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## In This Issue

CORMAC BROEG, a student in the University of Iowa College of Law, recounts an incident that took place a month after the end of the Civil War when a group of Iowa soldiers killed the bloodhounds on a South Carolina plantation near where they were stationed. Setting the incident thoroughly in the context of its time and place, he interprets it as an act of political violence, a bloody repudiation of slaveholder power.

ANNA THOMPSON HAJDIK, senior lecturer in English and film studies at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, provides a history of the Surf Ballroom and its role in the community of Clear Lake, including its recent revival as a locus for cultural memory and for “dark tourism,” demonstrating the cultural power of nostalgia for the 1950s.

BARBARA CHING reviews two recent interrelated art exhibitions, one devoted to Grant Wood at the Whitney Museum of Art in New York City and the other to Edward Hopper at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art.

## Front Cover

John Magee’s 1856 cartoon criticized Southerners’ tendency to use violence to suppress antislavery sentiment through the depiction of the incident when Southern Congressman Preston S. Brooks caned antislavery Senator Charles Sumner in the U.S. Senate on May 26, 1856. Image from Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections. For more on the role of political violence in the era surrounding the Civil War, see Cormac Broeg’s article in this issue.

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# Killing Butler's Bloodhounds: An Act of Political Violence by Iowa Soldiers in Reconstruction South Carolina

CORMAC BROEG

ON THE MORNING of May 22, 1865, more than a month after General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General U. S. Grant at Appomattox, a band of Iowa soldiers left their encampment on Shultzzer's Hill east of the town of Hamburg, South Carolina, across the Savannah River from Augusta, Georgia. The night before had brought heavy rain, but the veterans of two years of war walked two miles to their destination: a plantation with a large brick house and an impressive peach orchard. On a previous visit to the orchard, some of their comrades had discovered a kennel of bloodhounds trained to pursue enslaved people, and Robert Butler, the owner of the plantation, had threatened to sic the dogs on them. In the three days since the Iowa regiments had arrived in South Carolina, rumors had spread among the men that the Confederate government had employed Butler and his bloodhounds to pursue escapees from prisoner-of-war camps. Private Ephraim Blake, one of the Iowa soldiers at the plantation that morning, later wrote, "We resolved these dogs must die and Butler too if he monkeyed with us." With tri-sided bayonets affixed to their rifles, the soldiers performed their bloody task. As a wrathful Butler hurled expletives, they killed every dog in the pack with bullets and bayonet thrusts. "When the battle was over in

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THE ANNALS OF IOWA 78 (Spring 2019). © State Historical Society of Iowa, 2019.

the peach orchard," an officer later recalled, "the ground looked as if it had rained . . . a plain shower of blood hounds."<sup>1</sup>

After the attack, Robert Butler, lodged a complaint with the Iowa soldiers' brigade commander. He claimed that the animals had been worth \$23,000 (equivalent to \$345,000 in 2015) and demanded restitution from the government. The army officers allowed him to visit the camp to identify the perpetrators so they might face military justice. The three Iowa regiments assembled on a makeshift parade ground so the face of each man could be clearly seen.<sup>2</sup> Those faces bore little sympathy for Butler's loss. Captain William Rigby wrote in his diary, "Few regret the death of [Butler's] dogs. Neither would his death be lamented by us." As Butler moved along the line of men in blue, the Iowa soldiers began to make their feelings known. Some "began to bawl like dogs," while others threatened to hang him. Afraid for his life, Butler fled to his buggy. Accounts diverge about what happened next. Two officers of the regiments described Butler's immediate departure, but Blake recalled that Butler's buggy was overtaken by an angry mob of soldiers eager to cut loose the horses in an attempt to send the buggy rolling off the steep hill—an attempt foiled only by the timely intervention of regimental officers.<sup>3</sup>

In the following days, guards were appointed to protect the Butler plantation from future visitors. The only mention of the incident in official military sources is the assignment of soldiers as a "safeguard for Butler" on order of their brigade commander.

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1. E. E. Blake, *A Succinct History of the 28th Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Belle Plaine, 1896), 81–82; S. C. Jones, *Reminiscences of the Twenty-Second Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Iowa City, 1907); Samuel D. Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints: The Twenty-Second Iowa Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*, ed. Jeffrey C. Burden (Iowa City, 2008), 220–26. Most information about the actual killing of the dogs comes from the postwar accounts of Ephraim Blake, Samuel Pryce, and Samuel Jones. All three accounts were written during the reconciliatory period after Reconstruction when veterans' accounts often obscured their wartime opinions of their enemies and sanitized the struggle. For conclusions about the soldiers' political opinions, this work relies primarily on the wartime correspondence of soldiers and media published before, during, and immediately after the conflict. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

2. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 220–26.

3. William Titus Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865, William Titus Rigby Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (hereafter cited as SHSI-DM); Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 220–26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103–5.

There is no record of any court martial proceeding concerning the events of that day; none of the soldiers were ever charged for the killing of the dogs.<sup>4</sup>

A study of the political opinions espoused by the soldiers of the three Iowa regiments on Shultzzer's Hill and the wider context of May 1865 reveals the significance of the bloodhound killings as an act of political violence. To the Iowa soldiers, Butler was a member of the slaveholding planter class, the enemy from whom, as free laborers clad in the blue coats of citizen-soldiers, they had saved the republic. Bloodhounds were weapons used by slaveholding planters to brutally assert their power over their captured comrades. More than merely an act of revenge on behalf of the bloodhounds' blue-coated victims, the act of killing Butler's bloodhounds was a bloody repudiation of slaveholder power in a reunited nation.

THE THREE IOWA REGIMENTS encamped on Shultzzer's Hill on May 22, 1863—the 22nd, 24th, and 28th Iowa Volunteer Infantry Regiments—shared a history. Each had drawn its men from the farms and small towns of eastern Iowa, seen its first heavy fighting in the campaign for Vicksburg, and participated in the disastrous Red River Campaign before traveling east to fight under General Sheridan in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In January 1865, the already exceptionally well-traveled infantry regiments traveled by steamer to the conquered city of Savannah, Georgia. From there, they traveled up the Savannah River to Augusta and camped on Shultzzer's Hill across the river in South Carolina.<sup>5</sup>

The three Iowa regiments had not participated in Sherman's march through South Carolina or the destruction it wrought. Until that morning at Butler's plantation, relations between the Iowa regiments on Shultzzer's Hill and the surrounding community had been amicable.<sup>6</sup> Captain Rigby of the 24th Iowa wrote

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4. "Morning Reports: Companies A to E," in 24th Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Group 1088 in Court Martial Case Files, National Archives, Washington, DC.

5. Blake, *A Succinct History*; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*; Jones, *Reminiscences*; Simeon Barnett, *History of the Twenty-Second Regiment Iowa Volunteer Infantry* (Iowa City, 1865).

6. Blake, *Succinct History*; Jones, *Reminiscences*; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*; A. B. Cree Letters, University of Iowa Digital Library, <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/>

in his diary that the only depredation the Iowans committed in South Carolina was the attack upon that “desperado’s house in the vicinity.”<sup>7</sup> The official records do not contradict Rigby’s statement. There is only one court martial case in 1865 concerning interactions between the three Iowa regiments and Southern civilians: a soldier from the 24th Iowa was convicted of his role in a scheme to sell army hay to the townspeople of Savannah.<sup>8</sup>

Enlisted men remembered their time in Hamburg as one of flirtation with local girls looking for “beaux.” The Sunday before the dog killing, officers of the 22nd Iowa crossed the river to attend church in Augusta, worshipping alongside paroled Confederate soldiers. Other officers attended balls where they rubbed shoulders with local planters, including Robert Butler. Captain Rigby wrote that Butler “has taken an oath of allegiance to the old flag since he can do it no more harm with safety to himself; associates with our leading officers, drink[s] with them and is a very fine man.” Despite Butler’s friendly association with some of their officers, however, the enlisted men included “a few boys with more ideas of justice than respect for high officials or the Southern mogul.”<sup>9</sup>

Only one of those boys, Ephraim Blake, identified himself (in a later account) as one of Butler’s morning visitors. Although Samuel Pryce, Adjutant of the 22nd Iowa, did not participate himself in the killings, his memoirs provide a detailed account of the slaughter. Pryce identified three participants in the killing: William Franklin, Alexander Moreland, and John Yarick. Like Blake, Moreland and Yarick belonged to Company E of the 28th; Franklin served in Company F of the 22nd. Like most of their comrades in the three Iowa regiments, all four men had emigrated to Iowa from free states (three were born in Ohio; Moreland was a

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cdm/compoundobject/collection/cwd/id/22505/rec/1; *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor: The Civil War Letters of a Union Soldier and His Wife*, ed. Richard L. Kiper (Lawrence, KS, 2002); John Walker Lee Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City (hereafter cited as SHSI-IC).

7. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865.

8. Group 1088 in Court Martial Case Files, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General, National Archives.

9. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 215–26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103–5; Rigby, *Diary*, 5/22/1865; Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81–82.

native Pennsylvanian). All four were farmers by occupation who enlisted in their early twenties; the oldest, Franklin, had enlisted at the age of 22. Three of the four lived in Johnson County; Blake's family farm was in neighboring Iowa County.<sup>10</sup>

These four men cannot be collectively described accurately as regimental troublemakers. Two were non-commissioned officers. John Yarick had mustered into the army as a first corporal and received a promotion to third sergeant in the aftermath of the siege of Vicksburg. After suffering a minor wound at the Battle of Fisher's Hill in the Shenandoah Valley, he recovered in time to fight at Cedar Creek less than a month later. Alexander Moreland, one of three Pennsylvania-born Morelands in his company, had mustered in as a third corporal and suffered a leg wound at the Battle of Third Winchester. A superior described him in the company descriptive book with a relatively common platitude – "worthy of the name of soldier and an honor to the Co., always performing his duty" – and then added the more unique "indubitable and sociable."<sup>11</sup>

The killing of "slave-catching dogs" by Union soldiers was not an unprecedented act. The *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, the newspaper of choice for the men of the 22nd and 28th Iowa, reported that, during Sherman's March to the Sea, "wherever our army has passed everything in the shape of a dog has been killed" to protect "negroes and our escaped prisoners."<sup>12</sup> These dog killings were justified as acts of war, if not ordered, then at least sanctioned by officers. An Illinois soldier under Sherman's command in Georgia later remembered his regiment being issued an order "to kill all bloodhounds and other valuable dogs in the country." In 1865 an Iowa newspaper presented a killing of bloodhounds as part of a plan of retributive justice for the abuses of slavery. According to the newspaper account, a group of Union soldiers and formerly enslaved people killed all the dogs on a plantation before burning down the house and tying the slave-owner himself to a tree to be flogged by his former slaves. No

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10. 22nd Iowa Infantry, 24th Iowa Infantry, and 28th Iowa Infantry in Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 1/4/1865.

formerly enslaved person is mentioned as participant or instigator in accounts of the killing of Butler's bloodhounds, and there is no evidence that the attack was ordered by Iowa officers. There was no wartime exigency on May 22, 1865.<sup>13</sup>

The actions of Butler's morning visitors should be understood within the context of this political landscape. The desire to avenge the use of bloodhounds against prisoners of war bore a sociopolitical charge. Although the original encounter between the Iowa soldiers and the dogs sprang from a foraging expedition, the killing of the dogs was not merely a means to steal peaches. Blake's account makes it clear that the killing of Butler's dogs was the band's objective that morning.<sup>14</sup> Butler's earlier threat spoke to the soldiers' class consciousness and political ideology. As historian Robert Darnton argues in *The Great Cat Massacre*, an act of violence against animals can be a social statement. The significance of killing Butler's bloodhounds, like that of cat murders committed by eighteenth-century Parisian apprentices, can only be fully appreciated by first understanding the perpetrators' perspectives on the political climate in which the act was committed.<sup>15</sup>

ROBERT J. BUTLER lived in the southwest of South Carolina's Edgefield District. In 1860 the Edgefield District was South Carolina's leading cotton producer and second only to Charleston in total value of real and personal property. The majority of its population was enslaved. In the antebellum period, the district was home to politicians with national reputations as fierce defenders of slavery, including Senator James Henry Hammond, Congressman Preston Brooks, and Senator Andrew Preston Butler.

Although the Iowa soldiers in 1865 may have believed that Robert was a relative of Senator Butler, Robert was not a member of the Butler dynasty long prominent in South Carolina politics. Robert had been born in 1815 to a slaveholding family that had

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13. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 1/4/1865; Matthew H. Jamison, *Recollections of Pioneer and Army Life* (Kansas City, 1911), 280; "General Sherman's Great March through the Carolinas," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 4/1/1865; Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81-82; Pryce, *Vanishing Footprints*, 215-26; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103-5.

14. Blake, *A Succinct History*, 81-82.

15. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984).



*Robert Butler's estate, The Star of Edgefield. Photo taken by author, February 14, 2017.*

not yet amassed enough human property and social prestige to be counted among the district's planter elite.<sup>16</sup> By the beginning of the Civil War, however, Robert J. Butler was a wealthy planter. In 1859 he had begun construction on a plantation house known as "The Star of Edgefield." A newspaper correspondent described the plantation as "magnificent"; elevated several hundred feet above the Savannah River, the houses and church steeples of Augusta were clearly visible from the house's windows. Such a home served a social climber like Butler as "the symbolic foundation for

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16. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House Are Many Mansions* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1985), 40–44; John Butler Senior, 1820 census, Edgefield District, South Carolina, Ancestry.com.

his claim of membership in an upper order." The house sat on a plantation valued at \$50,000 (equivalent to \$1,470,000 in 2015). Butler's human property included 19 children under the age of 15, 8 men and 9 women between the ages of 15 and 60, and 2 men and 2 women over the age of 60. These people accounted for the majority of his personal property valued at \$32,700 (\$962,000 in 2015). Butler had become a planter in his own right in a society in which social mobility was dependent on slave ownership. His human property served not only as a source of labor on his plantation, but also as collateral for loans to expand his holdings.<sup>17</sup>

Yet the impressive plantation and enslaved people were not enough in themselves to establish Butler's claim to a high rank in the South Carolina social order; Butler also needed to assert authority over his estate and within his community in a manner required by a Southern code of honor. A South Carolina planter was expected to appear generous to those who respected his authority and retaliate violently against those who challenged him. In the fall of 1864 a dispute of honor between Butler and John David Twiggs, a Confederate officer from a prominent Augusta family, ended in an exchange of gunfire at a crossroads, leaving Twiggs dead and Butler's teenaged son fatally wounded. Butler's threat to sic his dogs on the soldiers for encroaching on his orchard was consistent with the violent defense of his honor at the crossroads and the social expectations of planter conduct.<sup>18</sup>

The Iowa soldiers perceived the hotheaded and wealthy Butler as epitomizing the brutality of the slaveholding planter class. Butler had a different reputation among the region's black pop-

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17. Burton, *In My Father's House*, 39; "Georgia Avenue-Butler Avenue Historic District" in National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Department of the Interior, 1984, [www.nationalregister.sc.gov/aiken/S10817702017/S10817702017.pdf](http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/aiken/S10817702017/S10817702017.pdf); Blake, *A Succinct History*, 82; Robt Butler, 1860 census, Edgefield District, South Carolina, Ancestry.com; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982); Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1982).

18. *Edgefield Advertiser*, 9/21/1864; Obituary for Robert J. Butler Jr. in *Edgefield Advertiser*, 11/16/1864. Robert J. Butler was later indicted for the murder of Colonel Twiggs and found not guilty at trial in 1866. Edgefield County Records of Mixed Provenance, 1864-1866, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1997).

ulation. They knew him as "an old negro-hunter" who had "made his living, all he had made, by hunting negroes before the war."<sup>19</sup>

PROFESSIONAL SLAVECATCHING was seen more as an avenue for upward mobility in the antebellum South than as an activity of established planters. Successful slavecatchers took great pride in the speed with which their bloodhounds could capture runaways. The term *bloodhounds* in the colloquial usage of the antebellum North referred not to a particular breed of dog, but to any dog trained to track human fugitives. Also known as "negro dogs" in the antebellum South, bloodhounds served as a means of apprehending runaway slaves and as instruments of intimidation to deter escape attempts. After catching a runaway, dogs often hounded the runaway back to the plantation to induce fear and discourage others from similar attempts. Since enslaved people were valuable property, bloodhounds seldom killed or maimed, but they did inflict minor wounds on runaways. Such wounds demonstrated the physical reach of the slaveowner.<sup>20</sup>

In the antebellum United States, the image of the bloodhound became a symbol of the power of slaveholders as a class. In the early nineteenth-century American press, the term *bloodhound* was most associated with the war dogs used by colonial authorities to brutally conquer native populations and suppress slave rebellions in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1840 the U.S. government imported Cuban bloodhounds as a weapon in its war against the Seminole people who were resisting removal from Florida.<sup>21</sup> Abolitionists who saw the war as a plot by proslavery politicians to expand slavery dubbed the conflict the "Bloodhound War." The Whig Party used the bloodhound controversy in campaign

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19. *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC, 1877), 152; "To and Fro on Business," *Edgefield Advertiser*, 10/30/1873; "Georgia Avenue-Butler Avenue Historic District"; Obituary for Robert J. Butler Jr.

20. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York, 1999), 160-64.

21. I do not mean to suggest that no dogs were used to track runaway slaves before 1840, only that the importation of Cuban dogs by the federal government was an important moment in developing the image of the bloodhound in American popular culture. John Campbell, "The Seminoles, the 'Bloodhound War,' and Abolitionism, 1796-1865," *Journal of Southern History* 72 (2006), 259-302.

literature for the 1840 presidential election. Eight years later, opponents of the Whig ticket would decry Zachary Taylor, who as a general had advocated the importation of the “Cuban method” and who kept several bloodhounds at his Louisiana plantation, as “the Bloodhound candidate.”<sup>22</sup>

As the sectional conflict over slavery intensified, the image of the bloodhound appeared more frequently in Northern political rhetoric. After Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, the Wisconsin legislature stated that the law made “good citizens” into “the blood hounds . . . of the slave owner” and “the slave hunters.” In 1854 Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts admonished Edgefield’s own Senator Butler with a declaration that there was no “kennel of bloodhounds” in the Constitution.<sup>23</sup>

In the political dialogue of the 1850s—including in the Iowa press—the bloodhound became an emblem of the oppressive violence of the Southern planter. In 1859 the *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, a Republican newspaper, described the bloodhound as the “instructor and police” of the Southern plantation.<sup>24</sup> The increased use of the term *bloodhounds* in Northern political rhetoric coincided with the rapid growth of a political ideology that interpreted the power of slaveowners, embodied by bloodhounds, as a threat to the nation’s future.

Bloodhounds featured prominently in popular culture, too. In Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* they were an instrument of the power of the slaveowner. Simon Legree, the novel’s exemplar of the cruel slaveowner, owns several bloodhounds. In one scene, Legree, while “caressing the dogs with grim satisfaction,” tells Tom, “Ye see what ye’d get, if ye try to run off. These yer dogs has been raised to track niggers; and they’d jest as soon chaw one on ye up as eat their supper.” Pop-

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22. *Ibid.*

23. “Report of the Special Committee: On that part of the Governor’s Message relating to the Fugitive Slave Law,” in *Appendix to the Journal of the Senate, 1852*, Wisconsin State Legislature (Madison, WI, 1852), 371–74; “Fast Day Address,” *Belvidere (IL) Standard*, 10/29/1861; George Frisbie Hoar, ed., *Charles Sumner: His Complete Works*, 20 vols. (Norwood, MA, 1900), 5:253

24. “Civilizing Under Difficulties,” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 10/15/1859. In 1855 the *Hawk-Eye* suggested that if the anti-immigrant Know Nothings won an upcoming election, the “Dutch and Irish would be hunted with bloodhounds next year.” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 8/8/1855.

ular antebellum productions of the novel had offstage actors imitate the howl of bloodhounds during an escape scene. The bloodhounds illustrated the reach and brutality of Legree's power.<sup>25</sup>

The growing prevalence of the bloodhound in popular culture corresponded with the growth of the free-labor movement. Free labor was defined by its opposition to the slave system of the American South and formed the ideological foundation of the Republican Party. The free-labor ethos celebrated the independent small businessman and farmer of the North; its proponents insisted that the American North's republican institutions provided every industrious man with a path to economic independence. This devotion to the progress of both the individual and the nation promoted the development of American capitalism, railroad construction, and public education.<sup>26</sup>

According to the ideology of the early Republican Party, slavery was a bulwark against progress in the American South and the enemy of free labor in the contest for the American West. In the Southern slave society, which was economically and politically dominated by a decadent and lazy planter class, there could be no dignity of labor or upward mobility for the enslaved black and poor white populations. The conflict was not simply between sections and ideologies but between two classes—Northern free laborers and Southern slaveowners—that could not coexist. Abraham Lincoln referred to this struggle as “a house divided”; William Seward described it as the “irrepressible conflict.”<sup>27</sup>

The other side of this irrepressible conflict contested the Republican claims of free-labor superiority. One of the slave system's most prominent defenders was Senator James Henry Hammond, whose plantation lay only ten miles from The Star of Edgefield. In an 1857 speech before the U.S. Senate, Hammond justified slavery by asserting that all societies required an underclass to perform menial duties so their superiors could advance humankind. He called the members of this underclass “mud-sills.”

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25. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly* (Kindle edition), 392, 452; John W. Frick, *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen* (New York, 2012), 123–29.

26. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

27. *Ibid.*



He claimed that the treatment of enslaved people under the paternal rule of slaveowners was more humane than Northern society's treatment of its underclass of "manual laborers and operatives."<sup>28</sup> Hammond's argument was offensive to those who believed that the free-labor system of the North created an egalitarian society of independent farmers, self-employed mechanics, and small-town merchants without a permanent underclass. The term *mudsills* entered the national political conversation as evidence of slaveholders' disdain for the Northern white free laborer.<sup>29</sup>

A year earlier, in 1856, the acts of another Edgefield politician shaped Northern public opinion toward Southerners and enshrined another term in the nation's political vocabulary. On the floor of the U.S. Senate South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks beat Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner with a cane

28. *Ibid.*, 66–67; Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South*, 346–47.

29. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*.

to avenge an insult Sumner had made against Brooks's cousin Senator Butler. The caning was celebrated in the South as an honorable act; in the North it was regarded as a brutal act of aggression. One Northern political cartoon depicted a raging Brooks savagely clubbing a languid Sumner, armed only with a pen. It was captioned "Southern Chivalry, Argument versus Club's."<sup>30</sup> In 1860 a glossary of American slang defined "Southern Chivalry" as "a cant term" for Southerners.<sup>31</sup> A year later, the "mud-sills" and "Southern Chivalry" were at war. Free-labor ideology served as the interpretive lens through which many Union volunteers experienced that war.

IN THE REPUBLICAN ETHOS, those who volunteered to fight in the Union Army were citizen-soldiers demonstrating "civic duty and patriotic virtue." For many, this civic duty was irrevocably tied to the free-labor interpretation of the slave system as an existential threat to the republic. They were "thinking bayonets" informed by political affairs and restrained by their own civic-mindedness from committing violence for violence's sake. They interpreted the conditions of poor Southern whites as evidence of the oppression of slaveholders and the superiority of a free-labor system.<sup>32</sup>

The men of the three Iowa regiments encamped on Shultzzer's Hill on May 22, 1865, commonly defined their service as a defense of the republic from the insidious slaveholding class. Colonel Harvey Graham, who commanded the regiments during their stay in South Carolina, identified the "Spirit of Secession" as the nemesis of "our Republican government." The threat to the republic was a threat to their own families' futures. Sergeant Taylor

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30. Burton, *In My Father's House*, 93–95; John L. Magee, *Southern Chivalry – Argument Versus Club's*, 1856, lithograph, Library Company of Philadelphia Digital Collections, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A130221>.

31. John Russell Bartlett, *A Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States*, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1860).

32. Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York, 2007); James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York, 1997); Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet* (Athens, GA, 1998); Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Towards Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York, 1995).

