polls on election day to monitor for potential voter fraud.<sup>92</sup>

In 1911 Batten also helped lead the charge in Des Moines for the Men and Religion Forward Movement (MRFM), a national campaign advertised as a “stirring challenge to . . . red-blooded Christian men” to get involved with Protestant churches.<sup>93</sup> Organizational work for Des Moines’s MRFM campaign launched in the spring of 1911, culminating with a week-long series of meetings and addresses in October. At the official kick-off rally for the campaign, Methodist minister Orient Fifer linked the movement with the Des Moines Plan. “Des Moines, far more than many other cities, will receive close observation,” Fifer argued, because Des Moines had a reputation for “progressiveness” and “for pioneering the way to satisfactory city government.” Charles Medbury followed by praising the MRFM for its potential to “redeem the non-Christian manhood from the clutches of certain destruction.”<sup>94</sup>

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91. Samuel Zane Batten, *The Social Task of Christianity: A Summons to the New Crusade* (New York, 1911); Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture* (Baltimore, 1991), 141–42.

92. Des Moines Citizens Association to A. J. Mathis, 12/9/1910, box 5, Mathis Papers; “Booze Petition Remains on File,” *R&L*, 1/1/1911; “Church Council Eliminates Three,” *R&L*, 3/20/1914.

93. “A Stirring Challenge to the Red-Blooded Christian Men of Iowa,” *R&L*, 4/2/1911; Bederman, “The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.”

94. “First Rally for Church Campaign,” *R&L*, 9/25/1911.

The MRFM sought to present church work—especially social service activity—as manly by portraying it as businesslike, efficient, and practical.<sup>95</sup> Des Moines was no exception to this general trend. But the work of the MRFM in Des Moines was not entirely different from the political mobilization that had resulted from the Des Moines Plan. Des Moines's leading ministers had already urged Christian men to break down the secular and sacred divide by bringing their faith into the realm of politics, and the Laymen's Civic Union had launched "scientific" investigations of candidates' moral positions.

After Des Moines's MRFM campaign, the city's white Protestant leaders sought to channel newly reached men into Protestant institutions. Central Christian Church, for example, held a follow-up "Enlistment Week," and the city's evangelical churches worked together to form the Interchurch Council, a new, broader institutional expression of the evangelical Protestant establishment. As with the MRFM, the council featured social service endeavors and aimed to recruit men into the Protestant churches. J. W. Graves, Mathis's pastor at Calvary Baptist, left behind his ministerial position to serve as the Interchurch Council's first executive secretary.<sup>96</sup> Thanks in part to the Interchurch Council, Batten boasted in 1912, the "moral and religious forces" were more "fully federated" in Des Moines than anywhere else, and few cities had "a more earnest and active interest in social service."<sup>97</sup>

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95. Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 137–42. Central Christian Church's periodical, the *Weekly Worker*, covered the workings of the MRFM in the following issues: 9/8/1911, 10/15/1911, 10/22/1911, 10/27/1911; all are accessible at SHSI-DM.

96. "Enlisting Week," *Weekly Worker*, 10/27/1911, 1; "Batten Warns Churchmen," *R&L*, 5/30/1911. Letters to J. W. Graves explaining the Interchurch Council and offering him the position of executive secretary are found on p. 585 in Records 1872–1918, box 1, Calvary Baptist Church Records, SHSI-DM.

97. Samuel Zane Batten, "The Moral and Religious Life of Des Moines," *Standard*, 4/27/1912, 8; Samuel Zane Batten, "Des Moines," *Missions* 3 (May 1912), 340. Des Moines's Interchurch Council may have been influential within the city, but it was not unique on a national level. In the wake of the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in Christ in 1908, many cities developed similar federated Protestant organizations. On the growth of these groups within Protestantism, see Mislin, *Saving Faith*, 90–118; and Robert A. Schneider, "Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century," in *Between the Times*, 95–121.

The evangelical establishment did not neglect local electoral politics.<sup>98</sup> The precedent set in 1910 of mobilizing evangelical voters after investigating candidates' positions on moral issues continued through the outbreak of World War I. The success of those efforts fluctuated. The 1912 election, for example, belonged to the Labor League and its allies, who portrayed the election as "a strictly capital vs labor fight." Labor unequivocally won the fight; two of the five elected candidates (Zell Roe and William Needham) received official Labor League endorsements, and the other three (James Hanna, Fred Van Liew, and Joseph Myerly) all earned unofficial support from the *Iowa Unionist*. Zell Roe, the only candidate categorically condemned by evangelical moralists, tallied the second-most votes of the council candidates.<sup>99</sup>

The election in 1914 proved to be more successful for Des Moines's white Protestants. The LCU once again mobilized, but more importantly the Interchurch Council—an organization with a much broader scope of interests—entered the fray at the behest of its executive secretary, J. W. Graves. At a meeting on March 19, just three days after the primary election, the Interchurch Council condemned three candidates for their support of the saloon: R. M. Galbraith, James Conroy, and Harry Frase. The Labor League had endorsed the latter two, so their presence on the list was no surprise. But Galbraith was a businessman, widely recognized as one of two candidates on a businessman's slate along with W. F. Mitchell. The censure Galbraith received led to howls of protest from some businessmen within the Interchurch Council. Still, the council stuck by its decision. "If we win," Graves predicted, "we will get the biggest victory that has ever been won in the country." By bringing the Interchurch Council into a political campaign, Graves felt that Des Moines's evangelical voters were ushering in "a new era in church work."<sup>100</sup>

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98. "Rig Up Catechism to Try Candidates," *R&L*, 2/19/1912; "Civic Union Gets Line on Politics," *R&L*, 3/4/1912; "Paragraphs from Sunday Sermons," *R&L*, 3/11/1912.

99. "Our Candidates," *Iowa Unionist*, 3/22/1912; "Laymen Report on Council Candidates," *DMT*, 3/4/1912; "Hanna, Van Liew, Roe, Needham and Myerly Form New Council," *R&L*, 3/26/1912.

100. "Church Council Eliminates Three," *R&L*, 3/20/1914; "Bannister Not Missed Replies Rev. J. W. Graves," *Des Moines News*, 3/23/1914.



The Interchurch Council's reproof of Galbraith did not win approval from all quarters within the city's white Protestant establishment, but it did earn the support of most of the prominent ministers. Howland Hanson supported the council's actions. So did C. W. Lowrie of Westminster United Presbyterian Church, who declared that the fate of the Des Moines Plan was at stake; its success could only be achieved by voting for men who had no history of supporting the saloons, men who could be trusted to oppose "the perpetuation of this assassin of American manhood."<sup>101</sup>

The final tally went as well as Graves could have hoped: all three candidates opposed by the Interchurch Council went down in defeat. It is difficult to ascertain just what influence the council's denunciation had on Galbraith's loss. Galbraith tallied fewer votes than Mitchell, his business-slate counterpart, in all seven wards. Still, it is suggestive that in the First Ward, which should have been friendliest to a business candidate, Galbraith trailed Mitchell by nearly 500 votes. And in the precincts of the

101. "Cleaner Municipal Government Urged," *R&L*, 3/23/1914.

First Ward with the greatest gap in votes between Mitchell and Galbraith, John Hamery, the darling of the evangelical moralists, did disproportionately better than in the precincts in which Galbraith and Mitchell received roughly equal tallies.<sup>102</sup>

Building on the encouraging results of the 1914 election, the forces of evangelical Protestantism received another boost that year when Iowa-born revivalist Billy Sunday came to town. Launching his campaign on November 1, 1914, Sunday followed his typical pattern of preaching an old-time gospel coated in bombastic theatrics and witty slang, buttressed by attacks on the saloon and effeminate church leaders. By the time he departed, nearly 20,000 people had walked the sawdust trail, including *Register and Leader* editor Harvey Ingham.<sup>103</sup>

That Ingham, a theological liberal, would support Sunday is not surprising. In 1915 the evangelical establishment—particularly in cities like Des Moines, where it remained the dominant religious force—had not yet splintered into competing fundamentalist and modernist camps. Thus, while Ingham's moral vision included interests like racial and economic justice that went beyond the scope of Sunday's message, he could rally around the revivalist's call to manly, practical action and his fight against alcohol.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, just a few months after Sunday's revival in Des Moines, the liberal Protestant *Outlook* published a piece lauding the revivalist. The article's author admitted that Sunday focused on outdated notions like eternal damnation and that he unnecessarily limited his social concern to "the simple saloon issue." Despite those flaws, the article continued, Sunday

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102. "Complete Results," *R&L*, 3/31/1914. The disparity occurred in precincts that the *R&L* would describe two years later as strongholds of the "church vote." See "Plunking System Defeated Hamery," *R&L*, 3/18/1916.

103. George Mills, *Looking in Windows: Surprising Stories of Old Des Moines* (Ames, 1991), 114–18. Ingham joined Plymouth Congregational Church soon after the Sunday revivals.

104. On Ingham's liberalism and support for human rights, see Jack Lufkin, "The Founding and Early Years of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines, 1915–1930," *Annals of Iowa* 45 (1980), 446–50; and George Mills, *Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr.: Things Don't Just Happen* (Ames, 1977), 39–52. On Billy Sunday's broad Protestant appeal in the Progressive Era, see Jennifer Wiard, "The Gospel of Efficiency: Billy Sunday's Revival Bureaucracy and Evangelicalism in the Progressive Era," *Church History* 85 (2016), 587–616.

succeeded where high-minded liberals could not: he reached the “heart and mind and conscience of the man in the street.”<sup>105</sup> Ingham made a similar point when defending Sunday from criticism dispensed by Everett Martin, Mary Safford’s successor at First Unitarian Church. The *Register and Leader* editor argued that Sunday reached men that other preachers could not reach and that he inspired them to action. “He is a power for the right side,” Ingham declared.<sup>106</sup>

Events soon after Sunday’s campaign seemed to back up Ingham’s claim, at least for those who viewed the evangelical Protestant establishment as the “right side.” James Hanna, leading a city council friendly to evangelical moral causes, announced that saloon licenses in Des Moines would not be renewed. With that decision, carried out on February 15, 1915, the evangelical Protestant establishment finally had their dry city—if they could keep and enforce it.<sup>107</sup>

THE EVANGELICAL political mobilization that began in the wake of the Des Moines Plan’s passage culminated with the election of 1916. At stake was the protection of the most important step toward moral progress since 1908: the elimination of the city’s saloons. Although the Laymen’s Civic Union was still in operation, the most dynamic evangelical political agitation in 1916 came from the pulpit of Plymouth Congregational Church. Nine years earlier Frank Hodgdon had employed the Plymouth pulpit to vigorously support the passage of the Des Moines Plan; in 1916 his successor, J. Edward Kirbye, campaigned to ensure that the Des Moines Plan would continue to be a force for moral progress.

Branching out from church-based organizations, Kirbye led a group of fellow evangelical ministers who joined with the Good Government Association. They settled on a slate of three candidates: John Budd, Ben Woolgar, and Fred German. With

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105. Frederick M. Davenport, “On the Trail of Progress and Reaction in the West,” *Outlook*, 6/9/1915, 311–15.

106. “Misjudging Sunday,” *R&L*, 11/18/1914.

107. On the closing of the saloons, see Mills, *Looking in Windows*, 118–22. In 1915 Iowa’s state legislature also overturned the Mulct Law, effective January 1, 1916.

only five men on the council, evangelicals needed just three to ensure that their moral reforms would be properly implemented. In the two weeks leading up to the election Kirbye and Good Government Association members gave speeches, organized get-out-the-vote campaigns, and sent a resolution in support of their three candidates to every evangelical pulpit in the city.<sup>108</sup>

On the eve of the election, evangelical pulpits in Des Moines thundered with urgent appeals to vote. "I do not want the words to be scattered far and wide that Des Moines is dropping behind," First Methodist pastor J. L. Hillman pleaded, asking his congregants to vote for "law and order and all that makes for a clean progressive city." Kirbye promoted the Good Government slate with a sermon titled "Shall the Church in Des Moines Be Like the First Church in Jerusalem?" Following the sermon, Plymouth Congregational Church unanimously passed a resolution supporting Kirbye "in this fight he is making for good government in Des Moines."<sup>109</sup>

The election results revealed mostly good news for evangelical voters. Two of the three Good Government candidates, Ben Woolgar and John Budd, earned a spot at city hall. Although the voters elected two candidates opposed by the evangelical establishment—Harry Frase and Tom Fairweather (owner of the city's baseball team, the Des Moines Boosters)—newly elected mayor John MacVicar had the trust of white Protestant leaders.<sup>110</sup> With three city council members who seemed to support the moral reforms of the evangelical establishment and with the cornerstones of those moral reforms in place—the red light district abolished and alcohol prohibited—evangelical Protestants in Des Moines could be proud of the progress they had made.

THE 1916 ELECTION signaled the end of the unusually intense evangelical voter mobilization that had resulted from the passage of the Des Moines Plan. Eight years earlier, inspired by the evangelical Protestant sense of moral guardianship and the push for

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108. "Association Stays Neutral," *R&L*, 3/19/1916; "Voters Take Turn at Political Game as Day Commences," *R&L*, 3/27/1916; "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

109. "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

110. "Voters Finish Job of Making a Clean Sweep in Council," *R&L*, 3/28/1916.

a more masculine and active faith, the city's evangelical leaders had entered into the political realm at an unprecedented level. Their efforts intensified two years later during the 1910 election with the formation of the Laymen's Civic Union and the fight to ensure that the moral progress achieved under John Hamery did not recede. Over the next three elections the LCU and evangelical ministers played a prominent role. Their efforts were always challenged by those who held to different conceptions of morality or to a different ordering of moral priorities. Yet the evangelical Protestant establishment repeatedly consolidated its forces and expanded its constituency; if its favored candidates fared poorly in the 1910 and 1912 elections, that pattern was reversed in the 1914 and 1916 elections.

Evangelical Protestants continued to take an interest in electoral politics after 1916, of course, but the context was rapidly changing. One change—women winning the right to vote—promised to bring reinforcements to the white Protestant moral cause.<sup>111</sup> Yet it also caused a reorientation away from the masculine rhetoric that dominated white Protestant calls for electoral action in the years between 1908 and 1916.<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, the Great War in Europe increasingly pushed international issues to the forefront of public attention while the commission system fell out of favor and a new system, the city manager plan, took its place.<sup>113</sup> The sense that the eyes of the world were on Des Moines abated.

So, too, did the connection between progress and evangelical Protestantism. Buoyed by demographic dominance in Des Moines, in the first two decades of the twentieth century conservative and liberal Protestant leaders could unite behind a push for a practical and masculine faith that sought to embed the moral values inherited from the nineteenth century within the rapidly changing consumer-driven society of the twentieth.

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111. Thomas G. Ryan, "Male Opponents and Supporters of Woman Suffrage: Iowa in 1916," *Annals of Iowa* 45 (1981), 537-50.

112. As early as 1916 Rev. R. K. Porter was arguing that only when women received the vote would Des Moines get "that moral and spiritual cleansing of the city which we should so much desire." See "Appeals Made for Good Government," *R&L*, 3/27/1916.

113. Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 100-109.

But with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the fundamentalist movement after World War I, evangelical moral reform increasingly became associated with reaction and maintenance, with protection of an old order rather than the advancement of a new. In Des Moines, as in the country at large, the white Protestant establishment divided in response to this new state of affairs, with some liberal Protestants finding that they shared more in common with the inclusive moral vision of non-Protestant religious leaders like Rabbi Eugene Mannheimer than with their conservative coreligionists.<sup>114</sup> We can surmise that in this new postwar cultural climate, the slogan that had previously inspired Des Moines's evangelical leaders to create their "city on a hill" took on a rather different connotation. What had once signified a zeal for progress and cutting-edge reform now seemed to signify the ordinary banality of a city dominated by white Protestants: "Des Moines Does Things."

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114. "Quitting Klan Brings Pastor Hate of Some," *R&L*, 3/31/1924. On Mannheimer, see Michael J. Bell, "'True Israelites of America': The Story of the Jews of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994), 111-15. On Mannheimer's involvement in an interwar tri-faith initiative in support of religious pluralism, see Douglas, "Making Iowa Safe for Differences," 234-59.

# Iowa's Original Ethanol Debate: The Power Alcohol Movement of 1933–1934

JEFFREY T. MANUEL

IOWA is perhaps best known to the rest of the nation for two things: corn and politics. Iowa's prestige for the productivity of its farms dates from the state's earliest days. Iowa's fame for politics also has a long history, although many Americans in the twenty-first century associate the state's political influence with the Iowa caucuses, which became the first test for presidential hopefuls beginning in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> When Iowa's crucial role in choosing presidential candidates was combined with its enormous corn production, ethanol – the name given to ethyl alcohol that is often produced from grain (typically corn) and used as a liquid transportation fuel – became central to the state's history.<sup>2</sup>

Iowa has consistently led the nation in ethanol production. In 2016 Iowa was forecast to produce almost 3.9 billion gallons of ethanol for fuel – far and away the most of any state, nearly double

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1. On the history of the Iowa caucuses, see John C. Skipper, *The Iowa Caucuses: First Tests of Presidential Aspiration, 1972–2008* (Jefferson, NC, 2010); and Hugh Winebrenner and Dennis J. Goldford, *The Iowa Precinct Caucuses: The Making of a Media Event*, 3rd ed. (Iowa City, 2010). Iowans also played crucial roles at the federal level, especially in setting agricultural policy, during the decades from 1890 to 1940. Four Iowans – James Wilson, Edwin Meredith, Henry C. Wallace, and Henry A. Wallace – served as U.S. secretary of agriculture during that era.

2. Ethyl alcohol is produced by the fermentation of sugars by yeasts. It can be produced from many sources, although corn has been the predominant feedstock for ethanol production in the United States.

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the production of second-place Nebraska.<sup>3</sup> Ethanol became one of Iowa's major industries by the early twenty-first century, generating 43,000 jobs and approximately 3.5 percent of the state's gross domestic product, according to industry advocates.<sup>4</sup> Ethanol has received substantial political support over the years, ranging from tax breaks in the late 1970s to the 2005 Renewable Fuel Standard's nationwide mandate for ethanol-gasoline blends.

Both Congress and presidential administrations supported ethanol during this period, largely for political reasons. In the late 1970s, for instance, President Jimmy Carter launched a nationwide ethanol program as part of an effort to woo Iowa voters during the 1980 presidential election. The ethanol question dominated Iowa's presidential contests, leading candidates from both parties to support ethanol in the hope of winning the crucial Iowa caucuses. One reporter joked during the 2008 primaries that once presidential aspirants arrived in Iowa to campaign, "one of their first orders of business was bowing to the ethanol gods."<sup>5</sup> In short, Iowa has been central to the nation's great debate over ethanol over the past 40 years.

Debate over ethanol and biofuels sharply divided Iowans and other Americans concerned about energy policies during this era. Supporters portrayed ethanol as a miraculous fuel that could promote energy independence by weaning the nation off of foreign oil. Ethanol, supporters claimed, would clean the air while supporting the nation's farmers. In contrast, ethanol's detractors portrayed the fuel—and government subsidies for it—as a political boondoggle. Ethanol did little to help the environment, detractors noted, and shifted large sums of taxpayer dollars into the pockets of agribusiness corporations and their lobbyists.<sup>6</sup> Ethanol debates

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3. Chris Buckner, "U.S. Ethanol Plant Capacity Increases for Third Consecutive Year," *U. S. Energy Information Administration*, 8/10/2016, [www.eia.gov](http://www.eia.gov).

4. Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, "Ethanol and the Economy," <http://iowarfa.org/ethanol-center/ethanol-facts/ethanol-and-the-economy/>.

5. Bill Lambrecht, "Political Road Gets Rockier for Ethanol," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 7/22/2007.

6. The literature debating ethanol and other biofuels is voluminous and growing. For a brief overview, see Daniel Yergin, *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*, rev. ed. (New York, 2012), 649–70. A supportive but slightly dated approach is in Hal Bernton, William Kovarik, and Scott Sklar, *The Forbidden Fuel: A History of Power Alcohol*, new ed. (Lincoln, NE, 2010).

crossed party lines, often pitting midwestern and rural politicians – both Democrats and Republicans – against representatives of metropolitan areas or oil- and gas-producing regions.

Yet for all the debate over ethanol in recent decades, there has been a surprising amnesia about alcohol fuels in Iowa *before* the 1970s energy crises. Both sides of the ethanol debate have forgotten about alcohol fuel's long history in Iowa and have failed to learn from previous efforts to promote alcohol fuels. This is part of a larger amnesia about the complex history of energy use and alternatives to oil and gas in the United States. As Alexis Madrigal notes, "There's almost no institutional memory of what happened before the energy crises of the '70s."<sup>7</sup> This article describes Iowa's first major debate over ethanol, a movement – known as the power alcohol movement – to legislate alcohol-gasoline blends in the 1930s, a time when power alcohol, like ethanol today, was the focus of vigorous debate in Des Moines and Washington, D.C., that pitted farmers and their representatives against gasoline consumers and oil companies.