Peirce of the 22nd fought to “establish a government that would protect the rights of my children.” Peirce believed that slave-owners had abandoned republican virtue to worship at the “altar of avarice” as an “incubus on our free government.” In the spring of 1863 a resolution of the 22nd Iowa that was published in local newspapers defined the regiment’s mission as defending “our Republican institutions” from a force “abhorrent to every friend of freedom throughout the world.”<sup>33</sup>

The rhetoric of the resolution was strikingly similar to the war-time platform of the Republican Party. William Milo Stone, the first colonel of the 22nd, had, as editor of a Free-Soil newspaper, played a prominent role in organizing the Iowa Republican Party. In 1863 Stone, with his arm in a sling from a wound inflicted at Vicksburg, left the army to accept the Republican nomination for governor. He won 221 votes in his former regiment to his Democratic opponent’s 36. That landslide should not be attributed solely to the regiment’s familiarity with their former commander. An overwhelming majority of Iowa soldiers supported Republican candidates. In 1864 nearly 90 percent of Iowa soldiers’ votes went to Lincoln. In the 24th Iowa that percentage was even higher, with 285 soldiers voting for Lincoln and only 18 voting for his Democratic opponent, General McClellan. In letters home, Sergeant John Walker Lee of the 22nd praised his father’s attendance at rallies for Lincoln’s National Union ticket and rejoiced at hearing that “old Johnson Co. came out all right for the Union ticket.”<sup>34</sup>

In these overwhelmingly Republican regiments, some volunteers saw little distinction between their service to the republic and their commitment to the Republican Party. When Sergeant George Remley of the 22nd was asked by his younger brother

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33. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 6/28/1865; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 1/14/1865, in *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor*, 336; Harvey Graham to his wife, 12/14/1862, Harvey Graham Papers, SHSI-DM; Charles Haverly to “friends at home,” 9/18/1863, Charles E. Haverly Papers, SHSI-DM; *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 5/24/1865; “The Voice of the Soldiers,” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 3/28/1863.

34. Addison A. Stuart, “William Milo Stone,” in *Iowa Colonels and Regiments, Being a History of Iowa Regiments in the War of Rebellion* (Des Moines, 1865), 7-15; George Remley to Pa, 12/23/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, ed. Julie Holcomb and Steven Woodworth (DeKalb, IL 2004), 112; Diary of Levi Hoag, 11/8/1864, Levi Hoag Papers, SHSI-DM; John Walker Lee to his parents, 11/20/1864, John Walker Lee Collection.

whether Union Leagues (Republican political clubs) existed in the army, he replied, "I belong to a Union League. Its members number several hundred thousand and we do not allow as much treason to be expressed in our presence as you tolerate up there in Oxford." In his last letter home before his death in battle, Remley declared that the "soldiers as a class are true as steel and will show at the coming election that they can fight for their country with ballots as valiantly as they do with bullets."<sup>35</sup>

Newspapers in the Civil War era were partisan institutions, so the allegiance of the 22nd Iowa to the *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, a Republican Party organ, provides further evidence for the political orientation of the regiment. In numerous letters home, soldiers discussed stories they had read in the *Republican*. Captain David Davis was a battlefield correspondent for the *Republican*. After Davis was killed in battle, the role passed to Sergeant Lee. In 1865 Iowa soldiers were still receiving copies of the *Republican* within a few weeks of its publication.<sup>36</sup>

Despite a common partisan allegiance, views about enslaved people varied widely within the Iowa regiments from support for the political equality of former slaves to staunch opposition to emancipation. However, across this spectrum of views toward the enslaved, there was a shared antipathy toward slaveowners. Sergeant Taylor Peirce believed black people to be "less given to vice and . . . a more intelligent class than the poor whites are and as a moral class . . . vastly superior to the higher classes," who were "raised in idleness and tyranny." Even soldiers who saw no harm in slavery could detest the arrogance of Southern slaveowners. Lieutenant Colonel John Meyer of the 28th Iowa wrote in June 1864 that if "called upon to decide if such creatures were to be free or to have a master," he would "certainly consider them in no condition to make any good use of freedom." Yet only a month later, Meyer agreed that Southern honor was what "stood in the way

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35. Howard Remley to George Remley, 10/18/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 97; George Remley to Howard Remley, 9/15/1864, *ibid.*, 160.

36. John Walker Lee to Father, 5/3/1865, John Walker Lee Collection. In the spring of 1864 George Remley was still reading the *Republican* so thoroughly that he wrote to his father to alert him of a notice in its pages concerning unclaimed letters at the Iowa City Post Office. George Remley to Pa, 12/23/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 111.

of peace." Corporal Silas Hemphill wrote to his parents of his contempt for "nigger regiments" and his belief that escaped slaves were unworthy of aid provided by the army, but also condemned plantation owners for their decadence and laziness in deriving benefit from the labor of others.<sup>37</sup>

Iowa soldiers expressed contempt for wealthy planters in the political language of the free-labor ideology. After encountering the governor of Louisiana, Private Benjamin Booth described him as "one of the chivalry of the great South . . . using all the resources of his state . . . to prolong a bloody and wicked war." The Iowans described the Southern chivalry as looking down on Northern farmers as "mud sills."<sup>38</sup> From the planter's mouth, "mud-sill" was a condescension, but for the Iowa soldiers who identified themselves as "mud-sills," it was a term of pride and defiance of the planter's belief in the superiority of his class and the slave system. Ephraim Blake of the 28th and Benjamin Booth of the 22nd used the term to describe themselves and their comrades as an expression of their identity as free laborers performing their duty as citizen-soldiers. The "Southern chivalry" was the natural enemy of the mud-sill. Private Booth wrote that in fighting the war "the men of the South based their conclusions on the universally cherished belief that one son of the Southern chivalry could easily whip all the way from five to ten Northern 'mud-sills.'" In a poem for his wife, Peirce celebrated "Hawk eye brave and Hoosier stout" triumphing over "the boasting Southern chivalry."<sup>39</sup>

Wartime hatred of Confederates as arrogant adversaries of the republic was often minimized in memoirs written decades later by veterans promoting that era's reconciliatory sentiment. During the war, however, letters of soldiers expressed a hatred of their enemy exacerbated by a belief that Confederate forces operated outside the confines of civilized warfare. Stories of

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37. John Meyer, *Diary*, 6/21/1864, 7/3/1864, 9/2/1864, John Meyer Collection, SHSI-DM; Charles Haverly to "friends at home," 9/18/1863 and undated [1863], Charles E. Haverly Papers; Silas Hemphill to Joseph Hemphill, 10/9/1863, Hemphill Family Papers, SHSI-IC; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 5/8/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 394.

38. Benjamin Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion* (Garrison, IA, 1995), 30; Alfred B. Cree to Hattie Cree, 11/11/1863, A. B. Cree Letters, University of Iowa Digital Library.

39. Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 7/9/1864, in *Dear Catharine, Dear Taylor*, 223; Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 129-30.

vicious atrocities circulated in camp. In one of those stories heard by soldiers of the 22nd Iowa, Confederate partisans burned down a Unionist home with a woman and her children trapped inside. The actions of Confederate partisans from Missouri to the Shenandoah were interpreted as a product of the Southern slave society and proof of the inherent barbarity of the "Southern chivalry." The Iowa soldiers experienced some of this "uncivilized warfare" firsthand. The company descriptive book recorded Private Cyrus McKee of the 24th Iowa as "murdered by the citizens of Natchitoches, La." The circumstances of McKee's death are unclear, but the use of the word *murder* suggests that he was not killed during an engagement with uniformed enemies. Peirce described a Southern lady's letter written in Yankee blood as "evidence of the heroism of chivalry" and recalled "another one of the chivalry" drinking from a skull cup.<sup>40</sup>

BEFORE THE WAR, bloodhounds had symbolized cruel treatment of enslaved people and the political power of the "chivalry." By 1865, the bloodhound had transformed in the public imagination from a figurative oppressor of nonslaveholding whites to a literal weapon wielded against white flesh. The transformation began in 1862 with the Confederate government's employment of "negro dogs" against Southern Unionists resisting conscription. The Northern press provided sensational stories of loyal men being hunted "like wild beasts by conscripting officers with bloodhounds." These actions provided evidence of the Confederacy's contempt for nonslaveholding white men. An Iowa newspaper described the practice as "blood-hounds of rebellion" purloining "white flesh for Jefferson Davis."<sup>41</sup>

As the war continued, bloodhounds began to be used against another group of white men who resisted the authority of the

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40. "Company Descriptive Books: Companies A-E," 24th Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives; Lycurgas Remley to Pa, 1/9/1863, in *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers*, 29; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 4/17/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 384.

41. "Their Loyalty," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 5/31/1862; "New Use of Bloodhounds," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 3/21/1863; "Horrible Cruelties of the Rebels," *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 4/2/1864; J. S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men," *Harper's New Monthly* 30 (February 1865) 273-81.

Confederate government: escaped prisoners of war. By the war's final months, Northerners were well aware that beasts had been employed against their young men in uniform. Not only were stories of bloodhounds published in newspapers, but bloodhounds featured prominently in many narratives of prisoners of war published during and shortly after the war.

Bloodhounds are particularly prominent in the narratives written by Union soldiers who survived imprisonment at Camp Sorghum outside Columbia, South Carolina. In lieu of a wall or a fence, Camp Sorghum had only a deadline (a line around or within a prison that a prisoner crosses at the risk of being shot). "Every morning at daylight, the hounds raced around the outside of the camp, to see if any prisoner has escaped during the night." One day, two of the dogs entered the camp itself. Samuel Byers, an officer from the 5th Iowa, and his fellow prisoners decapitated both dogs with an axe and threw their carcasses into a well. The beheading was not committed as part of an escape attempt. It was an act of vengeance against those who had used these canine instruments of intimidation to steal their agency.<sup>42</sup>

The owner of the dogs and the camp guards promised retribution for this challenge to their authority. Days later, a captive was shot in the back on the living side of the deadline. An even crueler fate befell another imprisoned officer. A Lieutenant Parker was treed by the bloodhounds after escaping the camp. The masters of the dogs forced Parker down from the tree at gunpoint. Then they sicced the animals upon him, "tearing him so fearfully" that he died of his wounds. Parker's death represented a common practice taken to an uncommon extreme. Apprehended escapees from Sorghum were often described as bearing dog bites on their bodies. One captive called Parker's brutal death "a sacrifice to Southern chivalry." He was not alone in equating the brutality of bloodhounds with the true nature of "Southern chivalry."<sup>43</sup>

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42. S. H. M. Byers, *What I Saw in Dixie: Or Sixteen Months in Rebel Prisons* (Dansville, NY, 1868), 70–71.

43. *Ibid.*; Willard Glazier, *The Capture, Prison Pen, and the Escape, Giving an Account of Prison Life in the South* (Albany, NY, 1865), 184; J. N. Whitney, "Diary Extract," in G. E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War* (New York, 1865), 140; Allen O. Abbott, *Prison Life in the South at Richmond, Macon, Savannah, Charleston, Columbia, Charlotte, Raleigh, Goldsborough, and Andersonville* (New York, 1865), 130–31.

In his narrative of prison life published shortly after the war, Benjamin Booth of the 22nd Iowa also described the bloodhound as an instrument of repression unleashed against captured Union soldiers by the "Southern chivalry." Like Byers, Booth recalled a "large kennel of fierce blood hounds" circling his camp every morning to search for potential escapees and intimidate the inmates. A prisoner's escape was "a gala day for those who have the hounds." Once the escapee is "overtaken and once more in their power," Booth wrote, the "merriment begins, he is compelled to march back to the prison ahead of the blood hounds, and he is warned that his life depends on his own ability to keep out of the reach of the brutes." During the march, mounted men yell insults to humiliate the prisoner, comparing him to "runaway niggers." "This is called 'Southern chivalry!'" Booth concluded his account of bloodhounds in action: "Its more proper name is 'Southern barbarity and deviltry!'"<sup>44</sup>

Republican politicians seized upon this image of dogs bred as weapons to oppress enslaved people being employed to intimidate unarmed Union soldiers. Members of Congress invoked stories of bloodhounds as evidence of the true nature of slaveholders in arguing for the necessity of the Thirteenth Amendment. Congressman John Farnsworth of Illinois claimed that bloodhound pursuits of Union men proved that owning slaves makes men "ignoble, unjust, ungenerous, and tyrannical." Iowa's John Kasson described the bloodhound as an institution "subordinate to slavery" employed by the Confederacy to defend the slave order. Kasson told a story of Southerners with dogs forming a ring around four escapees from a prison camp before the "bloodhounds were let in on those four soldiers [who] were torn to pieces amid the jeers and shouts of the rabble that encircled them." Kasson argued that a defense of slavery was a defense of mutilation of white men by slavery's agents.<sup>45</sup>

Stories of the Confederacy employing bloodhounds against prisoners of war would have been known to the Iowa soldiers who visited Butler on the morning of May 22, 1865. Many of their friends and comrades had been captured during the Shenandoah

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44. Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 129–30.

45. "Abolition of Slavery," *Woodstock (IL) Sentinel*, 2/1/1865; "Debate on Amending the Constitution," *Davenport Daily Gazette*, 1/18/1865.

Valley campaign, particularly in the chaos following the Confederate morning assault at the Battle of Cedar Creek. Not only had accounts detailing prisoner experiences been published in newspapers such as the *Iowa City Republican*, but at least one of the visitors had been a prisoner himself. In February 1864 Private William Franklin, one of the men alleged by Pryce to have participated in the killing of Butler's bloodhounds, had been captured while serving as a scout near Lavaca, Texas. He was exchanged in July 1864 and returned to his regiment in time to fight at Cedar Creek. The details of his experience in captivity are unknown, but the capture itself meant forced submission to the army of the slave system, in which bloodhounds played an integral role.<sup>46</sup>

Both the provenance and veracity of the Iowa soldiers' belief that Butler's dogs had been used against prisoners of war are unclear. It is possible that the Iowa soldiers simply assumed that every large pack of bloodhounds had been involved in pursuing prisoners of war. They also may have identified Butler's dogs with accounts of a particular pack of South Carolina bloodhounds. On January 17, 1865, in an official report, Major General John Foster, commanding a Union military district headquartered at Hilton Head on the Carolina coast, had described a Butler living about a hundred miles southeast of Hamburg who, "in November 1864, had captured more than 70 escaped Union officers by dogs."<sup>47</sup>

REGARDLESS of how their belief in Butler's culpability came to be, the Iowa soldiers' desire to act against "Southern brutality" was undoubtedly exacerbated by their location and the national political climate in May 1865. They were in South Carolina, the state most associated with secession and the slave power, at a time of intense anger against the slave system and great uncertainty about the nation's future.

On May 19, with "colors flying and drums beating" the three Iowa regiments marched through the streets of Augusta along streets lined with paroled Confederate soldiers. That night, they

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46. "Regimental Descriptive Book," 22nd Iowa Infantry, Book Records of Volunteer Union Organizations, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, National Archives.

47. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, part 3, vol. 47, Series I (Washington, DC, 1895), 75.

took special satisfaction in hammering their tent stakes into South Carolina soil. No state better represented the idea of an aristocratic slave system assaulting the nation. South Carolina had been the first state to secede and the first to fire on the flag. The state was, in the words of Lieutenant Jones of the 22nd, "the pugnacious little fire eating popinjay" and "hot bed of secession." "What a contrast," Captain Rigby wrote, to march upon "their sacred soil which was their babel four years ago, that no Yankee vandal heard should [ne'er] tread [except] as prisoners of war, while the chivalry are returning to desolated homes whipped." The politically radical Sergeant Taylor Peirce, who held the ruling class of South Carolina particularly responsible for the four years of bloodshed, wrote to his wife of a desire for revenge. "Desolation will reign where once the oligarchs of Slavery held their revels and squandered the fruits of the toils of their human brutes." He had "the will to lay waste their homes and scatter their families to the ends of the Earth for the lives they have caused to be sacrificed at the altar of Avarice and the woe and sorrow that hangs like a mist over our once happy land."<sup>48</sup>

With four years of bloodshed coming to an end, animosity toward the enemy had not dissipated but did not necessarily extend to the entire Southern population. After General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Sergeant George Winchester of the 28th Iowa wrote that the rebels would soon "be in the bottomless pit receiving their just due from the Devil." Yet Winchester's feeling toward the Southern whites with whom he interacted daily was far more favorable. In the same letter, Winchester discussed in poetic detail his love affair with the "sweetest Southern girl."<sup>49</sup> Under a theory of the war built on a foundation of antebellum free-soil ideology, a hatred for the "rebels" was compatible with warm feelings towards many Southerners.

On April 14, 1865, Henry Ward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and one of the nation's most famous orators, gave an address to celebrate the hoisting of the American flag over Fort Sumter on the fourth anniversary of its surrender to rebel

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48. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/20/1865; Jones, *Reminiscences*, 103; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 1/14/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 336.

49. George W. Winchester to Wesley, 4/14/1865, Winchester Family Papers, SHSI-IC.

forces. The speech, widely published in Northern newspapers, including the *Iowa City Republican*, argued that the conflict had not been “legitimately a war between *the common people* of the North and South [but] set on by the ruling class, the aristocratic conspirators of the South.” This “ruling class” of slaveholders, “an aristocracy as intense, proud, and inflexible as ever existed,” possessing a sense of “superiority not compatible with republican equality, or with just morals,” had manipulated poor and middle-class white men into fighting a war against their own interests. Now, with the ruling class defeated and the slave system destroyed, the lower classes of Southern whites could finally reap the benefits of a free-labor society.<sup>50</sup>

Beecher did not invent this interpretation. The theory he articulated was familiar to the men of the Iowa regiments. In 1863 Private William McKeever wrote to his parents about poor white Southerners being told by planters that Northerners meant to enslave them. Benjamin Booth frequently described Southern leaders as “miserable slave-drivers” of their own men whose arrogance had led them to underestimate the strength and commitment of the “mud sills.”<sup>51</sup>

Hours after Beecher’s speech in Charleston Harbor, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in Ford’s Theater. As word of Lincoln’s death spread to the hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers occupying the South, many soldiers wrote of their desire to avenge the crime. Some even fantasized about exterminating their now defeated enemies. Violent acts were committed against Confederate prisoners of war and Southern civilians who were deemed to be celebrating the assassination. Lincoln’s mourners viewed his assassin as a product of the inherently barbaric Southern system. Sergeant Peirce wrote that the assassination was “in keeping [with] the principles of the Southern People. Slavery has divested them of every principle of humanity. They are more like barbarians than civilized beings.” Sergeant Lee, emotionally reserved in his other letters, displayed great passion in his description of his regiment’s reaction to Lincoln’s assassination: “The rebels have

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50. *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, 5/10/1865.

51. William McKeever to his parents, 5/4/1863, Hemphill Family Papers; “Army Correspondence,” *Ottawa (IL) Free Trader*, 9/12/1863; Booth, *Dark Days of Rebellion*, 30, 111.

caused his death and every soldier now goes in for having revenge and to . . . exterminate every traitor from the United States."<sup>52</sup>

Union soldiers interpreted both the assassination and the conditions of newly liberated prison camps as violations of the standards of civilized warfare. Their belief that the barbarity of the "Southern chivalry" was, like the war itself, a direct consequence of the slave order prescribed a course for the nation's reconstruction: a radical transformation of the South into a free-labor society. Until the South became a land of free laborers without its powerful ruling class, it could not become a loyal section of the Union. Sergeant Lee was pleased that Georgians "are a badly whipped people . . . perfectly willing [to] take the oath and abide by our laws." After leaving the army, Lee returned to the South to serve as a civilian commissary for black soldiers. Taylor Peirce proclaimed his desire to "Yankeeize" the South so the entire nation could be "blended in one vast community of free labourers." Peirce thought it necessary for Southern society to "succumb to the enterprise and superior energy of the free and labourious men of the north." Although many of his comrades disagreed, Peirce wanted a black-dominated Southern political order.<sup>53</sup>

Two days before the killing of the bloodhounds, Captain Rigby had recorded interactions with two old Southerners in his diary. The first was with a wealthy white man who told the Iowa officer, much to the chagrin of Confederate veterans around him, "'You have not whipped us, you have only overpowered us. . . . We are ready to fight you again.'" The second was with an old black man unsure whether he was free from bondage. Rigby "explained to him his freedom [and] what he might expect in the future." Encountering him again, Rigby saw that the "poor fellow's back was dreadfully lacerated by a cow hide." When the man had told his former master that he was no longer a slave, the white man had drawn his pistol and whipped him. Rigby wrote that this encounter had shown him that "we should not close our eyes to

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52. Martha Hodes, *Mourning Lincoln* (New Haven, CT, 2015), 121–34; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 142; Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 4/17/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 384; John Walker Lee to his father, 4/19/1865, John Walker Lee Collection.

53. John Walker Lee to his father, 5/30/1865, John Walker Lee Collection; Taylor Peirce to Catharine Peirce, 7/16/1864, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 228.

the demands of humanity." If the North turned its back, Rigby feared, the old ruling class of the South would be restored to once again threaten the nation's future.<sup>54</sup>

On May 22, 1865, Butler's bloodhounds were a killable emblem of the barbarity of slaveholders as a class. The armies of the "Southern chivalry" had been defeated in the field, but the weapons that epitomized their brutality and power had not been. Butler's rumored use of his dogs against prisoners of war and his threat to sic them on Union soldiers were perceived as clear examples of the arrogant "Southern chivalry" attempting to dominate the "mud-sills" by a brutal use of force. They thus merited a violent response. By killing the bloodhounds, the Iowa soldiers intended to destroy the instruments with which Butler could violently assert his power to reverse the victory of free labor won on the battlefield.

ON JULY 4, 1865, the 22nd Iowa mustered out of federal service in Savannah, Georgia. The holiday was marked by public readings of the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation. That afternoon, a mob of townspeople and drunken Union soldiers assaulted the city's black fire brigade as it paraded in celebration of the nation's triumph. After the riot, Taylor Peirce wrote home to his wife about the assault. The scene led him to doubt that the South could change. He feared that the army would allow the old system to be reinstated: the old slaveholders would return to power and the former slaves would be free in name alone.<sup>55</sup>

Eleven years later, on July 4, 1876, Robert Butler's son Tom and son-in-law Henry Getsen encountered a black militia company while driving a buggy on the Hamburg road. In the decade since the war, Hamburg had become a community of the formerly enslaved. With both a gubernatorial and national election looming, tensions were high as the "Redeemer" movement of white Democrats and its paramilitary organizations sought to depose the Republican government elected by the state's black majority. Tom and Getsen demanded that the militiamen remove themselves from the path. Initially, the militia refused to yield,

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54. Rigby, *Diary*, 5/20/1865.

55. Taylor Peirce to Catherine Peirce, 7/9/1865, in *Dear Catherine, Dear Taylor*, 416.

but after a heated exchange of words, Tom and Getsen were allowed to pass.<sup>56</sup>

Following the incident, the two young white men went to the *The Star of Edgefield* to discuss the incident with Robert Butler, who was incensed by the black militiamen's insult to his family's honor. By 1870, the value of Robert Butler's real estate had decreased from \$50,000 to \$15,000 (\$281,000 in 2015), and with the emancipation of his human property, the value of his personal property had fallen from \$32,700 to \$3,350 (\$62,800 in 2015), a tenth of its antebellum value. Two years after the war, he owned only a single dog. Clearly, he had lost much, but he had not lost his sense of honor.<sup>57</sup>

Robert Butler filed charges against the militiaman for blocking a public road and threatening Tom and Getsen. When militiamen appeared in court in Hamburg on July 8, an armed mob of white men gathered in the predominantly black community. The mob demanded that the black militia surrender its weapons. When the militiamen refused, a gun battle erupted. That night, most of the outnumbered militiamen escaped. The white mob then turned its anger on what remained of Hamburg's black population, looting homes and assaulting residents. The mob executed four black men along the banks of the Savannah River.<sup>58</sup>

The Hamburg Massacre was widely reported in Northern newspapers, knocking the Battle of Little Bighorn off the front pages in eastern cities. Yet the *Iowa City Republican* was slow to cover the Hamburg Massacre, providing only a mention in its "Condensed News" section on July 12 and a denouncement of a Democratic newspaper for defending "the inexcusable butchery of Negroes at Hamburg" on July 22. But on August 2 the *Repub-*

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56. "Testimony of Doc Adams," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:35-37; "Testimony of Louis Schiller," *ibid.*, 1: 145-46; Claudio Saunt and Stephen Berry, "The Hamburg Massacre," *CS! Dixie* (University of Georgia), 2/12/2016, <https://csidixie.org/chronicles/hamburg-massacre>.

57. Robert J. Butler, 1870 census, Aiken County, South Carolina, Ancestry.com; Comptroller General Tax Record Books, Edgefield County, 1867, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

58. "Testimony of Doc Adams," 1:40-44; Saunt and Berry, "The Hamburg Massacre."

*lican* published on its front page a report of the havoc wreaked on Hamburg by the mob. Stories of similar violence would appear frequently in the months to come, but South Carolina was a particular focus. The paper published the South Carolina Democratic Party platform in its entirety. The paper's message was clear. The "Southern chivalry" sought to reverse the progress of Reconstruction and the outcome of the war itself. The *Republican* condemned Democratic presidential nominee Samuel Tilden as "the most offensive pro-slavery, anti-war, disloyal tool of the Southern rebel element."<sup>59</sup>

Many Northern Republicans viewed the election of 1876 as a continuation of the war, with the Republican Party as the successor to the Union Army and white Democrats as the successors of the Confederacy and its Northern sympathizers. The incident in Hamburg would be only one of several assaults on a black Republican community by mobs of white Southern Democrats in the months preceding the election of 1876. With a former Confederate general as their gubernatorial candidate, the Redeemers won control of South Carolina. In the Compromise of 1877, the disputed electoral votes of South Carolina and Florida were awarded to Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. The Republican administration removed federal troops from Southern states and refrained from interfering with the policy of Redeemer state government. Reconstruction was over.<sup>60</sup>

Robert J. Butler was one of many white Democrats arrested but never tried for their participation in the Hamburg Massacre.<sup>61</sup> He testified before a congressional committee investigating the violence in South Carolina that he had been ill on the day of the riot and not involved in any of the violence. However, Doc Adams,

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59. *Iowa City Republican*, 7/12/1876, 7/16/1876, 7/22/1876, 8/2/1876, 8/17/1876, 8/18/1876, 8/20/1876, 9/29/1876; James E. Mueller, "The Old Rebel Spirit," in *Shooting Arrows and Slinging Mud: Custer, the Press, and Little Bighorn* (Norman, OK, 2013), 121-45.

60. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 98-139; Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York, 2006), 197-98; *Iowa City Weekly Republican*, July-September 1876.

61. In his 1896 account of his role in the killing of the bloodhounds, Ephraim Blake declared that the dogs' owner was the same Butler who "led the mob in the Hamburg massacre later on when so many colored people were murdered." Blake, *A Succinct History*, 82.

captain of the black militia company, testified to seeing "old man R. J. Butler" on the night of the massacre. Adams had watched from a hiding place as Butler shot and killed a local black man named Moses Parker.<sup>62</sup>

The conflict between the Butlers and the militiamen had not begun with the encounter on the Hamburg road. Adams and another witness testified that two months earlier, Robert's eldest son, Harrison, told them that a group of prominent local white men planned to murder Hamburg's black leaders in order to intimidate black voters. Adams testified that Harrison stated, "We have got to have just such a government as we had before the war, and when we get it all the poor men and the niggers will be disfranchised, and the rich men would rule. We can't stand it and won't stand it." Before the killing began on July 8, witnesses heard Robert Butler declare his belief in "white man's government" and rejoice in the "beginning of the redemption of South Carolina."<sup>63</sup>

On the day after the massacre, Robert Butler, Harrison, and Getsen discovered the hiding spot of Louis Schiller, a militiaman they had pursued the night before. Schiller recognized Butler as the "old negro hunter" who "wouldn't lose an opportunity to kill . . . if he could." Schiller fired at the three men with his pistol, then fled into a swamp. The men left.<sup>64</sup>

Later, Butler returned with a pack of bloodhounds to continue the hunt.

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62. "Testimony of R. J. Butler" and "Testimony of D. L. Adams," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:1050-60, 34-77.

63. "Testimony of Doc Adams," 1:34-77; "Testimony of Harry Mays," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 1:27-34.

64. "Testimony of Louis Schiller," in "Testimony as to the Denial of the Elective Franchise in South Carolina at the Elections of 1875 and 1876," *Miscellaneous Documents of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Forty-Fourth Congress*, 145-60.

# The Surf Ballroom: Rock & Roll, 1950s Nostalgia, and Cultural Memory in Clear Lake

ANNA THOMPSON HAJDIK

“It reminds me of the musical *Brigadoon*, about the village that magically comes back every 100 years. Every year, the Surf Ballroom, this time of year, is magic, too.”<sup>1</sup>

– Winter Dance Party attendee Michael Burrage

IN THE HISTORY OF ROCK ‘N’ ROLL, no date has been more enshrined in twentieth-century musical memory than that of February 3, 1959. On that frigid night, a plane carrying three young, up-and-coming performers – Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J.P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson – crashed into an Iowa cornfield shortly after takeoff. They, along with local pilot Roger Peterson, died on impact after the young musicians had spent the evening entertaining an enthusiastic audience of young people at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa.

That tragic event contributes mightily to the Surf Ballroom’s enduring appeal. Yet the entertainment venue has a rich musical history apart from that event. The Surf serves as an iconic representation of Iowa’s popular culture, particularly as it relates to the history of music and the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll. However, this essay also traces the multifaceted history of Clear Lake and its long association with tourism, which began during the Progressive Era. That history illuminates such topics as boosterism,

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1. Deb Nicklay, “A Collection of Memorable Quotes from 2012,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 12/30/2012.

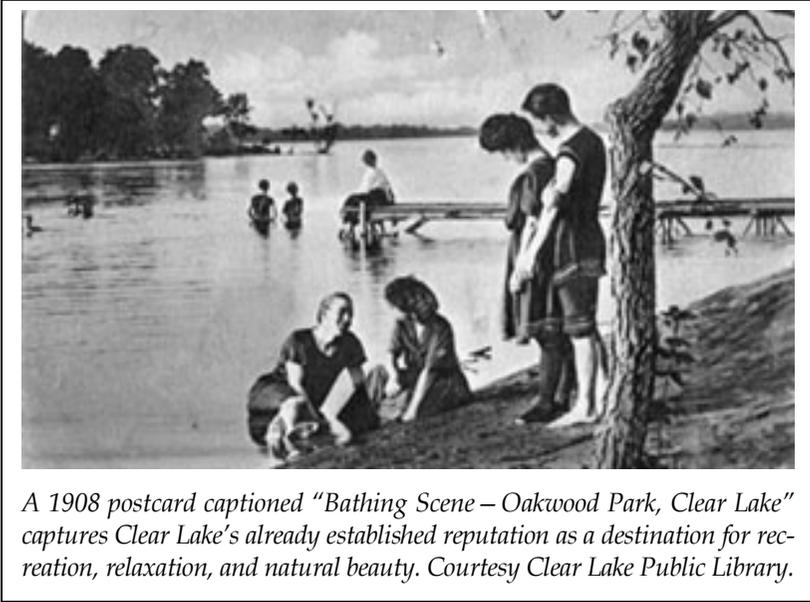
the emergence of a distinct youth culture, and even the struggle for civil rights. I also examine the Surf's construction during the Great Depression and its evolution during the 1930s and 1940s as it became an important venue for popular culture and community engagement in northern Iowa, especially during World War II. Ballrooms once fulfilled an important social function in small towns across the Midwest, providing myriad opportunities for exposure to diverse forms of entertainment far outside the conventionally prescribed norms of the midwestern small town.

Yet the Surf's existence today does indeed owe a great deal to the events of 1959. In the second half of the essay, I chronicle what happened to the Surf after the Winter Dance Party and that tragic plane crash. The key to the Surf's still salient appeal is the desire for an authentic link to the past, coupled with a macabre fascination that surrounds dark tourism. The recent recognition that this venue enjoys has been driven by a variety of outsiders, especially musicians, journalists, and music fans. Civic leaders were initially slow to recognize the Winter Dance Party's legacy, but more recently community-led efforts in the arenas of historic preservation and tourism infrastructure have been an important tool for maintaining cultural memory at the Surf and throughout Clear Lake.

The Surf Ballroom has become a locus for the nation's collective musical memory, simultaneously demonstrating the cultural power of the 1950s and the still fervent nostalgia for that decade. As the ballroom seeks out younger audiences with no living memories of Buddy Holly or poodle skirts, cultural memory will become critically important for maintaining the venue's relevance in the years to come.

### **"The Saratoga of the West"**

Clear Lake's history as a vacation destination stretches back to the late nineteenth century. It was billed for several decades as "The Saratoga of the West" because of the many hotels that hosted middle- and upper-class visitors. Early images accompanied by booster rhetoric emphasized the natural beauty of the lake as well as the opportunity for refuge and respite from the drudgery and difficulties of urban life. As early as 1900, the ladies of the



Clear Lake Library Association issued a souvenir edition of the daily newspaper, the *Clear Lake Mirror*, that outlined the early history of the area and engaged in a bit of community boosterism. Local resident Mary Emsley wrote the following bit of poetic prose in describing her hometown:

If joys unbounded, if dreamy life in a dreamy land of blissful laziness is what is wanted as a rest from the whirl of business and the noise of cities, then Clear Lake is a place of refuge where care is flung to winds that fill flapping sails and ruffle peaceful waters, and where you shall be soothed always by lap, lap, of the waves upon the shore.

Another brochure from 1911 was a bit more specific in its description of the lake and its seemingly untouched surroundings, thus helping to create an image of a community bound tightly to its greatest natural resource. Here, the author emphasizes the minimal development around the lake:

Clear Lake has become immensely popular as a summer resort, and justly deserves the appellation so often applied to it by eastern parties, "The Saratoga of the West." The lake is an attractive body of water, clear as crystal, having an area of about 4,000 acres, seven

miles in length and two miles in width. Its shores are covered with beautiful groves of native oak, walnut, elm and maple trees, planted in the most picturesque order of that grandest of landscape architects—Nature.

This same bit of promotional literature characterized the population of the town in north central Iowa as “2,000 wide-awake, enterprising, culture-loving people, eager for every forward movement.” Thus, at the dawn of the twentieth century the community’s civic leaders struck a “devil’s bargain” with tourism, but they were also eager to embrace the ideals of the Progressive Era and, as so many other small towns across the Midwest did, they fancied their town the next Chicago.<sup>2</sup>

The lake was the community’s greatest asset, but the formation and organization of the Clear Lake Chautauqua brought thousands. It mirrored in many ways the original Chautauqua, formed in 1874 on the banks of Lake Chautauqua in New York. In 1876 a group of prominent Methodists brought the event west to Clear Lake. A pavilion and campground built along the lakeshore served as the gathering point for meetings and speakers. By 1900, the Chautauqua became a well-known institution across the state and the nation. Visitors would descend on the town for three weeks in the heat of summer to participate in an event that historians have seen as emblematic of a Progressive Era that valued intellectualism and edification.<sup>3</sup> One brochure published in 1911 to promote Clear Lake’s Chautauqua emphasized these progressive ideals: “The Chautauqua has as its fundamental purpose, the ambition of making people think,—think about politics, about religion, about books, about men and women. And such thinking breeds independence in all lines of endeavor. This is the great aim and purpose of the Clear Lake Chautauqua,—to furnish to all its supporters and visitors a means of enjoyment and improvement.”<sup>4</sup>

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2. Mary A. Emsley, “Clear Lake as a Summer Resort,” *Clear Lake Mirror*, 3/29/1900, newspaper clipping in Joanne Watkins Scrapbook, ca. 1890–2009, privately held by Ms. Watkins, Clear Lake, Iowa; “Clear Lake Chautauqua, held July 22–31, 1911” (Clear Lake, IA, 1911), in Joanne Watkins Scrapbook.

3. Pete Conroy, “Clear Lake Chautauqua Once Highlight of Summer Season: Famous Persons Heard During 18 Years of Existence,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 8/12/1943.

4. “Clear Lake Chautauqua, held July 22–31, 1911.”



*Orator and politician William Jennings Bryan (and associates) visited Clear Lake in 1908 for the Chautauqua. Courtesy Clear Lake Public Library.*

A wide range of well-known figures, including temperance firebrand Carrie Nation and orators such as Booker T. Washington and William Jennings Bryan, made their way to Clear Lake for the summer chautauquas. The Clear Lake Chautauqua only lasted until 1914, its demise hastened by many other competing summer attractions in and around the area. But it helped create the tourist trade, contributing to the community's thriving reputation as a summer vacation spot.<sup>5</sup>

In 1910 construction began on the White Pier, which soon served as northern Iowa's largest dance hall. Patrons could also take in a movie or go roller skating. Many other summer venues competed for the tourist's dollar, including Bayside Amusement Park, the Oaks Hotel, Petersen's Bath House, and a range of lakeside resorts and campgrounds. Moreover, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Clear Lake and the neighboring community

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5. Beth Ann Herker Schumacher, "From Camp Meetings to Memories: The Story of the Clear Lake Chautauqua" (master's thesis, University of Northern Iowa, 1985), viii, 69-70.

of Mason City jointly constructed an interurban, an electric railway that carried visitors and residents between the two towns on a daily basis. In short, for a town of its size (the population stood at 2,014 in 1910 and steadily grew by 1,000 over the next two decades), Clear Lake possessed a significant tourism infrastructure that made it one of the most desirable vacation destinations in the upper Midwest.<sup>6</sup>

That set the stage for Carl Fox to successfully establish the Surf Ballroom. Born in 1895, Fox was an Iowa farm kid with big dreams. While serving abroad during World War I, his entrepreneurial ambitions began to take shape. After the war, he and his wife, Emma, opened a few seasonal roller skating rinks across the upper Midwest. Clear Lake was among those communities, but Fox saw the potential for something more there.<sup>7</sup> He decided to build a dance hall on the north shore of the lake. The White Pier had been destroyed by a tornado in 1931, and another dance hall, the Tom-Tom, had burned down in 1932, creating a business opportunity for Fox despite the dark economic climate throughout the nation.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Surf Opens for Business**

Construction began on the first Surf Ballroom in January 1933 with a budget of \$25,000. Fox envisioned a dance hall that resembled an ocean beach club, perhaps drawing inspiration from the lake. The interior featured floating clouds and brightly colored palm trees on the walls. The exterior was of Art Deco design, and the local newspapers remarked on the Surf's Lamella roof (the only one in the entire state), a vaulted style that became popular in America between the world wars. It was patented by Friedrich Zollinger in 1921 and first used in Germany. The gothic-inspired style caught on in the United States, and a number of American architects adapted the Lamella roof for industrial uses, especially for aircraft hangars in the 1930s. The interior had "floor space of

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6. Marianne Morf, *Clear Lake, Iowa, 1851–2006* (Mason City, 2006), 12.

7. "Carl J. Fox," Fuchs Family, <http://fuchs-foxfamily.blogspot.com/2007/08/carl-j-fox.html>.

8. "Petersen Starts Work on New Lakeside Dance Hall," *Clear Lake Reporter*, 1/26/1933.



*The Surf Ballroom's Art Deco style architecture reflected the trend toward the new and modern in contrast to the Victorian-style dance halls of the early twentieth century. Courtesy Clear Lake Public Library.*

8,000 square feet, accommodating 500 couples easily," and was made entirely of maple, "laid in such a way that the dancers will always be going with the grain of the wood." The Surf also featured state-of-the-art ventilation and heating innovations for its time. It opened in April 1933 with Wally Erickson's Marigold Orchestra of Minneapolis entertaining the opening night crowd.<sup>9</sup>

Across America in the 1930s, small towns began to modernize through their architecture, infrastructure, and business development. The original Surf's architecture reflected this new modernism with a streamlined, contemporary look very different from the Victorian-style bathhouses and hotels that had dotted the town at the dawn of the twentieth century. The Surf's visual appeal in

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9. Michael Dickson and Dave Parker, *Sustainable Timber Design* (New York, 2015), 81; "New Lakeside Ballroom Opens with Dance Monday," *Clear Lake Reporter*, 4/13/1933.



*This photograph of the Surf's ballroom from the 1930s shows off both the venue's Lamella roof, a vaulted style that was very popular in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and its dance floor made entirely from maple, an attribute that Carl Fox promoted to prospective dancers at the Surf. Courtesy Clear Lake Public Library.*

its architecture, interior design, and up-to-date amenities reflected this nationwide desire for the new and novel, despite the deprivations of the Great Depression.<sup>10</sup>

Ballrooms and dance halls were ubiquitous in Iowa, with at least 72 scattered throughout the state in the 1930s and 1940s. From the Val-Air in Des Moines to venues in much smaller communities, such as the Riviera in Janesville or Matter's Ballroom in Decorah, such spaces offered important opportunities for young people to gather, especially in the summer months. Amateur historian Myron Kelleher observed of his own participation in small-town dance hall culture, "Kids listened to rock 'n' roll on the radio and their records, and on weekends could actually go see their favorites in person for a couple of bucks. Sometimes the ballrooms would be so crowded you couldn't get inside.

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10. Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 101.

I remember nights when Decorah's Matter's Ballroom had 1,500 or 1,600 teenagers show up."<sup>11</sup>

The Surf – and the White Pier before it – succeeded for decades because of the embrace of a new public dance culture that catered to youth and tolerated the intermingling of the sexes.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, despite Clear Lake's rich history as a religious tourism destination, by the 1930s it seems that there was very little pushback from any moralists or clergy in the community. On the contrary, when the Surf opened for business in April 1933, the reaction seemed wholly enthusiastic. Businesses ranging from ice harvesters to hardware stores placed advertisements in the local paper congratulating Carl Fox and wishing him success.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s the Surf often featured urbane, sophisticated musical acts, including top swing bands from Kay Kyser to the Dorsey Brothers. As David Stowe argues, "Swing was the preeminent musical expression of the New Deal: a cultural form of 'the people,' accessible, inclusive, distinctively democratic, and thus distinctively American." To its legions of fans in the 1930s, Stowe notes, "Swing was both proof and cause of an American society growing ever more egalitarian and progressive." At the height of the genre's popularity, Fox booked the "King of Swing," 28-year-old Benny Goodman, who appeared at the Surf on September 24, 1937. Earlier that year Goodman had played at the Paramount theater in New York City to highly enthusiastic crowds made up mostly of a newly defined group, teenagers.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Melody Parker, "Local Dance Enthusiast Shares His Passion for Iowa Ballrooms," *Waterloo Courier*, 2/6/2005.

12. As Joan Jensen has argued in her study of dance halls in Wisconsin, "Dancing is one way to transcend place and space." While much of Jensen's work (and that of other historians as well) focuses on urban dance halls, her observations related to social and spatial mobility, courtship, and sexual mores certainly apply to the Surf as well as to the commercial dance halls that preceded it in Clear Lake. Joan B. Jensen, "I'd Rather Be Dancing: Wisconsin Women Moving On," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22 (2001), 1-20. See also Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986, 90-91).

13. *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 4/14/1933 (advertisements on pp. 10-11).

14. David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, 1994), 13; "Air Ya Listenin? Goodman on Air from Surf Friday," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 9/23/1937.

Music held a new form of power for teenagers in the 1930s. As Kelly Shrum observes, “Music provided an important popular outlet—a forum for group activity, a background for dancing, and a way to express feelings within the realm of popular culture—that could not be suppressed.”<sup>15</sup> Because of the proliferation of commercial dance halls like the Surf, music became much more integrated into the daily lives of young people. And if attending concerts at a nearby dance hall was not possible, there was always the even more ubiquitous radio. Throughout the 1930s many of the Surf’s performances were broadcast over the local radio station, KGLO, usually airing Saturday nights from 10:05 to 10:30.<sup>16</sup>

Among the many entertainers who appeared at the Surf, prominent performers included several African Americans, offering a glimpse of a more diverse nation outside the confines of small-town Iowa. On July 21, 1935, for example, African American bandleader Cab Calloway, along with the Cotton Club Orchestra, performed at the Surf long after he had established a firm reputation as a charismatic singer in the clubs of Chicago and New York City. Other bands led by notable African Americans during this same period included Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Andy Kirk and His 12 Clouds of Joy.<sup>17</sup> In 1937 a piece in the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* struck a rather poetic tone about the Surf’s place in the community and its important role in bringing a bit of culture to northern Iowa. “Proud are the lake residents to claim the city in which the Surf ballroom, the melting pot of mid-west dancers, is located. Posed on the shore in a manner comparable to any cosmopolitan amusement, the waves of Clear Lake lap the beach in rhythmic harmony with the tuneful strains of continental orchestras.”<sup>18</sup>

The world of swing music was more progressive in its stance on integration and racial equality than other facets of the entertainment field. As early as 1936 Benny Goodman began to hire

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15. Kelly Shrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls’ Culture, 1920–1945* (New York, 2004), 107.

16. “Surf Bands Over KGLO Are Named,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 6/26/1937.

17. Advertisements for these various bands appeared in the *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter* and *Mason City Globe-Gazette* from 1935 to 1937.

18. “Northern Iowa’s Most Popular Ballroom Now Completed,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 7/1/1937.

black entertainers as guest performers or stand-alone trio or quartet “units,” although the full band remained all white until 1939. That year, Goodman hired pianist Fletcher Henderson and guitarist Charlie Christian for the big band. Three years later, Goodman offered three African Americans—a trumpeter, a drummer, and a bassist—spots in his band. Furthermore, Goodman traveled throughout the South, staying with his band in many of the top hotels. If bookers in the South objected to the band’s black performers, Goodman wouldn’t take the date. Musician Lionel Hampton (who played the Surf frequently throughout the 1950s) noted, “Benny wouldn’t back down. He once bopped a guy in the head with his clarinet when the guy told him he should ‘get those niggers off his show.’” As Goodman stated, “I am selling music, not prejudice.” Indeed, when Goodman played at the Surf in September 1937, the press notice in the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* made special mention of Hampton and African American pianist Teddy Wilson, who both joined Goodman at the Surf for the performance.<sup>19</sup>

Carl Fox’s abilities as a shrewd promoter and manager enabled him to recruit such high-caliber, well-known talent as Goodman for the Surf. He built two other ballrooms—the Terp in Austin, Minnesota, and the Prom in St. Paul—and made sure that the bands would have at least a trio of venues to play in the region. Fox, like most concert venue owners of the period, worked through booking agencies such as the Music Corporation of America, the General Artists Corporation, and William Morris, who handled the itineraries of the bands and supplied local newspapers with press releases and other forms of publicity. It is uncertain how much bandleaders like Goodman, Calloway, or Kirk commanded in fees from small-town venues like the Surf, but big band tours usually operated on razor-thin margins because of the high overhead costs. And those at the very top kept up a grueling pace. For example, in 1940, Iowa native Glenn Miller, considered the number one bandleader in the country, grossed \$630,000, equivalent to \$11.2 million in 2018. The band’s schedule that year included 52 weeks of radio programs sponsored by the Chesterfield Cigarette Company, 25 weeks of hotel

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19. Lewis A. Erenberg, *Swingin’ the Dream: Big Band Jazz and the Rebirth of American Culture* (Chicago, 1998), 128–29; “Air Ya Listenin?”

engagements, 16 weeks of one-night engagements around the country, 10 weeks of theater shows, and two record dates per month for RCA Victor. Moreover, Miller and many other prominent bandleaders often paid for their own radio wires, especially at smaller venues such as the Surf.<sup>20</sup>

During the Great Depression and its aftermath, Clear Lake was somewhat insulated from the financial and environmental devastation that affected the rest of the country. The economy of northern Iowa – and Clear Lake in particular – remained relatively diversified when compared to the rest of the Midwest, especially the more sparsely populated Great Plains. Agriculture and manufacturing were the primary industries in northern Iowa, but Clear Lake had its tourism, which gave it a leg up in surviving and even thriving during hard economic times. By 1939, its population stood at 3,600, an increase of 534 from 1930, with the nearby regional center of Mason City at 27,000. It is impossible to know what percentage of Clear Lake's population consistently attended concerts at the Surf throughout the 1930s, but the regular influx of tourists every summer certainly helped the venue operate in the black. One promotional brochure noted the availability of more than 600 cottages near the lake, in addition to several new hotels.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1940s swing bands continued to dominate the Surf's marquee. Glenn Miller, Al Menke, and Sammy Kaye were just a few of the nationally known bandleaders to headline concerts. However, the Surf also played an instrumental role in the war effort and soon became one of the preferred venues in all of northern Iowa to host war bond drive concerts. In this way, the ballroom literally brought members of the community and region together in the broader service of home front mobilization. As Lisa Ossian has noted, "Iowa developed and strengthened its own mythology of the perfect small town throughout the war."<sup>22</sup> Articles in the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* contributed to this mythology and, with particular relevance for Clear Lake, highlighted the

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20. Stowe, *Swing Changes*, 118–21.

21. "It's Good to Live in Clear Lake: City of Homes and Recreation" (Clear Lake, 1939), Joanne Watkins Scrapbook; "Come to Clear Lake, Iowa's Beautiful Resort City" (Clear Lake, 1939), Joanne Watkins Scrapbook.