The 1933–1934 power alcohol debate was a significant moment in Iowa's twentieth-century industrial and agricultural history. Although the state ultimately did not pass a law mandating alcohol-gasoline blends, the movement fused farm interests, state politicians, and researchers into a powerful interest group. That coalition would later prove crucial to the creation of Iowa's agrochemical industrial complex. The power alcohol movement also highlights the key role that several Iowans played in setting national agricultural and energy policy in the 1930s. Henry A. Wallace's contributions to the New Deal are well known, but his initial support for alcohol fuels as a form of farm relief has been little discussed by historians. The power alcohol movement was Wallace's final attempt to find new markets for corn before fully embracing supply reduction strategies through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. Less well known but also important was chemical engineer Leo Christensen, an Iowa State College professor and tireless booster for power alcohol. Christensen coordinated power alcohol's diverse advocates in the 1930s. In 1934 he coauthored an influential book, *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief*,

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7. Alexis Madrigal, *Powering the Dream: The History and Promise of Green Technology* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 1.

that made a case for power alcohol as technically feasible and politically necessary.<sup>8</sup> The outlines of Iowa's later biofuel debates originated in the 1933–1934 power alcohol movement.

Iowa's power alcohol movement is also significant within the longer history of alcohol fuels in the United States. Historians have portrayed the push for power alcohol in the 1930s as an interesting precursor to the serious ethanol policy that was launched in the 1970s. Other historians have discussed the demand for federal power alcohol legislation in those years but have overlooked Iowa's key role in launching the movement to legislate alcohol-gasoline blends.<sup>9</sup> Iowa's debate was not a curious sideline or an isolated local example; it marked an important turning point in the history of alcohol fuels in the United States, which stretched back into the nineteenth century and continues well into the twenty-first.

The 1930s movement stands out as the last moment when nineteenth-century agrarian rhetoric was central to arguments for alcohol fuel from grain. Farmers in the 1930s were keenly aware of the energy transition on the farm that was replacing horses with cars and tractors. Thus, they framed the argument for alcohol fuel in terms of an old agrarian demand that farmers needed protective legislation to ameliorate the costs of technological change. Iowa's power alcohol debate was also an origin point for legislation mandating alcohol-gasoline blends. The idea that legislation should require that motor fuel contain a certain percentage of alcohol gained national attention in the 1930s in the wake of Iowa's debate. The idea circulated among ethanol boosters for decades before finally becoming law in the early twenty-first century with the Renewable Fuel Standard. Finally, the power alcohol debate in Iowa highlights how energy and agricultural policymaking has often involved regional or interstate conflict based on resource production. After the 1970s energy crises, rhetoric about

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8. Leo M. Christensen, Ralph M. Hixon, and Ellis I. Fulmer, *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief* (New York, 1934), 19.

9. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*; August W. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel: The Alcohol Motor Fuel Movement of the 1930s," *Agricultural History* 54 (1980), 173–84; David E. Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage: The Farm Chemurgic Movement and the USDA in the Alcohol Fuels Campaign in the Spring of 1933," *Agricultural History* 67 (1993), 36–66.

national energy independence or energy security has tended to obscure important regional differences within the United States regarding energy policies. Those differences were at the center of the 1933–1934 debate, which pitted midwestern farm interests against the oil and gas producers based in other regions. Interestingly, many of those interstate conflicts may reappear in the twenty-first century as a result of the shale revolution’s dramatic increase in U.S. oil production, which has raised difficult questions about which regions should benefit from federal energy policy. Similar questions were at the heart of the 1930s power alcohol debate.

USING ALCOHOL as fuel had a long history prior to the 1930s. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Americans used blends of alcohol and other liquids — often turpentine — to fuel lamps for lighting. Fuels known as “burning fluids,” or camphene, used in alcohol lamps, gave off a brighter light than tallow candles and were significantly cheaper than whale oil. Unfortunately, they were highly explosive.<sup>10</sup> With the development of the internal-combustion engine in the late nineteenth century, alcohol was held out as a potential fuel for the new motor. Although alcohol fuel was overshadowed by gasoline as the fuel of choice for internal-combustion engines, the door never fully closed on alternative fuels in the early decades of the twentieth century. Calls to use alcohol as a fuel — either in its pure form or blended with gasoline — arose whenever there were concerns that gasoline might run out or when surplus crops sent prices down and farmers sought new markets for their harvests.<sup>11</sup> During the 1920s, several companies attempted to market alcohol fuels or gasoline-alcohol blends, but the blends were rendered uneconomical by cheap gasoline from newly opened wells in the mid-continent oil

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10. Christopher Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 93. On the history of camphene and burning fluids, see Harold F. Williamson and Arnold R. Daum, *The American Petroleum Industry: The Age of Illumination, 1859–1899* (Evanston, IL, 1959), 27–42; and Loris S. Russell, *A Heritage of Light: Lamps and Lighting in the Early Canadian Home* (Toronto, 1968), 93–110.

11. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 8; Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York, 2009), 6–7; Giebelhaus, “Farming for Fuel,” 174; Tom McCarthy, *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment* (New Haven, CT, 2007), 47–48.

fields. The discovery that tetraethyl lead could be added to gasoline to prevent it from knocking (pre-igniting in the cylinder) killed demand for alcohol as an octane booster in the 1920s.<sup>12</sup> By the early 1930s, alcohol fuels were considered technically feasible but economically unpromising.

At the same time, the United States was undergoing a transformation as motive power shifted from animals and steam engines to gasoline-powered automobiles, tractors, trucks, and buses. As historian Daniel Yergin writes, the years following World War I witnessed "the motorization of the American people."<sup>13</sup> Iowa was hardly exempt from this process. By 1931, Iowa had over 700,000 registered passenger cars and consumed over 364 million gallons of gasoline annually.<sup>14</sup> Less noticed but equally important was the marked decline in the demand for animals to supply power in cities and on farms. During the 1920s, Americans destroyed over six million horses and mules.<sup>15</sup>

The shift from animal power to engine power had profound effects on American farming. As farm animals gave way to tractors and cars, land that had previously been used for pasture was freed up for grain production. During the 1920s, approximately 21 million acres of farmland shifted from growing feed for animals to producing commodities for the market.<sup>16</sup> But fewer animals on American farms and in American cities meant less

12. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 174–75; Alan L. Olmstead and Paul Rhode, "The Farm Energy Crisis of 1920," *Agricultural History* 62 (1988), 48–60; McCarthy, *Auto Mania*, 48–49.

13. Yergin, *The Prize*, 191; Olmstead and Rhode, "The Farm Energy Crisis of 1920," 48–49. For other overviews of the shift toward automobiles and internal combustion engines in U.S. history, see Martin V. Melosi, *Coping with Abundance: Energy and Environment in Industrial America* (New York, 1985), 103–12; McCarthy, *Auto Mania*; David E. Nye, *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 175–83; and Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle, 2012).

14. "Use of Alcohol from Farm Products in Motor Fuel," S. Doc. No. 73-57, at 41 (1933).

15. Z. R. Pettet, *The Farm Horse* (Washington, DC, 1933), 7; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York, 1999), 17. See also Ann Norton Greene, *Horses at Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 270–73; and Clay McShane and Joel A. Tarr, *The Horse in the City: Living Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 2007).

16. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 17; Greene, *Horses at Work*, 273.

demand for feed, exacerbating the glut of grain that lowered crop prices throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Prices for agricultural products dropped throughout the 1920s and then fell precipitously at the beginning of the Great Depression.<sup>17</sup> Although the farm problem of the 1920s and early 1930s was multifaceted, many observers at the time blamed gasoline-powered engines for farmers' woes. For instance, a 1933 photo in the *Des Moines Register* captured this sentiment by showing a farmer driving a tractor with the caption, "They displaced horses, but they don't eat the resulting surplus of feed."<sup>18</sup> Farmers, like most Americans, eagerly embraced the internal-combustion engine but were also keenly aware of how it disrupted the older farm economy.

Power alcohol offered the alluring prospect that crops could be converted into alcohol fuel and farms could return to the old days of growing fuel for the animals – or machines, in this case – that worked on the farm. As an Iowa newspaper editorial put it, "Instead of having our horses eat the corn we can make the tractor eat it."<sup>19</sup> Farmers and their allies also framed a pro-power alcohol argument in terms of a debt owed by petroleum. As oil and gas displaced agricultural products as fuel, farmers contended that oil and gas owed something in return to farmers and rural America. As a longtime farmer recalled, "Petroleum products first began to crowd out agricultural products when the kerosene lamp succeeded the tallow candle, and they have been at it ever since. . . . Today, when the suggestion is made that petroleum products pay back to the farming industry a small part of what it has robbed them of . . . a hulabaloo goes up from one end of the country to the other, and thousands of dollars are spent in propaganda against such a proposition."<sup>20</sup> American farmers in the 1920s and

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17. For an overview of the farm situation in the 1920s and 1930s, see R. Douglas Hurt, *American Agriculture: A Brief History*, rev. ed. (West Lafayette, IN, 2002), 221–330; idem, *Problems of Plenty: The American Farmer in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2002), 41–96; and Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames, 1982). For the situation in Iowa specifically, see Dorothy Schwieder, "Rural Iowa in the 1920s: Conflict and Continuity," and Joseph Frazier Wall, "The Iowa Farmer in Crisis, 1920–1936," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1983), 104–27. Both are reprinted in Marvin Bergman, ed., *Iowa History Reader* (Iowa City, 2008), 327–46.

18. "Federal Opinion on Alcohol-Gas," *Des Moines Register*, 5/15/1933.

19. L. A. Brunsting, "The Quiet Hour," *Sioux Center News*, 2/24/1938.

20. Rolfe Arrow, letter to the editor, *Humboldt Independent*, 8/15/1933.

'30s had witnessed a wholesale transformation of motive power on their farms. It was impossible for them to deny the benefits of gasoline-powered tractors and cars, but they were keenly aware of the costs of the transition in terms of destroyed animals and falling crop prices. Alcohol fuels held out the possibility of regaining some of what gasoline had taken away.

Another factor motivating support for alcohol fuels in the 1930s was concern that gasoline supplies would run out in the near future. That worry was as old as the oil industry. Fears of depletion had stalked the petroleum trade since its birth in the mid-nineteenth century. In the early decades of the twentieth century, there were gasoline shortages in some regions, especially as demand for automobile fuel surged ahead of refining capabilities. Fears of a so-called gasoline famine were endemic in the 1900s and 1910s.<sup>21</sup> By the 1920s and early 1930s, however, refining breakthroughs that increased gasoline production and falling demand due to the depression alleviated immediate fears of gasoline shortages. Nonetheless, many observers fretted about depletion even in the midst of low prices during the 1930s. Their fears were driven less by rational analysis of markets and supplies than by a commonsense notion that oil was a nonrenewable resource that must run out at some point. For instance, advocates of power alcohol described the nation's oil and gas as a "national reserve" that was constantly being depleted. In contrast, crops were a "national income of energy" or a renewable resource that could be replenished each season.<sup>22</sup>

The technical feasibility of using alcohol as a fuel, the shift from animal to motor power, and fears of oil depletion were the deep factors driving interest in power alcohol in the 1920s and '30s. But it was the collapse of crop prices in the early 1930s that spurred serious discussion of mandating alcohol fuels and led to Iowa's proposed power alcohol legislation in the 1930s. Average commodity prices dropped 37 percent between 1929 and 1933 while farmers' gross income dropped 52 percent.<sup>23</sup> In 1933 the Iowa Farmers Grain Dealers Association described the farm crisis

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21. Yergin, *The Prize*, 95–96; McCarthy, *Auto Mania*, 17–18.

22. Christensen et al., *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief*, 19.

23. Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 63.

as “the greatest emergency the state has ever seen.”<sup>24</sup> It was in this context of acute crisis that legislation mandating the use of alcohol fuel was first proposed in Iowa.

By the early 1930s, then, Iowa farmers were both dependent on gasoline-powered machinery and reeling from a long-term agricultural depression that had slashed commodity prices. Out of this vortex came the power alcohol movement, a popular but diffuse campaign to mandate that the nation’s gasoline supply be blended with alcohol derived from American-grown crops. The proposal was intended primarily as a means of providing economic relief to struggling farmers by creating a lucrative new market for their harvests.<sup>25</sup>

LEGISLATION supporting alcohol-gasoline blends cropped up in several midwestern states during the 1930s, but Iowa was the clear leader of the movement. Iowa’s interest in power alcohol began with a study by researchers at Iowa State College (now Iowa State University). In late 1932 several professors at Iowa State began investigating the feasibility of using a blend of 8 percent ethyl alcohol, 2 percent of a blending agent such as benzene, and 90 percent gasoline as a motor fuel. The study brought together faculty from chemistry, mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, and agricultural economics. These researchers were convinced that the food market for agricultural production would not expand in the near future, so alternative markets were needed to avoid ongoing agricultural depression. They also were intrigued by evidence that alcohol-gasoline blends were already being used successfully in several other countries.<sup>26</sup> Early tests found that blended fuels containing 10 to 20 percent alcohol had better anti-knock properties than pure gasoline (that is, it was less likely to pre-ignite in the combustion chamber). The researchers’ main

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24. “Grain Dealers Ask Aid Action,” *Des Moines Register*, 1/27/1933.

25. Giebelhaus, “Farming for Fuel,” 173, 175–76.

26. Alan I Marcus and Erik Lokensgard, “The Chemical Engineers of Iowa State College,” *Annals of Iowa* 48 (1986), 198; “Study Surplus Control Plan,” *Des Moines Register*, 1/1/1933; “New Motor Fuel Is Tested Here,” *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 1/3/1933; Wright, “Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage,” 46–47. Wright argues that a conference on alcohol fuels at Iowa State on December 10, 1932, marked the birth of the 1930s power alcohol movement.

emphasis, however, was the fuel's ability to use up excess corn supplies and relieve the farm crisis.<sup>27</sup>

It is not surprising that Iowa's power alcohol plan was hatched at Iowa State College. In the early 1930s Iowa State was a hothouse for collaboration between engineering and agricultural sciences. Engineering faculty and agricultural researchers worked on parallel tracks in most universities at the time, often competing for scarce funding during the depression. Yet Iowa State College developed a "highly unusual" and very productive collaboration between the two fields. Practically, the harmony between engineering and agriculture found an outlet in the work of chemical engineers who eagerly promoted a new chemical industry based on agricultural products. Throughout the 1920s, chemical engineering faculty experimented with various ways to turn agricultural waste into useful products. Experiments included turning corncobs into chemicals such as acetone, oxalic acid, furfural, and even plastics. Iowa State's chemical engineers were also savvy promoters of their research. They recognized that ongoing funding and public support for their investigations depended on publicizing their work to the state's major industries and highlighting the industrial possibilities of Iowa's abundant agricultural waste products. Thus, Iowa State College researchers approached the alcohol fuel issue with the confidence borne of a decade of experimenting across disciplinary lines to create industrial products from farm output.<sup>28</sup> Building on the researchers' initial findings, Iowa legislators quickly brought the issue to the state capital.

In the first days of 1933, Iowa politicians took the research coming from Ames and pulled it into the orbit of state politics. Power alcohol legislation found fertile ground in Iowa's 45th General Assembly. An unprecedented Democratic majority had entered office on the coattails of Roosevelt's landslide election.

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27. "State College Scientists Striving to Develop Production Technique for Manufacture of New Motor Fuel to Use Nation's Surplus Corn," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 1/4/1933.

28. Marcus and Lokensgard, "The Chemical Engineers of Iowa State College," 177-205. David Wright notes that Iowa State College's researchers were part of a loose, nationwide coalition of agricultural scientists working in the 1920s to fuse agriculture and chemistry. Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 40.

Patrick Bauer describes the 1932 election in Iowa as one in which “Democratic candidates were elected to positions that had been held by an almost unbroken line of Republicans since before the Civil War.”<sup>29</sup> Reversing decades of Republican dominance of Iowa’s General Assembly, Democrats controlled Iowa’s House of Representatives with a 77–31 majority; the Iowa Senate was evenly split between the parties, with the Democratic lieutenant governor breaking tie votes; and Democrat Clyde Herring occupied the governor’s mansion, only the second Democratic governor in Iowa since the Civil War. That wholesale shift in Iowa’s political culture created a context in which new and more radical ideas for farm relief, such as power alcohol, received more consideration than they had in earlier eras. Due to the farm crisis, the political situation in Iowa in 1932 and 1933 “had reached the point where [leaders] were ready to risk a change.”<sup>30</sup>

Iowa State researchers had shown that alcohol-gasoline blends were technically feasible, but it remained unclear whether there would be a market for them given the low price of oil and customers’ familiarity with straight gasoline. As a solution, state lawmakers considered mandating that alcohol derived from Iowa’s surplus corn be blended into gasoline. A legal mandate would solve alcohol fuel’s economic problems by instantly creating a market for the fuel regardless of cost. Iowa state senators Frank Byers of Linn County and Fred Nelson of Story County, both Republicans, outlined a proposed bill. They were motivated primarily by the belief that, if passed, such a bill “would absorb the corn surplus.” Yet they acknowledged that any legislation would be effective only if it could reach beyond Iowa. Eventually, the U.S. Congress would need to adopt a similar proposal nationwide to make a serious dent in the country’s corn surplus.<sup>31</sup> Thus, when Iowa’s General Assembly convened on January 9, 1933, the alcohol fuel issue was poised to be one of the year’s most contentious legislative matters.

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29. Patrick B. Bauer, “Farm Mortgage Relief Legislation in Iowa during the Great Depression,” *Annals of Iowa* 50 (1989), 28.

30. C. C. Clifton, “Democrats to Rule Iowa House,” *Des Moines Register*, 11/10/1933; Earle D. Ross, *Iowa Agriculture: An Historical Survey* (Iowa City, 1951), 167. See also 1933 *Iowa House Journal*.

31. “Propose Bill on Motor Fuel,” *Oelwein Daily Register*, 1/7/1933.

Support for power alcohol legislation came from a coalition of farmers, agricultural scientists, and politicians representing rural interests. The foremost supporters of power alcohol were scientists and engineers at midwestern universities who believed that converting agricultural surpluses into fuel could solve the farm crisis. These scientists were supported by Corn Belt farmers who were always eager to find new markets for their products, organizations such as the Farm Bureau that represented farmers' interests in the halls of power, and politicians who sought farmers' votes.

Opposition to the power alcohol plan developed more slowly, but once it became clear that possible legislation would mandate an alcohol fuel blend, the petroleum industry coordinated a powerful counterattack. Nationally, the petroleum industry in the early 1930s was organized through the American Petroleum Institute (API). Facing low oil prices and rising taxes in 1932, including a new federal excise tax on gasoline, the API focused on lowering state and local gasoline taxes. Many states had raised gasoline taxes, or were considering doing so, to make up for budget shortfalls during the Great Depression. The API formed a new industries committee meant to "protect the petroleum industry from and relieve it of unjust burdens resulting from discriminatory taxation or adverse legislation."<sup>32</sup> When the power alcohol bill was first considered in Iowa, then, the petroleum industry was already keenly concerned about new state taxes and regulations on gasoline and well organized to lobby against them.

Within Iowa, petroleum business interests were defended by the Iowa Petroleum Association (IPA). That organization was formed in 1921 — it was originally the Iowa Independent Oil Men's Association — and was made up primarily of jobbers. By 1932, the IPA was working closely with other state petroleum organizations and groups representing drivers' interests to fight against new state and local taxes. For instance, at a meeting in February 1932 a speaker warned IPA members that state gasoline taxes

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32. "Gasoline Taxes Must Come Down" (editorial), *Oil and Gas Journal*, 6/9/1932, 32; "National Petroleum Association Convention Asks Government Economies and Tax Relief," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 9/22/1932, 11; Andrew M. Rowley, "A.P.I. Convention Had Many Interesting Phases with Tense Period of Political Maneuvering," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 11/24/1932, 31.

were “the fastest growing tax in history” and opened the door to an “orgy of fraud” by gasoline bootleggers.<sup>33</sup> Also opposed to the power alcohol plan were the nation’s automobile clubs, such as the American Automobile Association, which saw themselves as defenders of gasoline consumers.<sup>34</sup>

As word spread that a law requiring alcohol fuel to be blended into Iowa’s gasoline supply was brewing in the General Assembly, newspapers around the state began reporting on the issue. Many of the state’s editorial pages strongly supported the proposal. The *Ames Daily Tribune-Times* called it “most interesting and perhaps most fruitful of real benefit for Iowa.” The *Sumner Gazette* noted that “nothing which has been announced for some time has appealed so much to the popular imagination, according to conversation heard in the past two weeks.” News of the benefits of alcohol-gasoline blends spread statewide in mid-January when the *Des Moines Register’s* farm editor explained how his own car benefited from the fuel. He described better acceleration from the blended fuel and encouraged its use across the state, writing, “Use of this blend the last few days in my own car has impressed me with its merit.”<sup>35</sup>

Some intrepid Iowans took matters into their own hands and started mixing regular radiator alcohol into their gasoline after reading about the technical success of alcohol-gasoline blends. Iowa State faculty rushed to remind people that radiator alcohol contained too much water and should not be blended with gasoline outside of a laboratory for fear of harming automobile engines.<sup>36</sup>

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33. “Warns of Great Tax Scandal in Gasoline Levies,” *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 2/19/1932.

34. “Iowa Oil Jobbers Form Independent Association,” *Petroleum Age*, 12/15/1921, 35; “Davenport Made Director of Association,” *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 2/21/1929; Wright, “Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage,” 59.

35. “Scanning the News,” *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 1/9/1933; “Alcohol from Corn as a Motor Fuel,” *Sumner Gazette*, 1/12/1933; J. S. Russell, “Corn Alcohol Gas Is Proving Efficient Fuel,” *Des Moines Register*, 1/15/1933. On the *Des Moines Register* as the primary statewide newspaper in Iowa, see William B. Friedrichs, “The Newspaper That Captured a State: A History of the *Des Moines Register*, 1849–1985,” *Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 303–37.

36. “Radiator Alcohol Is Not Good Motor Fuel,” *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 2/9/1933.

Bills supporting Iowa's power alcohol movement were quickly drafted and brought before the General Assembly. The legislation required two stages: first, the state needed to pass laws permitting the manufacture of industrial alcohol (alcohol unsuitable for human consumption), which had been banned during Prohibition. Second, legislators needed to tackle the specific mechanism by which alcohol fuel would be mandated. Dealing with the first problem was straightforward. In late January the Iowa House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a bill that allowed for the manufacture of industrial alcohol. Observers noted the irony that the president of the state's Woman's Christian Temperance Union had offered the traditional prayer before the legislative session opened. On February 3, the Iowa Senate easily passed the bill, and Governor Herring signed it into law the following week.<sup>37</sup>

The second phase of legislation, determining exactly how an alcohol fuel mandate would work, proved far more difficult. While the General Assembly was in session, several powerful voices in Iowa politics weighed in with their support for an alcohol fuel mandate. First was the formidable Farm Bureau, which endorsed alcohol fuels in late January. The Farm Bureau's annual platform called for the production of new products, including alcohol fuels, from Iowa's agricultural crops.<sup>38</sup> Next to weigh in was Henry A. Wallace, who was among the nation's most influential voices on agricultural matters. His father had been U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in the Harding and Coolidge administrations, and he held the same position in the incoming Roosevelt administration. In addition, the Wallace family's farm journal, *Wallaces' Farmer*, was an influential voice in the agricultural community in Iowa and the larger Midwest. Speaking to the Iowa General Assembly on January 31, Wallace advocated power alcohol derived from corn as one important tool for getting the

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37. "Ia. Moves to Open Way for Manufacture of Alcohol in State," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 1/27/1933; Rider Richmond, "Progress Rapid in Legislature," *Des Moines Register*, 1/29/1933; "Events of Week at State House in Des Moines," *Humboldt Republican*, 2/3/1933; "Alcohol Bill Is Passed 43 to 6 by Iowa Senate," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/3/1933; "Farm Aid Tops Assembly Week," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/11/1933.

38. "Resolutions Drawn by Farm Bureau," *Des Moines Register*, 1/20/1933.

nation's farmers out of the deep financial furrow of the Great Depression.<sup>39</sup>

Wallace had been investigating the power alcohol plan for several months and had met with Iowa State researchers. In August of the previous year, he had written a column in *Wallaces' Farmer* claiming, "The chances are ten to one that the automobiles of our children and grandchildren will be run to a considerable extent with alcohol made from corn." Converting corn into alcohol fuel would be a boon to Iowa, Wallace argued. "We should not send all of our automobile money out of the state. If we can grow one-fourth of our motor fuel at home, let's get ready to do it."<sup>40</sup>

In December 1932 Wallace included the power alcohol plan as part of the domestic allotment farm relief plan being crafted in Congress. Mandating alcohol-gasoline blends was proposed as a useful way to help corn farmers in Iowa and Illinois who sold corn to the market rather than feeding it to hogs. Mandating that some portion of the corn crop be converted into alcohol fuel would lessen the depths of the cuts to hog production. Wallace acknowledged that the power alcohol plan might harm oil-producing states in the name of farm relief: "The oil producers of the southwest would undoubtedly be temporarily somewhat damaged, but the benefit done to the corn farmers would be much greater than the damage done to the oil producers."<sup>41</sup> Initially, Wallace framed the 1933-1934 power alcohol debate as an issue of interstate competition rather than national energy policy.

Momentum seemed to be on the side of alcohol fuel. The key bill mandating that alcohol be mixed into Iowa's gasoline supply was introduced in the Iowa Senate on February 9. The complicated bill would have required that all gasoline sold in Iowa be blended with alcohol produced from Iowa crops at a percentage set by a new executive council that would monitor annual harvests to determine how much of a surplus existed. A state alcohol administrator would be charged with permitting new distilleries and ensuring that they did not make more than 10 percent profit.

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39. "Wallace Talks to Legislature," *Oelwein Daily Register*, 1/31/1933.

40. Henry A. Wallace, "Odds and Ends," *Wallaces' Farmer*, 8/6/1932.

41. Henry A. Wallace, "Voluntary Allotment Plan," *Wallaces' Farmer*, 12/24/1932.

As proposed, the bill was technocratic and punitive. It would have instantly transformed the state's gasoline supply and endowed the new alcohol administrator and executive council with sweeping power to control the state's agricultural and energy industries.<sup>42</sup>

Criticism of the proposed law appeared immediately in some Iowa newspapers. The *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, for instance, worried that the plan would raise gasoline costs for consumers and might harm engines.<sup>43</sup> In the national press, *Business Week* weighed in with sharp criticism, describing Iowa's entire power alcohol plan as "among the more scatterbrained proposals put forward in the general anxiety over the plight of the farmer." The article's author argued that diluting gasoline with alcohol made no financial sense. "What this scheme comes down to is the dilution of gasoline, selling for 5¢ at the refineries, with an inferior liquid fuel costing five times as much per gallon."<sup>44</sup> Opponents of the alcohol gasoline mandate spoke on behalf of the petroleum industry and, more broadly, Iowa's gasoline consumers who were more worried about the price they paid at the pump than about supporting farmers.

In February supporters of power alcohol ramped up their lobbying on behalf of the bill. Researchers at Iowa State College, who had initiated alcohol fuel research months earlier, moved quickly to form a committee to promote the plan statewide. Ames was to be the center of "a statewide educational campaign" on behalf of the power alcohol bill. Supporters of the bill from northwestern Iowa organized a caravan to Des Moines to demonstrate the bill's widespread support in rural Iowa. Proponents of power alcohol legislation also pointed to foreign nations, such as Germany, Hungary, and Brazil, that had already enacted similar laws. Opponents argued that the situation in those foreign nations did not apply to the United States since it was an oil exporter and such laws were meant to promote national energy

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42. S.F. 227, 45th General Assembly (1933); "Bill to Make Compulsory Mixing Alcohol with Gasoline in Iowa," *Oelwein Daily Register*, 2/9/1933; "Shelves Bill to Create Agents," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/9/1933; "Farm-Brewed Fuel," *Business Week*, 3/15/1933, 9.

43. "The Observing," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/3/1933.

44. "Alcogas," *Business Week*, 2/8/1933, 9.

self-sufficiency. Foes of alcohol fuel argued that in the United States, unlike in those nations that mandated alcohol fuels, "there is a great plenty of oil, and there are both an important petroleum industry and a great body of motorists to protest."<sup>45</sup>

In mid-February, Iowa's petroleum industry launched a coordinated critique of the power alcohol bill pending in the General Assembly. In a letter of opposition, the IPA outlined numerous criticisms of the bill. (1) It would raise gasoline prices since alcohol was more expensive to produce than gasoline. (2) Higher gasoline prices would lead many consumers, especially Iowans living near a state border, to buy gasoline outside Iowa. (3) Bootleggers could bring out-of-state gasoline into Iowa and undersell filling stations. (4) As higher prices caused people to cut back on driving, the total amount of gasoline taxes collected would decrease. (5) High-priced gasoline would lead automotive tourists to avoid Iowa, which, in turn, would lead to lower tourism spending. (6) New storage facilities would be needed to keep water out of gasoline (water caused alcohol and gasoline to separate), and the blended fuel would ruin the shellac on carburetor floats. (7) The legislative mandate would use up only 3 percent of the corn crop, so it would not actually help Iowa's farmers much.<sup>46</sup>

Iowa's power alcohol plan was also criticized by the national petroleum industry. The *Oil and Gas Journal*, the main petroleum industry trade publication, reported on Iowa's power alcohol bill throughout early 1933. Early articles focused on technical problems with alcohol-gasoline blends and emphasized that previous efforts to promote alcohol fuels had failed.<sup>47</sup> Once it became clear that the Iowa legislature was seriously considering the power alcohol bill, however, the *Oil and Gas Journal* took a more critical stance. "The petroleum industry needs be concerned," the journal wrote in March 1933, describing Iowa's legislature as barreling ahead with a plan to help farmers despite the costs to the petro-

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45. "Committee Studies Corn Gas Day Plan," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 2/8/1933; "Caravan to Support Alcohol Fuel Planned," *Des Moines Register*, 2/21/1933; "Alcogas," 9.

46. "Oil Men Fight 'Alcohol Gas,'" *Des Moines Register*, 2/19/1933; Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 177.

47. Robert C. Conine, "Many Fallacies to Arguments Advanced in Favor of Laws Requiring Gasoline-Alcohol Blends," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 2/23/1933, 12, 56.

leum industry and drivers. Reflecting the petroleum industry's national perspective, the *Oil and Gas Journal* argued that a state-by-state approach to power alcohol would not be helpful. Mandating alcohol fuels might make sense in Iowa, but it could unleash a wave of beggar-thy-neighbor state legislation. "The question then resolves itself into whether each . . . state is to set itself apart from the rest of the country and try to live more and more within itself. . . . If practiced to place certain states at a disadvantage, it is possible retaliatory measures will be taken by those states. Maybe Oklahoma will require that every pound of hog lard contain 10 per cent hydrogenated cotton seed oil, or Nevada might say that every package of corn flakes must contain 10 per cent toasted cactus flakes." Overall, the *Oil and Gas Journal* argued, Iowa's power alcohol bill "will mean investing additional capital to produce an inferior motor fuel from a raw material, the price of which is too high even now to compete with petroleum."<sup>48</sup>

Some local newspapers were sympathetic to the petroleum industry's critiques of power alcohol. The *Oelwein Daily Register*, for instance, wrote, "There is no reason why the auto drivers should be penalized for a surplus of corn in the state."<sup>49</sup> Or, as the manager of the Iowa Motor Club summed up its opposition, "It is a plan to tax motorists one or two additional cents a gallon and give this tax to the farmers."<sup>50</sup>

As Iowans learned about the bill and its potential effects, it was clear that it pitted the economic interests of farmers against those of gasoline consumers. Thus, when the bill was first debated in Iowa's General Assembly on February 21, 1933, each side of the power alcohol debate made an impassioned case for or against the bill. Opponents argued that alcohol from grain was expensive to produce and would lead to a rash of engine problems, such as clogged carburetors and fuel lines. Supporters presented evidence from Iowa State College tests showing that cars running the gasoline-alcohol blend got better mileage and performance. They also emphasized how the fuel would help to

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48. W. T. Ziegenhain, "Program of Substituting Alcohol for Gasoline as Motor Fuel Appears to Be Short-Sighted," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 3/2/1933, 10, 37.

49. "Opposing Mixing Alcohol and Gasoline," *Oelwein Daily Register*, 2/23/1933.

50. "Rhoades States Alcohol, Gasoline Mixture False Economy for Agriculture," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/21/1933.

alleviate the enormous corn surplus that held down commodity prices.<sup>51</sup>

Legislative debate focused on technical questions such as the fuel's performance in automobile engines and potential effects on the corn surplus. For instance, the bill's opponents noted that, because even a nationwide plan to blend 2 percent alcohol into the gasoline supply was expected to raise the price of gasoline by approximately ½ cent, it would be simpler to add a small gasoline tax and use the money to purchase corn and then destroy it.<sup>52</sup>

Some observers felt that the General Assembly's technical debate had drained the life out of an idea that initially resonated with a simple agrarian message. The *Algona Upper Des Moines* newspaper wrote, "It seems that somebody or something is always taking the joy out of life when what Iowa needs worse than anything else is higher prices for hogs and corn." The *Bode Bugle* also described the bill's appeal in simple language: "The farmers want these measures passed. The business people of Iowa favor the idea. It is the one way in which Iowa can do something for herself."<sup>53</sup>

Because of the "heated debate," the House of Representatives did not move on the alcohol fuel bill in the first session; it was pushed back to the second session.<sup>54</sup> During the recess from February 24 to March 6, opponents of the power alcohol bill marshaled their forces and launched a publicity drive urging Iowa legislators to vote no. Rhetoric from the bill's supporters also sharpened over the recess. One farm woman wrote to the *Des Moines Register* to express her belief that it was time for Iowans to look out for their own economic interests. She described the debate as a fight between regional interests, pitting Iowa and the Farm Belt against "the eastern states where the big factories are located" and "the southern states where these big oil men live in luxury."<sup>55</sup>

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51. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 176-77; "Alcohol-Gas Plan Argued," *Des Moines Register*, 2/22/1933.

52. "Farm-Brewed Fuel," 14.

53. "News of the State House," *Algona Upper Des Moines*, 2/22/1933; "Increase the Value of Iowa Corn," *Bode Bugle*, 2/24/1933.

54. "On Capitol Hill," *Des Moines Register*, 2/23/1933.

55. "Legislators Urged to Oppose Proposed Gas, Alcohol Bill in Iowa," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 3/3/1933; B. L. Caudill, "Make Alcohol for Gasoline?" *Des Moines Register*, 3/5/1933.

Clearly, power alcohol struck an old, agrarian chord among Iowans who saw the debate as one pitting the righteous farmers of the Midwest against the parasitic oil men of the East and South.

As word of Iowa's power alcohol debate spread, however, it became clear that not all farmers supported it. That was especially true when farmers outside Iowa weighed in on the issue. The president of the National Farmers Union, a farmer from Oklahoma, pointed out that many farmers in oil-producing states received royalties for oil wells on their land and opposed anything that would lessen the value of that oil. For such farmers, the union's president argued, "crude oil . . . is a farm crop just as much as cotton or wheat."<sup>56</sup>

When the General Assembly returned from its spring recess on March 6, the power alcohol bill was the first item on the House's calendar.<sup>57</sup> When the bill came up for a vote on March 8, it was defeated by a vote of 48-57. The deciding arguments against the bill were that it was too vague about where grain alcohol would be produced and blended, whether it would come from Iowa crops, and whether such a law would constitute an unfair tax on Iowans. Other legislators favored the idea but believed it would work only if implemented on a nationwide basis and therefore voted against the Iowa bill.<sup>58</sup> Although power alcohol had many vocal supporters in Iowa, they were unable to alleviate concerns about the effect of requiring a significant change in the state's fuel supply.

Many supporters blamed the shadowy machinations of the oil industry for the bill's failure. According to the *Rock Valley Bee*, "The big oil industries got into the game and worked against the measure to the end that it was defeated."<sup>59</sup> There was some truth to the accusation that the oil industry had worked to defeat the Iowa bill and similar ones developed in other states. The American

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56. "Quack Remedy," *Williamsburg Journal-Tribune*, 5/18/1933.

57. "Fuel Measure Awaits House," *Des Moines Register*, 3/6/1933.

58. "Iowa Legislature Votes Down Bill to Mix Alcohol and Gasoline," *Oelwein Daily Register*, 3/8/1933; "Hush, Hopp Discuss Legislation Here at Meeting Saturday," *Malvern Leader*, 3/9/1933; Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 177. The vote was not partisan; 13 Republicans and 35 Democrats voted aye, while 17 Republicans and 40 Democrats voted nay. 1933 *Iowa House Journal*, iv-vi, 684.

59. "Thinking Out Loud," *Rock Valley Bee*, 3/17/1933.

Petroleum Institute coordinated opposition to the bill by organizing the oil and gas industry as well as other groups representing motorists, such as state auto clubs, to forge a powerful counterpunch to the proposed alcohol fuel mandates.<sup>60</sup>

Opposition to the power alcohol proposals included creative marketing schemes funded by the API. Gas station attendants received mimeographed paperwork to share with drivers discussing the perils of alcohol fuel. Filling stations also received small sample kits with gasoline and alcohol meant to show how the two liquids would separate with the presence of water.<sup>61</sup>

Gasoline consumers — a group that by the mid-1930s included most Iowans — were torn. Given concerns about higher gasoline prices and technical problems associated with alcohol fuels, many motorists likely needed little encouragement from the API to oppose power alcohol. Yet Americans were also deeply suspicious of the oil industry in the wake of the 1920s Teapot Dome scandal and earlier revelations about Standard Oil's monopoly practices.<sup>62</sup>

Behind the scenes, the API and individual oil companies debated how to respond to the power alcohol mandate. There was consensus that the large oil companies would not tolerate proposals such as Iowa's that required a 10 percent blend of alcohol into the gasoline supply, but many companies were open to proposals to blend 1 or 2 percent alcohol if it would alleviate political pressure. Although the prospect of losing a percentage of the national gasoline supply was hardly welcomed, oil companies were well aware that rural gasoline consumption had dropped precipitously during the depression. The loss of sales to alcohol blends might be made up in increased purchasing power among farmers and rural motorists. Standard Oil of New Jersey, for instance, simultaneously lobbied against any national alcohol fuel laws and explored how it could profit if the law was passed.<sup>63</sup>

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60. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 177.

61. Christensen et al., *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief*, 141.

62. Yergin, *The Prize*, 194–201.

63. "Farm-Brewed Fuel," 9, 14. See also the relatively positive coverage of the alcohol plans in the *Oil and Gas Journal* in March 1933. "Use of Agricultural Products in the Manufacture of Chemicals to Blend with Motor Fuels," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 3/16/1933, 10–11, 29.

FOLLOWING the power alcohol bill's failure in early March, Iowans who supported a mandate for power alcohol turned their attention to Washington, D.C. They hoped a nationwide bill similar to the one rejected in Iowa would solve the farm problem. In part, supporters realized that Iowa alone was too small of a gasoline market to make a dent in the nation's agricultural glut. A report by Iowa State College economists in late March confirmed that the state's plan for mandating alcohol fuel would have had no significant effect on the price of corn. Only a nationwide program would consume enough surplus to significantly raise the price of corn.<sup>64</sup>

Confirming that Iowa politicians hoped to shift the power alcohol issue to the federal government, on March 22 the Iowa General Assembly passed a resolution encouraging the federal government to "enact legislation tending to promote and develop the production of grain or ethyl alcohol to be used as a blend with petroleum products as a motor fuel." The General Assembly also asked Congress to add an import duty on blackstrap molasses—the primary feedstock for industrial alcohol production—to make it equal to the price of corn.<sup>65</sup> Newspapers echoed the General Assembly's support for a nationwide alcohol fuel plan. According to one editorial, "It might be hard for one state alone to make a success of the venture, but if the mixture could be used nationally, there is no question but that it would use up the surplus of farm products."<sup>66</sup>

It was not surprising that Iowa politicians turned to the federal government to solve the power alcohol debate. During the spring of 1933, the eyes of Iowans—and most Americans—were transfixed on Washington, where the Roosevelt administration was preparing to take power. Roosevelt had promised swift, decisive action upon taking the oath of office, and many Iowans that spring pondered whether a nationwide alcohol fuel bill might be in the cards of the New Deal.

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64. "State's Action Termed Futile," *Des Moines Register*, 3/29/1933.

65. "Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 21," 1933 *Iowa House Journal*, 938-39; "State Senate Asks Congress for an Import Duty on Black Strap," *Oelwein Daily Register*, 3/22/1933.

66. "Thinking Out Loud."

Other states had followed Iowa's lead in pushing for alcohol fuel bills in early 1933.<sup>67</sup> On Iowa's eastern border, a chemist from El Paso, Illinois, named Paul Beshers began promoting a nationwide plan to require alcohol be mixed into the nation's gasoline supply. He modestly called it the Beshers Plan.<sup>68</sup> It electrified farmers in central Illinois and quickly drew condemnation from the eastern business press. *Business Week* mocked Beshers as the "current patron saint of this old scheme in modern dress." Yet Beshers's ambitious plan differed from the one proposed just weeks earlier in Iowa by calling for nationwide legislation rather than a state law. Beshers and his supporters immediately captured the attention of Illinois representatives and senators who brought forth bills in Congress.<sup>69</sup> Yet state officials in Illinois nonetheless looked to Iowa to take the lead on alcohol fuel legislation. In a letter, the director of Illinois's Department of Agriculture wrote, "After we see what Iowa does, we will be in a better position to work out a plan for Illinois."<sup>70</sup>

Other streams of support for alcohol fuel rose up across the Midwest, but the key figure channeling their flow into Washington was an Iowan: Henry A. Wallace. Likely the state's best-known farmer and editor, Wallace had Roosevelt's ear on agricultural matters even before his appointment in late February as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, the position his father had held under Presidents Harding and Coolidge. Wallace had learned of the power alcohol experiments at Iowa State College months earlier,

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67. Proposals for power alcohol legislation in states beyond Iowa arrived very quickly in early 1933. Yet David Wright points out how Iowa State researchers, especially Leo Christensen, were at the center of many states' power alcohol plans. Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 51-53.

68. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 176; Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 17. For an overview of the power alcohol movement in Illinois, see Carol Brockman, "Alcoholized-Gasoline: Fuel for Recovery?" [Illinois Wesleyan University] *Undergraduate Review* 5, no. 1 (1992), 1-9, accessible at <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/rev/vol5/iss1/9>.