22. Lisa Ossian, *The Home Fronts of Iowa, 1939–1945* (Columbia, MO, 2009), 91.

Surf's value as an entertainment destination in the service of war-time fundraising.<sup>23</sup>

Summertime concerts had the added bonus of drawing on the goodwill and pocketbooks of vacationers. On September 8, 1942, for example, the Surf hosted a war bond drive concert with bandleader Frankie Masters as the headliner. Admission was a \$100 maturity value bond per couple. By 1944, war bond drive concerts had become routine. In June of that year, the Surf hosted its "5th War Loan Dance." City leaders issued warnings about large crowds and encouraged concertgoers to purchase their tickets in advance. Once again, a \$100 bond was the price of admission. For these concerts, the Surf usually donated the space, and the bands donated their services.<sup>24</sup>

In late 1946 Fox decided to sell the Surf to the Aragon Ballroom Company based in Chicago. The sale netted Fox the sizeable sum of \$1.6 million for all three of his ballrooms, which also included the Terp and the Prom.<sup>25</sup> He stayed on in an advisory role with the company and maintained his residence in Clear Lake. But a year later tragedy struck when the building caught fire and burned to the ground. Almost immediately, management agreed to rebuild the Surf "larger and more beautiful than ever and as soon as possible."<sup>26</sup>

And it did reopen within 15 months, just in time for the popular Fourth of July festivities in 1948. The new Surf featured "every possible facility for your dancing pleasure," included air conditioning, a larger dance floor, 200 booths, more parking, and, perhaps most importantly, fireproofing.<sup>27</sup> The program for its opening week also revealed that popular music tastes were beginning to shift. Two nights were devoted to "Old Style Dances," featuring the Six Fat Dutchmen and Fess Fritsche and his band,

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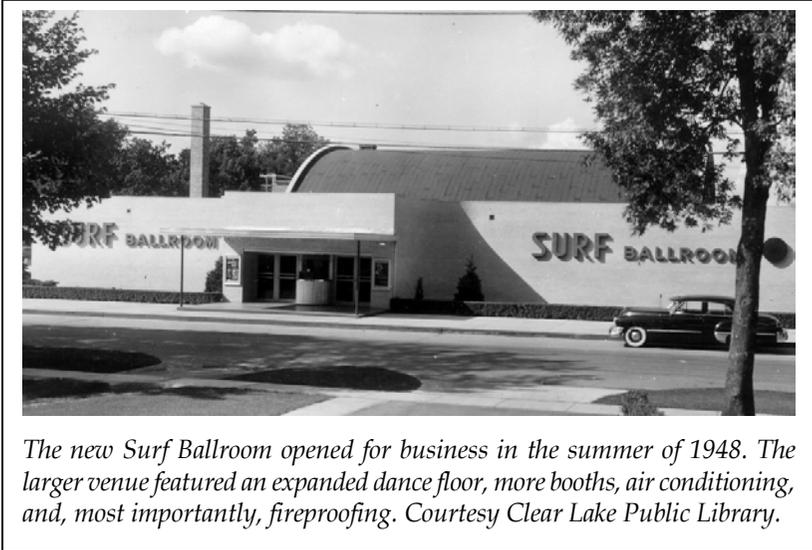
23 "Salute to Heroes' Opens September Bond Drive," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 8/31/1942.

24. "Announce Change in Plans for Sale of Tickets for 5th War Loan Dance at Surf," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 6/19/1944.

25. "Fox Sells Three Ballrooms to Chicago Interests," *Clear Lake Mirror*, 12/19/1946.

26. "Surf Ballroom to Be Rebuilt on Same Site at Clear Lake," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 4/25/1947.

27 "Announcing the New Surf Ballroom," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 6/30/1948.



*The new Surf Ballroom opened for business in the summer of 1948. The larger venue featured an expanded dance floor, more booths, air conditioning, and, most importantly, fireproofing. Courtesy Clear Lake Public Library.*

but on Saturday night, July 3, the Surf featured “Regular Modern Dance” with Ray Pearl and His Musical Gems. Pearl’s band actually wasn’t much of a departure in musical style from the popular big bands of the 1930s and 1940s since he was known for “sweet, smooth, and dreamy” arrangements, but change was slowly coming to the Surf as a different style of music began to take hold across the United States.<sup>28</sup>

### **The 1950s: Controversy, Conformity, and Change at the Surf**

When we look to popular culture as a guidepost for the emergence of rock ‘n’ roll, the simple narrative is that the genre began with Bill Haley and the Comets’ rendition of “Rock around the Clock,” which became even more popular when it appeared in the “classroom scare” film *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). Of course, “Rock Around the Clock” was popular primarily with one slice of the population: teenagers.<sup>29</sup>

28. *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 6/30/1948; “Ray Pearl, 83: Led Musical Gems Dance Orchestra,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2/28/1997.

29. Adam Golub, “They Turned a School into a Jungle! How *The Blackboard Jungle* Redefined the Education Crisis in Postwar America,” *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 39 (2009), 21–22.

**ANNOUNCING THE NEW SURF BALLROOM**

**CLEAR LAKE, IOWA**

On July first, 1948 the new Surf Ballroom, the finest in the middle west, will open at Clear Lake, Iowa, replacing its former predecessor destroyed by fire 15 months ago. Every possible facility for your dancing pleasure has been incorporated in this new, biggest structure, located across the street from the former Surf. Same size and more air conditioning—large dance floor—ample check-in facilities—dances—200 bottles—restaurant—bar—ample parking. The same friendly, informal atmosphere that endeared the old Surf to its thousands of patrons has been preserved in a new setting of beauty and charm that we know you are going to like.

**OPENING WEEK DANCE SCHEDULE**

<b>GRAND OPENING DANCE</b> Ray Ford and his "Musical Genes"	Thursday	July 1
<b>OPENING OLD STYLE DANCE</b> Ray Ford and his Band	Friday	July 2
<b>REGULAR MODERN DANCE</b> Ray Ford and his "Musical Genes"	Saturday	July 3
<b>PRE-HOLIDAY DANCE</b> Jack Cole and his Orchestra	Sunday	July 4
<b>HOLIDAY SPECIAL</b> Ray Ford and his "Musical Genes"	Monday	July 5
<b>SPECIAL OLD STYLE DANCE</b> St. Fat Dutchman	Tuesday	July 6
<b>Pre-Opening Builders' Dance</b> Sponsored by Contractors, Trade Employees, and Owners on This Night. PUBLIC NOT INVITED.	Wednesday	June 30

HOURS: 9:00 P. M. to 1:00 A. M.

**ADMISSION PRICE POLICY**  
25 cents plus tax "Walk Days"  
50 cents plus tax Saturdays, Sundays and holidays  
Fees include free check-in and free parking  
There will be no dancing in public during the opening week with such low prices prevailing but the dancing in public during this opening week with such low prices will be the same as when charged in the old Surf.

**SURF BALLROOM**  
Clear Lake, Iowa

*This advertisement promoting the opening of the "New Surf Ballroom" appeared in the Mason City Globe-Gazette, June 30, 1948.*

At the Surf in the early 1950s, most of the acts were familiar faces from the prior decade, such as Wayne King, the Waltz King, Henry Charles and His Orchestra, and Jan Garber. In Clear Lake, teens generally stayed away from these acts, preferring instead to patronize businesses like the Barrel Drive-In, where radio DJ's blasted the latest, edgiest rock 'n' roll hits and young couples found refuge in their cars away from the prying eyes of adults.<sup>30</sup> The most frequent performers at the Surf, by contrast, were far from edgy and helped to reinforce a dominant belief about the decade: "a pervasive, powerful, public ideology proclaiming the United States a harmonious, homogeneous, prosperous land."<sup>31</sup>

30. Douglas Thompson (recalling his experiences as a teenager in Clear Lake during the 1950s) in discussion with the author, May 2018.

31. Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (New York, 2003), 9.

However, several ugly episodes regarding race relations in the Surf's history challenged this perception and upended the idealized vision of small-town America that Clear Lake boosters had worked for decades to cultivate.

On June 13, 1952, an integrated group of members of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) union from Waterloo and Des Moines attended a leadership training school in Clear Lake. One evening they tried to attend a square dance at the Surf, but the doorman refused them entry because several members in the group were black. Backed by the UPWA, African American Isadore "Pat" Patterson Jr. filed a lawsuit against the Surf's manager, Carroll Anderson, accusing him of violating Iowa's civil rights law. Shortly thereafter, another African American, Charles Bennett, from Mason City, filed a similar lawsuit against Anderson after he and his date were denied entry to see Louis Armstrong at the Surf on July 30, 1952.<sup>32</sup>

Patterson's suit (which Bennett later joined) was covered consistently for several weeks in September 1952 in the press as the case was brought before a six-member justice court jury. Coverage of the trial revealed that Anderson and his employees had discriminated against African American customers on several occasions earlier that year. Assistant County Attorney Murray Finley got Anderson to admit that a month prior to the Patterson incident a group of African Americans had been denied admission when they attempted to purchase tickets to a Lionel Hampton concert. Anderson defended his actions by stating that (a) "the Surf reserved the right to refuse service to anyone," and (b) he believed that these particular African Americans "would not fit into the particular social group." Anderson also defended his actions by arguing that he was "just following the orders" of the Chicago-based owners of the Surf, Prom Inc.<sup>33</sup>

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32. Multiple accounts of the evenings in question when Patterson and Bennett were denied admission were published in the *Daily Iowan*, *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, and *Des Moines Register* throughout early September 1952. For the first incident, see also Bruce Fehn, "'The Only Hope We Had': United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948-1960," *Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 211.

33. *Ibid.*; "Surf Manager Says No Policy Barring Negroes," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 9/17/1952.

IOWA'S WONDER SHOW PLACE  
**SURF**  
NO. SHORE • CLEAR LAKE, IA

TONIGHT, Friday, LEO  
And His PIONEERS  
Sat., June 16, Al Menke

**SUNDAY, JUNE 17**

AT THE SURF



**LIONEL HAMPTON**

King of the Vibraharp. Terrific entertainment — wonderful dance music. One of the largest Bands ever presented at The Surf . . . 25 members. Very successful at Indianapolis — drew 20,000 people. At the Castle Farm Ball people were turned away after Ballroom was filled to capacity. His next Big Stop is the Hollywood Bowl. Don't miss an attraction such as this when you live so near.

Admission \$1.47 plus tax

*Lionel Hampton's appearances at the Surf in 1951 and 1952 were occasions that resulted in lawsuits brought by African Americans who had been denied admission to the Surf. From Mason City Globe-Gazette, June 15, 1951.*

Some news coverage in northern Iowa newspapers drew attention to the fact that Patterson and Bennett's suit was being bankrolled by the UPWA and that, consequently, these "outsiders" were forcing their progressive views of racial equality and integration onto the community. Ultimately, Andersen was acquitted by an all-white jury, which consisted of five retired men and one female homemaker. A week after the verdict, the *Des Moines Register* published a letter to the editor sent by Esther Walls from New York City.

The so-called civil rights case held in Mason City regarding the refusal of the Surf Ballroom management to admit Negroes is another blot on Iowa's good name. It recalls the incident in Sioux City when a soldier of Indian ancestry was refused burial in a cemetery there. It also makes one feel that sentiments in Iowa regarding racial justice and equality are not so different from those one would expect to find in a rural Mississippi town. The decision, which allows the management to decide who shall enter based on whether or not such individuals fit in with the social group in attendance is a travesty of justice. Iowans should bow their heads in shame.<sup>34</sup>

The UPWA, however, resolved to keep fighting against discrimination at the Surf, and the owner's win was short lived. A year later, in November 1953, Mrs. John Amos of Mason City, again with the help of the UPWA, filed suit against the Surf ownership for denying her admittance to the ballroom on December 8, 1951. On the evening in question, Mr. and Mrs. Amos, along with six other African Americans, wanted to attend a Lionel Hampton concert but were stopped at the door. This time, the case was heard in federal court, and the judge ruled that a ballroom was indeed a place of amusement and thus was subject to civil rights law. Although Mr. and Mrs. Amos won only a \$400 judgment of the \$10,000 they sought, their victory was significant. From 1939 to 1950, Iowans brought 22 civil rights cases to court. Of those, only three resulted in a conviction and/or fine. Additionally, national publications like *Jet* magazine took notice of the legal win. The *Des Moines Register* also published an editorial that recapped the case and commented on the significance of the decision within the context of the broader civil rights movement at the time. "This time, discrimination was rebuked and civil rights triumphed. It still takes a lot of persistence and a lot of help for a Negro to get the rights the state has guaranteed to him since 1884 and the federal government longer than that—but nowadays, that persistence and that support are beginning to show up."<sup>35</sup>

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34. Esther Walls, "A Civil Rights Case and Iowa Ballroom," *Des Moines Register*, 9/28/1952. For the Sioux City incident Walls refers to, see Thomas A. Britten and Larry W. Burt, "The Sergeant John R. Rice Incident and the Paradox of Indian Civil Rights," *Annals of Iowa* 63 (2004), 279-310.

35. "'Rights' Jury Awards \$400," *Des Moines Register*, 11/25/1953; George William McDaniel, "Trying Iowa's Civil Rights Act in Davenport: The Case of Charles and Ann Toney," *Annals of Iowa* 60 (2001), 235-36; "Award \$400 to Iowa

These court cases laid bare the ugly reality of racism in the northern half of the United States.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Clear Lake, although the community had promoted a progressive image of itself for decades (beginning with the era of the chautauquas), it also embodied what Gunnar Myrdal, in his 1944 landmark book, *An American Dilemma*, termed “the social paradox of the North,” namely, that “almost everybody is against discrimination in general but, at the same time, almost everybody practices discrimination in his own personal affairs.”<sup>37</sup> The Surf unfortunately illustrated that very paradox of northern racism precisely at the moment when the national struggle for civil rights was gaining significant momentum.

### The Winter Dance Party

The winds of cultural change in the 1950s extended as well to the growing influence and economic clout of America’s teenagers. At the Surf those developments culminated with the infamous Winter Dance Party at decade’s end. As Thomas Hine notes, “The roughly two and a half decades from immediately before World War II to the beginning of Vietnam—from the adolescence of Andy Hardy to that of Gidget—might be termed the classic period of the American teenager.”<sup>38</sup> Teens as a distinct group had enjoyed a new sort of recognition since the 1940s, perhaps most vividly marked by the inaugural issue of *Seventeen* magazine in September 1944. Northern Iowa was not immune to the increasing spending power of teens. In April 1957, for example, the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* included many advertisements for movie theaters, restaurants, and other dance halls throughout the region

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Woman Barred from Dance,” *Jet*, 12/17/1953, 6; “A Victory for Civil Rights in Iowa,” *Des Moines Register*, 11/26/1953.

36. Historians too often overlook racism in the North and Midwest. As Thomas Sugrue has noted, “The exclusion of the North—or its selective inclusion as a foil to the southern freedom struggle—comes at a cost. It ignores the long and intense history of racial violence and conflict in northern towns and cities.” Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, 2008), xv.

37. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 1010.

38. Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience* (New York, 1999), 225.

clearly targeted at teen audiences. The local drive-in movie theater frequently featured rock 'n' roll-themed weekends, playing the music of Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, and Pat Boone nightly and offering autographed photo and record giveaways.<sup>39</sup>

At the Surf, many of the dances had long drawn youthful, energetic crowds, but those crowds were beginning to grow older. Indeed, the venue seemed to resist shifting musical tastes (much as it had resisted racial integration after it was sold in 1946) and continued to book many of the same acts it had hired in the 1930s and 1940s. On May 11, 1956, however, manager Carroll Anderson announced weekly teen dances to be held during the summer months. A year later, the television program *American Bandstand* debuted on ABC. Featuring clean-cut teenagers and the perpetually peppy, youthful Dick Clark as the host, the show effectively sold rock 'n' roll to Middle America. Although the program did feature artists of color, including Chuck Berry, Frankie Lymon, and an up-and-coming Latino singer from southern California, Ritchie Valens, it was not as progressive in the realm of civil rights as it appeared to be. Officially integrated in 1957, *American Bandstand* featured only one African American couple dancing before the cameras (in a sea of white teenagers), and of course they could only dance with each other.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Surf continued to book primarily middle-of-the-road orchestras and big bands, musical acts that occasionally offered something a little edgier began to appear. Spike Jones, an entertainer known for pushing the boundaries of his music into both the satirical and experimental, appeared on March 12, 1956 (a Monday night). The advertisement proclaimed that there would be "Dancing until 1 a.m."<sup>41</sup> Apparently, Jones's popularity at the time allowed for a very late-running performance—on a school night, no less! Acts targeted specifically at teens included local radio disc jockeys who spun the latest rock 'n' roll hits and a lo-

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39. See, for example, advertisements in the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 4/26/1957.

40. "Weekly Teen Dances to Begin at Surf," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 5/11/1956; Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, 40. See also Matthew L. Delmont, *The Nicest Kids in Town: American Bandstand, Rock 'n' Roll, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in 1950s Philadelphia* (Los Angeles, 2012).

41. *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 3/12/1956.

cal group known as Jack Rockufeler and the Records who made many appearances at the Surf in the latter half of the decade.<sup>42</sup>

The local newspaper also reflected national anxieties about youth culture and the increasing popularity of artists who embraced rock 'n' roll, especially Elvis Presley. Although Presley never performed at the Surf, his profile nationally was prominent enough that his influence was felt even in small-town Iowa. In December 1956 the *Globe-Gazette's* editorial page included a reprinted column by Ed Creagh (distributed by the Associated Press) titled "An Elvis Presley Century." Creagh lamented the state of the country, tying Elvis's popularity to atomic anxiety and what he perceived as a general national malaise linked to increasing consumerism and misplaced values.

History may say that this sideburned youth who wriggles his hips while singing popular songs was a symbol of this time—that this century does a lot of wiggling and squirming without getting anywhere. Try to imagine a Presley in the 1800s when tougher people than we were forging the world we seem to be dithering away. But let's not be too hard on Presley. Doubtless he does the best he can, and nobody should interfere with his right to do it. But when the American people shell out over a million dollars a year to watch him do it—. Well, leave it at that. Maybe this is an Elvis Presley century.<sup>43</sup>

This writer's column on Elvis spoke to larger concerns related to juvenile delinquency and the general state of America's young people across the nation. A month before the *Globe-Gazette* published "An Elvis Presley Century," it had reprinted portions of an article by FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who cited statistics from 1955 showing that 42 percent of major crimes were committed by individuals under the age of 18. Hoover blamed parents, specifically "parental incompetence and indifference . . . for youthful behavior problems."<sup>44</sup> In reality, most historians agree, the hype

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42. "Dick Co-Ette '1957's Top Disc Jockey,'" *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 9/19/1957.

43. Ed Creagh, "Roving Reporter: An Elvis Presley Century," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 12/13/1956.

44. E.A.N., "Straws: Showing Which Way the Wind Blows," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 11/9/1956. See also Jennifer R. Terry, "Cultivating Healthy Personalities: Iowa and the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth," *Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 130–63.

and hysteria over juvenile delinquency was unfounded, but it did become ripe fodder for cultural expressions of youthful restlessness in such arenas as film, comic books, fashion, and, of course, music. At the same time, as Joshua Garrison notes, intense currents of atomic anxiety led to Cold War “Youth Scare” rhetoric from adults seeking to regulate the morality and perceived degradation of America’s young people.<sup>45</sup>

Northern Iowa was hardly a hotbed of youthful rebellion. When the Surf was not hosting musical acts, it was used primarily for a wide range of regional events, thus contributing to a shared sense of community identity and civic engagement. In January 1957, for example, the ballroom became the venue for the “Teens against Polio” benefit at which a “North Iowa Polio Queen” was chosen, with all proceeds awarded to the March of Dimes. Much as in the war years a decade prior, the Surf played an important role in bringing individuals from across the region together to fight a different sort of insidious evil that had preyed upon the nation’s youth for decades.<sup>46</sup>

By decade’s end, members of the first wave of baby boomers were turning 13, and the demographics of the country had transformed so that there were now many more residents under the age of 20 than over the age of 40. Now that the teenaged population had become substantial, it was clear that this demographic group had, in the words of Victor Brooks, “developed a distinctive appearance, musical taste, and vocabulary that overshadowed even the decidedly youth-oriented Jazz Age and swing years.”<sup>47</sup> And, although the Surf continued to host musicians that seemingly belonged to the earlier eras of jazz, big bands, and swing, in the winter of 1959 manager Carroll Anderson readily agreed at the last minute to add the Surf to the “Winter Dance Party” tour, which showcased a group of young rock ‘n’ roll artists not much older than their core audience.

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45. Joshua Garrison, “The Teenage Terror in the Schools’: Adult Fantasies, American Youth, and Classroom Scare Films during the Cold War,” *American Educational History Journal* 36 (2009), 3-21.

46. “Will Choose Polio Queen,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 1/29/1957.

47. Victor Brooks, *Last Season of Innocence: The Teen Experience in the 1960s* (Lanham, MD, 2012), 9, 21.

CLEAR LAKE IOWA WINDGRAPES THE FINEST BANDS **Surf**  
 FRI., Jan. 20th MIDWEST CARAVAN  
 Sat., Jan. 21st **RAY LEWIS**  
 And His Orchestra  
 MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2nd — DANCING 8 TO 12 P. M.  
**WINTER DANCE PARTY**  
**BUDDY HOLLY**  
 and THE **CRICKETS**  
 "PROUD BOY"  
**BIG BOPPER** "CHANTILLY LACE"  
**FRANKIE SARDO** "THE OUT"  
**FRANKIE SARDO** "THE OUT"  
**RITCHIE VALENS** "DYNAMITE" "COME ON, LET'S GO"  
**DION** and THE **BELMONTS** "I WONDER WHY"  
 For Ages 12 to 21. This All-Star Cast  
 Bob Hale to M.C. & Spin Records. Adm. \$1.25; Checking 35¢

*The Winter Dance Party was promoted in the Mason City Globe Gazette in the days before the famous concert on February 2, 1959. From Mason City Globe-Gazette, January 28, 1959.*

Organized on a shoestring budget by the General Artists Corporation, a group of unscrupulous record promoters, the Winter Dance Party is most remembered for the three performers who never made it out of Iowa: Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J. P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson. Other artists on the bill included Dion DiMucci (of Dion and the Belmonts), Frankie Sardo, and Waylon Jennings, who played bass in Holly's band. The touring conditions were terrible, with very little thought given to the geographic distance between concert venues, exacerbated by harsh winter weather. As the group crisscrossed Wisconsin, the heating system in one of the buses quit working; another bus broke down near Ironwood, Michigan. Holly's drummer, Carl Bunch, suffered

frostbite on his feet and needed to be hospitalized. Leaving the buses and Bunch behind, the musicians boarded a train to Green Bay and performed as planned on February 1, 1959. The performance at the Surf was scheduled for the next day. The bands arrived in Clear Lake via that unheated bus, pulling up an hour before show time. Despite the last-minute booking, ticket sales were robust; about 1,300 fans turned out to see the show despite the cold weather and a Monday night performance.<sup>48</sup>

Upon arrival in Clear Lake, Holly – fed up, exhausted, and fighting a cold – made arrangements to charter a private plane to the next stop, Moorhead, Minnesota, in order to avoid the ten-plus-hour ride in that same unheated bus that awaited the group at the conclusion of the show. A local company, Dwyer’s Flying Service, housed a single-engine, four-passenger Beechcraft Bonanza airplane. Owner Jerry Dwyer was unavailable to fly, so instead a 21-year-old, less experienced pilot named Roger Peterson got the assignment. As a result of the combination of Peterson’s inexperience and the weather conditions, the plane crashed into a cornfield less than five minutes into the flight. The pilot and all three passengers were killed instantly.<sup>49</sup>

Dwyer discovered the plane wreckage the next morning. Crash investigators and a photographer for the *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter* arrived on the scene shortly thereafter. A rather gruesome pair of photographs showing the bodies of the men strewn about the wreckage appeared on the newspaper’s front page on February 5, 1959. A week later, the same paper printed a request from a teenaged Ritchie Valens fan in Illinois who wished to have crash photographs sent to him personally.<sup>50</sup>

Today in Clear Lake, several antique shops along Main Street feature yellowing copies of the newspaper with images of the crash, appealing to a macabre fascination with how these men perished. And yet the plane crash is only one piece of a bigger picture that includes how the cultural memory of the Winter Dance Party has evolved since that bitterly cold night in February.

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48. Kevin Romig, “Not Fade Away: The Geographic Dimensions of Buddy Holly’s Meteoric Career,” *Journal of Texas Music History* 11 (2011), 12.

49. Ibid.

50. *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter*, 2/5/1959, 2/12/1959.



*One local antique shop in downtown Clear Lake contains a Winter Dance Party corner of memorabilia, including promotional photographs of Holly, Valens, and Richardson and framed images of the plane crash. Author's photograph.*

In the immediate aftermath, Clear Lake, and northern Iowa more broadly, moved on relatively quickly. On February 4, the *Globe-Gazette* noted that these “Dead Rock ‘n’ Roll Stars Had Many Fans” in Mason City, and the reporter interviewed several record-store owners in town to verify that claim.<sup>51</sup> Most press coverage at the time noted that the entertainers were young and that they were “all on the way up as singers.” Holly had the most established career, having toured in England for 25 days in 1958. Several years later, the Beatles discussed Holly’s influence on their band’s style and musical sound.