69. "Farm-Brewed Fuel," 9.

70. Walter McLaughlin to Henry A. Wallace, 7/26/1933, in Alcohol for Fuel—Beshers's Plan 1933-1936 folder, Illinois Department of Agriculture Director's files, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL. Note that Director McLaughlin was told this by Clifford Gregory, editor of *The Prairie Farmer*, whom McLaughlin contacted seeking advice about how to reply to Secretary Wallace. Clifford Gregory to Walter McLaughlin, 7/24/1933, *ibid*.

and he encouraged President Roosevelt to give the idea serious consideration as part of his emerging agricultural agenda.<sup>71</sup> As legislation wound its way through congressional committees, Wallace carefully studied alcohol fuel as a potential solution for the farm crisis. Wallace even tried using ten gallons of the fuel in his official federal vehicle.<sup>72</sup>

National debate over the alcohol fuel legislation came to a head in May. Various bills had been introduced in Congress's first session, but none had made it out of committee. In May Wallace went before the Senate Finance Committee to support a bill that appeared more promising. It would increase the federal gasoline tax by one cent per gallon through 1934. The tax would be raised to three cents per gallon after that. If gasoline was mixed with alcohol—in a percentage rising from 1 to 5 percent after 1934—it could avoid the federal gasoline tax altogether.<sup>73</sup>

As it had in Iowa, the API strongly criticized the bill, even though it required half as much alcohol as Iowa's proposed bill. An API spokesman suggested that it would be cheaper and more efficient for every driver to buy five bushels of corn and burn them. The API charged, "The blend legislation . . . was placed on the congressional doorstep after failing of enactment in the legislatures of Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota." Iowa representative Otha Wearin countered that Iowa's General Assembly had petitioned Congress to support a nationwide law even though it had rejected it at the state level.<sup>74</sup> The Senate Finance Committee tabled the bill two days later, arguing that it raised questions about whether such a bill could combine new taxes with an alcohol fuel mandate.<sup>75</sup>

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71. "Study Alcohol as 'Farm Aid,'" *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/24/1933.

72. "Wallace Tries Alcohol Fuel," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 4/11/1933. David Wright argues that Wallace favored allotment policies by 1933 but supported power alcohol as a means to win over farmers who were skeptical of cutting back production. Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 43.

73. "Bills Would Force Alcohol as Fuel," *New York Times*, 5/2/1933; Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 57-61.

74. "Opposition to Alcohol Blends Grows as Higher Federal Tax Bill Is Introduced in Congress," *Oil and Gas Journal*, 5/4/1933, 9; "Alcohol Fuel Bill Attacked," *Des Moines Register*, 5/5/1933.

75. "Puts Off Tax Study on Gasoline Blends," *New York Times*, 5/4/1933; Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 61.

Alcohol fuel's supporters were heartened by a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) report in mid-May showing that power alcohol was technically feasible and would benefit America's farmers.<sup>76</sup> Iowa's congressional delegation met with Wallace on May 17 to again argue for the importance of a power alcohol bill in Congress. Secretary Wallace remained supportive but noncommittal.<sup>77</sup>

The May debate in Washington, D.C., proved to be the high-water mark for alcohol fuel legislation in the 1930s. While Wallace was reassuring Iowa's congressional delegation that he still supported a power alcohol bill, the New Deal's agricultural program was gathering speed and moving in a very different direction. Laws mandating alcohol fuel blends were predicated on the principle of expanding markets for corn as a means of farm relief. Wallace and President Roosevelt had concluded, on the other hand, that cutting supplies was a more realistic and immediate answer to the farm crisis. To that end, the landmark Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed on May 12, 1933. Working through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), the USDA worked with farmers to reduce the output of major agricultural crops, including corn. Although Wallace and the AAA focused immediately on cotton since it was the primary product of the beleaguered South, by the summer of 1933 the AAA's attention was turning to corn farmers.<sup>78</sup>

When Wallace returned to Des Moines in June, he outlined the New Deal's farm relief efforts thus far. While most of Wallace's focus was on cutting production to raise prices, he indicated that he was still considering the power alcohol plan. "We must either cut down production or find new markets at home or abroad. I think the use of alcohol made from corn in a motor fuel blend might offer one outlet for some of our surplus grain so that we could produce a normal corn crop again without upsetting the balance and causing low prices," Wallace told an Iowa audience.<sup>79</sup>

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76. "Federal Opinion on Alcohol-Gas," *Des Moines Register*, 5/15/1933.

77. "Alcohol Gas Parley Held," *Des Moines Register*, 5/18/1933.

78. Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 68-80.

79. "Corn, Hog Relief Next: Wallace," *Des Moines Register*, 6/27/1933. David Wright argues that Wallace became convinced in May 1933 that alcohol fuel proposals were "long-term, capital intensive efforts of high political risk when what

Yet the government's emphasis had shifted to prioritize cutting production over mandating new markets. Just as work horses and mules had been replaced by petroleum-powered tractors, national alcohol fuel legislation was soon left behind by the AAA's sweeping program to reduce farm output.

WHILE CONGRESS was considering a nationwide alcohol fuel bill, debate over power alcohol continued in Iowa even after the General Assembly voted down the bill in early March. Only a few days after the alcohol fuel bill was defeated in Des Moines, the Spencer Chamber of Commerce sponsored an event to sell 500 gallons of alcohol-blend gasoline in the hope of convincing drivers that stories about technical problems with the fuel were untrue.<sup>80</sup> Faculty from Iowa State College and local chambers of commerce came together in April to stage a demonstration of the fuel for the General Assembly in Des Moines, as well as local demonstrations in Storm Lake, Fort Dodge, and Garner. Another plan surfaced to encourage use of alcohol-blend fuels in all state-owned vehicles and, ultimately, to reintroduce the failed mandate bill in a later legislative session.<sup>81</sup> Power alcohol's backers in Iowa clearly had not given up hope that their fuel would be supported by consumers and legislation.

The largest of the demonstrations came in May, when filling stations in Ames sponsored a three-day sale of 22,000 gallons of alcohol-blend fuel. The sale was heavily advertised in local newspapers, and the participating filling stations reported high demand. Drivers who filled their tanks during the sale also reported satisfactory results from the new fuel. It was later revealed, however, that much of the so-called corn alcohol produced for these demonstrations was not made from Iowa corn but was distilled instead from blackstrap molasses brought in from Cuba and Louisiana. The few midwestern distilleries capable of producing anhydrous alcohol were unwilling to invest in new equipment

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was needed were short-term, labor intensive interventions in the farm economy around which greater political consensus could be built." Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 61.

80. "Spencer to Sell 500 Gallons of Corn Alcohol Mar. 10-11," *Sioux County Index*, 3/9/1933.

81. "To Demonstrate Alky-Gas Fuel," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 4/1/1933.

## **FOUND at Last!**

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Advertisement from *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 5/2/1933.

without a law ensuring a steady market for the product, so supplies had to be imported from elsewhere. Legislators, stung by the molasses debacle, soon introduced a bill levying a tax of 25 cents per gallon on alcohol produced from blackstrap molasses.<sup>82</sup>

Legislators tried for another alcohol fuel bill in mid-April. That bill would have taxed regular gasoline at five cents per gallon and alcohol-gasoline blends at three cents per gallon, putting the two fuels at parity for consumers. The bill was blocked in a

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82. "Alcohol-Gas Demonstration Wins Supporters for New Motor Fuel," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 5/3/1933; "Alcohol-Gasoline Is Well Received," *Ames Daily Tribune-Times*, 5/9/1933; "The Joker in the Deck" (editorial), *Humboldt Republican*, 6/2/1933; "From Our Exchanges," *Postville Herald*, 8/3/1933; "Blow Is Aimed at Blackstrap," *Des Moines Register*, 11/15/1933.

parliamentary move on the grounds that it was too similar to the failed bill from March.<sup>83</sup>

During the warm summer of 1933, arguments went back and forth over alcohol fuel's performance in automobiles. Iowa State researchers found that the fuel performed well in real-world tests, leading to minor improvements in acceleration and fuel economy. But a major test sponsored by the American Automobile Association found that alcohol-blend fuels decreased mileage. Supporters of alcohol fuel charged that the American Automobile Association test was faulty, citing faulty equipment and the hot, humid conditions of the Virginia test. Congress even considered getting into the testing business that summer, with Illinois congressman Everett Dirksen proposing a long-distance road test of the fuel in cars driving from Washington, D.C., to the Midwest and back. The long-distance road test was delayed several times before it was ultimately canceled.<sup>84</sup>

Alcohol fuel supporters in Iowa launched an increasingly bitter critique of the "oil interests" based outside the region. The *Humboldt Independent* wrote, "Propaganda from the east is now flooding the mails against the alcohol-gasoline fuel for motor vehicles. It is a determined effort on the part of the large refineries to stop the western move for the 'alky-gas' mixture."<sup>85</sup>

Whether alcohol fuel supporters knew it or not, the political campaign to mandate the fuel in Iowa and nationwide had already passed its zenith. By the fall of 1933, the Roosevelt administration had abandoned its support for power alcohol and instead favored immediate crop reductions for farm relief. That fall the AAA launched its hog reduction program by purchasing and then destroying six million hogs. Since hogs were major consumers of corn, slaughtering so many hogs exacerbated the corn glut. So the AAA began a program to immediately reduce the corn crop as well by contracting with farmers to cut production.<sup>86</sup>

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83. "Alcohol and Gasoline Motor Fuel Bill Is Reported to House," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 4/15/1933; "New Delegation Boosts Corn Alcohol," *Humboldt Independent*, 4/18/1933.

84. "Hard to Convince," *Terril Record*, 7/6/1933; "Alcohol-Gasoline Fuel Test Delayed," *Des Moines Register*, 9/14/1933.

85. Editorial, *Humboldt Independent*, 8/1/1933.

86. Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 76-77. On the politics and policies of the AAA in 1933, especially the corn-hog program, see Van L. Perkins, "The AAA and the

The AAA remained supportive of power alcohol but now reported that “there are practical obstacles to immediate utilization of . . . corn in making alcohol for motor fuel. Federal legislation to this end has been asked, but it may be at least two years before the present domestic manufacturing capacity can be expanded sufficiently to handle more than 100 million bushels of corn a year.”<sup>87</sup> Developing an alcohol fuel industry to soak up excess supply thus moved to the background.

At about the same time, distilleries began ramping up production to meet the demand created by the repeal of Prohibition. Repealing the Eighteenth Amendment, one newspaper noted, “has assured Iowa of a new market for 50,000,000 to 60,000,000 bushels of corn.” The National Recovery Administration distillers code drafted by Secretary Wallace required whisky to be made from corn, which was viewed as Wallace’s effort to protect Iowa’s agricultural interests.<sup>88</sup>

With the AAA focused on cutting back corn production and the opening of a lucrative new market thanks to the repeal of Prohibition, alcohol fuel’s political momentum quickly fizzled out. When the Iowa General Assembly held a special session from November 1933 to March 1934, it took no action on power alcohol. The news was the same from Washington, D.C. When Iowa representative Guy Gillette wrote to his constituents about news from the capital in 1934, he noted, “The corn-alcohol fuel blend, which still has many warm supporters, does not seem to have gained any ground and many of its former supporters have become lukewarm.”<sup>89</sup> National efforts for power alcohol legislation foundered in 1934. In October, leaders of the power alcohol movement announced that they would not seek a bill in the upcoming congressional session because of a smaller than expected

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Politics of Agriculture: Agricultural Policy Formulation in the Fall of 1933,” *Agricultural History* 39 (1965), 220–29; and Roger Lambert, “The Illusion of Participatory Democracy: The AAA Organizes the Corn-Hog Producers,” *Annals of Iowa* 42 (1974), 468–77.

87. “U.S. Tells Why Corn-Hog Program Is Needed,” *Des Moines Register*, 10/8/1933.

88. “Repeal Opens Corn Market,” *Terril Record*, 12/4/1933.

89. Guy Gillette, “Lights from Washington,” *Terril Record*, 4/26/1934; see also “Results Fail to Justify Advocacy of Legislation to Force Motorists to Use Alcohol Blends,” *Oil and Gas Journal*, 3/8/1934, 43, 45.

corn crop that fall and staunch opposition from powerful groups like the American Automobile Association.<sup>90</sup> By early 1935, Secretary Wallace was actively downplaying power alcohol as a farm relief measure. "We contemplate no action further than that we have taken in the last two years," Wallace said. Alcohol fuel was still held out as a long-term possibility but it was no longer considered a tool for immediate farm relief since the AAA's crop reductions had already alleviated the worst problems facing corn farmers.<sup>91</sup>

EVEN AS the political push for power alcohol faded in Des Moines and Washington, another Iowan took up the cause and moved forward with a plan to produce alcohol-blend fuels in the Midwest. Leo Christensen was one of the young chemical engineering faculty at Iowa State College who had worked on the initial alcohol fuel experiments in 1932. He soon emerged as one of Iowa's leading promoters of power alcohol. One newspaper noted how his "honest Danish features glow as he tells the possibilities of the alky blend."<sup>92</sup>

In the summer of 1933 Christensen was among the scientists who observed the American Automobile Association tests that showed lower fuel economy with gasoline-alcohol blends, directly contradicting his own previous experiments. Christensen criticized the tests, arguing that the results were invalid because the test was conducted on an especially hot day with highly volatile gasoline. The real-world tests conducted in Ames, he argued, were a much more accurate demonstration of the fuel's performance.<sup>93</sup>

Traveling to Washington, D.C., Christensen became one of the chief supporters of a nationwide alcohol fuel bill. He later worked with the USDA to collect accurate statistics about power alcohol. He presented his findings to the Senate but could not

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90. "Motor Blend Drive Halted," *Des Moines Register*, 10/7/1934.

91. "Wallace Cool on Alky-Gas Plans," *Muscatine Journal and News-Tribune*, 2/21/1935.

92. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 178; "Meeting Called to Build Opinion for Alky Fuel Blends," *Malvern Leader*, 4/26/1934.

93. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 19-20.

convince a Senate subcommittee to bring a national power alcohol bill forward for a vote. Christensen was “somewhat disappointed” but vowed to continue lobbying for national power alcohol.<sup>94</sup>

Frustrated by the lack of political action on power alcohol, Christensen and two fellow Iowa State scientists, Ralph Hixon and Ellis Fulmer, wrote a book manuscript explaining the technical and economic benefits of alcohol fuels. They had difficulty finding a publisher for the treatise. Eventually they took it to William Hale at Dow Chemical, who arranged for it to be published by the Chemical Foundation, the entity created during World War I to hold the patents for chemicals taken from German firms.<sup>95</sup> The book, titled *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief*, was published in 1934.

In the book, Christensen and his coauthors revealed the primary motivations driving power alcohol’s supporters in the 1930s. First, they were propelled by nationalism. Worried that relying on imported agricultural products weakened the United States in times of war and hurt the American farmer, they made replacing imported products with alternatives derived from American farms central to their research agenda. They also worried that the long agricultural depression of the 1920s and early 1930s was causing American farmers to sink into European-style peasantry, fatally undermining democracy. Second, Christensen and his coauthors advocated an early version of resource nationalism and energy independence, contrasting fossil fuels such as coal and petroleum, which were a “national reserve” that was depleted, with the “national income of energy” from photosynthesis. They wrote, “Agriculture stores up energy each year from the rays of the sun; in contrast, all energy secured from coal and petroleum represents a destruction of natural resources which can never be replaced. It is sound national economic policy to utilize this annual income of energy and to conserve the reserve supplies of coal and petroleum.”<sup>96</sup> Like other alcohol fuel proponents in the 1930s, Christensen proceeded from the assumption that American

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94. “Iowan Works on Fuel Law,” *Des Moines Register*, 3/30/1934; “Iowan Ends Fuel Talks,” *Des Moines Register*, 4/17/1934.

95. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 19–20.

96. Christensen et al., *Power Alcohol and Farm Relief*, 19, 177.

supplies of petroleum were an exhaustible resource that would run out in the near future, although he stopped short of predicting when, exactly, oil supplies would run dry.<sup>97</sup>

Most of Christensen's book concerned technical analysis of alcohol fuel's performance in engines and its economic challenges. Christensen argued that the engineering changes that would be required in engines to use pure alcohol as fuel made that option unfeasible at the time. He advocated blends containing 10–20 percent alcohol as an acceptable compromise.<sup>98</sup>

Christensen's political recommendations were relatively conservative, although he did insist that government action was needed to spur the alcohol-fuel industry. He opposed laws mandating specific amounts of alcohol in the gasoline supply. Instead, he recommended altering the federal gasoline tax to make alcohol blends competitively priced with straight gasoline and then letting consumers decide. Yet the need for farm relief compelled immediate action, in his opinion. He suggested that alcohol fuels receive a government subsidy to begin but that such aid should be "eliminated at some future date."<sup>99</sup> These political recommendations never took hold in Des Moines or Washington.

In the absence of political action, Christensen joined William Hale of Dow Chemical and Francis Garvin of the Chemical Foundation as leading advocates of a nationwide movement to use agricultural products, including alcohol fuels, as the basis for a chemical industry. Known as the farm chemurgy movement, this little-remembered fusion of chemical engineering and agricultural sciences was prominent in the 1930s. The chemurgists embraced a "vision of a worldwide, agrichemical revolution from which alcohol would emerge as a renewable, alternative fuel." Farm chemurgy attracted attention from wealthy industrialists such as Henry Ford, who hosted several conferences on the topic.<sup>100</sup>

Although efforts to mandate alcohol fuels via legislation foundered after 1934, Christensen continued his quest to create an alcohol fuel industry by partnering with the Chemical Foun-

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97. *Ibid.*, 33–49.

98. *Ibid.*, 51–52, 67.

99. *Ibid.*, 158–59, 165.

100. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 15. On the farm chemurgy movement, see Wright, "Alcohol Wrecks a Marriage," 36–66.

dation in a business venture. Christensen resigned his position at Iowa State in 1936 to move to Atchison, Kansas, where the Chemical Foundation was building a distillery to produce alcohol for fuel. Christensen personally oversaw construction of the distillery, worked to perfect the distilling process there, and even coordinated a marketing campaign for the fuel, which was marketed throughout the Midwest as Agrol. The Agrol venture had some success in the late 1930s. At its zenith, Agrol was offered at two thousand filling stations across the Midwest.<sup>101</sup>

When the Agrol blend arrived in Iowa filling stations in 1937–1938, there was considerable debate in the press over the fuel's benefits and drawbacks. A March 1938 advertisement for the fuel urged Iowans to use it to support the farm economy: "[Whether or not] you will buy and use an alcohol blend of gasoline is not for us to attempt to dictate but you must admit it is a step in the right direction. After all, in this vicinity we are all farmers, and anything that benefits the farmer benefits all of us." Although the Agrol plant was located in Kansas, Christensen reminded Iowans that they still benefited from it. During the first half of 1938, the plant purchased approximately 125,000 bushels of corn from Iowa farmers and shipped 100,000 gallons of the fuel to Iowa in May 1938 alone.<sup>102</sup>

By early 1938, plans were in the works for a second Agrol distillery to be located in Sioux City, Iowa, even though the original Atchison distillery was struggling to turn a profit. Local boosters encouraged Agrol to expand into Iowa. The *Sioux Center News* described "considerable demand around here for an alcohol blend fuel." The Sioux City Chamber of Commerce led efforts to bring an Agrol distillery to the city. In a radio address, a speaker from the chamber told Sioux City residents that the fate of alcohol fuels rested on their willingness to purchase the fuel once it became available. "Mr. Fleet Owner, Mr. Car Owner, Mrs. Car Owner, will you do your part in this great movement? Have you the interest of America and your own welfare enough at heart so that you will make a real effort to help this movement

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101. Bernton et al., *Forbidden Fuel*, 23–24.

102. *Ibid.*, 8; Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 181; "Agrol Motor Fuel Alcohol Blend Gasoline" (advertisement), *Boyd's Reporter*, 3/10/1938 (quotation); "Buys 125,000 Bushels Corn," *Des Moines Register*, 6/5/1938.

succeed? Have you the courage to drive from a filling station un-serviced when told that Agrol is not on sale?" Yet plans for the Sioux City plant fell apart in the summer and fall of 1938 as the larger Agrol venture failed. Leo Christensen, who had worked tirelessly for alcohol fuels, both in Iowa and Kansas, returned to his family farm in Nebraska.<sup>103</sup>

POWER ALCOHOL sputtered out in the late 1930s, a victim of cheap oil, coordinated attacks from the oil industry, and farm policies that emphasized reducing supply rather than expanding markets for agricultural products. Yet the end of power alcohol hardly marked the final debate over ethanol in Iowa.

Just a few years after the Agrol experiment failed, Iowa was again at the center of national controversy over alcohol derived from corn. In that case, the issue was not liquid transportation fuels but synthetic rubber. Immediately after the United States entered World War II, the nation grappled with a crippling shortage of rubber because most natural supplies were under Japanese control. Although a U.S. crash program to create synthetic rubber was successful, debate broke out over whether the feedstock for synthetic rubber should come from petroleum, which the oil industry preferred, or alcohol derived from agricultural products. Iowa Senator Guy Gillette demanded that the nation use corn alcohol as a synthetic rubber feedstock, opening a controversial investigation in Congress. The debate pitted "farm rubber" against "monopoly rubber" or "Standard Oil rubber." As in the 1930s power alcohol movement, though, petroleum-based synthetic rubber proved cheaper and more immediately available than alternatives created from farm products.<sup>104</sup>

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103. "Corn Alcohol Parley Today," *Des Moines Register*, 2/12/1938; Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 182; "News Force," *Sioux Center News*, 2/10/1938; Albert F. Swanson, "Agrol Industry Contracts Corn at 56¢ Per Bu.," *Boydton Reporter*, 4/21/1938; "Young Heads Corn Alcohol Firm," *Des Moines Register*, 9/2/1938; "Biographical Note," Leo M. Christensen Papers Finding Aid, Michigan State University Archives and Special Collections, <http://archives.msu.edu/findaid/174.html>.

104. I. F. Stone, "A People's War—Or Monopoly's?" *The Nation*, 8/1/1942, 85. The fullest account of the World War II synthetic rubber debate is in Mark R. Finlay, *Growing American Rubber: Strategic Plants and the Politics of National Security* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2009), 171–97. See also Keith Orejel, "The Origins of

After a hiatus during the postwar decades, Iowa's ethanol debate roared back to life in the 1970s in response to concerns about pollution from automobiles and, most importantly, the energy crises of the decade. When the nation launched an ambitious effort to cut back on smog and air pollution in the 1970s, Farm Belt politicians recalled the earlier power alcohol debate and suggested alcohol fuels as clean-burning alternatives to leaded gasoline. In the wake of the 1973 Arab oil embargo and the 1978–1979 energy crisis, Iowans urged the nation to adopt ethanol-gasoline mixtures—called gasohol in that era—as a gasoline supply extender and a tool for achieving energy independence. In the early twenty-first century, Iowa's ethanol industry was boosted by the Renewable Fuel Standard (passed in 2005 and updated in 2007), national legislation mandating that ethanol be blended into the nation's gasoline supply.

What lessons can be drawn from Iowa's original ethanol debate? Iowa's early consideration of alcohol fuels established several important precedents that would shape the state's—and the nation's—alcohol fuels policies for the rest of the century. First, the 1930s power alcohol debate revealed that the high cost of alcohol fuels forced them into an uphill battle in their contest for market share with gasoline. Producing alcohol for fuel simply made it more expensive than gasoline in the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> Thus, all the arguments in favor of alcohol fuels faced the difficult challenge of explaining why consumers should pay more for the new fuel.

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the Iowa Development Commission: Agricultural Transformation and Industrial Development in Mid-Twentieth-Century Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 56–58.

105. Giebelhaus, "Farming for Fuel," 183. It must be noted that the low price of gasoline in the 1930s was not the result of an unfettered free market, which has never existed for energy sources in the United States. Instead, energy prices have always resulted from a mixture of profit-minded companies and government regulation and oversight. For instance, oil companies benefited from the tax code's oil depletion allowance that gave a significant subsidy to oil producers beginning in 1926. On the lack of a free market in U.S. energy history, see Martin V. Melosi, *Coping with Abundance: Energy and Environment in Industrial America* (New York, 1985), 11; and Paul Sabin, *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market, 1900–1940* (Berkeley, CA, 2005). On the oil depletion allowance, see Peter A. Shulman, "The Making of a Tax Break: The Oil Depletion Allowance, Scientific Taxation, and Natural Resources Policy in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Policy History* 23 (2011), 281–322.

During the 1930s, a few drivers in the Midwest were willing to do so, but it proved impossible to convince most consumers that it was worth paying more at the pump to support farmers. In later decades, namely during the 1970s oil shocks and the early 2000s, ethanol claimed a broader share of the fuel market at moments when high oil prices made alcohol fuels competitive with gasoline. In contrast, oil was abundant and cheap throughout the 1930s, and alcohol fuels never could compete with gasoline on price without changing the tax code.

Second, and closely related, the 1930s power alcohol debate pitted farmers' interests against the concerns of petroleum producers and consumers. There was little doubt that a law mandating use of alcohol fuel would provide a valuable new market for farm crops and perhaps raise commodity prices. But those price increases would be passed on to drivers in the form of higher-priced fuel. That dynamic has persisted in ethanol debates as the number of drivers dwarfs the number of farmers, even in the 1930s and more so today. Yet within the state of Iowa there was something closer to a balance between those interests, which accounts for the state's long advocacy on behalf of alcohol fuels. Asking drivers to pay a bit more at the pump to help farmers resonated in Iowa more than elsewhere in the country. Many Iowans in the 1930s either lived on farms or could reach back a generation or two to recall their own rural roots.

Although the 1930s power alcohol debate established precedents that have lasted for decades in the nation's ethanol policies, there were important differences between the situation in the 1930s and later debates such as the gasohol policies pursued in the wake of the 1970s energy crises and post-1990 ethanol policy. The generation of farmers and drivers who debated alcohol fuels in the early 1930s remembered the transition from animal to engine power. They were keenly aware of what had been gained from their new tractors and automobiles, but they also likely had nostalgic memories of beloved work horses. Arguments for power alcohol in that era were therefore tinged with agrarianism, in this case the demand that distant oil companies owed something to the farmers and their products for all they had displaced.

Additionally, debates over alternatives to oil and gas as motor fuels before the 1970s were not focused on national energy

independence or security, which became central to U.S. energy policies after the 1970s energy crises. Some of power alcohol's most vocal proponents, such as Leo Christensen, certainly anticipated these arguments by fretting that the nation would be dependent on foreign supplies in a time of war. But most Americans had little worry over energy independence in the 1930s when the United States was awash in cheap oil from domestic wells. Instead, arguments over alcohol fuels in that era were regional and emphasized interstate competition. Rhetoric in favor of power alcohol imagined a noble heartland of struggling farmers pitted against a corrupt but powerful eastern and southern elite of oil and gas barons. Not surprisingly, Iowa's power alcohol supporters drew on a deep well of antimonopoly rhetoric in American culture that increasingly focused on so-called big oil by the middle of the twentieth century.

Finally, the 1930s power alcohol debate differed fundamentally from later biofuels arguments in that the environmental benefits and costs of producing transportation fuel from farm crops were not central to the discussion. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the twenty-first century, arguments for and against ethanol have hinged on the fuel's environmental trade-offs. That was not the case during the 1930s. In part, the lack of environmental focus during the 1930s reflected that era's thinking about the natural world. Modern environmentalism and concerns about environmental harm from gasoline-powered automobiles did not become widespread until the postwar era.<sup>106</sup> To be sure, some power alcohol proponents anticipated later environmental critiques of the oil and gas regime. Leo Christensen described oil as a finite natural reserve in contrast to alcohol fuels, which he framed as a renewable national income. Other farm chemurgists went further in anticipating environmental arguments. For instance, William Hale argued that gasoline-powered automobiles were already leading to smog and carbon monoxide problems in major cities such as London and New York.<sup>107</sup> Yet that issue never became a focus of the 1930s power alcohol debate,

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106. Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (New York, 1987); Wells, *Car Country*.

107. William J. Hale, *The Farm Chemurgic: Farmward the Star of Destiny Lights Our Way* (Boston, 1934), 149–51.

although it was perhaps a missed opportunity for power alcohol proponents because one of their strongest arguments was that alcohol could replace tetraethyl lead as an octane booster, known even then to be poisonous.

Iowa's first serious debate about the merits of using alcohol derived from corn as transportation fuel occurred in the 1930s. In the short term, the power alcohol movement of the 1930s was a failure. Bills mandating that 10 percent of the state's motor fuel supply come from alcohol failed in the General Assembly, and the Agrol experiment was bankrupt by the end of the decade. But the state's debate over alcohol as a motor fuel was just beginning. Well into the next century, Iowans are still debating the intersection of corn and politics.

## Book Reviews and Notices

*Lincoln in Indiana*, by Brian R. Dirck. Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. ix, 132 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Bruce Bigelow is professor of geography at Butler University. His publications focus on Indiana during the Civil War, especially politics, and also on the Midwest as a culture region.

The purpose of the Concise Lincoln Library series is to present lucid narratives for general readers about Lincoln based on recent research. Brian Dirck does a superb job in this regard, recounting Lincoln's upbringing in southern Indiana near the Ohio River from 1816, when he was seven, to 1830, when he became an adult legally. In the first book dealing exclusively with Lincoln's formative era written by a professional historian, Dirck describes the geographical, social, and political context of Lincoln's upbringing. His main source is the Herndon-Weik collection of interviews compiled in 1865 and 1866.

In chapter one, "Beginnings," Dirck follows the Lincoln family—father Thomas, mother Nancy Hanks, older sister Sarah, Abraham, and cousin Dennis Hanks—as they crossed the Ohio River from Kentucky to Indiana in 1816, the year that the "wild region" of dense forests, dangerous wildlife, and Native Americans became a state. The Lincolns moved because the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 made the land north of the river free soil that had been surveyed by a grid system that made the sale of land orderly and unambiguous.

In chapter two, "Roots," the author traces the ancestry of the Lincoln and Hanks families from Virginia to Kentucky. A major event in the Lincoln family was the murder of Abraham's grandfather by a Native American in 1786; in the Hanks family, there was the illegitimacy of mother Nancy and cousin Dennis. Dirck also discusses the demands of family farming on the frontier, including the removal of the forest, the construction of housing, and disease that took the life of Abraham's mother and sister.

In chapter three, "Mothers," Dirck focuses on the arrival of Lincoln's widowed stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnston, from Kentucky along with three children to create a blended family. Dirck employs the concept of "Republican motherhood" to praise Abraham's two mothers for introducing him to books and encouraging his education. However, Lincoln only had about one year of formal public education.

In chapter four, "Father and Son," Dirck emphasizes the tension between Abraham and Thomas. The father provided well materially for his large family by farming and carpentry, but there was always the threat of failure and the county poorhouse. Thomas did not drink or gamble and was a member of a Calvinist Baptist church. Even so, Thomas was perceived as a "piddler" and was only semiliterate. Abraham, on the other hand, disliked manual labor, read constantly, did not participate in organized religion, and disliked having to turn over his wages to his father until he reached adulthood.

Chapter five, "Growing," emphasizes the alienation of father and son. The son created partial separation from the father by working in small businesses in nearby Ohio River towns and even took a long journey to New Orleans with another teenaged boy during which Abraham became disgusted with slavery upon seeing slaves in chains.

In chapter six, "Leaving," we see Abraham helping his family move to the central Illinois prairie in 1830 to farm richer soil. After the move, Lincoln quickly divorced himself from the family by moving to the Springfield region in order to ascend to the professional urban class. His example embodied the opportunity for success for ambitious white men in the urbanizing antebellum Midwest. The 1787 Ordinance made a great difference in Lincoln's life and for many other midwesterners.

*Lincoln's Greatest Case: The River, the Bridge, and the Making of America*, by Brian McGinty. New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., a division of W. W. Norton & Co., 2015. 260 pp. Illustrations, timeline, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.95 hardcover, \$15.95 paperback.

Reviewer Marvin Bergman has been the editor of the *Annals of Iowa* since 1987. He edited the *Iowa History Reader* (1996 and 2008) and coedited *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa* (2008).

The legal case *Hurd et al. v. The Railroad Bridge Company*, better known as the *Effie Afton* case, is the subject of a paragraph or so in many histories of related topics, such as railroads, steamboats, Abraham Lincoln, and regional economic development in the Midwest. Here, in fewer than 200 pages of text, the case gets a detailed treatment and is thoroughly set in its context, with its ramifications also spelled out.

For context, readers are treated to accounts of such topics as steamboats and steamboating on the Mississippi River and its tributaries, the development of railroads and Lincoln's advocacy of that development, the history of bridge building going back to Roman times and beyond, the history of Rock Island (which includes Dred Scott's residence there as well as a brief account of the Black Hawk War, in which Lincoln

served as a militiaman), and Lincoln's involvement in a few other cases relating to river traffic and in many both for and against railroads. (In one case, Lincoln successfully represented the Illinois Central but then sued the company when it refused to pay his \$2,000 fee because that was "as much as Daniel Webster himself would have charged." Lincoln sued for \$5,000 instead—the shocking equivalent of about \$130,000 in today's dollars—and won.) This context is usually helpful and interesting, although sometimes it seems excessive: Do we really need a biography of the author for whom the *Effie Afton* was named?

The trial itself is the subject of just 4 of 14 chapters (56 of 192 pages). Technically, the case was a suit by the owners of the *Effie Afton* to recover the damages they incurred when the steamboat and its contents were destroyed (along with a portion of the bridge) when it crashed into a pier of the Rock Island Bridge, the first railroad bridge over the Mississippi River, completed just a month earlier. In effect, though, it was a case that pitted steamboat interests against railroad interests or, to put it more simply, a case of St. Louis versus Chicago. Official transcripts of the trial were lost in the great Chicago Fire of 1871, but readers of this book might actually be grateful for that. McGinty relies on newspaper reports from the *Chicago Press* and especially the *Missouri Republican*, whose reporter recorded much of the trial in his own shorthand and passed it along to readers. McGinty complains that both reporters "were content from time to time to summarize points they considered marginally important and eliminate those they considered obvious, repetitious, or merely trivial" (119). Readers might occasionally wish that McGinty had used more of that kind of judgment.

A couple of concluding chapters quickly summarize Lincoln's subsequent career, emphasizing his support for a transcontinental railroad beginning in Omaha, and describe subsequent efforts to bridge the upper Mississippi River.

The title is somewhat disingenuous. Although the author highlights Lincoln's role in the story at every opportunity, he also takes pains to show that Lincoln was not a lead attorney in the *Effie Afton* case, and it's not clear how prominent his role actually was. This is a story primarily about the case, not about Abraham Lincoln.

It's unlikely that historians of Lincoln, railroads, steamboats, or the economic development of the Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century will learn anything significant from the treatment of those topics here, and there's no real thesis, except for the author's advocacy of the importance of the case for Lincoln and for sectional development (the result strengthened the ties linking Iowa and the Great Plains to Chicago at the

cost of St. Louis and New Orleans). Most of the context is based, appropriately enough, on secondary sources. Sometimes the choice of secondary source is questionable; for example, his account of the famous 1854 Grand Excursion on the recently completed Chicago & Rock Island route from Chicago to Rock Island and then up the Mississippi by steamboat to St. Anthony Falls relies on a 1933 article in the *Palimpsest* by William J. Petersen rather than the more recent and more thorough book, *Grand Excursion*, by Steven J. Keillor (2004). If there's nothing particularly new here for scholars, however, the narrative is clear and engaging enough for the book to appeal to any lay person who might be interested in the topics it covers. McGinty's book complements the earlier privately published book by Larry Riney, *Hell Gate of the Mississippi: The Effie Afton Trial and Abraham Lincoln's Role in It* (2006) in illuminating an important legal case for the development of Iowa and the Midwest.

*Prairie Defender: The Murder Trials of Abraham Lincoln*, by George R. Dekle Sr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. xiv, 248 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.50 hardcover.

Reviewer John A. Lupton is executive director of the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission. He was formerly an assistant editor on *The Papers of Abraham Lincoln* and has written extensively about Lincoln as a lawyer.

Since the publication of the *Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition* (LPAL) in 2000, new books on Lincoln's pre-presidential career have enlightened readers not only on his 25-year law practice but on midwestern antebellum society as well. In *Prairie Defender*, George Dekle Sr. relies on 30 years of experience as a criminal lawyer paired with the documentary record made available by LPAL to examine Lincoln's criminal cases generally, and murder cases specifically.

Dekle argues against a long-standing misconception that Lincoln detested criminal practice and was not good at it (2). He focuses primarily on Lincoln's 18 murder cases but mentions other criminal cases — most notably, a child-rape case in which Lincoln served as prosecutor. He devotes one chapter to Lincoln's pardon practice and concludes the book with a summary assessment of Lincoln's murder cases, deconstructing several popular myths about his criminal caseload.

By examining famous (Almanac, Harrison, and Goings) and not-so-famous (Patterson, Longnecker, and Bantzhouse) murder cases, Dekle provides, for the first time, a complete study of Lincoln's murder cases, demonstrating that Lincoln was a competent and successful criminal

lawyer. The author thrives in his legal analysis. His chapter on the Goings case, in particular, shines. The elderly defendant, Melissa Goings, charged with murdering her husband, failed to appear in court. After she asked for a drink, Lincoln allegedly suggested that she flee by telling her there was good water in Tennessee (138). Dekle discounts the story and convincingly argues that Lincoln most likely repeated a joke from fellow lawyer Usher Linder, who had used a similar story previously. It is well established that Lincoln frequently borrowed stories and inserted himself into them.

With murder cases constituting less than 0.5 percent of Lincoln's total caseload, Dekle does not argue that these cases are representative. Lincoln was a general practice attorney who occasionally represented and prosecuted alleged criminals. Murder cases are better known because of their intrinsic interest and extensive contemporary newspaper coverage. Lincoln's entire criminal practice also was a small percentage of his total caseload (approximately 6 percent), which previous biographers have used as proof that Lincoln did not like criminal law. Dekle counters this notion effectively but could have strengthened his argument by noting that Lincoln's criminal caseload generally mirrored the court docket as a whole.

Two interesting threads appear frequently in Dekle's analysis. First, the social nature of the criminal courts is best exemplified by the unfavorable treatment Tom Patterson received, despite a pretty clear case of self-defense, because he was a newer resident in the community who had killed a long-time resident (153). Dekle does not investigate as deeply, however, the socioeconomic reasons for leniency in murder/manslaughter cases. Many juries were reluctant to convict if the accused had a family lest his wife and children become dependents of the community. Dekle alludes to this type of leniency with respect to John Hibbs, who had been found guilty of manslaughter, and Lincoln assisted in obtaining a pardon for him (93). Second, Dekle implies that Lincoln did not work as hard on a case when he knew he would receive little or no compensation (53, 189-90). The implication is that Lincoln, who argued that lawyers should be paid for their services, was perhaps less effective when there was no compensation, contributing to the longstanding narrative of Lincoln's lack of interest in criminal cases.

Despite minor interpretive issues of not delving into certain matters more deeply, this is an engaging and interesting book that effectively demonstrates that Lincoln was indeed a successful criminal lawyer. More importantly, it illustrates a clear evolution in Lincoln's skill as an attorney in general.

*Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors*, by Stephen D. Engle. Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. iii, 725 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Wallace Hettle is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of *Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* and *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and War*.

In this ambitious book, Stephen D. Engle traces the impact of Union Civil War governors on the course and outcome of the conflict. Without minimizing the impact of President Lincoln or Congress, Engle first shows how governors built regiments in 1861. Union governors rushed to provide troops after Lincoln called for the raising of militias in the wake of Confederate shots at Fort Sumter.

Because Republican governors ruled the majority of northern states, the group responded to Lincoln's calls for help with alacrity. Prior to Bull Run, though, Iowa's Samuel Kirkwood was hampered by geographical distance, a weak militia system, and the need to defend Iowans against potential Indian attacks. Kirkwood also worried that proslavery Missourians could prove a threat to Iowa's southern tier of counties.

It is hard to generalize about the governors across the board. While Republicans had more strength, Democratic governors often were obstacles for Lincoln. Governors' priorities diverged because their states differed so much. Through their governors, slave states like Maryland and Missouri stood with Lincoln. However, strongly antislavery states like Massachusetts supported the war with far more enthusiasm. In Engle's account, Massachusetts Governor Andrew Curtin emerges as a particularly formidable Union leader.

Engle ably demonstrates that most governors were ahead of Lincoln on emancipation. Further, many of them pressed him to escalate the war effort to include emancipation. This emerging view among governors became especially evident after an 1862 conference in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The group proceeded to Washington to share their views of the war with Lincoln. Although some historians have argued that lobbying efforts by governors had little impact on the president, Engle effectively makes the case that governors solidified his move from a war for the Union to a war against slavery.

At the Altoona conference, Iowa's Samuel Kirkwood recognized that the cautious General George McClellan had to be fired after his failure to follow through on the Union victory at the Battle of Antietam in 1862. In Washington with his fellow governors, Kirkwood had the backbone to confront Lincoln directly about McClellan. During the meeting, Lincoln pushed back, but shortly thereafter he adopted Kirkwood's point of view.

A thread running through the book is the creation of a strong national government, which the author calls a Union "leviathan." The success of the war effort required leadership in both economic and military spheres; governors were extraordinarily cooperative in recognizing the need for strong national power. They created a nation, rather than just a collection of states.

This is a big book. In covering the stories of Union governors, Engle effectively retells the central story of the Union homefront. The work is based on massive archival research. It features accessible prose. However, its size, the plethora of characters depicted, and the scope of the argument may intimidate casual readers.

One should always hesitate before using the word *definitive*. Nevertheless, Engle's book will be the indispensable source on Union governors for a long time to come.

*Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865*, by Thomas W. Cutrer. The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xiii, 588. Map, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert Wooster is Regents Professor of History at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His books include *American Military Frontiers: The U.S. Army in the West, 1783–1900* (2009) and *The Civil War Bookshelf: 50 Must-Read Books about the War Between the States* (2001).