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51. Dave Dale, “Record Sales Go Up: Dead Rock ‘n’ Roll Stars Had Many Fans in City,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/4/1959.

The *Globe-Gazette* article about the victims' popularity shared space with a much larger advertisement for the Surf's next concert, one featuring Jules Herman and his Orchestra on the occasion of a "Pre-Lenten Benefit Dance." In the immediate months, and then years, after the crash, shows went on at the Surf as usual without much reflection or mourning.

### Decline, Nostalgia, and Resurgence in the 1960s–1980s

As America and the Surf Ballroom entered the 1960s, the venue's popularity declined. As musical tastes continued to evolve, the advent of "liquor by the drink" contributed to the venue's steep drop-off in attendance.<sup>52</sup> That change in Iowa law in 1963 allowed bands to play in small bars, thus drawing patrons away from ballrooms. As a result, the youthful crowds, the couples out for a night on the town, and the summer tourists did not flock to the Surf as they once had. One business leader plainly stated, "The Surf needs something in addition to the ballroom itself, because dancing is dying out."<sup>53</sup>

By 1967, the future looked bleak. Longtime manager Carroll Anderson moved on from his position at the Surf. Some city leaders raised the possibility of turning it into a convention center, but the plan failed and the Surf closed later that fall. An insurance company took ownership for several years while no one in town was quite sure what to do with what seemed to be an aging relic of a bygone era. In 1970 a group of local investors purchased it, but still there seemed to be little consensus on how the Surf might evolve with the changing needs of the community.<sup>54</sup>

In 1974, however, its future as a key site of nostalgia and cultural memory began to take shape. That year, a local businessman, Rex Livingston, agreed to lease the Surf from the group of investors with the goal of bringing back regularly scheduled Sat-

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52. For the debates that led to this change in Iowa law, see Jerry Harrington, "Iowa's Last Liquor Battle: Governor Harold E. Hughes and the Liquor-by-the-Drink Conflict," *Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 1–46.

53. "Surf's Future Is Discussed: Backing Sought on Proposed Convention Center," *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter*, 3/18/1967.

54. "Surf Ballroom Manager, Carroll Anderson, Resigns," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 1/11/1967; Morf, *Clear Lake, Iowa*, 119.

urday night dances.<sup>55</sup> In the intervening years, the Surf had been used primarily for private events. Livingston's timing reflected the first wave of 1950s nostalgia that began to grip the nation.

The resurgence of 1950s-style rock music began in the late 1960s, when Frank Zappa and his band, The Mothers of Invention, recorded a doo-wop-style concept album, *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets*, in 1968. It received a good amount of radio airplay, outperforming previous Zappa albums on mainstream radio stations. A year later the group Sha Na Na performed at Woodstock preceding Jimi Hendrix. The popular reception of the group's simultaneous celebration and parodying of 1950s rock 'n' roll prefigured the cultural nostalgia of the next decade.

Films and television in the 1970s displayed the appeal of nostalgia for the 1950s. In 1973 George Lucas's semiautobiographical coming-of-age drama, *American Graffiti*, featured an expansive 1950s rock 'n' roll soundtrack and placed a kind of nostalgic sheen on the youth culture of the late 1950s and early 1960s. A year later *Happy Days* made its debut and ran successfully on ABC for the next decade, romanticizing the same decade. The release of *Grease* in 1978 and its subsequent popularity at the box office rounded out a decidedly nostalgia-fueled 1970s popular culture. All of these examples celebrated the 1950s as a time of lost innocence and were hugely popular with audiences that were suffering through the disillusion surrounding the Vietnam War and Watergate.

Along with film and television recasting of the 1950s as a simpler, purer period in American history, the lives and musical contributions of Holly, Valens, and Richardson once again became fodder for the culture industry. In 1971 folk-rock singer Don McLean released "American Pie," a lengthy ballad that was at once profoundly personal and national in scope. Perhaps more than any other artist, McLean, with his lyrics about "the day the music died," reintroduced the dead musicians to a new generation of fans while simultaneously tapping into a national collective nostalgia. Several years later, in 1978, the film version of Holly's life, *The Buddy Holly Story*, was released to critical acclaim. A young Gary Busey earned an Academy Award nomination for his portrayal of the singer.

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55. "Surf Bringing Back Dances," *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter*, 10/29/1974.

All of this cultural nostalgia laid the groundwork for a concert held at the Surf Ballroom in February 1979, the twentieth anniversary of the plane crash. Billed as a “Buddy Holly Tribute Concert,” it was organized by local radio personality Daryl Hensley, otherwise known as the “Mad Hatter.” He took out a \$20,000 loan and used the money to round up a cavalcade of acts deemed contemporaries of Holly’s, including Del Shannon, the Drifters, and Nicky Sullivan, one of the original Crickets. Disc jockey Wolfman Jack (fairly well known at the time because of his association with the film *American Graffiti*, and, by default, 1950s rock ‘n’ roll) served as the master of ceremonies for the evening. It was such a success that the Surf played host to a second such concert the following year. The 1980 concert added former teen heartthrob Rick (Ricky) Nelson to the lineup. By that point, the Buddy Holly Memorial Society had formed and boasted 3,000 members from across the country.<sup>56</sup>

The 1980s brought more 1950s nostalgia to American popular culture. The film *Back to the Future* (1985) comically mined 1955 for laughs. *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986), another 1950s-era time-travel-themed melodrama, was released a year later. That same year, a headline on *Esquire’s* cover read, “America on the Rerun,” commenting on the singer Madonna’s recent impersonation of Marilyn Monroe for her “Material Girl” music video, the enduring popularity of Ralph Kramden, and, of course, President Reagan’s “matinee” image. Indeed, as Michael Dwyer has argued, “the ‘Gipper’ relied on the ability to evoke the mythic Fifties small-town America depicted in film, television, and other forms of popular media—an America that featured a booming consumer economy, military strength, domestic stability, dominant ‘family values,’ and national optimism and belief in the ‘American Way.’”<sup>57</sup> Reagan certainly was not the first public figure to do this, but he was especially effective at harnessing nostalgia for the decade.

Against this backdrop, the Surf again gained national prominence in 1987. Douglas Martin, writing for the *New York Times*, published a sentimental travelogue taking readers down memory

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56. “Buddy Holly Tribute a Smashing Success,” *Clear Lake Mirror Reporter*, 2/7/1979; “Holly Tribute Begins Tonight,” *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 2/1/1980.

57. Michael Dwyer, *Back to the Fifties: Nostalgia, Hollywood Film, and Popular Music of the Seventies and Eighties* (New York, 2015), 1-2.



*In 1988 a section of street in front of the Surf was renamed Buddy Holly Place. In 2009 one segment of North Shore Drive was renamed Ritchie Valens Drive. Author's photograph.*

lane and waxing nostalgic about the “ghosts of the past” that haunt the ballroom. “On the sweeping maple dance floor of the Surf Ballroom, love and memory mix magically, then linger like the swirling, cloudlike light patterns on the ceiling. . . . From Basie to the Beach Boys, America’s music has waltzed, jitterbugged, twisted, and boogied through the Surf Ballroom. In more subdued fashion, it still does.”<sup>58</sup>

Martin went on to highlight the annual Winter Dance Party and the many visitors who came to the Surf from across the country, many of whom were “older.” Martin’s rediscovery of the Surf may also have had something to do with popular culture. At the time of publication, *La Bamba* (1987), a feature film depicting the life of Ritchie Valens, was doing well at the box office.<sup>59</sup>

58. Douglas Martin, “Ghosts of Past Haunt Floor of Old Ballroom,” *New York Times*, 9/18/1987.

59. *Ibid.*

A year later, civic boosters in Clear Lake made noticeable changes on the landscape that specifically recognized the three musicians. A plaque was placed just outside the door to the Surf commemorating Holly, Richardson, and Valens, and a street nearby was renamed "Buddy Holly Place."

### **Dark Tourism and the Desire for Authenticity**

The Surf's enduring popularity in the American cultural imagination is notable for another reason as well. A fascination with the macabre, or "dark tourism," has long persisted in American culture. From holocaust museums to the World Trade Center Museum and Memorial, visitors often feel compelled to visit sites of death and trauma. As Marita Sturken notes, "By visiting these places, tourists can feel that they have experienced a connection to these traumatic events and have gained a trace of authenticity by extension." Several other scholars have explored the topic in recent years. Chris Rojek's articulation of the term *Black Spots* is helpful for further defining the interest tourists have in the Surf and the crash site. Put simply, Black Spots are places where the famous have met their end. Rojek focuses primarily on the stretch of California highway where the actor James Dean met his demise. Members of the James Dean Fan Club commemorate the tragic event every year by retracing the route he took. Black Spots that are especially notable in the history of rock 'n' roll include Graceland (although the bathroom where Elvis died is not on the official tour), the Dakota apartment complex where ex-Beatle John Lennon was assassinated by crazed fan Mark David Chapman, and Room 100 of the Chelsea Hotel, where Sex Pistols bassist Sid Vicious allegedly stabbed his lover Nancy Spungen to death.<sup>60</sup>

In 1988, the same year that civic boosters began to capitalize on the musicians' link to the Surf more visibly around Clear Lake, a fan from Portersfield, Wisconsin, Ken Paquette, fashioned a stainless steel memorial in the shape of a guitar with three accompanying records etched with the artists' names, their biggest

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60. Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, NC, 2007), 11; Melanie Smith, Nicola MacLeod, and Margaret Hart Robertson, *Key Concepts in Tourist Studies* (Los Angeles, 2010), 35–36; Chris Rojek, *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel* (New York, 1993), 137–45.



*A stainless steel memorial to Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J. P. Richardson erected by fan Ken Paquette marks the spot where the ill-fated plane came to rest in a north Iowa cornfield. Author's photograph.*

hits, and the recording labels. This monument now marks the crash site in a cornfield about five miles north of town. Before the memorial was created, fans would often come out to the field and leave flowers and other offerings along the fence line.<sup>61</sup> In 2009 landowner Jeff Nicholas took an extra step by commissioning a local artist to create a giant metal pair of black-rimmed glasses (like Holly's) that now marks the roadside for the benefit of visitors.<sup>62</sup> Today, fans leave all manner of ephemera at the crash memorial, including black-rimmed glasses, money, LPs and 45s, toy guitars, handwritten messages, and even undergarments.

University of Iowa musicologist Donna Parsons noted of the plane crash site, "I know this sounds macabre, but Buddy Holly's

61. "Paying Tribute," *Des Moines Register*, 2/2/2009.

62. Peggy Senzarino, "Glasses Mark Path to Crash Site," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 1/28/2009.



*The addition of a giant sculpture of a pair of horn-rimmed glasses commissioned by landowner Jeff Nicholas in 2009 has made the crash site easier to spot along the rural road five miles north of Clear Lake. Author's photograph.*

DNA is in that ground, their spirits are there.”<sup>63</sup> Parsons’s remark helps us understand why fans feel so compelled to visit the crash site, and reveals as well the decades-old interest in how the musicians died, beginning with that young fan who requested photographs of the crash from the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* a week after it happened. In contrast to 1959, when the reaction to the plane crash was more muted (especially from a local perspective), the visual and material expressions of memory have been especially pronounced since 1988, the year Paquette erected his monument at the crash site. The surge in the desire for memorialization reflected national trends as well. As cultural critic Andreas Huyssen notes, the 1990s witnessed a “memory boom,” a “resurgence of the monument and the memorial as major modes of aesthetic, historical, and spatial expression.”<sup>64</sup>

63. Tom Snee, “Not Fade Away: Buddy Holly’s Spirit Lives on in Clear Lake,” *Iowa Now*, 7/19/2013.

64. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, 1995), 3.

While Don McLean's "American Pie" aided in the recasting of the Surf and the crash site as sacred to rock 'n' roll fans as early as 1971, each anniversary of the Winter Dance Party since 1979 has accelerated the process. In February 2009, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the crash, the *Globe-Gazette* ran a photograph on the front page showing tourists tramping through deep snow out in that cornfield to get to the memorial. The headline read simply, "Pilgrimage." That term has been used historically to describe a religious journey that results in some sort of personal transformation. Of dark tourism in particular, "it can be said that people make pilgrimages to sites of tragedy in order to pay tribute to the dead and to feel transformed in some way in relation to that place."<sup>65</sup>

The 2009 *Globe-Gazette* article also demonstrates a generational orientation to the way cultural memory is created and maintained among baby boomers and their children. A photograph featured Charles City natives Dennis and Brad Tierney, a father and son united in their love for Buddy Holly. Son Brad states in the article that "he inherited his love for Holly and other early rock 'n' roll performers from his baby boomer parents." He is pictured wearing a Holly-style pair of black-rimmed glasses while his father wears his '61 high school letterman jacket.<sup>66</sup> As Erika Doss writes, "For many Americans, memory is defined by generational recollections of traumatic historical moments."<sup>67</sup> While the plane crash that killed Holly, Richardson, and Valens was not as transformative a moment as, say, the world wars or the Kennedy assassination, how it was memorialized in popular culture decades after the event contributes to its mythology. McLean's ballad certainly spoke to musical fans from the baby boomer generation that, at their oldest, would have been 13. McLean himself was that age when the plane crash occurred.

Since 1979's first tribute concert, the Surf has hosted a "Winter Dance Party" every year. It continues to draw legions of fans from across the nation and the world. Increasingly, those fans

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65. "Pilgrimage," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 1/31/2009; Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 11, 46.

66. Mary Pieper, "Love of Music Draws Holly Fans from Near and Far," *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, 1/29/2009.

67. Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago, 2010), 49.

have become a more intergenerational group—as they must if the ballroom is to sustain itself for the future. Upon the occasion of my own recent visit, I observed a young man in his thirties browsing in the gift shop with his young daughter as reproduction Winter Dance Party posters, poodle skirts, and cat-eye glasses were offered for sale.

Indeed, the Surf has undergone a transformation and rebirth, with a painstaking restoration now close to complete. In 2008 management of the Surf shifted to the North Iowa Cultural Center and Museum, a nonprofit entity that offers the all-volunteer board and executive director more flexibility in applying for grants along with a tax-exempt status. In 2009 the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame named the Surf a national landmark; two years later it was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With that designation, an extensive museum was developed that now includes information, photographs, and artifacts on display for visitors. While the story of the Winter Dance Party from 1959 is the main focus, the ballroom's earlier history is not ignored; countless photographs of performers from the 1930s to the present hang throughout the ballroom.

On the occasion of my visit, historic preservationists were at work painstakingly repainting pineapples on the wall as they worked to restore the old murals. The polished maple dance floor, the elevated stage, and vibrant, colorful paintings of Holly, Richardson, and Valens hang prominently across from the stage. Elsewhere, the tropical theme is on display as the booths surrounding the dance floor look as if they should be filled with girls in poodle skirts and boys with duck tails. Nearby, the dedication speech given by a representative from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in February 2009 is printed in its entirety for the benefit of visitors:

Fifty Winters Later, we also remember that rock and roll history couldn't just be told from the perspective of New York or Cleveland, Memphis or New Orleans. Rock and Roll radiated out into places like Montevideo, Minnesota and Clear Lake, Iowa and shook up a generation of kids who poured out of their houses to see the real thing. The musicians battled grueling conditions to make it happen. From opening night in Milwaukee to the show in Clear Lake, the group played eleven nights in a row and covered 2,600 miles in

frigid temperatures, hitting mainly small towns. Tours like the Winter Dance Party gave kids a chance to imagine themselves on stage, singing or playing the guitar—maybe even writing songs. Kids like Bob Zimmerman (later Bob Dylan), who traveled from Hibbing, Minnesota to see the show at the Duluth Armory on January 31st.

Lauren Onkey, Vice President of Education and Public Programs,  
Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum

Onkey's sentiments are particularly important in that they seek to affirm the value of the midwestern small town in the promotion and dissemination of transformative culture. In the broader context of music history, the Surf Ballroom has played an important role in that dissemination of culture, even if the civic boosters of Clear Lake were somewhat slow to officially recognize its significance.

## Conclusion

The Surf Ballroom now serves as the cornerstone for Clear Lake's image, although the small town's civic boosters have long been effective in marketing it as a vacation wonderland in a state with few natural lakes and watersheds. Brochures and postcards featuring sailing, fishing, carnivals, marching band concerts, and, of course, dance halls long ago replaced materials promoting the Chautauqua. Throughout the decades, however, the character of the community has always retained a kind of wholesome flavor as the solidly middle-class playground of northern Iowa.

Nostalgia is powerfully and skillfully utilized in Clear Lake, especially during the peak summer months when classic car shows occur once a month and the Surf offers a range of concerts targeted primarily at baby boomers. The venue's 2018 acts suggest that perhaps the Surf has evolved a bit generationally in the kind of musical nostalgia it works to perpetuate. A tribute concert to Prince in celebration of what would have been his 60th birthday, the once edgy rock band Kiss, the Devon Allman (son of Gregg Allman) Project, and a constantly rotating lineup of big bands, including the still active Jan Garber Orchestra, round out the spring/summer schedule. Nostalgia has, of course, obscured the uglier side of Clear Lake's past, that of racism and the outright denial of civil rights to African Americans. There is also a

darker element of tourism at work in Clear Lake: the macabre kind of “death tourism” that compels visitors to peer at yellowing newspaper accounts of the accident that still hang in Clear Lake’s many antique shops and to head out to the plane crash site.

The question looming over the Surf’s enduring popularity is whether the venue would still exist at all without the tragic deaths of Holly, Richardson, and Valens and the resulting mythology that surrounds them. Fox’s two other ballrooms, the Terp and the Prom, closed their doors long ago. The reality is that Clear Lake’s now very visible commemoration and promotion of the Surf would not have occurred without the demand and desire of outsiders — music fans — who seek an authentic connection with 1959. Consequently, the story of the Surf Ballroom raises all sorts of fascinating questions related to the shaping of public memory, the meaning of authenticity, and the role popular culture plays in commemoration. It also reveals how generational shifts in cultural taste have a significant impact on how history is interpreted and valued, whether that history is local, regional, or national in scope.

# Transplanted – Edward Hopper in Cedar Rapids, Grant Wood in New York City: A Review Essay

BARBARA CHING

TENSION between rural and urban outlooks continues to shape American culture long after Grant Wood and other Regionalist painters brought images of the countryside and its inhabitants to big-city galleries and museums. Wood called that movement a “Revolt against the City,” a topic of particular interest both in the mid-twentieth century, when dust storms and the Great Depression displaced so many rural Americans, and now, when American politics and culture are riven by our fixation on broad red and blue brush strokes. Interrelated recent exhibits devoted to Grant Wood at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City and to Edward Hopper at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art create new understanding of what Regionalist art shows us and what it means to be part of a regional community.

The Whitney and Cedar Rapids exhibits speak to each other specifically since the Whitney lent nine paintings and four etchings from its collection for *Edward Hopper: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York* (in Cedar Rapids, February 3–May 20, 2018) in exchange for the 27 works that Cedar Rapids contributed to *Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables* (in New York City, March 2–June 10, 2018). Although the Cedar Rapids exhibit did not call attention to the fact, Wood’s career spanned just the middle of Hopper’s; Hopper, born in 1882, began

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THE ANNALS OF IOWA 78 (Spring 2019). © State Historical Society of Iowa, 2019.

exhibiting in 1906, when Wood was 15 years old. Hopper died in his studio in 1967, 25 years after Wood was buried. Nevertheless, the two artists reached career peaks nearly simultaneously albeit a thousand miles apart. Hopper exhibited in the first *Whitney Museum Annual* (1932) and every subsequent one until his death. (That Whitney tradition became a biennial event in 1973.) In 1933 the Museum of Modern Art mounted a retrospective of his work. Outside of the New York orbit, Wood, too, experienced a rapid artistic ascent in the 1930s, vaulting from entering Iowa State Fair art competitions to national renown for *American Gothic*, his 1930 third-place entry in the Chicago Art Institute's annual juried show.

*Hopper: Selections from the Whitney* focused on Hopper's early career (1906–1933) and included none of his masterpieces. The time frame excluded *Nighthawks* (1942), the urban counterpart of *American Gothic*, but its absence did not erase its image in the context of the works on display. The ability to capture ineffably American scenes links Hopper to Wood, as does their shared rejection of modern, non-representational art. Yet the Regionalist movement fueled its engine not only by rejecting European traditions and trends but also by separating itself from the East Coast art establishment, Hopper included. In turn, Hopper believed that “the Midwestern painters . . . caricatured America.”<sup>1</sup>

In light of this mutual rejection, the differences between the lonely late-night diner in New York City and the incongruous gothic window on an Iowa farmhouse reveal important ways to appreciate each artist. The large well-lit window in *Nighthawks* lets you look in, lets you look at people who don't see you. (That invisibility may be one of the reasons the painting is so often parodied by replacing the diner's self-absorbed customers with self-absorbed dead celebrities.) In contrast, the small curtained gothic window in *American Gothic* bars your eyes while the farm couple meets your gaze, makes you feel judged. In turn, they protect themselves from your judgments and preconceptions with that curtain and a pitchfork. This painting, too, has sparked countless parodies that replace the man and woman with couples whose role in American culture spark controversy. Therein lies the midwestern mystique that Grant Wood unleashed, turning on an elemental

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1. Cited in Wieland Schmied, *Edward Hopper: Portraits of America* (Munich, 1995), 8.

question: how do we see the hands that feed us and the ones who lead us? In *Nighthawks*, the cook is almost literally beneath notice, squatting behind the counter, looking up at the customers, whereas the farmers in *American Gothic* stand stiffly upright, holding their equal creation self-evident.

The Cedar Rapids show revealed the divergence between Hopper and Wood through a focus on geography: the exhibit implicitly contrasts Hopper's East Coast cosmopolitanism with Wood's "homebodyhood." Like Wood, Hopper painted scenes from France early in his career, and, like Wood, he lost interest in being an artist in the expatriate style. But post-Paris, Hopper worked in more varied venues than Wood — Manhattan, Vermont, and Cape Cod, among others — although his distancing perspective remained a constant.

Sequenced chronologically, the show opened with *Stairway at 48 rue de Lille* (1906), a claustrophobic gray-toned painting of a Paris interior. The etchings, all about the size of a piece of typing paper and inherently limited in color, create more gloom. *Rural Scene* (1920) shows a scrawny trio of cows coming home. They're crossing a railroad track to get there. The viewer's point of view, along with the etcher's, is a distant one: you're far from the tracks, probably on the right side of them, much farther from the inhospitable, possibly empty house that the cows are approaching. The landscape, such as it is, looks stunted: sere grass along the tracks and a blur of unimpressive trees on the horizon.

The urban scenes on view capture similar emptiness and disengagement. In the etching *Night Shadows* (1921), the viewer looks down on a man striding through a deserted street. The man keeps his head down. You see his back in full. One log-like shadow, emerging from the upper story of the building as well as from the entrance, breaks the street in two, just as the railroad track divides *Rural Scene*. In *The Balcony* (1928, alternately titled *The Movies*), you survey the sparsely attended theater from the upper rows, looking down on the backs of two viewers who sit side by side yet keep their distance.

The last painting, *Cobb's Barn and Distant Houses* (1931), nearly contemporaneous with *American Gothic* (1930), shows no sign of an active farmer or farming: just trees, grass, and the buildings.

A road running between the barn and the houses puts the viewer in transit, engaged in a sort of drive-by abandonment.

In addition to displaying the Whitney loans, the Cedar Rapids Museum drew on its own collection to assemble a group of paintings by lesser-known artists who portray Hopper's favorite settings. The selections in *Hopper's World: New York, Cape Cod, and Beyond* don't so much illuminate as affirm the essentially urban perspective of Hopper's East Coast contemporaries and successors. These scenes and landscapes emerge from respite, from summer homes and beach cottages, rather than from engagement in the communities depicted.