Thomas W. Cutrer's *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865* represents the first modern attempt by a Civil War specialist to craft a comprehensive study of the entire Trans-Mississippi West from secession through the collapse of the Confederacy. This is operational and tactical history at its best, told in bold, sweeping terms. Wisely, Cutrer does not attempt to overstate the significance of the fighting west of the Mississippi for the overall war effort. As he acknowledges, "The Civil War was neither won nor lost west of the Mississippi River" (443). Still, as the fastest-growing part of the South and as a vital component of the campaigns for the Mississippi River, the region had strategic importance, especially in the wake of Napoleon III's military intervention in Mexico. Thus, as Cutrer demonstrates, "It was of vital importance in and of itself" (448).

Those seeking a comprehensive narrative of the conflicts between Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors and their Indian allies from the Mississippi River to New Mexico need go no further. Printed primary materials are supplemented in some cases by manuscript collections, but the strength of the work lies in its narrative power. With an

eye for the telling quotation, Cutrer describes in often vivid prose the maneuvering of soldiers who usually deserved better than the sad leadership of generals like Earl Van Dorn, Theophilus Holmes, Nathaniel P. Banks, and Benjamin F. Butler. Thematically, Cutrer emphasizes just how savage the war became in Missouri, Kansas, and the Indian Territory, as well as of the Federal advantage in artillery that proved decisive in sharp (if often overlooked) battles like Buzzards Prairie, Louisiana, and Honey Springs, Indian Territory. Even more insightful is his reminder that the geographic boundaries of military districts and departments had unforeseen but significant consequences. Already suffering from a distinct disadvantage in material resources, the Confederates found that their defense of the Mississippi River was made even more difficult because lines of military authority were “divided east and west . . . with authority sharply delineated by the river” (4). Whereas the north-south axis of Union commands promoted (at least in many cases) “the common cause of opening the Mississippi” (4), Southerners west of the great river had little reason to cooperate with their cousins to the east, and vice versa. Thus, more often than not, the Trans-Mississippi was to the Confederacy a separate war, long before the fall of Vicksburg.

Writers of big and ambitious books like this get to choose their focus—in this case, Cutrer’s interest lies in the Civil War itself rather than the conflicts between federal and local authorities in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Minnesota, and the Dakotas versus Native Americans that occurred during the war, which are treated in but one of 24 chapters. The Confederate recapture of Galveston in January 1863, for example, receives 20 paragraphs of text, whereas the three-and-a-half-year conflict (not two, as Cutrer suggests) in Minnesota sparked by the Dakota uprising in 1862 receives just 11 paragraphs. As a consequence, although Cutrer’s work is clearly superior to the earlier work of historian of American Indians Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *The Civil War in the American West* (1991), those interested in more emphasis on Indian versus non-Indian conflicts will still find Josephy’s older work most useful.

With that caveat, *Theater of a Separate War* is the best single volume on the Civil War west of the Mississippi River. Students of Iowa history will find much of interest, with the service of Iowa troops in the fighting at Pea Ridge, in the campaigns for South Texas of 1863–64, and more explicitly the devastating losses suffered by the Nineteenth and Twentieth Iowa Infantry regiments at Prairie Grove receiving the author’s due attention. Unfortunately, the publisher has done readers a major disservice by publishing such an important book without including the maps necessary to bring the splendidly written text to life. Almost astonishingly for a detailed operational narrative like this, the book

includes only one map, and that map, though clear and pleasing to the eye, fails to locate points like Helena, Arkansas; Alexandria, Louisiana; or Niblett's Bluff, Texas—all places of strategic importance referred to repeatedly in the text.

*Pioneer Girl Perspectives: Exploring Laura Ingalls Wilder*, edited by Nancy Tystad Koupal. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2017. 317 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. He is the editor of *Almost Pioneers* (2013) and is writing a biography of Laura Ingalls Wilder that pays particular attention to her faith.

When reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books, one is led to believe that things happened exactly as they were written. In addition, at a speech at a book fair in Detroit in 1937, Wilder said, in reference to the most recent book published, that "every story in this novel, all the circumstances, each incident are true. All I have told is true but it is not the whole truth" (15). After Wilder's death in 1957, however, readers and researchers began to discover many ways that the books were not historically accurate. That process accelerated when it was revealed that Wilder had previously written an adult memoir she called "Pioneer Girl" that publishers had rejected. The memoir was first made widely available to the public by the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, Iowa, during the 1980s. The South Dakota Historical Society (SDHS) Press published *Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography* in 2014, and it quickly became a best-seller. It is now in its ninth printing; more than 165,000 copies have been sold.

*Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is a collection of essays edited by Nancy Tystad Koupal, director of the Pioneer Girl Project, and published by the SDHS Press. The volume was originally meant to address how the publication of *Pioneer Girl* shapes our understanding of Wilder and her work. However, contributors take their considerations in a number of new directions, including the life and works of Wilder's daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, the popularity of the Little House books, and the books' literary value.

The book is divided into four sections. "Working Writers" begins by reprinting Wilder's Detroit Book Fair speech, and then biographers of Wilder and Lane engage the different types of writing each published. In "Beginnings and Misdirections," authors consider the history of the Pioneer Girl manuscript and the Little House books compared to other early twentieth-century children's literature. Historians writing in the third section, "Wilder's Place and Time," situate Wilder in regional

and historical context. The essays in the final section, "Enduring Tales and Childhood Myths," explore a variety of literary features of the books.

As in all books of essays, some chapters are more insightful than others. Readers of this journal will be especially interested in John E. Miller's essay describing the midwestern context of Wilder's life and work. He argues that the Midwest is depicted in the following characteristics of the Little House books: "(1) the prominence of the land in its residents' thinking and the centrality of agriculture in its way of life; (2) the Homestead Act and the frontier process as integral parts of its historical experience; (3) the crucial role that small towns played in its culture; and (4) the development and nurturing of specific values as a result of those cultural experiences that helped shape residents' special identities as Midwesterners" (155). Paula Nelson does a thorough job placing Wilder's views on family, women's roles, farming, and woman suffrage into the multiple contexts of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. Nancy Fraser examines the use of the tale of the "Bloody Benders" in some Pioneer Girl manuscripts in order to assess Wilder and Lane's relationship to the "yellow journalism" of the early twentieth century. Elizabeth Jameson considers how Wilder's troubled and poverty-ridden childhood was transformed into the happy childhood of the Little House books. Finally, William Anderson gives a fascinating brief history of the Pioneer Girl manuscript between Wilder's death in 1957 and its publication in 2014.

Overall, *Pioneer Girl Perspectives* is an excellent book. It's slightly larger than a normal hardback, and the dust jacket art is beautiful. It includes many illustrations from the original Helen Sewell editions of the Little House books as well as historical photos of Wilder, Lane, and others. Many essays fill gaps in Wilder scholarship or bring together what is already known in helpful ways. It is a worthy companion to *Pioneer Girl* on the shelves of anyone interested in the Little House books and the way that they depict the West—and the Midwest.

*Coxey's Crusade for Jobs: Unemployment in the Gilded Age*, by Jerry Prout. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. 152 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Carlos A. Schwantes is Saint Louis Mercantile Library Endowed Professor of History Emeritus, University of Missouri-St. Louis. He is the author of *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey* (1985) and "Soldiers of Misfortune: Jack London, Kelly's Army, and the Struggle for Survival in Iowa" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1983).

Do readers need yet another book on the highly publicized 1894 march to Capitol Hill led by Jacob S. Coxey? Yes, and Jerry Prout's *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs* is a worthy addition to the substantial body of literature already extant on the topic — by my count, five books (counting this one) published since Henry Vincent's official history appeared contemporaneously while the marchers were still 40 miles from their goal. For all that has been written about "Coxey's Army," the term most often used by its observers, Prout explores in depth a number of topics that have been ignored or given very slight attention by previous writers on the topic, such as how African Americans came to view the march in highly positive terms because it drew no "color line" in terms of its membership or its stated goals.

Prout, as the title of this book suggests, portrays the Coxey phenomenon as a crusade for jobs. It was that, of course, but it was so much more. For Coxey himself, the main purpose was to drum up support for his crusade to improve the awful condition of American roads and make them usable by the rapidly growing legions of bicyclists. (The first American automobiles made their sputtering appearance in Massachusetts and Indiana only months before the 400-mile march from Coxey's hometown of Massillon, Ohio, to Washington commenced on March 25, 1894, a blustery Easter Sunday.) Prout's account is exceptionally thorough in its narration of the march's gestation in Chicago in 1893 and the weeks of preparation in Massillon that took place before the unprecedented "petition in boots" took its first steps toward Capitol Hill.

At some level, the Coxey phenomenon was pure entertainment, a dramatic national soap opera with a new episode unfolding each day on the front page of newspapers across the United States. In fact, it became the biggest news story since the disputed election of 1876. Prout's account of how that happened is excellent and is perhaps his most important contribution. He introduces readers to the cadre of newspaper reporters "embedded" in the ranks of the Coxey marchers — none of those more important in Prout's account than Ray Stannard Baker and Robert Peet Skinner. Baker (of the *Chicago Record*) was an energetic 24-year-old not long out of the University of Michigan who had never before reported on news outside Chicago. Skinner, the publisher and editor of the *Massillon Evening Independent*, wrote the initial accounts of the Coxey phenomenon unfolding almost literally on his doorstep that soon became the talk of the nation. This portion of Prout's book is especially fascinating not only in its description of newspaper coverage of Coxey's crusade but also because it serves to explore the evolving world of journalism in the 1890s. Prout notes, too, how young Jack London marched with a troop of Coxeyites across Iowa and was thus able to

hone his writing skills in terms of the working-class subject matter he later used in his novels.

Prout brings to his topic the unusual perspective of a corporate executive: he was from 2000 until 2013 the vice-president of government and public affairs for FMC, the Fortune 500 Corporation he joined in 1979. However, when *Coxey's Crusade for Jobs* was published in 2016 the author was visiting professor of political science at Marquette University. He does not reveal how or why he became interested enough in the Coxey phenomenon during his time as a business executive to write a book about it, yet Prout clearly has produced a highly informative and entirely satisfying study of the contribution of Coxey's "Industrial Army" to the history of American protest.

By the way, the author includes 24 pages of highly informative chapter notes; however, they appear densely compressed by type so small that my aging eyes needed a magnifying glass to study them. Yet it would be a mistake for serious readers to ignore them: the notes contain valuable additional details on the Coxey phenomenon and its context in Gilded Age America.

*Finding Bix: The Life and Afterlife of a Jazz Legend*, by Brendan Wolfe. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. ix, 235 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer C. A. Norling is a graduate student in musicology at the University of Iowa.

Simultaneously pitied and idolized, jazz cornetist Bix Beiderbecke acquired an increasingly discordant legend after his premature death in the summer of 1931. The 28-year-old Davenport native, a noted alcoholic, was likely at the peak of his career when he succumbed to sudden and still highly debated causes. Despite having worked for both Jean Goldkette and the presumed "King of Jazz," Paul Whiteman, Beiderbecke was scarcely a public figure in his own time. The ensuing decades, however, saw heightened admiration for and musical imitation of his recorded solos, bringing about a decidedly cult-like "Bixophilia."

More than a biographical profile of a famous musician, Brendan Wolfe's *Finding Bix* chronicles the author's navigation through a subject fraught with misinformation and polarizing opinions. Including topics of discography, bibliography, myth-making, and musical canonization, Wolfe presents a synthesized reinterpretation of what he calls the "Great Bix Myth" (11). He also updates the Beiderbecke discourse with new interviews and accounts from internet forums. Although not an ideal source for historians and music scholars—Wolfe himself is "not

normally a huge fan of academic papers" (103) — the book's light, accessible nature is perfect for casual readers and jazz enthusiasts.

Perhaps of greatest interest to readers of the *Annals of Iowa* is the book's overt connection to the Hawkeye State. A text by an Iowan, about an Iowan, and published by the University of Iowa Press may inherently reflect its surroundings, yet *Finding Bix* provides more than mere references to Iowa. With a particular focus on Davenport, Wolfe recontextualizes the famously agricultural state in terms of regional modernity and challenges the established story of a seemingly provincial cornetist's "emerg[ence] from the cornfields" (11). By no means a "cultural backwater," claims Wolfe, Davenport was not "entirely the caricature that many historians and biographers have rendered" (22). A prominent river and railway center since the mid-nineteenth century, it was a thriving industrial metropolis during Beiderbecke's formative years. Much like New Orleans, Davenport, with its historically intemperate sensibilities toward alcohol and adult entertainment, created its own burgeoning jazz scene that attracted musicians on the Mississippi's riverboat circuit. Wolfe's subsequent presentation of Beiderbecke's early performance opportunities and musical encounters in Iowa mocks the flawed perceptions of previous biographers, a theme that recurs throughout the book.

*Finding Bix* is not without concerns, however. With mostly short, sporadic chapters, the book lacks an effective organizational cohesion. The modest page count, encompassing nearly 50 discrete chapters, is forced into sections that are too brief for adequate development. The resulting string of arguments is regularly interrupted and left open-ended, thus stifling rhetorical momentum and requiring repeated backtracking. Instances of disconnected thoughts could have been mitigated by longer, sustained chapters with plainly defined criteria. Secondly, Wolfe's writing, while refreshingly lively and conversational, suffers from hyper-colloquial idioms that distort his otherwise clear authorial voice. Phrases such as "artsy-fartsy" (25), "up pops a band of Johnny-come-latelies" (85), and "gotten all Hoagy Carmichael about it" (10), even when used sarcastically, color the text as unnecessarily campy.

Critiques notwithstanding, *Finding Bix* is an entertaining narrative that addresses the ambiguous and rather convoluted nature of jazz historiography. By organizing dissonant sources and, at times, subverting prior inaccuracies, Wolfe formulates a new, personal sketch of the late jazz musician. Readers will undoubtedly glean valuable historical contexts for Beiderbecke's life and musical output, Iowa's urban development, and the ever-mythologizing culture of jazz fandom. "Bix is a specter," claims Wolfe, "flitting in and out of the snaps and pops of a wax record. . . . He is a shadow" (8).

*J. C. Penney: The Man, the Store, and American Agriculture*, by David Delbert Kruger. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017. xiv, 346 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer William Friedrichs is professor of history and director of the Iowa History Center at Simpson College. He is the author of *A Great State Fair: The Blue Ribbon Foundation and the Revival of the Iowa State Fair* (2017); editor of the University of Iowa Press's Iowa and the Midwest Experience book series; and author of biographies of Iowa businessmen F. M. Hubbell, John Ruan, and Bill Knapp.

Business journalists have spilled a lot of ink about the demise of department store J. C. Penney amid the retail revolution led by Amazon. In the wake of this negative news comes *J. C. Penney: The Man, The Store, and American Agriculture*, an interesting biography of the company founder. Readers should not judge the book by its title, however. Author David Delbert Kruger, an agricultural research and instruction librarian at the University of Wyoming, focuses primarily on Penney's ties to, and then involvement in, agriculture; those seeking a detailed business biography of Penney the merchandiser and the store bearing his name will need to look elsewhere.

Penney was born into a large family in rural Missouri in the late nineteenth century. Tough agricultural times meant a hardscrabble existence on the Penney farm. Besides farming, Penney's father also volunteered as a Baptist pastor, and the young Penney was imbued from an early age with a mixture of Christian morality and the Protestant work ethic, emphasizing hard work, independence, frugality, and treating others fairly.

The adolescent embraced agrarian life but did not envision a future in farming. Penney's father agreed, and seeing his son's aptitude for sales and marketing, he arranged a job for him with a local merchant. After learning the basics of retailing, Penney headed to the American West in 1897. There he joined Thomas Callahan in Colorado in his Golden Rule chain store operation. With a business based on low mark-ups, repeat business, and his core value of fair treatment of suppliers and consumers, Callahan found a ready market for his retail formula in small mining towns and agricultural communities in the region. Callahan taught Penney about mass merchandising and the idea of growing through employee partnerships. Penney rose rapidly and was soon offered a generous deal. In 1902 he became the managing partner of the new Golden Rule store in Kemmerer, Wyoming. Under Penney's savvy leadership, it was immediately successful. By 1904 he was overseeing three Golden Rule stores; three years later, he bought his partners out.

Penney expanded rapidly, employing the partnership strategy. By 1913 there were 48 stores in eight western states. That year, the operation was renamed J. C. Penney and changed from a partnership to a corporation. Growth continued as the company went nationwide and eventually moved into larger cities and suburbs, but for years its bread and butter remained Main Street storefronts serving small rural communities. There were nearly 70 J. C. Penney stores in Iowa as of 1933.

Curiously, it was shortly after Penney moved to New York City, where the firm's corporate headquarters had been relocated, that his interest in agriculture was reignited. He purchased a large farm in Dutchess County, New York, but had no intention of being a gentleman farmer. He knew the difficulties faced by American farmers and now had the opportunity to better their situation. He bought the farm with his Golden Rule principle of "doing unto others" in mind and established a Guernsey dairy cattle operation in an effort to improve the breed and help farmers generally. The effort was a success and became "a living blueprint of [his] future projects" (36).

Penney later returned to Missouri, buying his family's former farm and others, where he started a purebred Aberdeen Angus beef herd and horse and mule business. But by far his most ambitious agricultural effort infused by his Golden Rule philosophy was Penney Farms, a 120,000-acre model community he established in northeast Florida in the 1920s. There he planned to use the partnership strategy he had employed so successfully in building his department store. After going through a rigorous application process, selected farmers and their families were provided with a home on 20 acres rent-free for one year. They could gradually accrue an interest in the farm by raising crops and eventually purchase their own land. Besides carving out the town and building the infrastructure, Penney also established an agricultural research institute there to educate farmers. Unfortunately, he suffered major losses during the Great Depression and was forced to sell off most of the land making up the farms. However, many of the farmers who bought into the experimental community stayed, and Penney Farms remains an incorporated town today.

As the foregoing suggests, this book offers a different perspective on mass merchandising mogul J. C. Penney. It is not a comprehensive biography, but those interested in learning about Penney's abiding ties to American agriculture will want to read it.

*The Religion of Chiropractic: Populist Healing from the American Heartland*, by Holly Folk. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xii, 351 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.95 paperback.

Reviewer Eric Juhnke is professor of history at Briar Cliff University. He is the author of *Quacks and Crusaders: The Fabulous Careers of John Brinkley, Norman Baker, and Harry Hoxsey* (2002).

Iowa holds a special place in medical history as the wellspring of the chiropractic movement. In the late nineteenth century, D. D. Palmer, the self-proclaimed “fountainhead” of chiropractic, introduced a new medical philosophy as well as its premier training facility in Davenport, Iowa. In *The Religion of Chiropractic*, Holly Folk takes on D. D. Palmer and his son B. J. as well as the ways they and other chiropractors perceived and publicized their field. Folk contends that D. D.’s “discovery” of chiropractic as well as its early success must be seen within the context of the late nineteenth century, “in which science, religion, and political sentiment . . . fused together” in a vitalist outlook of “Body, Mind and Spirit” (2, 17). As medicine became less individualistic and more institutionalized, alternative medicine, Folk argues, served as a “form of cultural resistance” for those struggling to come to grips with post-industrial society. The autodidactic Palmers’ commingling of metaphysics and populist rhetoric with health care resonated because it echoed established thinking. It also limited the boundaries of chiropractic’s appeal.

The Palmers play a starring role in Folk’s book. Although D. D.’s first chiropractic treatment allegedly cured a patient of deafness, he was slow to feature spinal adjustments, a core feature of the “straight” chiropractic theory later taught at the Palmer school. In fact, D. D.’s medical theories shifted markedly over the years. The one constant for the free-thinking D. D. was his belief in a “divine force connecting all reality” that fused health care with religion. Like his father, B. J. also combined metaphysics and chiropractic, claiming that the spinal cord served as a vibratory “cable transmitter” of life force or God (233). B. J. navigated the Davenport school through several schisms with rival chiropractors, including his own father, and developed a “chiropractic empire” through aggressive salesmanship and shameless self-promotion (193). Folk argues that B. J. made chiropractic protest against organized medicine “fun” with populist crusades, such as encouraging state-sanctioned chiropractors to “go to jail for the cause” (196). Such anti-establishment rhetoric never penetrated the mainstream, although it did align chiropractic with other oppositional social stances, including racist and nativist movements.

Folk moves beyond the Palmers to chart the evolution of chiropractic. Thirty thousand strong in the 1930s, chiropractors’ numbers dwindled in the 1940s and 1950s only to rebound again in the 1970s and 1980s as

the public lost faith in various institutions, including established medicine. In 1987 the AMA lost an antitrust suit that ended their longstanding campaign against chiropractic. Victims of their own success, chiropractors have struggled in recent decades to compete against holistic and allopathic practitioners who “learned from the chiropractic story” and incorporated touch-based therapy and even spinal manipulation (256). Folk admits that chiropractic has a “poor track record for healing structural damage to the spine” and may best be viewed as “condition management” (254). Although chiropractic has modernized and professionalized in many respects, Folk shows that it remains connected to its spiritual and populist past. For example, contemporary chiropractors “form a sizeable contingent” of the right-wing “Tea Party, Sovereignty, and Tax protest movements” (263). The Palmers’ embrace of metaphysics, although often shielded from the patient, also persists among many chiropractors today.

Folk has done her research, scouring popular health and religious literature from the late nineteenth century as well as the special collections at the Palmer School of Chiropractic. Her coverage of chiropractors’ metaphysical views makes for fascinating reading, although including the outlook of patients would have added greater depth. *The Religion of Chiropractic* was clearly a personal endeavor for Folk, a self-identified religionist who shares “lifestyle habits associated with alternative health movements” (8). Despite frequent editorializing, Folk skirts criticism of the Palmers’ controversial beliefs, including their rejection of vaccinations and the germ theory and B. J.’s embrace of gadget quackery. Folk also dismisses D. D.’s theoretical vacillations as only “unsettling if one prefers consistent thinking” as well as B. J.’s plagiarism as “common” within “populist intellectual writing” (89, 210). Folk does, however, critique the Palmers’ personalities if not always their beliefs. She admits that “there is no way to hide” their “strangeness and remain intellectually honest” (52). Both were eccentric — particularly B. J., who collected phallic relics, housed alligators in his basement, and iconized himself as a Greek god on cigar boxes. Each was so “selfish, dishonest,” and “provocative with people,” concludes Folk, that “it is hard to decide which of the two . . . was worse” (235). In the final analysis, *The Religion of Chiropractic* helps demystify chiropractic medicine by placing the Palmers and their movement within a broader historical context. Those interested in the history of alternative medicine as well as chiropractic’s fascinating founders will appreciate Folk’s work.

*Women in Agriculture: Professionalizing Rural Life in North America and Europe, 1880–1965*, edited by Linda M. Ambrose and Joan M. Jensen. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. xii, 258 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$65.00 paperback.

Reviewer Jenny Barker-Devine is associate professor of history at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois. She is the author of *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (2013).

With *Women in Agriculture*, editors Linda Ambrose and Joan Jensen present an ambitious collection of ten skillfully crafted essays that shift central conversations in rural women's studies toward the issues of food security and women's professional lives. For nearly 40 years, historians have explored the experiences of rural women within the context of the home and local community, grappling with the assumption that country folks negotiated traditional practices with urban-based reforms in agricultural science and home economics. The essays in *Women in Agriculture* reveal a more complex story, showing that rural women in North America and Europe played significant roles as reformers, scientists, economists, and producers in shaping the technological revolutions of the last century.

By focusing on the years between 1880 and 1965, *Women in Agriculture* captures the emergence of agricultural science, agricultural economics, rural sociology, and home economics as distinct professional fields. During those years, women enjoyed access to higher education in greater numbers, the development of new technologies such as automobiles and radios enhanced communication, and members of marginalized groups, including African Americans and indigenous populations, continued efforts to realign dynamics of power. At the outset of these rapid changes, gendered spaces within the professions had not been clearly delineated, allowing some room for women to quietly contest patriarchal attitudes and institutions.

Within this context, Ambrose and Jensen argue that the women featured in the book's essays, many of whom came from rural backgrounds, challenged understandings of the New Woman as a purely urban phenomenon. Rural women also "sought more independence, visibility, and participation in public life" as they asserted that educated, middle-class women should pursue careers in agriculture (36). Their aspirations materialized in myriad ways: women organized women's institutes (in the case of Canada and the United Kingdom) and educational clubs (in the case of the Netherlands); they also oversaw cooperatives, worked as home demonstration agents, produced radio shows, and conducted crucial scholarly research that set standards in the fields of agricultural economics, anthropology, and rural sociology.

The essays in *Women in Agriculture* focus primarily on women's efforts in the fields of food production and security and are arranged into three categories: education, experts, and extension. The first section on education reveals how reformers created opportunities for women to enter agricultural professions, from cultivation to rural sociology and agricultural economics. The second section on experts presents three biographical essays on women who initiated research projects or organizations that defined and supported women as agricultural producers and professionals. Finally, in the third section on extension work, readers learn about how educated experts imparted information to women in their local communities, and then how those women interpreted and applied that information.

The essays demonstrate that women prioritized food-related issues across time and throughout North America and Europe, and they approached the issue of food security with diverse strategies. The authors and editors made a conscious effort to link essays that might otherwise seem unrelated, and readers can move easily from wealthy female reformers in urban London to poultry operations in Montana and then from women's educational programs in The Netherlands to African American home demonstration agents in rural Arkansas. Striking commonalities emerge from these varied experiences. Women's strategies were shaped not so much by geography as by economic class, race, and patriarchy. Regardless of their location in place or time, female professionals encountered complicated, hierarchical relationships with male leaders in male-dominated spaces. Their success often hinged on the approval of male superiors or women's willingness to act primarily within all-female spaces. At the same time, these professional women grappled with conflicting professional priorities and local women's priorities.

*Women in Agriculture* unifies diverse voices that set a welcome new tone in the field of rural women's studies. As Ambrose notes in her essay on women's institutes in Canada and the United Kingdom, popular discourse and scholarly research have minimized the influence of rural women's organizations and expertise. Labeling such organizations as conservative, limited, "inconsequential 'tea parties,'" scholars have largely overlooked the power of women's professional work in agricultural fields (120). There is much to be gained from comparative studies that reveal how regional and temporal factors shaped women's lives. *Women in Agriculture* opens rich new conversations that will allow scholars of rural women to situate their work in broader frameworks of professionalization, the New Woman, and food and food security studies.

*Conserving the Dust Bowl: The New Deal's Prairie States Forestry Project*, by Sarah Thomas Karle and David Karle. Reading the American Landscape Series. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017. xi, 160 pp. Maps, illustrations, tables, photo essay, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 hardcover, pdf, and ebook.

Reviewer Rebecca Conard is professor of history emeritus at Middle Tennessee State University. Her books include *Places of Quiet Beauty: Parks, Preserves, and Environmentalism* (1997).

*Conserving the Dust Bowl* provides a succinct history of one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signature New Deal projects—the shelterbelt project to curb wind erosion on the Great Plains. The Prairie States Forestry Project (PSFP), its official title, was an ambitious federal response to catastrophic drought and monstrous dust storms that brought agriculture to its knees in this region in the 1930s. Between 1935 and 1942, more than 200 million trees were planted, more or less strategically, in a corridor stretching from the Canadian border through eastern North and South Dakota, eastern and central Nebraska, central Kansas, central and western Oklahoma, and into the Texas panhandle.

In their first two chapters, the authors, drawing on the scholarship of Wilmon Droze, Donald Worster, and others, provide a good overview of nineteenth-century federal land policies and laws that enabled the development of agriculture in the ecologically fragile Great Plains and—once it became clear that rain would not, in fact, simply follow the plow—the two basic approaches devised to change the plains climate: rainmaking schemes and planting trees. Franklin D. Roosevelt's triumph in the 1932 presidential election was a boon to the latter. FDR, who once self-identified as a tree farmer, threw the weight of his office behind soil conservation and forestry as instruments of resource stewardship (chap. 3). Chapter 4 delves into the policy and politics of implementing the shelterbelt idea, which Roosevelt launched with an executive order in July 1934, with funding to come from work relief appropriations. His executive order touched off a debate that had foresters arguing its scientific merits and politicians questioning whether the federal government should be spending emergency funds on a long-term project designed to help farmers in a sparsely settled part of the country. Ultimately, the project went forward, administered by the U.S. Forest Service until it was transferred to the Soil Conservation Service in 1942. For seven years, the Roosevelt Administration kept the project going with annual infusions of work relief funds, ultimately totaling less than \$14 million and coming mainly through the Works Progress Administration (chap. 6). This signature New Deal project, “never fully endorsed by Congress” (97) and initially projected to cost \$75 million, was thus implemented on a shoestring budget.

What the authors do not adequately explain is how a project that came to be associated almost exclusively, in historical memory, with the venerated Civilian Conservation Corps, popularly known as “Roosevelt’s Tree Army,” was, in reality, a very complicated undertaking. Brief passages devoted to funding, land tenure, management, and workers reveal that the PSFP employed a variety of specialists and workers, including women, and relied on cooperative agreements with farmers to achieve what would have been impossible had the federal government tried to repurchase the land: establish “nearly 19,000 miles of disconnected shelterbelts on 33,000 separate farms” (141). The PSFP thus forged an important pathway into what we now call public-private partnerships, one that ultimately left farmers in control of the shelterbelt’s long-term sustainability.

Deeper inquiry into how the PSFP worked on the ground would have been helpful, and would have been warranted considering the authors’ purpose, which is finally revealed only in a concluding chapter devoted to the project’s legacy. In a nutshell, despite inconsistent and often competing agricultural policies that swing from promoting maximum production to encouraging resource conservation, plus widespread use of irrigation technology that is slowly draining the Ogallala Aquifer, the PSFP, the authors argue, “represents a balance among long-term planning, far-reaching national policies, and a willingness to reconsider core values at the local level regarding the federal government’s involvement on private land” (134). They see a “striking parallel” (139) between the looming effects of climate change on agriculture and the federal government’s response to the devastating environmental and economic effects of the great drought of the 1930s, positing that the PSFP is a cogent case study for climate adaptation. Although the authors might have developed their argument more coherently, *Conserving the Dust Bowl* is worth a look by those who continue the noble effort of cultivating a land ethic in the agricultural sector. A good bibliography awaits anyone who wants to dig deeper.

*From Warm Center to Ragged Edge: The Erosion of Midwestern Literary and Historical Regionalism, 1920–1965*, by Jon K. Lauck. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2017. xii, 246 pp. Notes, index. \$27.50 paperback.

Reviewer C. Elizabeth Raymond holds the Grace A. Griffen Chair in History at the University of Nevada, Reno. She has written extensively about a sense of place in the Midwest and West.

Midwesterners weary of eastern intellectual condescension, or of hearing the charms of their subtle landscape casually dismissed as “flyover

country" by Californians who have never actually seen it, will find much to cheer about in Jon Lauck's latest book. *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge* is a fervent regional call-to-arms disguised as a modest history of the Midwest's brief, late nineteenth-century ascendancy in American politics and culture and its subsequent decline into marginality during the years highlighted in the subtitle.

Lauck makes his argument in three succinct chapters, along with an introduction and conclusion. The entire text takes up less than half the volume, the bulk of which is devoted to footnotes (of which more later). His sympathies are never in doubt. From the beginning, Lauck announces that his "primary purpose" is "to bolster the new and concerted search for the history of the lost region at the heart of our nation by studying what went wrong" (3). In that quest he is a clear, consistent, and unabashed booster of the region he defines loosely as "the rolling green expanse between the rivers Ohio and Missouri" (2).

Readers looking for a nuanced assessment of that expansive region will be disappointed. Jon Lauck takes the Midwest as a given, assuming that his readers will recognize it as their own home territory. Rather than examining its origins or history, he sets out to explain why such "vast mental and physical territories . . . have been neglected and marginalized" in contemporary scholarship (7). Although his context is nominally global, with allusions to both Scotland and Catalonia justifying his contention that "the regionalist impulse persists" (6), his book focuses resolutely on the American Midwest as "the warm center of the world" (108). His perspective on it is predominantly, though not exclusively, scholarly. In this work Lauck apprehends the Midwest through its literature and its historical scholarship. He writes clearly about both, with a fluency based on extended study of his subject.

*From Warm Center to Ragged Edge* recounts the origin and persistence of the familiar "revolt from the village" characterization of midwestern writing. The trouble began in 1921 with the publication of an essay by Columbia University professor Carl Van Doren in *The Nation*. Van Doren suggested that a bold new crop of contemporary American novelists like Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Sinclair Lewis were unified in their liberating rebellion against the provincialism of the interior American villages from which they came. Lauck explains how Van Doren's provocative thesis was taken up and repeated verbatim by subsequent literary critics and scholars, all of whom ignored other, more nuanced regional writers, and even the nonconforming works of the writers initially championed by Van Doren.

The damage to midwestern regional reputation was done, however. Regardless of the determined efforts of regionalist writers like

Frederick Manfred, Ruth Suckow, and Herbert Quick, or publishers such as John T. Frederick in *The Midland*, the region was visible to eastern intellectuals only as a backwater. In a prevailing postwar intellectual climate of cosmopolitan internationalism, the frequently agricultural and small-town subject matter of midwestern writers was easily dismissed by modern critics as nostalgic and ultimately inconsequential. The difficulties were compounded by concurrent trends in the history profession, as midwestern universities enlarged their faculties to encompass new areas of study such as Russian history and international affairs. Midwestern history did not disappear, but it was no longer so prominent or so exclusive a focus. Previously, the history of the Midwest had been seen as the history of all America, as illustrated by Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." By the 1940s, however, that was no longer the case. The unfortunate association of Senator Joseph McCarthy with Wisconsin further solidified the region's national reputation as a domain of ignorance and prejudice. In that context, the controversial transformation in 1964 of the venerable *Mississippi Valley History Review* into the *Journal of American History* was emblematic of a broad cultural turn away from the American Midwest.

In his conclusion Lauck argues for a view of midwestern regionalism that does not simply equate it with the 1920s village revolt and thereby confine it to the irrelevant past. Instead, he seeks a vibrant, revived regional study that would amplify Hispanic and African American voices and grapple with twentieth-century regional transformations in agriculture, population distribution, and economy. A culture that obsessively seeks out local food, he seems to suggest, might profitably also learn to appreciate other, even more consequential forms of regional variation.

Lauck is too modest to inform readers that he himself is at the heart of just such an effort. Instrumental in the formation of the Midwestern History Association in 2014, he has almost singlehandedly rejuvenated scholarly and public attention to the region by means of the new organization and its two associated journals: *Middle West Review* (where Lauck serves as a member of the editorial board,) and *Studies in Midwestern History* (where he is the general editor). In addition, Lauck has published four other books on various aspects of midwestern history and politics and is editor or coeditor of numerous others. His immersion in all aspects of contemporary midwestern regional study makes the footnotes of *From Warm Center to Ragged Edge* a particular treasure trove. Longer than the actual text, they are a tour de force for any scholar or general reader interested in aspects of midwestern writing or history scholarship. Lauck has read broadly and generously, and he shares his

knowledge joyfully. These are not the pedantic notes of a critic, but the enthusiastic comments of a supportive scholar. No one with interest in the region should skip his footnotes. They testify volubly to the fact that descriptive writing and scholarly analysis have, in fact, continued in and about the Midwest even as it moved to what Lauck regretfully characterizes as “the ragged edge” of American culture.

*The Fighting Sullivans: How Hollywood and the Military Make Heroes*, by Bruce Kuklick. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017. xi, 212 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$27.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Anna Thompson Hajdik is a full-time lecturer in the English Department and Film Studies program at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. She is the author of “‘You Really Ought to Give Iowa a Try’: Tourism, Community Identity, and the Impact of Popular Culture in Iowa” (*Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy*, 2009).

Bruce Kuklick brings together various elements of biography, community history/memory, and the broader currents of twentieth-century American history through the lens of the “Fighting Sullivans,” five brothers who lost their lives together on the USS *Juneau* during the naval battle of Guadalcanal in November 1942. But this is far from a simple story. Rather, it is fraught with contradiction and controversy and lays bare the many tensions between nation and region, family and community, and even propaganda and truth. Ultimately, as Kuklick writes in his introduction, it is a book that “shows how narratives of the heroic are constructed and why we need them” (3).

Kuklick’s work is at its strongest when he places the Sullivans’ story in context with such topics as the shifting fortunes of the American war effort in 1943–44, Hollywood’s influence on the home front, and the postindustrial decline of Waterloo, Iowa. Chapters 8–11 are especially valuable, as Kuklick traces the history of Hollywood’s treatment of the Sullivan family, turning to such rich archival sources as correspondence among movie executives, the film’s director (Lloyd Bacon), various screenwriters, and family matriarch Alletta Sullivan. Script treatments and various promotional materials also prove to be especially rich archival documents. Ultimately, the film became much more of a home-front story, centering on an idyllic family and its strong Catholic faith, in stark contrast to the reality of the actual Sullivan family. As Kuklick argues, the persuasive power of Hollywood was much greater in the 1940s than it is now, shaping “morality, politics, and attitudes towards social problems” (96).

Much of the Sullivans’ story takes place in Waterloo, Iowa, the family’s hometown. The author chronicles the family’s working-class exist-

ence, heartbreak, and tragic notoriety from the early twentieth century to the present against the backdrop of the rising and declining fortunes of that blue-collar, industrial city. The book is a bit weaker when the author sets out to uncover just who the “real Sullivans” were, concluding ultimately and perhaps somewhat unconvincingly that prior to their entry into the war the majority of folks in Waterloo who actually knew them saw the five men as either unambitious louts or mischievous hoodlums. The reality of course is lost to history, as most of the Sullivans’ contemporaries are now gone. Kuklick’s actual evidence proves thin, consisting mostly of the town’s admittedly anemic response to the brothers’ deaths soon after the sinking of the USS *Juneau*. A more nuanced and balanced portrayal of the Sullivan brothers might have been appropriate. Still, Kuklick’s discussion of Waterloo’s response to the brothers’ collective sacrifice decades later is fascinating and worthy of attention.

In the 1990s, for example, Waterloo rode a wave of World War II nostalgia that resulted in the founding of a multimillion-dollar veterans museum named for the brothers. A highly engaged group of World War II veterans from across the country, along with more limited support from the city, helped make this possible. Steven Spielberg’s release of the World War II drama *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) furthered the legend of the Sullivan family’s collective sacrifice. Meanwhile, the city itself had hit some hard economic times, as postindustrial decline accelerated after the 1960s and resulted in the closure of meatpacking plants and other associated businesses. As Kuklick notes, “In the first part of the twentieth century, when the town was up, the family was down; at the end of the century, when Waterloo was down, the Sullivans were up” (166).

Ultimately, *The Fighting Sullivans* is a valuable work of cultural history. It spotlights a story that suffers tremendously from decades of calculated mythmaking and attempts to unpack and deconstruct those myths. It would be especially relevant as a text for courses that focus on Iowa history, World War II, or twentieth-century American history.

*Teacher Strike! Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order*, by Jon Shelton. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xii, 274 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$95.00 hardcover, \$27.95 paperback, \$25.16 ebook.

Reviewer John W. McKerley is a research associate at the University of Iowa Labor Center. He is researching the Keokuk teachers strike of 1970 and the origins of Iowa’s Public Employment Relations Act.

The 1970s was a critical decade in U.S. history. At the decade's outset, the U.S. labor movement was still a potent and well-recognized force in the nation's economic and political life. Although union members were sometimes at odds over civil rights and the Vietnam War, they were also crucial backers of and participants in the era's progressive social movements. Moreover, despite the increasing pressure of capital flight on unions, a new wave of public-sector organizing seemed to offer new possibilities. By the decade's end, public-sector unions had become a newly powerful force, but proponents of a revived free-market ideology (neoliberalism) were poised to undermine the power of organized labor as a whole and reshape U.S. politics for a generation.

Historians largely agree on the broad outlines of this narrative, but they continue to debate the identities of its main actors. In *Teacher Strike!* Jon Shelton makes an important contribution to this debate by focusing on the interplay between the rise of teacher unionism and neoliberalism in the context of the 1970s.

For Shelton, unionized teachers' willingness and ability to use strikes (especially illegal strikes) to advance their collective interests played a key role in shifting public opinion away from the "labor liberalism" of the post-New Deal era. By the end of the 1970s, he argues, "the nation's political center" had developed "a deepening sense that the labor-liberal state now victimized both white middle-class Americans and corporate America," leading to "new calls to let the market structure life in America" (160).

Shelton develops this argument by focusing on public debates provoked by a series of teacher strikes in major U.S. cities during the "long" 1970s (roughly 1968 to 1981). Most of the cities in question were in the East Coast and Midwest and reflected centers of a pre-1970s political economy based around the influence of predominately white, male, urban, private-sector union members. Shelton draws most of his evidence from newspaper opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Perhaps his most innovative sources are the letters sent by people across the country to American Federation of Teachers (AFT) president David Selden during his prison stay in 1970 for defying an anti-picketing injunction.

Since World War II, labor liberalism had substantially improved the lives of U.S. workers (especially private-sector union members) but left many public-sector workers, including teachers, behind. Although many prosperous urbanites (union members in particular) were initially sympathetic to teachers and other public-sector workers, those sympathies declined over the course of the 1970s as capital flight, recession, and inflation combined to undermine the urban industrial economies.

According to Shelton, this shift in sympathies also had racial and gendered dynamics. As employers fled urban centers, the most successful white workers attempted to follow them, often leaving behind financially struggling cities dominated by impoverished and excluded people of color. As teachers—women especially—turned to unionization for professional status and dignity in their workplaces, they came into conflict with people of color, who argued for greater control over the apparatus of the state (including schools) in the name of community empowerment.

These conflicts further alienated members of minority communities from unionism and labor liberalism and empowered conservative critics who saw both public employees and nonwhite urban “rioters” as having “flouted the law and siphoned off the resources of hardworking Americans” (2). It was these battles over 1970s urban teacher strikes, Shelton argues, that forged a producerist rhetoric in which owners and employees of private enterprise were “makers” in conflict with the unproductive “takers” of the urban (often non-white) poor and public employees.