Underwhelmed by the stingy offering from the Whitney, I went to the New York City show with the defensive eyes of, say, "a little old lady from Dubuque." Curator Barbara Haskell's introductory wall text elevated my dander by promising to show "the tension between [Wood's] desire to recapture the dream world of his childhood and his instincts as a shy, deeply repressed homosexual." No doubt curators heavily weigh their opening words, and these, in turn, weighed heavily on me. What "instincts" direct a "deeply repressed homosexual"? And what was the "dream world" of Wood's 1890s childhood? More to the point, why wouldn't Wood's dreams and instincts be as varied and volatile as anyone else's? And how does any of this add up to fables? In Haskell's introduction to the show's excellent catalog and essay collection, she uses the words *myth* and *fable* interchangeably and argues more broadly that Wood's art is best seen as self-expression: "However compelling Wood's art is as a window onto American consciousness, its enduring power lies in its mesmerizing psychological dimension. With the benefit of hindsight, it seems clear that Wood's paintings were primarily expressions of his inner life, much like those of his fellow American realist Edward Hopper."<sup>2</sup>

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2. Barbara Haskell et al., *Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables* (New York, 2018), 14. This argument apparently draws heavily on R. Tripp Evans, *Grant Wood: A Life* (New York, 2010), a fascinating and fearless biography of the artist that emphasizes the homoerotic element of Wood's vision and the troubled relationship that Wood had with his father, Francis Maryville Wood, a stern Quaker and hardworking farmer. His sudden death when Grant was 10 years old forced the family to sell their farm and move to Cedar Rapids.

I don't call attention to these statements to argue that the Whitney exhibit fails, but rather to say that it doesn't describe its achievements well—even that it understates its own achievements in a way that could be called midwestern. The show captured the fascinating, confrontational beauty of Wood's imagination and artistic realizations. I walked through the exhibit twice, then came back the next day with a Frank Sinatra mind set: Wood made it there; he could make it anywhere—not because he was like Edward Hopper but rather because the way he structures the viewer's experience, the eye contact he requires or withholds, differs so significantly. In the world outside Iowa, Wood's commitment to the state as his home and the source of his subjects adds mystery and misinterpretation to his body of work. Going well beyond the geographic setting, Wood focuses our attention on our relationship to his characteristic subjects—the pioneers whose labors made the midwestern landscape the source of our food.

This exhibit reveals more about Wood's signature patterns and designs than his deepest secrets, more about his cultural and historical context than his childhood dreams. More important, it alters our history of viewing Wood by gathering more than 100 objects from scattered museums and private collections.<sup>3</sup> I had seen the works from the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art and other Iowa museums several times, but in the Whitney exhibit I saw many other works for the first time, and all but the most ardent and well-traveled Wood aficionados would be in that position. This well-chosen accumulation created an experience that opened new perspectives on Wood's career and creativity, from his early craftwork and classroom teaching to his most renowned oil paintings, from his interior decorating to his book covers and illustrations. Large-scale installations, such as the stained-glass *Memorial Window* in Cedar Rapids's Veterans Memorial Building (1928–29) and the Iowa State University murals *Breaking the Prairie* and *Where Tillage Begins* (1934) could be viewed via video. This full spectrum revealed how Wood spent his time and used his gifts to cultivate a midwestern community and (re)present it to the world.

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3. The Whitney website hosts an excellent account of the exhibit and associated events as well as good reproductions of many of the objects on display. See <https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/GrantWood>.

The art was well displayed and thoughtfully sequenced, adjusting our lenses on even the most familiar pieces. In addition to creating thought-provoking juxtapositions, the Whitney exhibit used space generously, allowing people to look from many different angles and as up close as possible. The midwestern mystique could be seen all over — corn, cows, pigs, barns, plows, and people who appear to be thriving in communities that many people have never seen — hence the term *flyover country*.

Work embedded in a community, in public spaces and family homes, runs through Wood's career. In 1924, while working as an art teacher at McKinley Junior High School in Cedar Rapids, he engaged 45 14-year-old art students in a mural project: *The Imagination Isles*. Each boy painted a landscape scene, and Wood wrote a brief narrative for one boy to read aloud as the public witnessed the unfurling of the 28-foot-long finished project. The text promises that viewers will see "brilliantly colored trees of shapes unknown to science" and explains that as children "almost all of us" have "dream-power" but we lose it if we are not trained and encouraged in the arts — exactly what Wood was doing in the democratic space of the Cedar Rapids Public School system. The Whitney ingeniously displayed this work by having local high-school students recreate it. They hung it in a windowed room set apart from the cool, hushed, windowless galleries, suspended over the busy streets and the glittering river, reminding you as you stepped into the brightness that the museum itself, open to all, stands on an endlessly reimagined, remade island.

*The Imagination Isles* aside, the galleries displayed the art roughly in chronological order. The first room included Wood's early work as a decorator and craftsman: well-executed teapots and jewelry that he created to sell in a craft store he briefly operated with a colleague in Chicago (1914–16). The most eye-arresting work is a generically titled *Overmantel Decoration*. Mounted on a filigree mat, it's bright and banal except for the overblown, child-like rendering of trees that would come to characterize his work. A young woman, a young girl, and a baby in a buggy stand in front of their large white house and expansive lawn. The woman wears a white hoop-skirted dress and the young girl frilly white pantaloons. They wave at the man of the house as he takes leave, riding his horse and waving his top hat. Neither the time nor

place can be clearly specified: it's just the past prettified. The lawn, though expansive, shows no trace of agriculture or neighbors. Wood made it as part of an interior decoration project for the Stamats family of Cedar Rapids in 1930, the same year he painted *American Gothic*. The Whitney wall text characterizes it as a "fanciful scene . . . that speaks to [Wood's] romance with the world of his childhood"; I saw it as a picture of Wood waving goodbye to all that.

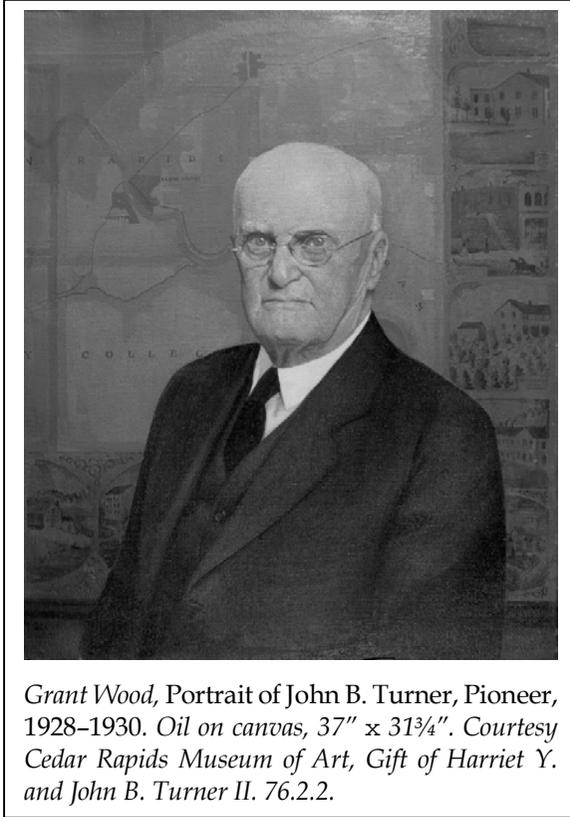
In the time he worked on the Stamats house, he also developed his distinctive style.<sup>4</sup> Iowa themes define early decorative projects such as the *Iowa Corn Room* at the Hotel Montrose in Cedar Rapids (1925) and at the Chieftain Hotel in Council Bluffs (1927), both featuring corn cob chandeliers and cornfield murals (also on display in the first room of the exhibit).

As he worked on *Overmantel*, Wood also began to paint Iowans. The level gaze of peers, so different from the vantage point in Hopper's work, shows in the portraits that hang in the next room: *John B. Turner, Pioneer* (1928), *Woman with Plants* (1930), and *American Gothic*. Wood's friends and family posed for all of them. The Turner portrait, like most commissioned images, entailed pleasing, if not flattering, a patron; Turner was the father of one of Wood's first patrons, David Turner. Most important, John Turner was the owner of the carriage house that Wood transformed into his (rent-free) studio when hearses replaced horses, rendering the hayloft available. Here Wood ingeniously crafted a small living, working, and gallery space, a sort of installation piece that he titled *5 Turner Alley* (a house number and street name of his own devising).<sup>5</sup> Wood paints Turner as if he were the owner of their patch of the state, posed in front of an 1869 map of Linn County and its county seat, Cedar Rapids. Dressed in a funeral suit, Turner isn't forbidding but he's not quite friendly: he's got real estate and gravitas, his face mirroring the lines of

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4. Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven, CT, 1983), 75.

5. This building was part of Turner Mortuary, the business interest of John B. Turner (pioneer) and his son David. Wood took charge of decorating the public areas of the mortuary business as well as his own intriguing living/studio space. Sadly, the Whitney did not exhibit any images or objects from it, although the space has become part of the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. For an illustrated account and analysis, see Jane C. Milosch, ed., *Grant Wood's Studio: Birthplace of American Gothic* (Munich, 2005).



*Grant Wood, Portrait of John B. Turner, Pioneer, 1928–1930. Oil on canvas, 37" x 31¾". Courtesy Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Gift of Harriet Y. and John B. Turner II. 76.2.2.*

settlement that the map documents. This painting won first prize at the 1929 Iowa State Fair art show, Wood's first recognition outside of Cedar Rapids, according to Barbara Haskell. She also points out that this success may have inspired Wood to paint his mother, Hattie, in *Woman with Plants* in a similar style.<sup>6</sup>

At the Whitney, that picture hung directly across from *John B. Turner*, and the wall text connected them by quoting Wood's explanation of the woman's stolid, unsmiling gaze: she has "the bleak, faraway, timeless . . . severe but generous vision of the Midwest pioneer." Like Turner, she meets you, but she doesn't greet you. As a pioneer, she's already done her part. Dressed dully in dark blue and black, she also communicates an aesthetic

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6. Haskell et al., *Grant Wood: American Gothic*, 18.

with the rickrack on her apron, her earrings, and the cameo at her throat. She arranges her potted plants around her, epitomes of the fertile landscape portrayed alongside her. The largest, a *sansevieria*, rests in her lap, while begonia and geranium flank her. Those details, in turn, link the woman with the *American Gothic* couple, not only because the model for the woman in *American Gothic* was Hattie's daughter (and Wood's sister), Nan, but also because the *sansevieria* reappears on the porch and the cameo reappears pinned above the woman's rickracked apron. The cameo, as R. Tripp Evans has noted, was a gift Wood bought in Italy. It depicts Persephone, a Greek agrarian goddess who, along with her mother, Demeter, symbolizes fertility, spring growth, and harvest.<sup>7</sup> That mythology is confirmed in Wood's 1939 lithograph *Fertility*, on display near the end of the exhibit, in which the *American Gothic* house reappears, dwarfed by a bulging barn that looms over a field of tasseling corn.

In addition to painting individuals, Wood also portrayed rural communities working for the common good. In those pictures, Wood structures our view differently. Instead of looking into the eyes of people, we see their absorption in shared labors. We're on the outside looking in as the work that feeds us – and them – gets done. *Arbor Day* (1932), *Dinner for Threshers* (1934), and the murals at Iowa State University (1934–1937) offer clear examples that most museumgoers would be seeing for the first time. *Arbor Day*, loaned from a private collection, shows children in a schoolyard, their backs turned from the viewer as they prepare to plant a sapling. The nearly treeless agricultural landscape that surrounds them highlights the value of their task, and their already green schoolyard foretells the eventual realization of their vision. *Dinner for Threshers* likewise offers a vision of community work and respite as farmhands groom and gather to eat while aproned and cameo-adorned women make it all happen by cooking and serving the products of previous harvests. They look at each other or at their plates. Although excluded, the viewer has a magical view of it all since the farmhouse interior is revealed in cross-section.

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7. Evans, *Grant Wood: A Life*, 84–88.

While working on *Dinner for Threshers*, Wood became director of the Public Works of Art Project in Iowa (which later was absorbed by the Works Project Administration). In that role, Wood designed a series of murals and guided 34 painters in the execution of a project for Iowa State University illustrating Daniel Webster's 1840 proclamation that "Where Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow." Like *Imagination Isles*, the 1,254 square feet of murals in the Iowa State University library were created through a group effort that, in turn, shows pioneers banding together to make and sustain the Midwest. On the ground floor opposite the foot of the stairs, the triptych *Breaking the Prairie* shows tillage meeting the challenging soil of the prairie where deep and dense grass roots hold the soil like chain mail. The central panel foregrounds a farmer pausing his horse and plow to drink from a jug that a woman, her eyes averted, has brought him. In the background, a farmer plows a greener field with a team of oxen. The mature hardwood trees, too, require determined rail-splitters before they give way, so Abe Lincoln lookalikes swing axes on the side panels. Opposite *Where Tillage Begins*, a grand staircase rises and murals of the arts that follow ascend. These depict subjects taught at Iowa State University: agriculture, veterinary medicine, mechanical engineering, home economics. In these murals, the people portrayed witness each other and their tasks. If these are fables, the moral of the story is community, cooperation, and an eye on posterity. The prairie breakers and university builders don't see us, as they seem to do in Wood's portraits, but with the generous gaze Wood ascribes to pioneers, they imagined us as they built the Midwest's institutions and farming economy.<sup>8</sup>

In *The American Golfer* (1940), a painting that only recently came into public circulation, Wood sets aside the generosity, bleakness, and severity he attributed to the pioneer gaze.<sup>9</sup> Art historians,

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8. Despite the serene sense of progress and cooperation projected by these murals, the painters chafed at working according to Wood's design. In September 1935 they wrote to the WPA requesting that other arrangements be considered for future projects, and when Wood learned of this matter in early October 1935, he resigned. See "Letter from the Cooperative Mural Painters Protesting Grant Wood's Leadership," in Lea Rosson DeLong, *When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow: Grant Wood and Christian Petersen Murals* (Ames, 2006), 367–68.

9. The painting was purchased at auction in 2014 by Walmart heir Alice Walton for her Crystal Bridges Museum.



Grant Wood, *The American Golfer*, 1940. Oil on board, 36½" x 48".  
 Courtesy Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas,  
 2014.33. Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

including the contributors to the exhibit catalog and biographer R. Tripp Evans, have said little about this portrait of Charles Campbell, a banker from Kalamazoo, Michigan, whose name is elided from the title in order to make a “fable” or exemplar out of the golfer. The echo effect of the titles *American Golfer* and *American Gothic* struck me immediately, and I could see both pictures at once from the corners of my eyes. In the second gallery, the *American Gothic* couple stands firmly in front of their churchy white house, while in the third gallery the *American Golfer* plays alone, the club his pitchfork and a distant white mansion his property (or his country club’s clubhouse at the very least). The grounds, with their verdant uselessness, return us to *Overmantel Decoration*. The frame, a blond wood oval with nailhead trim, echoes the golf theme as the wood of a club or the dotted surface of a golf ball (in contrast to the simple frame for *American Gothic*, streaked with barn red). Like a Hopper subject, the golfer is oblivious to human presence. Incongruously dressed in a jacket and

tie, he looks to the horizon, following his shot with a self-satisfied smile. Coincidentally, yet significantly, as an archetypal midwestern businessman, he resembles Vice-President Mike Pence. Wood accepted the commission in 1937 (judging from his dated studies for the project), a time of financial duress and personal upheaval. He painted it knowing that the immediate viewership would be limited; he even separated it from the rest of his work by shriveling one of his signature visual details: oversized, improbable tree foliage. A twig feeding three autumnal oak leaves, not falling yet unmoored from the rest of the branches, floats above the golfer's head. What acorns it produced are fallen; only an empty acorn cap hangs on. In the context of all the other works on display, this portrait is an anomaly that proves Wood's commitment to portraying the Midwest as a community and vital resource for the rest of the country.

Another portrait from 1940, perhaps the last one that Wood made, shows how persistently he relied on the style and theme he established with *John B. Turner, Pioneer*. For the cover of the September 23, 1940, issue of *Time* magazine, Wood drew [Henry A.] Wallace of Iowa, portraying a food-producing Iowan as a leader. Just announced as Franklin D. Roosevelt's running mate, Wallace looks out, a little sideways but with a gentle smile, at everyone who passes a newsstand. In the background, a farmer who looks like a young Wallace keeps his back to viewers as he bundles shocks. The title, telling us that Wallace is "of Iowa," links the two figures—one is working for our food, as Wallace does as an Iowa State University-trained farmer and as the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, while the other takes time to look at us, draw us in, perhaps lead us forward. Its appearance in *Time* magazine tells people that this candidacy is important, and Wood's rendering tells people that as a candidate, Wallace of Iowa can be trusted.

In distinguishing himself from the East Coast and European artists of his age, Wood showed not only the wary self-satisfaction that could result from the "pioneer" spirit but also the cooperative ethos and resourcefulness that turned pioneers into settlers and citizens, artists, models, and patrons. The "broken" prairie that produced golden corn and the golden corn that adorned hotel dining rooms in Iowa's cities shimmer in a continuum, the deco-

rated interior not so distinct from a painted landscape, the broken prairie looking exactly like a carpet, the broad lines made by a farmer's plow copied by a paintbrush. In the cities, artworks assembled from varying collections show community-supported artistry.

As always, what's not shown can place uncomfortable or irrepressible demands on the viewer, especially viewers from other times and places. I often visit *Where Tillage Begins* and I wonder how Wood (and his critics) could have failed to imagine the previous inhabitants of the land, why no Indian artifacts, let alone Indians, can be seen. Wood lived less than 60 miles from the Meskwaki Settlement, but its presence did not register in his artistic vision. I worry about the land that feeds us, our truly broken prairie ecosystem, a sort of community that needs a more compelling portrayal. I keep going back because, in some sense, I hope my looking will turn into finding. These two exhibits, *Edward Hopper: Selections from the Whitney Museum of American Art* and especially *Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables*, gave art lovers and scholars an enriching and intriguing opportunity to keep looking.

## Book Reviews and Notices

*Wanderer on the American Frontier: The Travels of John Maley, 1803–1813*, edited by F. Andrew Dowdy. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. xx, 244 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45 hardcover.

Review Roger L. Nichols is emeritus professor of history at the University of Arizona. He has written extensively about American Indian history and about the history of the frontier and the American West, including frontier exploration.

This book is an edited version of a frontier travel narrative written during the early nineteenth century by John Maley, an obscure but enthusiastic adventurer. His wanderings between 1808 and 1813 took him from Pittsburgh down the Ohio River to Indiana and Illinois and then beyond the Mississippi River into present-day Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and possibly Texas. Clearly interested in business prospects in the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase, he described his ramblings there. Although the narrative describes crossing Illinois and Missouri as well as traveling on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers just a few years after Zebulon Pike and Lewis and Clark, it focuses primarily on the Red River, Arkansas, and the southern plains. He discusses frontier travel by boat and overland, recounts dealing with Indians, and describes hardship and near starvation on the plains. During those travels, Maley kept some field notes from which he constructed the narrative. However, as editor Andrew Dowdy admits, his notes are incomplete, and he seems to have depended on memory for much of his descriptions (xv).

Little is known about the author. A New York native, he died in June 1891 at Charleston, South Carolina. His writing suggests only a modest education. His narrative pictures him as an energetic, even athletic, person who enjoyed the challenges of frontier travel. Clearly he had enough money to pay for the horses, weapons, and trade goods needed for successful journeys into unsettled areas and while meeting various bands of Indians in the Southwest of that day. His account suggests that he got along well with the trappers, hunters, and boatmen he met during his travels.

For readers interested in frontier travel and exploration, what this book offers is not a day-to-day travel journal but less-organized descriptions of Maley's frontier travels. Apparently, he expected to publish

this account but instead sold his two journals to a Philadelphia publisher. During the early 1820s, Professor Benjamin Silliman acquired one volume, which remained in his papers at Yale. The second volume came to light in 2012 and is now held by the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University. Some misgivings about its authenticity exist because of Maley's frequent errors concerning distances and travel times. The editor suggests that these mistakes occurred because, unlike government explorers, he had only incomplete travel notes. He praises the author for giving "a rare blue-collar view of the frontier," something others rarely did (xvi).

The book is well done, but its excellent maps would have been more useful if they had marked Maley's travels more clearly. Also, the table of contents needs some identifying terms, not just dates for each section.

*The Making of Pioneer Wisconsin: Voices of Early Settlers*, by Michael E. Stevens. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. xviii, 173 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$18.95 paperback.

Reviewer Wayne Duerkes is a Ph.D. candidate in history at Iowa State University. He is working on a dissertation on community and market creation in the antebellum rural Midwest.

In his latest publication, Michael E. Stevens, Wisconsin State Historian Emeritus, provides "an opportunity to meet, if only briefly, people from the past" (163). To accomplish that, Stevens compiles an assortment of primary source documents written by early Wisconsin pioneers up to the 1850s. The diversity of the 52 introduced sources is represented by excerpts from travel guides, personal correspondence, letters printed in newspapers, petitions, and memorials. He categorizes the documents into three main thematic groupings: migration, adaptation, and community creation. These groupings chronologically follow the general emigration pattern of new settlers to the region, although there is slight, unavoidable overlap. In the end, he seeks to demonstrate the resolve and mettle most of these pioneers displayed, laying the foundation for the Wisconsin character.

Stevens highlights a cross section of Wisconsin pioneers both demographically and thematically. There are sources written by a member of the Ho-Chunk tribe, free blacks, and white men and women, with a special focus on German and Norwegian immigrants. In the documents, the authors describe travel to their new homeland, environmental conditions, sickness, loneliness, assimilation, temperance, abolitionism, and the western stereotype of lawlessness. But the stalwart pioneers also allude to visions of the potential and opportunity of settling in

pioneer Wisconsin. By bringing the settlers' own words into print, Stevens offers readers a glimpse of the trials and tribulations as well as the hopes and dreams of early settlers in the nineteenth-century Midwest. In doing so, he addresses a much broader audience than just those interested in the Badger State. Very few of the documents should be viewed as unique to events in Wisconsin. In fact, without the author's brief commentary to guide the reader, most documents echo emotions, sentiments, and experiences common to pioneers across the Midwest during the era.

The representativeness is one of the book's two main strengths. The second is the bringing of these documents to a broader audience. Any exposure given to pioneers' voices to commemorate their achievements and to help readers develop a clearer picture of who they were and what stock they came from is welcome. This also highlights a potential pitfall for historians who publish such works—letting the documents tell too much of the story without the guidance of a specialist. Stevens offers very brief introductory statements that are more biographical than analytical. Some of the documents needed a bit more editing to keep them focused on the thematic point the editor is trying to highlight, and most lack any analysis to develop the editor's intended goal of identifying early Wisconsin identity. An expanded bibliography, beyond the 16 mentions of the state historical magazine, would have helped readers delve deeper into this useful and insightful contribution to midwestern history.

*Lincoln and the Natural Environment*, by James Tackach. Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019. vii, 149 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Patricia Ann Owens is an independent scholar in Lawrenceville, Illinois. Her research and writing have focused on Abraham Lincoln.

Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois once urged his colleagues "to get right with Lincoln." It seems that this has become a mantra not only for politicians of both political parties but also for historians and other scholars. Lincoln left no diary and few personal letters, but that has not stopped the endless research into every aspect of his life and times. There has even been a book published about Lincoln and his dog, Fido.

Southern Illinois University Press's Concise Lincoln Library series offers an array of topics that reflect the interest in everything about Lincoln, including Lincoln and the military, Lincoln and the Thirteenth Amendment, Lincoln and the immigrant, and Lincoln as hero. This volume in the series is presented as a groundbreaking environmental

biography of Lincoln written by a professor of English and the president of the Lincoln Group of Boston, James Tackach.

The book is composed of five chapters, each of which could stand as an independent essay. Tackach outlines facts of Lincoln's life from his boyhood in Kentucky and Indiana, his life in New Salem and later in Springfield, Illinois, and his political journey to the presidency. Key to understanding Lincoln's time is the role of the Industrial Revolution and how it transformed the American economy and way of life. New machines, including the railroad, accelerated economic growth and created new opportunities for many people, including Lincoln. He was born into a working farm family, but he abandoned that life for one of books and education and the practice of law and embraced his right to rise in the new industrial America. Tackach reminds readers that those industrial advancements came at a cost to the natural environment.

Another key aspect of this environmental biography of Lincoln is the focus on the Civil War. Years of total war wrought damage to land, forests, and watersheds—problems with lasting impacts. Had Lincoln lived, he would have had to confront those problems. During his administration Congress did pass legislation, supported by Lincoln, that was related to the environment. These included the Homestead Act, the transcontinental railroad acts, and the Morrill Act, which established land grant colleges that focused on education in agriculture and the mechanical arts.

Was caring for the environment on Lincoln's mind? Tackach reminds readers that during Lincoln's lifetime writers such as Henry David Thoreau, William Cullen Bryant, and George Perkins Marshall were describing how America's natural landscape was being threatened by industrial changes. Deforestation and soil erosion were recognized as problems, and there was a plea for the preservation of wild places such as Yosemite Valley in California.

Tackach brings together many well-known aspects of Lincoln's life and ties them to environmental questions and issues, thereby successfully focusing readers' attention on Lincoln's place in the environmental movement. Perhaps he was not an environmental president as we would define it today, but Lincoln's administration formulated some environmental programs that had long-lasting effects. Residents of the Midwest benefit from the organization of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and land grant colleges such as Iowa State University.

To get right with Lincoln—go green.

*Penitentiaries, Punishment, and Military Prisons: Familiar Responses to an Extraordinary Crisis during the American Civil War*, by Angela Zombek. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018. xv, 287 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45 hardcover.

*Crossing the Deadlines: Civil War Prisons Reconsidered*, edited by Michael P. Gray. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018. xxxix, 232 pp. Illustrations, graphs, notes, index. \$45 hardcover.

Reviewer Patrick G. Bass is professor of history at Morningside College. His research and writing have focused on the history of the Civil War.

Civil War prison historiography has enjoyed a kind of renaissance over the past two decades, using new sources, new research methodologies, and new theoretical frameworks. Both of these works from Kent State University Press are among the efforts in these new directions.

Angela Zombek's monograph *Penitentiaries, Punishment, and Military Prisons* is the more ambitious of the two works under review. Zombek approaches her subjects in a complicated manner. The structure proceeds from background and general overview through specific investigations to a Reconstruction postscript. The introduction summarizes the entire work. The first chapter provides a deep background analysis of theories of penology before and during the American Civil War, which reaches from the European Enlightenment to the Lieber Code of the early 1860s. The second chapter centers on the overall continuities of practices of penology throughout the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century. The last full chapter (not the conclusion) looks at postwar legacies in terms of the triumph of continuity. The conclusion ably restates her findings.

Zombek's book is a tough read, certainly not intended for the general public. She establishes a well-designed but complex comparative framework that she maintains throughout every subsection of every chapter in her specific investigations. These particular investigations range from the viewpoints and goals of prison administrators, to the inmates' world (and variations thereon), to various interactions between inmates and non-inmates, and to the particular issues associated with female inmates. Each subsection of every chapter maintains a loose chronological structure, emphasizing the inherent continuities of experiences, attitudes, and challenges of those persons associated with penology before and during the war. The author scrupulously constructs each chapter almost as if it should be able to stand alone. Thus, tiresome repetition occurs. Moreover, a bewildering number of individual actors emerge in several chapters, witnesses she uses in different ways depending on the points toward which she strives—and that

often proves disorienting. I found that reading the work one chapter at a time to be the best mode, allowing for thought and reflection between reading bouts; otherwise I tended to become confused and weary.

These remarks, I know, sound overly critical. Yet as I have examined the task Zombek set for herself, I can find neither better ways nor better methods than the ones she has employed. Her theoretical sophistication and structural integrity are vital models for those of us working in Civil War historiography. The vast sweep of her subject matter, when examined clearly, is breathtaking. She goes where her sources take her, within the bounds of her goals and frameworks. Her research is impeccable. And on second and third examinations, I noticed endearing elements of humor and pathos, of ethical dilemmas and structural failures, of humans at their best and at their worst. The struggle to make available means (including the humans involved) meet the noble ends of penology in this era is both excruciating and fascinating. All in all, Zombek's work possesses an importance that transcends her content and subject matter; all serious students of modern-era institutional history should persist through its density and study it carefully for her innovative approaches and robust theoretical elements.

*Crossing the Deadlines* is a collection of essays about Civil War prisons that also reveals new source materials, new research methodologies, and new theoretical ideas; it contains an essay by Zombek that is unlike her monograph on penology, although related tangentially. As indicated in the foreword by John T. Hubbell, this set of essays represents a significant departure from more traditional approaches to the topic, yet the work is more accessible to general readers of Civil War history than is Zombek's monograph.

Editor Michael Gray has included nine essays divided into three sections. The first two sections include only articles that maintain a framework seeking general and comparative conclusions about Civil War military prisons. The first section is eclectic ("New Encounters: Sensing Nature, Society, and Culture in and out of Prison") and appears to reflect a "catch-all" non-theme. The thread running through the second section is the complicating factor of race in Civil War military prisons. The last section contains two essays concentrating on archaeological investigations at just one prison site and one essay that looks at the roles of Civil War prisons in postwar remembrances that inhibited sectional reconciliation.

Almost always, readers are left wanting more information; these essays tend to introduce topics more than explore them satisfactorily. One might wish that the editor of the volume and the editors at Kent

State University Press would have performed their editorial duties at a higher level of sophistication. Gray's intriguing and excellent essay on Civil War prisons as "dark" tourist destinations is beyond reproach, as are a few other articles (among them Zombek's contribution on the impact of Catholic clergy and laity in Civil War prisons). But too many of the other essays in this collection are marred by simple but jarring grammatical errors and misspellings. Professional standards call for a better proofreading effort. More annoying are the needless repetitions across several of the included essays of the same events, dates, and persons, inevitably explained as if the reader is encountering them for the first time. Erudite editing (with authors' permissions, of course) would have added much to the satisfaction of readers by eliminating these redundancies.

Moreover, the thematic inconsistencies are irritating. The original idea (I perceive) to collect several essays that eschew the single-site, narrow-beam approach to Civil War prison history in favor of broader views and comparative methods is admirable. Yet something went awry along the way. Although the archaeological essays are interesting in their own right, they fit ill with the intentions and methods of the other contributions. The whole, somehow, feels weaker than the parts, even considering the sloppy errors of a couple of the inclusions. Yet some of the essays are really rewarding reading and worth coping with the other less meritorious elements in the collection. All of the articles appear to be well researched. The collection, however uneven the individual essays, holds a few real gems.

Although both Zombek's monograph and Gray's edited collection make reference to particular places in the Midwest, neither Iowa nor the Midwest as distinct states or regions appear. Those of us interested in regional variations of action, attitude, and response in the Civil War will find little of value on that score. Zombek's already complex model might have profited in some ways from an additional comparative element—regionalism in both warring sections—but that inclusion would have created difficulties and complexities that are boggling to consider. Gray's collection, if I understand the original intent aright, deliberately eschews such variations in favor of the more general overall themes of Civil War prisons. Some essays include passing reference to Iowa military units, but little more. Thus these works lack noticeable midwestern flavor or Iowa elements; even the notorious Rock Island Civil War military prison does not appear anywhere of importance in these books.

*Illinois History: A Reader*, edited by Mark Hubbard. Common Threads Series. Urbana, Springfield, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018. 304 pp. Map, illustrations, notes. \$25 paperback.

Reviewer Dan Monroe is associate professor of history and chair of the Department of History and Political Science at Millikin University. He is the author of *At Home with Illinois' Governors: A Social History of the Illinois Executive Mansion* (2002).

The bicentennial of Illinois statehood in 2018 prompted Mark Hubbard and the University of Illinois Press to collect 14 essays on the history of the state. These pieces previously appeared in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, for which Hubbard, professor of history at Eastern Illinois University, is the editor-in-chief. The essays are organized chronologically by topic from the territorial period to the present with a unifying theme of "relationships of power and their historical dimensions," and the political conflicts such relationships produced. The authors represented in the collection are talented historians whose names will be familiar to students of American and Illinois history: Paul Finkelman, Bob Sampson, Reginald Horsman, and Roger Biles, among others. The resulting collection is strong and offers readers excellent treatments of important historical episodes.

All of the articles are valuable, but several are particularly notable. The distinguished scholar of Illinois history Robert Sutton describes Edward Coles's battle against an effort that might well have made Illinois a slave state only a few years after it entered the Union as a free state. Coles is unfortunately a little-known figure, but as governor of Illinois he helped prevent a constitutional convention the leading object of which was to alter the state constitution to allow slavery. Thanks in part to Coles's leadership, the statewide referendum calling for the convention was decisively defeated in 1824. Coles's political career did not survive his antislavery sentiments. Sutton's article helps, along with recent biographies, to rescue Coles from an undeserved obscurity.

If Sutton's article on Edward Coles leaves the reader feeling positive regarding Illinois and race, Paul Finkelman's contribution on slavery and Illinois quickly diminishes any sense of triumphalism. Finkelman points out that Illinois was a remarkably antiblack state even by antebellum standards. Slavery, officially prohibited, existed nonetheless during the territorial phase and after statehood in 1818. Free black Americans were discouraged from settling in Illinois via laws that limited black civil rights and tried to deter black immigration into the state. The state's 1848 constitution required the passage of laws to restrict black immigration, and the Illinois legislature obliged in 1853.

Finkelman provides important historical context on the political milieu in which Abraham Lincoln operated. Lincoln spoke out against slavery, calling it morally wrong, and he said that African Americans were included in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, its natural rights affirmation. His statements seem all the more remarkable given the antiblack sentiment of his own state.

Finally, Bob Sampson's work is included twice in the collection, a reflection of his stellar if unsung scholarship on Illinois. In his piece on the Charleston riots of 1864, Sampson explains the conditions that produced the violence in Charleston, Illinois, violence that clearly reflected strong Democratic opposition to Lincoln administration policies, such as emancipation, and to the ongoing war in general. When Democrats from Coles and Edgar Counties fired on Union troops, they were, Sampson suggests, acting on a "logic of rebellion," responding to what they perceived as acts of repression on the part of the Lincoln administration, acts that, in their view, warranted an extreme reaction. Sampson builds on the work of Jean Harvey Baker and others and enhances our understanding of Illinois Democrats.

The collection features compelling articles on twentieth-century events and figures as well; indeed, no substantive period in the state's history is neglected. Anthologies and collections are notorious for incoherence and for the uneven quality of the assembled pieces. Mark Hubbard has succeeded in organizing a collection that is thematically coherent, informative, and interesting. Any scholar of Illinois history would profit from reading this fine work.

*A Brief History of Nebraska*, by Ronald C. Naugle. Lincoln: History Nebraska, 2018. v, 143 pp. Illustrations, map, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Mark R. Scherer is professor of history at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. His research and writing have focused on Nebraska and Great Plains legal and political history.

As its title suggests, *A Brief History of Nebraska* is an abridged version of Ronald C. Naugle's familiar and highly respected *History of Nebraska*. That volume, coauthored with John J. Montag and James C. Olson, is now in its fourth edition and has become the leading narrative text in Nebraska history, long serving specialists, students, and general readers as an essential starting point for exploring the state's rich and complex past. With this extremely condensed abridgement, Naugle obviously seeks to reach a much more casual readership, one that—regrettably but probably accurately—reflects the shortened attention spans of so many readers in the Instagram/Twitter world we now inhabit.

Given the breadth and depth of Naugle's expertise in the field, the winnowing process for this book must have been especially difficult. While it is easy enough for an interested observer to identify topics that beg for more detailed coverage and analysis (such as the displacement of Native Americans or the long-term effects of the Homestead Act, to name just two), nitpicking of that sort is unfair and almost completely irrelevant in evaluating this volume. The book's brevity is actually its greatest strength. Naugle's goal here is to whet rather than to satisfy readers' appetites. Viewed from that perspective, the book can only be judged a success. Indeed, one of the most remarkable aspects of the author's work is not what he has been forced to leave out, but rather what he has been able to include. In less than 150 total pages, and using chapters that rarely exceed three or four pages each, Naugle introduces a truly impressive array of themes, topics, events, and personalities, ranging from the prehistoric geology of the Midwest and Great Plains to the rural-urban dichotomies that help to shape the state's current social, political, and economic dynamics. The author's analysis of these topics is perceptive but necessarily brief. Like the Platte River valley that has itself been so central to Nebraska's history, the treatment is, by design, "a mile wide and an inch deep."

Written in a lively, conversational, and accessible style and enhanced by well-chosen illustrations and maps, this is a book that meets its intended purpose and should find its intended audience. Academics, specialists, and advanced students will need to look elsewhere for the interpretive scrutiny, sourcing, citations, and footnotes that their interests may require. But for newcomers to the state, younger students, and anyone seeking a brief and highly readable introduction to Nebraska's colorful and sometimes controversial past, Naugle's volume will fill the bill splendidly.

*Gabriel Renville: From the Dakota War to the Creation of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation, 1825-1892*, by Gary Clayton Anderson. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2018. xi, 220 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Linda M. Clemmons is a professor of history at Illinois State University. She is the author of *Conflicted Mission: Faith, Disputes, and Deception on the Dakota Frontier* (2014) and the forthcoming *Dakota in Exile: The Untold Stories of Captives in the Aftermath of the U.S.-Dakota War*.

Gary Clayton Anderson has written an important biography of Gabriel Renville, a Dakota man whose life intersected with the major events in Dakota history from the 1820s until the late nineteenth century. This

project adds to Anderson's previous works that also focus on the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, including a biography of Little Crow and *Through Dakota Eyes*, a primary source reader that offers Dakota viewpoints on the war. In this biography, Anderson can be commended for writing about a Dakota man who has received relatively little public attention.

The book is organized into eight chronological chapters, beginning in 1825 with Renville's birth at Lac qui Parle in southern Minnesota to Victor Renville and Winona Crawford, both of European and Dakota descent. Anderson notes that while he grew up in a trading family, Renville also "was steeped in Dakota tradition," especially the Medicine Society, as well as gift-giving and polygamist marriage practices (6-7). Through family ties, Renville also interacted with Joseph Brown, a white trader, land speculator, Indian agent, and government official in charge of scouts. Brown and Protestant missionaries guided his early education; however, while he learned to read and write, it was in the Dakota language, not English. Renville also never truly accepted Christianity.

Although he remained ambivalent about Christianity, from early on Renville accepted government treaties and assimilationist policies. For example, he supported the Treaties Traverse des Sioux and Mendota (1851), which led to the cession of all Dakota lands in Minnesota. After the treaties, Renville worked as a farmer and a land speculator and held a government farming position. During the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, Renville rescued white settlers; after the war, he served as a Dakota scout in the military's punitive expeditions in Dakota Territory. Thus, Renville was called a "friendly Indian" at the time, because he consistently demonstrated his "loyalty to the government" (35).

In part as a reward for his loyalty during and after the war, Renville, Anderson argues, was instrumental in obtaining a homeland for the Sisseton-Wahpeton people in 1867—the Lake Traverse Reservation in present-day North and South Dakota. Once located on the reservation, Renville did not support the faction who practiced Christianity, but he did endorse government education, farming, and allotment. He also worked as a diplomat, traveling across the plains "trying to convince these Indians to accept government rule" (109). Thus, in both his early life and on the reservation, Renville, Anderson argues, "demonstrated that it was possible to be loyal to his people, to advocate traditional values, and at the same time, be a friend to the white man" (153).

Anderson notes that he has written "a biography not quite like any other in the field," as Renville belonged among the "few who were peacemakers, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and builders during the time of strife and conflict in the American West" (xi). Certainly

Anderson shows that Renville was a complex man who attempted to navigate a tragic period of upheaval and strife. However, it is important to note that many Dakota at the time—and since—have criticized Dakota like Renville for their close ties with traders like Brown, the United States military, the scouts, and government officials. Anderson neglects to cite historians who differ in their interpretations of so-called “friendly Indians.” Some scholars, for instance, have called those who sided with the government and government policies “traitors” to their people. It is important to acknowledge—as Anderson has done in his other work—the negative and lasting legacy of conquest, settler colonialism, and government assimilationist programs, even if Renville tried to do what he thought was best for his people.

Finally, while Anderson can be commended for finding numerous written sources that give a complete account of the major events of Renville’s life, by the end of the biography his personality remains elusive. I never felt like I could hear Renville’s voice explaining why he made the choices he did and how others reacted to those choices. Despite these caveats of interpretation and presentation, Anderson’s biography of Gabriel Renville sheds light on a man who lived through a tragic period in Dakota history. Renville often made contradictory and controversial choices that he hoped would ensure his, and his people’s, survival. Those choices reverberate into the present day.

*Interrupted Odyssey: Ulysses S. Grant and the American Indians*, by Mary Stockwell. The World of Ulysses S. Grant Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. 256 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.50 hardcover.

Reviewer Scott L. Stabler is professor of history at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. He is the author of “Ulysses S. Grant and the ‘Indian Problem’” (*Journal of Illinois History*, 2003).

The process of revamping Ulysses S. Grant’s reputation has been ongoing for a few decades, but has just reached the mainstream historical audience. After the popular tomes by Ronald C. White (799 pages) and Ron Chernow (1,104 pages) and another more historical approach to Grant’s presidency by Charles Calhoun (720 pages), Mary Stockwell’s 256-page work on President U.S. Grant’s Indian policy is more manageable and more focused. Because no one has so thoroughly addressed Grant’s Indian policy, Stockwell’s work is vital for a complete picture of Grant. She covers a complex topic with a narrative that flows well and clarifies the story of postbellum Indian policy.

Stockwell approaches the topic chronologically from the perspective of Grant and the federal government and its employees, not Native Americans. She begins with Grant's family heritage of Indian interactions on the East Coast and in the Midwest. Chapters two and three provide background on Indian wars and Grant's comrade Ely Parker (Seneca). As Grant's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Parker was the first non-white major official in the country's history. Stockwell then describes Parker and Grant's plan to address the massive migration of whites west of the Mississippi River and the Native people they would engage and disrupt. Chapter four deals with the initiation of Grant's Indian policy, especially the addition of the Board of Indian Commissioners to oversee the Office of Indian Affairs' supply procurement practices. Chapter five details Ely Parker's travails from a congressional investigation brought on by the board. Parker, though found innocent, resigned as commissioner out of frustration and lack of support from Grant. Chapter six delves deeper into Grant's carrot-and-stick approach to the Indians in the West while supporting further white settlement. Chapters seven and eight deal with the wars brought on by white settler encroachment from Montana to California to Texas. Ultimately, Grant's initiative to create well-run reservations that enticed American Indians onto them worked moderately well, but when failure occurred, war forced Native Americans onto government-run entities often placed in the middle of nowhere.

*Interrupted Odyssey* has two basic premises, neither of which is a significant historiographical contribution. First, according to Stockwell, those who believe that Grant had a coherent Indian policy that reflected his attitudes and policies toward the freedpeople of the South are misled. She argues that Grant grew disgruntled trying to pacify and assimilate Native Americans and took a harder line toward them later in his presidency. Second, Grant's use of missionaries as reservation agents was not his first choice; rather, he sought to use soldiers first, but Congress banned them due to the lost patronage. Only then did Grant decide to again circumvent political patronage by allowing Christian denominations to choose church members to run reservations.

There are some quibbles. First, Grant's desire to end the treaty system was not motivated by his wish to prevent tribes from obtaining ammunition, as Stockwell implies. Instead, Grant signed the bill so that he could use executive orders giving him flexibility in dealing with tribes and Congress. Stockwell's use of government and primary sources is excellent, but the secondary sources she employs fail to give Native Americans any agency. For example, for the Modoc War she cites one 2014 source but also one from 1971 and another from as far back as 1914

when at least two of the four more recent works, published within the last three years, give some Modoc perspective. Finally, it is often difficult to tell when Stockwell is speaking for herself or paraphrasing someone else. For example, "It might take a generation or two, but by the end of the century the Navajo would look and act exactly like most Americans" (61); and "Grant instead would intervene on behalf of the Indians to save them" (63). After discussing Parker's marriage to a white woman, Stockwell writes, "At some point in the future, the two peoples, white and red, would become one through intermarriage" (66). Such examples occur throughout the book, creating a thread of Eurocentrism or sloppy attribution.

Overall, Stockwell tries to walk the line between a new historiography and a popular history of a major historical figure. She does well in the latter, offering a balanced portrayal of Grant and his dilemmas over the unsolvable "Indian problem." But the historiography raises a problem. Stockwell follows C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa's argument in *Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War* (2012) that Indians and the country would have fared far better if Ely Parker had not been forced out of his position as commissioner. That is far too simplistic. The historiographical point that's missing is how Grant brought his total war mentality to the West. His strategy in the Civil War sacrificed lives to end the war quickly, thus saving lives in the long run. He similarly brought the sword to bear on Indians off the reservation to potentially save their lives by putting them on well-run government agencies. His strategy established reservations all over the West, and Native Americans have kept them in existence and significant. Although reservations are not ideal places for many reasons, few American Indians want them to end. That is the significance of Grant's Indian policy that has been lost on historians and leaves a new avenue for future research.

*Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870–1920*, by Sara Egge. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018. xi, 233 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$85 paperback.

Reviewer Pam Stek recently received her Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa. Her dissertation was titled "Immigrant Women's Political Activism in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, 1880–1920."

In *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870–1920*, Sara Egge argues convincingly that midwestern suffragists' struggles to gain the vote are best viewed through the frame of their spirited and deter-

mined efforts to help settle the region and develop community institutions. Over time, women in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota built their claims for the ballot on the foundation of civic responsibility, community leadership, and wartime loyalty. Suffrage victories did not come easily, but midwestern women persevered, continually reevaluating and honing their message and strategies until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment solidified women's political equality.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, midwestern suffrage activists, like those in other parts of the nation, invested substantial time and energy in the fight for the ballot but realized few significant gains. The national women's rights movement faced internecine struggles in the latter decades of the nineteenth century; the 1869 split into two rival factions hampered concerted activism. During those early years, as Egge shows, women in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota started organizing suffrage associations that would later form the backbone of support for state suffrage amendments. Just as importantly, however, they also began to develop political identities and skills through their membership in women's clubs, temperance organizations, and church-based ladies' aid societies, as they worked to advance the construction and development of churches, schools, parks, and libraries. They claimed a civic presence while working within gendered boundaries of female respectability.

The reemergence in 1890 of a unified national suffrage organization, following the merger of the National Woman Suffrage Association with its rival, the American Woman Suffrage Association, coincided with an escalation of suffrage activism in the Midwest. As Egge points out, South Dakota suffrage activists supported three suffrage amendments in the 1890s, all of which were defeated for various reasons, including woman suffrage's association with temperance reform, tensions between state and local leaders, and the difficulties suffrage workers faced in traveling across the state to make their case to voters. Suffragists in Iowa and Minnesota also failed to achieve any victories during these years, but they continued to organize and adapt.

Part of that adaptation involved reevaluating the basis of women's claims for full citizenship. Egge demonstrates that during the early years of the movement, suffrage leaders tended to structure their calls for the ballot in terms of women's equal rights. As the years rolled on with few tangible successes, suffragists began to reframe their claim for the vote in the language of municipal housekeeping: women's inherent morality and virtue positioned them as able and indeed vital members of the body politic. These arguments resonated more strongly with midwestern voters than did those based on more radical ideas about

female equality. In the years between 1900 and 1916 suffrage campaigns in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota continued to end in defeat, but the cause was slowly gaining increased support among voters.

In 1917 U.S. entry into World War I allowed suffragists to use civic duty and national loyalty as a means to claim full citizenship rights. As Egge shows, midwestern suffrage leaders embraced the war effort, and suffrage workers' reputations as skilled and savvy community organizers allowed them to transform their work for the ballot into home-front mobilization. Wartime exigencies also allowed native-born suffrage activists to counterpose their demonstrated patriotism against the suspect sensibilities of European immigrants, a group that midwestern suffragists had always blamed for their electoral defeats. Suffragists' efforts to claim political equality in exchange for wartime service paid off with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed women's right to vote, on August 18, 1920.

Egge's study is a local one that focuses on one county in each state: Clay County in Iowa, Lyon County in Minnesota, and Yankton County in South Dakota. That approach allows her to dig deeply into local newspapers, community histories, church documents, personal correspondence, and other records preserved in county museums, public libraries, and community centers. It permits an understanding of suffrage work in the context of activists' daily lives, as part of their interactions with others in their communities and in concert with their efforts to develop local institutions and services. Suffragists were not just activists; they were also wives, mothers, neighbors, and church members. Examining their grassroots struggle for political equality allows readers to see the movement as its adherents did, as part of a larger effort to build social and political institutions in the rural Midwest.

This kind of study allows for a deeper understanding of local concerns and strategies, but Egge does not address the question of whether her conclusions are equally applicable to other counties in the states under examination, including urban, industrializing areas. Suffrage activists in rural counties may have used different strategies, pursued different goals, and had at their disposal different resources than did suffragists in metropolitan areas. Also, as Egge points out, suffrage leaders in rural counties often blamed immigrant men for standing in the way of woman suffrage. Limited local studies do not address the extent to which German and Scandinavian immigrant suffragists shared those views. Women like Clara Heckrich, the corresponding secretary of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association in Minneapolis and a second-generation German immigrant, and members of the Minnesota Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association, which was based in the

Twin Cities and made up of women of Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish descent, comprehended citizenship and suffrage through the lens of their experiences as immigrants. Focusing on just three counties limits our appreciation of the movement's diversity in these three states and of the ways different groups of midwestern women understood and worked for political equality.

Despite these limitations of scope, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest* offers valuable insight into midwestern women's long, difficult struggle for the ballot and provides compelling analysis of what their suffrage activism can tell us about gender, citizenship, and national belonging.