Overall, Shelton makes a compelling case for the importance of teacher militancy in the debates over urban public policy during the 1970s. As he readily admits, however, the book, like any ambitious national study, leaves as many questions as it answers. What role did strikes by other public-sector workers play in this process? How did the provisions of particular laws (for example, arbitration) shape teachers’ risky decisions to engage in illegal strikes? If the teacher strikes of the 1970s played such an important role in undermining labor liberalism, why did the coordinated backlash against public-sector unionism at the state level begin in the 2010s rather than the 1980s? And, of particular interest to Iowans, how did states without large urban centers fit into this framework? Such questions are to Shelton’s credit, however, as they reveal the groundwork his expansive vision has laid for other scholars seeking the roots of neoliberalism in the United States.

*The Good Governor: Robert Ray and the Indochinese Refugees of Iowa*, by Matthew R. Walsh. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2017. vii, 233 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 paperback.

Reviewer Paul Hillmer is dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota. He is the author of *A People’s History of the Hmong* (2010).

Thanks to Matthew Walsh, I now see the connection between the gubernatorial candidate whose hand I shook in 1968 at the Clay County

Fair (still on crutches after his April plane crash) and the people from Laos who moved in across the street from our home in Spencer in the mid-1970s. "From the close of the Vietnam War until 2010," writes Walsh, "Iowa alone resettled refugees as a state-run voluntary agency" (5). Elsewhere, the U.S. State Department contracted with voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) like Catholic Charities or Lutheran Social Services to resettle refugees.

Walsh first focuses on the ethnic Tai Dam, beginning with a fine, necessarily brief introduction to their history and beliefs and the place they occupied during the two phases of the Vietnam War. These were not backward or hapless victims but "shrewd negotiators who managed centuries of survival among more powerful neighbors" (7). Desiring to be resettled together in one place, they wrote letters to 30 American governors. Only one, Iowa's Robert Ray, replied. He requested and received a federal exemption from the State Department rule that required refugees to be scattered across the country. Resettling one linguistic/cultural group, he reasoned, would make assimilation and employment simpler and the state's burden lighter. This emphasis on "cluster resettlement," along with a "work first" philosophy intended to keep refugees off welfare and enlistment of local sponsors responsible for refugees' success, were the program's three cornerstones. "Staying off cash assistance represented a form of assimilation to Iowa culture and work values" (66).

There were bumps along the way. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare found that families in Ray's program refused welfare (despite qualifying for it), fearing that acceptance would jeopardize relatives' chances for resettlement. That "work first" approach embarrassed ethnic Kinh refugees from Vietnam (settled by the Catholic church), who received welfare at higher rates. Male-dominated Tai Dam culture interacted problematically with America's more "liberated" social norms and with Job Service of Iowa's director, Colleen Shearer (whose criticism of Kinh welfare rates opened the Governor's Task Force to charges of favoritism). Tensions between Tai Dam and African Americans emerged as the former associated blacks with French mercenaries in Southeast Asia, and African Americans who helped resettle Tai Dam felt that their charges were both ungrateful and racist. Even so, problems were taken seriously and addressed effectively, making the Iowa program a model both nationally and internationally.

After discussing the Tai Dam's unique contributions to their own successful resettlement, Walsh discusses the dual crises of the Vietnamese "boat people" and the Khmer refugees who fled the Killing Fields of Cambodia. These events may be more familiar to general readers, but

Walsh provides historical context before detailing Ray's role in helping both populations. In the case of the "boat people," Ray was moved by Ed Bradley's *60 Minutes* television report. Ray and five other governors visited Khmer camps in October 1979. On the day they visited Sa Khaeo, 50 people died (135).

Governor Ray was Christian enough to have compassion for refugee populations, conservative enough (by 1970s standards) to be strategic about resettling them in a fashion palatable to Iowans, and savvy enough to anticipate and blunt criticism. Ray's Iowa SHARES (Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation) program, launched over the 1979 Thanksgiving weekend, invited Iowans to buy a "share" in humanity for \$2.20, the price of a bushel of corn. Ray's goal of \$115,000 was nearly quadrupled, a sign of his moral and political leadership. By 1980, Ray was playing a crucial role in the creation of the Refugee Act of 1980, which guaranteed three years of federal support to states for the refugees they welcomed.

Walsh dedicates chapters to the perspectives of refugees and the sponsors who worked and lived alongside them. These chapters fit very comfortably in the broader literature of immigration and Southeast Asian refugee history. Shedding little new thematic light for scholars, they are nonetheless indispensable in the telling of this specific story. Walsh's book is as much about refugee agency as it is about Ray's leadership; the short shrift given those accounts in this review does not reflect their importance to our understanding of this subject.

Weaving oral history with state records and broader historical literature into a first-rate yet accessible, short narrative, Matthew Walsh effectively makes the case for Robert Ray's greatness and Iowa's unique role in the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees.

*A Great State Fair: The Blue Ribbon Foundation and the Revival of the Iowa State Fair*, by William B. Friedrichs. Des Moines: Business Publications Corporation, 2017. x, 178 pp. Illustrations, note on sources, notes, index. \$20.00 paperback.

Reviewer Michael Kramme is professor emeritus of theater at Culver Stockton College in Canton, Missouri. His most recent books are *The Governors of Iowa*, *The Schaffner Players*, and *Images of America: Washington, Iowa*.

William B. Friedrichs begins his book by acknowledging several recent books about the Iowa State Fair, explaining that his focus is on the story of the Iowa State Fair Blue Ribbon Foundation. He begins by giving a brief history of the fair. The first two fairs were held in Fairfield. Later fairs were held in Muscatine, Oskaloosa, Iowa City, Dubuque, Burling-

ton, Clinton, Keokuk, and Cedar Rapids before moving permanently to Des Moines in 1879. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Fair Board erected several Beaux-Arts buildings, including Exposition Hall, Machinery Hall, Administration Building, Agriculture Building, Livestock Pavilion, Women's and Children's Building, and livestock barns. Through the years, additional buildings, both permanent and temporary, were added to the grounds.

In 1980 the Women's and Children's Building (1914) was in great disrepair. It would have taken \$700,000 to renovate the structure. The Fair Board did not have enough funds for the project, so the building was razed. Many of the fair's other iconic buildings were also in disrepair, including the Administration, Agriculture, and Varied Industries buildings, the grandstand, and the 1920s Ye Old Mill. This was a wake-up call for the preservation of other buildings on the fairgrounds.

The Fair Board formed the Iowa State Fair Foundation. Its purpose was specifically to raise money for the fair and fairgrounds. After a slow start, it was reformed in 1993. Soon the Blue Ribbon Foundation was incorporated with John Putney as its first director, a position he held for several years. The first major success came in 1997, when Des Moines businessman Bill Knapp agreed to donate one million dollars. Other donations followed, and the foundation's coffers grew.

Members of the foundation began to educate legislators about the program. Many legislators were unaware that the state owned the fairgrounds. After much lobbying, the legislature agreed to several funding requests. A series of events and special programs followed, including the "Corn-dog Checkoff" passed by the legislature, allowing citizens to contribute to the fair on their state income tax forms. Other campaigns included "Treasure Our Fair" and "Rebuilding the Dream." "The Corn-dog Kickoff," a pre-fair party, became an annual event.

As the improvements continued, the fair's popularity increased to over one million visitors each year. After only a decade, the foundation helped raise an amazing \$53 million for the fair's facelift. At the time of the book's publication, the foundation had raised over \$135 million. As a result of the success of the Blue Ribbon Foundation's continuing efforts, the Iowa State Fair and its grounds have been transformed from a shabby embarrassment to a major part of Iowa's proud heritage.

Friedricks's book on the foundation is well illustrated, although a map of the fairgrounds would have been a good addition. He includes detailed documentation and a thorough index. The book might not be of interest to the average fair enthusiast, but it would be enjoyed by anyone interested in a behind-the-scenes story of the restoration of the fairgrounds and its return to former glory and a bright future.

*White Birch, Red Hawthorn: A Memoir*, by Nora Murphy. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. xvi, 179 pp. Illustration, resources and further reading. \$17.95 paperback.

Reviewer Greg Olson is curator of exhibits and special projects at the Missouri State Archives. He is the author of several articles and books on the Ioways, including *Ioway Life: Reservation and Reform, 1837–1860* (2016).

While growing up in a middle-class neighborhood in Minneapolis, Nora Murphy never questioned the comfort of the Victorian houses on the street where she lived or the belief that everything she could see from a nearby hilltop naturally belonged to her, her family, and other white people like her. However, Murphy's complacency about her place in America slowly began to be challenged when, as an adult, she started working at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. There, Murphy's Native colleagues invited her to become part of a circle that showed her the world from a new perspective and led her to question many of the conventions she had grown up with. She was forced to consider the extent of her white privilege—a phrase Murphy avoids—and to wrestle with “the embarrassing but fuzzy recognition that non-Natives have some unpaid debt to Native Americans” (10). This realization sent Murphy on a journey to “uncover a different way of understanding what it means to be an American in this land” (10).

*White Birch, Red Hawthorn* is Murphy's frank account of that voyage. In some instances, her journey involved physical travel. She visited her family's homestead in northern Minnesota and her ancestral home in North Tipperary, Ireland. In part, her travels helped satisfy her longing to reconnect with her past and with the earth. “The conqueror's thirst,” Murphy writes, is “to connect, to belong” (55).

The most difficult and painful segment of Murphy's journey involved self-reflection. She shows rare courage in her willingness to question her assumptions and to examine the process by which she and those like her have labored to erase the lives of Native people who had lived on the land before her family arrived. This exploration takes Murphy back to her ancestors, who, as immigrants, worked hard to put their own heritage and their connection to nature behind them in order to assimilate. Along the way, Murphy revisits stories she read as a child about Paul Bunyan, who cleared the north woods in order to rid it of its wildness, and Laura Ingalls Wilder, whose family took the newly domesticated land as their own without considering the Native people who had called it home for centuries.

This, in turn, causes Murphy to consider the process by which the U.S. government removed Native people from their land in her home

state. She examines the Doctrine of Discovery, the 1819 Indian Civilization Act, and forced assimilation and lists the more than 40 treaties that took place in Minnesota alone between 1805 and 1847.

When a Native elder asked Murphy, "When you find the truth, what are you going to do with it?" (138), she realized that she was on a journey with no end. She understood that she was obliged to tell the true story of how the United States was settled in hopes that it would help heal the scars of the land and the people. She also concluded that she must learn to listen to those who were not like her if she was going to become a more effective ally.

Murphy has engaged in a process of self-examination that few white people seem willing to undertake in public. She acknowledges her fears and the shame she felt over her privilege and articulates her struggle with clarity. *White Birch, Red Hawthorn* is a work of great insight and bravery that manages to challenge readers' beliefs without becoming strident or arrogant. No matter where we live on this continent, this work serves as a valuable guide for all who want to understand the process by which our cities, towns, and houses were built on top of someone else's home.

*A Spectrum of Faith: Religions of the World in America's Heartland*, edited by Timothy Knepper, photography by Bob Blanshard. Des Moines: Drake Community Press, 2017. ix, 126 pp. Full-color photographs. \$30.00 paperback.

Reviewer Bill R. Douglas lives and writes in Des Moines. His article on Des Moines's Calvary Baptist Church in the 1920s appeared in the Summer 2017 issue of *Baptist History & Heritage*.

This lavishly illustrated book is the result of sending Drake University students to 15 Des Moines religious communities: three of the four Jewish congregations (no Chabad), two Sikh groups, three Muslim mosques (Bosnian, primarily Arab, and international), two Buddhist and two Hindu temples (including an ethnically Nepali Bhutanese refugee community), and three Christian churches (Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant but no Pentecostal).

With subsections on history, identity, space, and practice, the project should be seen as an exercise in lived religion, as the introduction makes clear. The book also succeeds in its aim of uncovering the spectacular contemporary diversity of religious practice in one midwestern city. Concentrating on practice leaves at least one major question unresolved: why the degree of diversity *within* religions in Des Moines? Of

course there must be ethnic, historical, personal, and theological answers, but the book does not ask the question.

Limiting a broad religious tradition to three congregations also hides much of the new ethnic diversity within Christianity: Tai Dam Mennonites (and animists), Burmese Baptists, Mexican Pentecostals, Korean Methodists, South Sudanese Presbyterians and Lutherans, and Congolese evangelicals (for starters) complicate a Des Moines religious scene that seems a long way from 1950s-era *Life* and *Christian Century* portrayals of Iowa religion as white, Protestant, middle-class, and generous but self-absorbed.

*Local Vino: The Winery Boom in the Heartland*, by James R. Pennell. Heartland Foodways. Champaign, Urbana, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2017. xi, 192 pp. Illustrations, tables, references, index. \$95.00 hardcover, \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Josh Sopiartz is associate professor and reference librarian for social sciences and government information at Governors State University. He has presented conference papers on craft brewing and wineries in the Midwest.

James Pennell's romp through wineries in Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Iowa offers readers a glimpse into the Midwest's growing wine industry. *Local Vino* is an ode to the region's vintners, enologists, vigneronos, oenophiles, and casual imbibers and reflects Pennell's quest to better understand the wine boom he has recently been observing in the Heartland. Initially, Pennell set out to write solely about Indiana's burgeoning wine industry. At his editor's suggestion, Pennell expanded his scope to include wineries in Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa. The book benefits from this expansion; however, Pennell's ethnographic approach led him primarily to wineries reached easily by car from his home base in Indianapolis. To his credit, Pennell made many such trips and did his homework on the industry in each of the four included states. The result is a lively jaunt across a swath of a region not widely known for its wine, but whose winemakers are clearly working to establish its reputation nationally, if not globally.

In the first half of the book, Pennell lays the groundwork for the project by identifying three common themes that apply across the region. First, local wineries provide generally "merry, festive, convivial" places for people to gather and socialize informally. Second, local wineries unite "the need for community and the desire to pursue and be rewarded for good work" (3). Third, local wineries benefit both from the "buy local" movement and the burgeoning international wine market. Pennell

supplements personal interviews and anecdotes with data to bolster his arguments throughout.

In the book's stronger second half, Pennell breaks down the various challenges facing midwestern wineries. He identifies the usual suspects and market forces at work in all four of his target states. These include the three-tiered distribution system, labor issues, money/investment difficulties, problems at harvest or during production, quality control, and that one great big obstacle to success—reputation. At a time when affordable wines from the world's leading regions are available, how do majority first- and second-generation grape growers/vintners distinguish themselves *and* make ends meet? For Pennell, it is the people and their dedication to the product and their patrons that will determine the future. There is a boom underway, but major challenges loom and Pennell is not naïve about this.

The diversity Pennell encountered at wineries in his target states suggests that the industry is bigger and more complex than one might assume. And this is without including the state of Michigan, which is arguably the biggest player in the region. Also, although Pennell does mention the work of university extension services, it would have been appropriate to include something about Elmer Swenson (formerly at the University of Minnesota), whom many recognize as the person responsible for hybridizing grapes able to both withstand midwestern winters and make good table wine. This and the majority of any other quibbles are minor. Ultimately, Pennell's book presents a nuanced look at the industry. It is sure to interest professional and casual readers alike.

*Retired, Rehabbed, Reborn: The Adaptive Reuse of America's Derelict Religious Buildings and Schools*, by Robert A. Simons, Gary DeWine, and Larry Ledebur, with Laura A. Wertheimer. The Sacred Landmarks Series. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press in cooperation with Cleveland State University's College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, 2017. ix, 382 pp. Maps, tables, charts, illustrations, notes, glossary, index. \$45.00 paperback.

Reviewer Paula Mohr is an architectural historian for the State Historical Society of Iowa.

In the mid-1990s, the conversion of St. John the Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, into a microbrewery and restaurant was both praised and condemned (the beer is made where the altar was located). Historians and theologians held up that project and others like it as evidence of the commodification of "the sacred" in the postmodern era.

(See, for example, Paula Kane's article, "Is That a Beer Vat Under the Baldochino?") For those of us who work in historic preservation, however, the potential loss of some of our most monumental and architecturally rich buildings in the wake of profound shifts in American religious life is also significant. Changing worship patterns and demographics as well as church scandals that strain budgets have led to hundreds of buildings becoming vacant or being demolished each year. In the midst of this period of decline, the number of congregations in the United States actually rose in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, that does not necessarily mean good news for our old buildings. New congregations build new facilities and in other cases convert secular buildings into worship space, leaving old buildings empty and needing a new purpose.

*Retired, Rehabbed, Reborn* is intended to provide a road map for the conversion of these vacant historic buildings into new uses. Written primarily for an audience of developers, architects, public officials, and building managers, the book defines the problem, explains how to assess the feasibility of a project, and provides case examples. The primary authors are academics at Cleveland State University joined by an urban planner. Selected chapters are written by other design practitioners. While the focus is on religious buildings, the book also includes discussion of the adaptive use of historic schools, likewise accompanied by case studies.

Historians and preservationists will find value in the authors' chronicling of trends in Americans' spiritual life that have led to this preservation crisis. The real contribution of the book, however, is its pragmatic advice on how to determine the feasibility of a project, conduct market analysis, leverage financial incentives, and navigate the approval process. A glossary of financial, development, and governmental terms and acronyms is a handy reference. The level of detail in the book is impressive; a few examples are a checklist for holding a community meeting, sample pro formas, and a lengthy "developer's toolbox" of financial sources.

The case studies are detailed as well. The authors note that they present projects of varying financial and preservation success. The conversion of the Duetsche Evangelical Reform Church in Dayton, Ohio, into a rock-climbing gym will make some preservationists wince. St. Joseph Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, turned into apartments, is one of the few case studies that used historic tax credits, ensuring that the work was done according to the Secretary of the Interior's standards.

All told, this book is an important contribution to the fields of planning, preservation, and real estate development. It should be noted that

much of the guidance and tools presented here can be applied to other historic buildings types. While outside the scope of this publication, it does highlight the need for guidance on the architectural challenges of converting these buildings. Large sanctuaries (and other similar assembly spaces) that give religious buildings their unique character are among the most difficult spaces to sensitively convert to a new use. One hopes that this book that deals so thoroughly with the pragmatic concerns of adaptive use will result in more successful projects and that those, in turn, can be the basis of a work that explores the challenges and solutions from the preservation architect's point of view.

## Announcements

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (SHSI) announces a grant program for the 2018/2019 academic year. SHSI will award up to ten stipends of \$1,000 each to support original research and interpretive writing related to the history of Iowa or Iowa and the Midwest. Preference will be given to applicants proposing to pursue previously neglected topics or new approaches to or interpretations of previously treated topics. SHSI invites applicants from a variety of backgrounds, including academic and public historians, graduate students, and independent researchers and writers. Applications will be judged on the basis of their potential for producing work appropriate for publication in *The Annals of Iowa*. Grant recipients will be expected to produce an annotated manuscript targeted for *The Annals of Iowa*, SHSI's scholarly journal.

**Applications for the 2018/2019 awards must be postmarked by April 15, 2018.** Download application guidelines from our website ([iowaculture.gov/about-us/about/grants/research-grant-authors](http://iowaculture.gov/about-us/about/grants/research-grant-authors)) or request guidelines or further information from:  
Research Grants

State Historical Society of Iowa

402 Iowa Avenue

Iowa City IA 52240-1806

Phone: 319-335-3931

e-mail: [marvin-bergman@uiowa.edu](mailto:marvin-bergman@uiowa.edu)

THE IOWA HISTORY CENTER at Simpson College is pleased to congratulate Dwain Coleman as the 2017 recipient of our prize for the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history. His award-winning thesis, "Still in the Fight: The Struggle for Community in the Upper Midwest for African American Civil War Veterans," was completed at Iowa State University.

The Center now seeks nominations for the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history for 2018. Selection will be based on contribution to the knowledge of Iowa history; originality of the subject matter or methodology; use of sources; and written expression. Nominees must have completed their master's degree between July 1, 2017, and June 30, 2018.

The winner will be announced in the fall of 2018 and will receive a \$1,000 cash prize and an award plaque. Three copies of the thesis and a brief letter of nomination from the thesis advisor, which must include contact information for the nominee, should be submitted to Bill Friedrichs, Director, Iowa History Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street, Indianola, IA 50125. Application deadline is June 30, 2018.

For further information, contact Linda Sinclair, (515) 961-1528 or [linda.sinclair@simpson.edu](mailto:linda.sinclair@simpson.edu).

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## Contributors

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PAUL EMORY PUTZ is a doctoral candidate in history at Baylor University. His research focuses on religion, sports, and the Midwest. He has recently published essays in *The Midwestern Moment: The Ascendance of Midwestern Regionalism, 1880–1940* (Hastings College Press, 2017) and *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*.

## The State Historical Society of Iowa

*The Annals of Iowa* is published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, the Historical Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the State of Iowa. The society operates from two centers, Des Moines and Iowa City. A museum, research library, state archives, special collections, community programming, historic preservation, and membership programs are located at 600 East Locust Street, Des Moines, IA 50319, phone 515-281-5111. Publications, a research library, and special collections are located at 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240, phone 319-335-3916. The society also operates several historic sites across the state.

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## Submissions

*The Annals of Iowa* invites the submission of articles on Iowa history and on subjects concerning the nation and the Midwest with an Iowa focus. State, local, and regional studies of political, economic, social, cultural, intellectual, institutional, ethnic, religious, material culture, archeological, and architectural history are welcome. The *Annals* also reviews significant books on related topics. A detailed set of editorial guidelines is available on request. All correspondence concerning editorial matters should be addressed to:

Marvin Bergman, editor  
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