*Crusader for Democracy: The Political Life of William Allen White*, by Charles Delgadillo. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018. vii, 315 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Jeff Wells is associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. His current research focuses on the journalists of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party.

William Allen White gained widespread attention with his 1896 anti-Populist editorial, "What's the Matter with Kansas?" He continued to influence national politics for more than four decades. Other biographers emphasize White's midwestern values and relationship with his home town of Emporia, Kansas; in *Crusader for Democracy* Charles Delgadillo explores how White applied his regional small-town ideology during his career as a national political figure.

Throughout the early twentieth century, White (1868–1944) was the voice of the midwestern middle class. He bought the *Emporia Gazette* in 1896 but cultivated an audience far beyond Kansas as a writer for influential progressive magazines, as a novelist, and as a syndicated correspondent at major events such as the Versailles Peace Conference and the Washington Naval Conference. He broke from the influence of a political boss to become an independent voice for reform within the Republican Party, which dominated Kansas politics. He admired and befriended Theodore Roosevelt and forged relationships with his successors. His extensive international travel informed his commentary. In the Soviet Union, White observed that the Russians had exchanged liberty for security and peace. His tours of fascist countries convinced him that social justice was a national security issue. He was a liberal internationalist during the 1920s, when the GOP was defined by conservatives and isolationists, yet he remained loyal to the party throughout his career, with the notable exceptions of his support for his hero Theo-

dore Roosevelt's 1912 Bull Moose presidential campaign and his own 1924 bid for governor as an anti-Ku Klux Klan independent.

Delgadillo's political biography arrives with White's strand of liberal Republicanism extinct and its memory fading. Fortunately, however, the book's release coincides with renewed interest in the study of the Midwest as a region and its ideology. White's career coincided with the peak of the Midwest's political and cultural influence. Delgadillo relies heavily on White's correspondence with politicians to demonstrate how White employed "midwestern ideals of community and neighborliness" to shape policy (2). White's midwestern liberalism combined calls for political and economic justice with cultural conservatism. He believed in using the government to advance the general welfare. He did not, however, view government as a way to advance major social change.

Delgadillo's work is not a hagiography; he readily acknowledges White's flaws and many contradictions. White supported unions but sought ways to settle labor disputes without strikes. The Great Depression and the drought of 1930 caused many of White's neighbors to lose faith in the American system. In response, White wanted the federal government to provide relief, but he refused to endorse Franklin Delano Roosevelt. White attacked the Klan but helped fuel anti-Catholic attacks against 1928 Democratic presidential nominee Al Smith. Delgadillo explains, "Like many midwesterners, White's cultural ideology during the decade centered on two basic concepts: the Midwest was the heart of American civilization and it was under attack by outside forces" (168). To White, Smith's urban and immigrant constituency represented a threat to the midwestern culture forged by native-born white Anglo-Saxon Protestant men.

Students of Iowa political history will be interested in Delgadillo's exploration of how White's midwestern worldview shaped his politics. The book also mentions White's relationship with two prominent Iowa politicians. White shared information with Albert B. Cummins during the progressive phase of the career of the Iowa governor and U.S. senator. White gave active support to Herbert Hoover's 1928 presidential campaign. He boosted the businessman he described as "a farm boy" with more zeal than he had given any presidential candidate since 1912. Hoover, however, failed to seek White's advice as other presidents had done, and White was frustrated by Hoover's slow response to the onset of the Great Depression. His administration's efforts to orchestrate opposition to progressive Republicans seeking reelection to Congress troubled the editor even more. But personal relationships and loyalty mattered to White, and, despite meeting with Franklin Dela-

no Roosevelt, he felt obligated to endorse Hoover's reelection despite knowing that he would not win.

Delgadillo's epilogue notes how Hoover tried to use a 1950 speech to portray White as a conservative. White's long political career provides plenty of fodder for agreement and disagreement for readers on all points of the political spectrum. Delgadillo's balanced account avoids passing an overall judgment on White's politics and provides an accessible reminder of a bygone political tradition—one worthy of additional research.

*Swift as an Arrow: The Story of Thomas Benoist, Pioneer American Aviator*, by Melody Davis and Gary R. Liming. Chesterfield, MO: Mindwings Press, 2017. vi, 306 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, index. \$26.95 paperback.

Reviewer Janet R. Bednarek is professor of history at the University of Dayton. She is the author of *Dreams of Flight: A History of General Aviation* (2003) and *America's Airports: A History of Municipal Airports in the United States, 1918–1947* (2001).

Thomas Benoist was one of numerous young men, many from the Midwest, enthralled with the new technology of the airplane and determined to make it his life's work. Unlike most, Benoist actually found a way to make something of a living as an aircraft builder, parts supplier, and exhibition pilot/manager. Authors Melody Davis and Gary R. Liming trace the history of Benoist's company from its origins in 1909 in St. Louis, Missouri, to its end following the founder's untimely death in 1917 in Sandusky, Ohio. Benoist is perhaps most remembered for his role in establishing the first passenger-carrying airline in the United States, which operated for about three months between St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida, in 1914.

This work would appeal mostly to those interested in the very early years of the aircraft industry in the Midwest. Benoist's story could offer some broader context to demonstrate just how wide open aviation was in its pioneering years. One early history of aviation in Iowa, for example, names a dozen or more young men who also sought to find fame and fortune in the pioneering years of aviation.

*Swift as an Arrow* also shows how midwestern cities, such as St. Louis and Sandusky, figured prominently in early aviation history. It could have benefited from a larger comparative context—for example, comparing Benoist (born in Missouri in 1874) with Glenn Martin (born in Iowa in 1886), both of whom started in aviation at roughly the same time, yet with vastly different levels of success.

*Creating the Big Ten: Courage, Corruption, and Commercialization*, by Winton U. Solberg. Urbana, Springfield, and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2018. xii, 302 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$99 hardcover, \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer S Zebulon Baker is director of the University Honors Program at Miami University in Ohio. He received the State Historical Society of Iowa's 2014 Throne-Aldrich Award for his article, "'This affair is about something bigger than John Bright': Iowans Confront the Jim Crow South, 1946-1951," in the *Annals of Iowa* (2013).

Winton U. Solberg's *Creating the Big Ten* explores the founding and first half-century of the Big Ten Conference, one of the Midwest's most enduring cultural institutions. The Big Ten's origin story, as an association of the Midwest's top universities that "held the promise of imposing order on intercollegiate football in the Midwest" (17), has been told by sportswriters and historians alike, most notably Robin Lester, Brian Ingrassia, and, especially, Murray Sperber. But unlike many of these commentators, Solberg does not use his study to simply critique the current state of college sports. As he sees corruption and commercial demands overtaking the conference in the twenty-first century, Solberg turns to the Big Ten's past to understand how its present state—a multibillion-dollar, 14-institution enterprise expediently stretched from the Northern Plains to the Mid-Atlantic for the sake of TV ratings—has become "a strange perversion of the true spirit of university life" (241). To understand this competitive and commercial juggernaut, he soberly surveys how the Big Ten evolved in its first five decades from "a pioneer in institutional cooperation in the control of intercollegiate athletics" (15) to "the premier intercollegiate athletic conference in the nation" (62) by the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, where he sees the seeds of its current corrupted condition being sown.

Solberg devotes the first third of the book to studying how the Big Ten "reduced disorder to order in collegiate football" in the first quarter-century after its founding in 1895 by implementing a strong system of faculty governance and committing to the amateur athletic code (74). Yet the twin challenges of the two decades between the world wars—commercialization and professionalization of football—threatened to plunge the conference back into disorder, a crisis that provides the focus of the balance of the book. Football was ascendant after World War I, especially as the public imagination fired the "Golden Age of Sports" in the 1920s. Solberg expertly charts how "the Big Ten guardians of amateur athletics" (89) struggled mightily in this atmosphere to prevent their association from succumbing to the allure of professional sports. Red Grange's decision to sign a professional contract with the

Chicago Bears in 1925 once his playing days at the University of Illinois were over “marked the beginning of a new era in Big Ten football” (132), pitting the game as it was played by college amateurs against the febrile appeal of paid professionals. In that environment, Big Ten members were helpless before the commercial demands on the sport, which were now driving decisions in their league on everything from recruiting athletes to scheduling games. Faculty control of athletics in that age of commercialized sports was, in Solberg’s judgment, “a sham” (198).

No event proved the point more than the Big Ten’s dismissal, and subsequent reinstatement, of the University of Iowa in 1929, which receives a full chapter treatment. Iowa’s athletics program was accused of a constellation of bad behaviors: excessive alumni involvement, dishonest recruiting practices, slush fund payments to athletes. Iowa violated league rules, to be sure, but its truest offense was running afoul of the conference’s power brokers, namely University of Chicago head football coach Amos Alonzo Stagg, who, Solberg observes, “did not understand the harsh realities of intercollegiate athletics” (188). It was a reality being remade by administrators and faculty leaders at Iowa and other members, who “were all complicit in promoting and defending corruption” and pushing the conference away from its founding notions of amateurism (198). “With delinquency so widespread,” he argues, “the Big Ten was weakened and damaged” (198). Iowa’s censure proved “epochal” not only “because it imputed bad faith, double dealing, and athletic dishonesty to the highest educational institution of a great state whose citizens naturally look to that institution for good faith, square dealing, and high ideals” (172). It was also, Solberg contends, a harbinger of the conference’s twenty-first-century future. “Football had become less a game than a business, run for revenue, not for education,” he laments of the Big Ten’s current competitive landscape. “Moreover, football was played increasingly by men who were neither entirely amateur nor entirely hired. And football coaching was given by men whose preponderant interest was holding their lucrative jobs at whatever cost” (238). As “corruption became widespread, and intercollegiate athletics became commercialized” (241), Solberg closes his book, not with any solutions for fixing the Big Ten, but with a mournful, backward glance to the “worthy standard” of the conference’s founding principles (239).

*Ball Hawks: The Arrival and Departure of the NBA in Iowa*, by Tim Harwood. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018. x, 217 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Curtis Harris is a Ph.D. candidate in history at American University. His research and writing have focused on the relationships among race/ethnicity, labor rights, and social activism in professional basketball.

In *Ball Hawks*, Tim Harwood details the brief yet compelling history of the Waterloo Hawks. As Harwood admits in his preface, “Major league basketball did not survive long in northeast Iowa” (x). Nonetheless, the presence of professional basketball in Waterloo is worth remembering because it helps piece together the larger tapestry of major league basketball in the United States. Indeed, Harwood’s chronicle joins a growing body of historical work—such as *The National Basketball League* by Murry R. Nelson and *Ball Don’t Lie* by Yago Colas—reexamining the NBA’s origins and properly crediting the role communities like Waterloo had in the process of creating that league.

Notably, Harwood’s research is not limited to the confines of the basketball court. His book opens with an overview of early twentieth-century Waterloo, so readers can understand why the community and its leaders would invest in major league basketball during the 1940s. Throughout *Ball Hawks*, Harwood continues these important observations on larger social issues—including race, labor strife, war, and technology—alongside his chronicle of athletic exploits during the golden era of Waterloo basketball.

These insights are provided by Harwood interpreting contemporary coverage of the Hawks—particularly by *Waterloo Courier* sports editor Al Ney. Those news sources are supplemented by the research of other scholars as well as oral history interviews with former Waterloo players Wayne See and Leo Kubiak. One wishes that even more oral history could have been included to capture the thoughts and emotions of other people involved in the Hawks saga. Nonetheless, from this research process, readers can catch a laugh with the hardwood hijinks of player-coach Charlie Shipp, marvel at the scoring exploits of Kubiak, or wince at the grind players endured traveling through treacherous winter weather.

The transiency and chaos of pro basketball was not limited to travel. The Hawks participated in a different league every season of their existence: PBLA (1948), NBL (1949), NBA (1950), and NBPL (1951). This alphabet soup of disorder could overwhelm even seasoned sports readers, but one of Harwood’s great achievements is his ability to prudently explain the rise and demise of these leagues as well as their connections to one another. The transiency of pro hoops makes the

determination of Waterloo's community and basketball leaders more notable in hindsight. They concocted scheme after scheme to maintain a toehold in pro basketball that outlasted franchises in larger cities, such as Chicago or St. Louis.

To be sure, the Hawks were not a routine sell-out, but Harwood ably demonstrates that financial destitution did not cause their demise, as it did so many other clubs (and leagues) of the era. Instead, the NBA commissioner in 1950 bluntly declared cities like Waterloo undesirable and summarily ousted the Hawks. That hostile maneuver tipped the scales against Waterloo, despite its relative financial stability, and still stings Danny Steiber. One of the few people left who witnessed the Hawks play, the elderly Steiber ruefully believes that "Waterloo could have been the Green Bay of basketball, if they had been able to play a second and third year in the NBA" (181). Without a permanent league to call their own, the Hawks folded in the fall of 1951.

*Ball Hawks* crisply captures Waterloo's resolve to assert itself in the postwar era via professional basketball. Current and future sports writers should look upon Harwood's text as an excellent template chronicling the role that smaller communities play in the development of professional sports—past and present. That Harwood ably imbues this sports story with all the humanity it is due makes reading it all the more enjoyable.

*Great Plains Literature*, by Linda Ray Pratt. Discover the Great Plains Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xi, 168 pp. Illustrations, map, appendix, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Molly P. Rozum is Ronald R. Nelson Chair of Great Plains and South Dakota History and associate professor at the University of South Dakota. She is the author of *Grasslands Grown: Sense of Place and Regional Identity on North America's Canadian Prairies and American Plains, 1870–1950* (forthcoming).

In *Great Plains Literature* Linda Ray Pratt surveys historical and contemporary regional authors with depth and complexity. A joy to read, Pratt's study offers scholarly insight while maintaining popular accessibility. The study is one in a series of thematic introductions to the region as conceptualized by the Center for Great Plains Studies, joining volumes focused on geology, bison, Indians, and politics. Pratt selected literary works driven by the history and culture of, not merely set on, the Great Plains. Each chapter focuses on several thoughtfully selected authors who explore particular topics: First People, the Great

Depression, city living, and home. Nebraskan Willa Cather and Norwegian immigrant Ole Edvart Rølvaag receive chapters of their own.

Emerging after 200 years of American literary tradition, plains authors, Pratt argues, wrote “free from the thematic inheritance that had preoccupied much nineteenth-century literature” (9), that is, the U.S. Revolution, slavery, and the Civil War. The region’s literary tradition is especially important for understanding the nation’s westward expansion and the new wave of European immigrants destined to “redefine national identity” (42). Pratt succeeds, remarkably for such a slim volume, both at the task of regional interpretation and at placing the value of this literature nationally.

Generational experience weaves through the entire study. Rølvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* trilogy (1927) explores the plains environment through multigenerational Irish Catholic and Norwegian Lutheran immigrants to South Dakota and “illustrates *how* the immigrant becomes an American” (45). Ojibwe author Louis Erdrich’s *The Plague of Doves* (2008), set in North Dakota, shows the existence down the generations of a historical “burden” among “interlacing bloodlines” (139) of settler society and Native Americans “that makes forgiveness difficult and forgetting impossible” (137). Lois Phillips Hudson’s *The Bones of Plenty* (1962) suggests the generational tension emerging in the 1930s out of the timing of land acquisition as two related North Dakota families confront drought, depression, and the nation’s trade and financial services infrastructure. Pratt argues that, with the Great Plains economy “wholly reliant on agriculture,” the Great Depression had a singular effect on the Great Plains “that separates it from the rest of the nation” (101); yet the region does literary service expressing in a visual metaphor the devastation felt across the nation. The inclusion of Mari Sandoz’s *Capital City* (1939) demonstrates Pratt’s care in selection. In the book, set in the 1930s, Sandoz depicts a “dark anger” (101) in the culture of intolerance (anti-Semitism, red-baiting, nativism, racism, and Fascist sentiments) and class divisions evident in post-pioneer generations.

Historians and literary critics have a long tradition of defining the Great Plains region environmentally, disregarding national borders. Pratt sprinkles references to Canadian literature throughout the study, but, with the exception of Margaret Laurence’s novels set in Manitoba, such observations remain only reminders of a contributory Canadian tradition. Pratt accepts too readily the idea that Canadians forged more peaceful, “less destructive” relations with indigenous peoples than the United States did (3, 32). Shifting to political boundaries to define the U.S. section of the plains, Pratt declares that “Minnesota, Iowa, and

Missouri are not the Great Plains" (5). Strict environmental definitions (and a map from the *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*) might be causes to exclude Minnesota and Iowa. The inclusion of Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* (1978), set in Minneapolis-St. Paul, however, suggests the integral cultural connections between the plains and Minnesota that belie political boundaries. Indeed, the larger grasslands of North America connect western Minnesota and Iowa to Great Plains states and most of the themes discussed. Iowans will find that many of Pratt's interpretations resonate with their state's history and well-known Iowa authors.

*Great Plains Politics*, by Peter J. Longo. Discover the Great Plains Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. xvii, 127 pp. Illustrations, map, bibliography, notes, index. \$14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Karl Brooks, now deputy director of the New Mexico Administrative Office of the Courts, is former associate professor of history at the University of Kansas and former Heartland Regional Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Peter J. Longo views political action on the Great Plains as a praiseworthy form of local activism. His six brief biographies portray political actors: three represented their states in Congress; one served in a legislature; one held elective office in a tribal government; and one dedicated his activities to his community. The subjects remind us that the Great Plains, though today predominantly white, have since the mid-nineteenth century been home to African Americans and were always home to Native peoples. As many plains communities become increasingly Hispanic in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, Longo's book helps situate racial and ethnic tensions within the region's political culture.

Iowans will look in vain for discussion of its state politics or history. The map charting the Great Plains traces its eastern boundary along the Missouri River (xiv). Longo's biographies remain firmly situated west of Iowa, although longtime Nebraska Republican Representative Virginia Smith grew up a Hawkeye before crossing the river for college in Lincoln. Despite this frame, Longo's analysis of plains political culture offers suggestions for understanding Iowa's durable issues of rural depopulation and commodity agriculture's pervasive effects on political thought and action.

Longo argues that plains political culture offers a basically healthy structure for political action. Its thousands of smaller communities are really the places where political conflict and action enable people to

work out their differences. He portrays a local political scene full of cooperative opportunities, where the challenges of living engage nearly everyone with an opinion. Like many studies of midwestern politics, *Great Plains Politics* assumes the centrality of locality and minimizes class tensions that emerge and intensify in declining population areas.

Longo chooses to analyze Plains political culture as an expression of “virtues and values.” His biographies present their subjects engaging in political action as a way of seeking to express personal values in communities that believe their unique places nurture a distinct set of virtues.

Chief among the virtues is plains people’s intimate understanding of the land and its crops. Longo’s assessment of the impact of food on plains politics reminds more than it illuminates. Despite his interest in how his subjects engage with food, Longo could have better developed his analysis of the ways people making a living on and from the land continuously reshape plains “virtues and values” (97). Although most of his subjects were politically active in our lifetime, Longo rarely digs into how agriculture’s transformation after the 1970s—farm and ranch consolidation, high rates of leveraged capitalization, extensive irrigation investment—deepened rural class divisions and accelerated depopulation.

*Great Plains Politics*, by concentrating on local places, diminishes the larger influences of landscape, climate, and the geo-economics of agriculture, the most global American industry, on communities. “Food, its preparation and consumption,” Longo notes, “connects people” (99). Yet those connections have long extended far beyond the plains, making treatments of Kansas Senator Bob Dole and South Dakota Senator George McGovern among Longo’s best efforts to consider how land and economic use shapes the people, not vice versa.

The Great Plains region is more intimately defined by agriculture, capital, and global markets than any other American region. Longo’s book invites further reading about how global pressures determined what political conflicts were deemed “important” and what the contending forces considered “good” political outcomes. The book’s use of “food” as an analytical lens mostly restates its emphasis on community and connection, not division and conflict. The latter drive political action: *Great Plains Politics* raises, but does not deeply consider, why people differed about who should own food production, who should benefit from its manufacture and export, and how the wealth (and poverty) created by agriculture challenges the benign image of cohesive, united communities.

*Great Plains Politics* can be read as another midwestern “resistance” narrative. Longo defends plains people and their ways against the sneers of those claiming to be their cultural betters. This traditional stance will be appreciated by many readers, especially those who believe their “cohesive communities” should defend special, but threatened, midwestern virtues.

*The Fall of Wisconsin: The Conservative Conquest of a Progressive Bastion and the Future of American Politics*, by Dan Kaufman. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018. 319 pp. Notes, index. \$26.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Colin Gordon is the F. Wendell Miller Professor of History at the University of Iowa. He is the author, most recently, of *Citizen Brown: Race, Democracy and Inequality in the St. Louis Suburbs* (forthcoming).

In 2010 the Republican Party captured the “trifecta” of state power in Wisconsin, winning the state senate, the state house, and the governor’s mansion by wide margins. In short order, Scott Walker’s Republicans pressed through “Act 10,” a sweeping attack on the collective bargaining rights of public sector workers. Versions of that playbook had been employed in conservative bastions such as Kansas and North Carolina for years, but Wisconsin marked a turning point. There, the right—both the Wisconsin Republicans and the network of national groups behind them—had successfully flipped a state with a long progressive tradition. Fighting Bob La Follette’s “laboratory of democracy” was now home to a political experiment of a very different kind.

This juxtaposition—between Wisconsin’s progressive past and the eight-year tenure of Scott Walker—is the central theme of Dan Kaufman’s *Fall of Wisconsin*. Kaufman is a Madison-raised, New York-based journalist who covered these events for *The New Yorker* and other outlets. His account relies heavily on anecdotes, observations, and character sketches that stand in for larger patterns or problems. Randy Bryce (the ironworker who ran unsuccessfully for Paul Ryan’s open seat in 2018) embodies the confrontation between Walker and organized labor. Aldo Leopold and Gaylord Nelson are the foils for Walker’s environmental policies. And State Representative Chris Taylor is our guide to the role of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in “teeing up” Walker’s legislative agenda.

But these journalistic devices are also the book’s undoing. The blow-by-blow account (from Walker’s election, to the passage of Bill 10, to the recall elections of 2011 and 2012) seems—by 2018—pretty familiar ground. The stark contrast between the state’s progressive past and its conservative present is, I think, a misleadingly nostalgic reading of

that history: this, after all, is the state that gave us Joe McCarthy as well as Bob La Follete, that featured some of the nastiest labor disputes of the twentieth century as well as some of the earliest innovations in labor and social welfare law.

And what we have learned since 2010—about the role of ALEC and its offshoots in state politics and about the political and cultural and economic foundations of Walker’s support—is not well integrated into Kaufman’s account. He does a capable job of tracing the influence of ALEC, but does so as if he is unraveling a conspiracy (he claims that ALEC “was almost unheard of before Walker’s election” [121]) and not recounting a pattern of political influence that—even in 2010—was pretty well documented. Kaufman largely ignores the work of Alex Hertel-Fernandez, Nancy MacLean, the Center for Media and Democracy, and Wisconsin’s progressive state think tank, the Center on Wisconsin Strategy in tracing—and resisting—ALEC’s pernicious presence.

Kaufman’s largest blind spot, however, is race. Wisconsin (and much of the upper Midwest) has nurtured the nation’s largest racial disparities on everything from incarceration to school suspension. Milwaukee, the font of Walker’s political career, is one of the nation’s most segregated metropolitan settings. The works of Arlie Rothchild, Kathy Cramer, and others have underscored how the “politics of resentment” that swept Walker—and a few years later Donald Trump—to power are deeply imbued with racial animus. And yet, for Kaufman, this barely registers. The characters (and caricatures) in this story—aside from a brief discussion of Native treaty rights—are all white.

I admired Kaufman’s reporting on these events as they unfolded, but the book version adds little—and seems, in 2018, even a little stale and dated. Earlier works by Andrew Kersten (*The Battle for Wisconsin*) and John Nichols (*Uprising*) provide a richer account of the events of 2011–2014 in and around Madison; more recent work—by Kathy Cramer, Amy Goldstein, and others—does a better job of not just explaining why Walker won but why so many of the citizens of Wisconsin voted for him—in 2010, in the recall election of 2011, in 2014, and again in 2018.

## Announcements

THE IOWA HISTORY CENTER at Simpson College seeks nominations for the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history for 2019. 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, 2018, and June 30, 2019.

The winner will be announced in the fall of 2019 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, 2019.

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

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (SHSI) announces a grant program for the 2019/2020 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.

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Iowa City IA 52240-1806  
Phone: 319-335-3931  
e-mail: [marvin-bergman@uiowa.edu](mailto:marvin-bergman@uiowa.edu)





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## Contributors

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## 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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