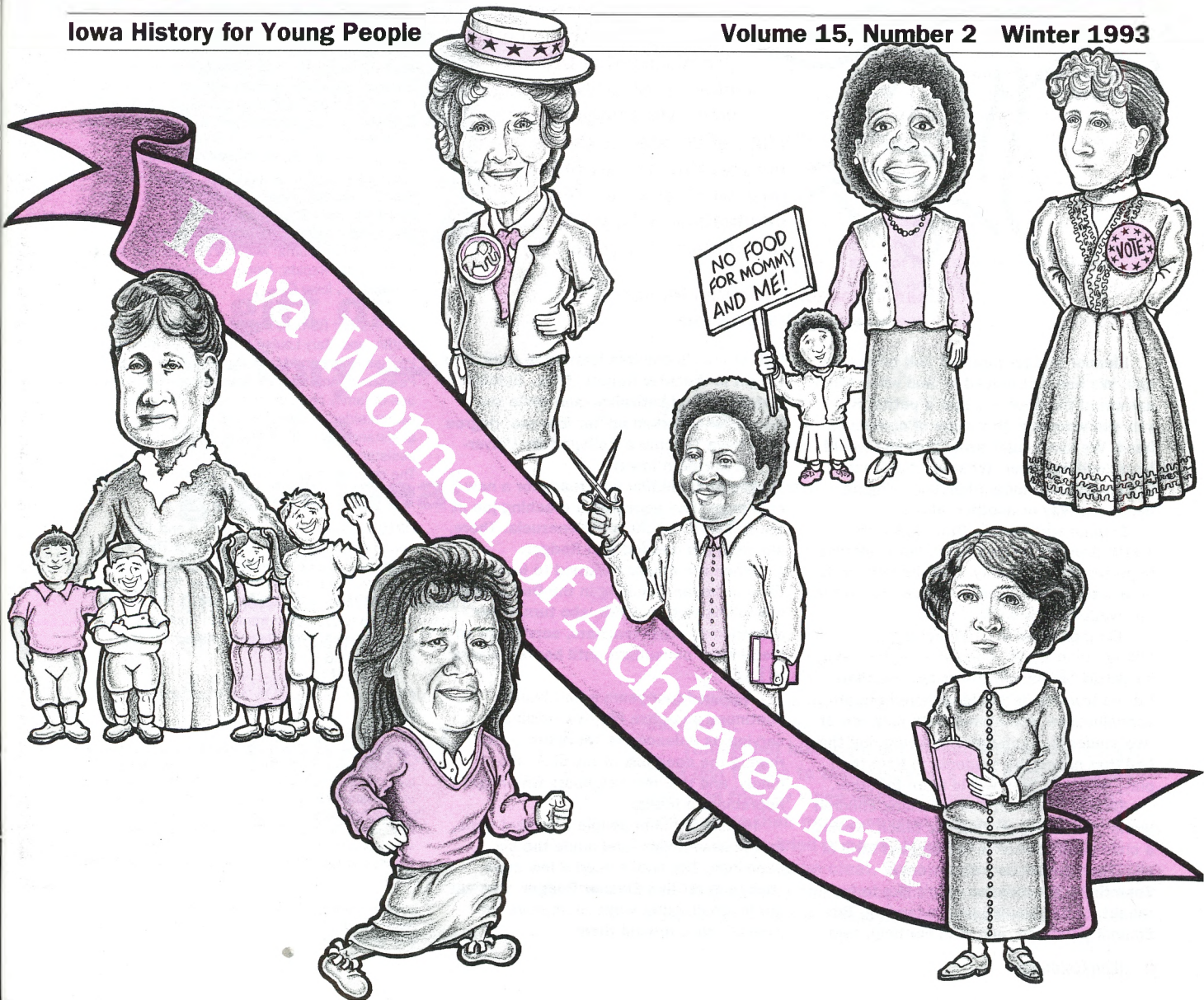
THE Goldfinch

Iowa History for Young People

Volume 15, Number 2 Winter 1993



HISTORY MAKERS

This issue of *The Goldfinch* highlights just a few of the many famous Iowan women of achievement. One of the winners of the 1993 Write Women Back into History Essay Contest tells the story of such a woman. Jenny Tindall of Urbandale writes about Eleanor Rodger, a neighbor who brings more than a plate of cookies to the people in her life. Here is part of Jenny's prize-winning essay. (For more information on how YOU can enter the contest, see page 30.)

Eleanor Rodger, Iowa Bell-Ringer

by Jenny Tindall, Urbandale

Eleanor Rodger rang our bell two years ago. We had just moved in, and when Mom answered the door, we saw a petite, 80-year-old woman with a plate of cookies in hand. We knew right away that she would be a good neighbor. What we didn't know is that Eleanor Rodger has been ringing bells, one way or another, all her life.

Eleanor was born in Otho, Iowa, in 1910. Growing up on a farm, her work was important to the family, and she learned to do whatever was needed. "I even drove the hay wagon," she said.

Eleanor really started making a difference in 1930, when she began a long career as an elementary school teacher. Her early years in teaching were in rural schoolhouses, sometimes with only one or two students. Each day she would ring the bell that called the students in from their play, and then they would learn together.

Eleanor never tired of watching children learn. "It's a real privilege to teach. Seeing a child learn to read is the biggest thrill of all." The job was not always easy. Sometimes the children didn't like to be taught, or had trouble understanding. But Eleanor persisted, and with her help, over 500 of Iowa's children learned to read. She taught in Webster County, Otho, Oldebolt, Cherokee, and LeGrand—and while she taught, she worked on her four-year degree from Iowa Teacher's College (the University of Northern Iowa).

In 1947, Eleanor was ready for a new challenge. She accepted a teaching job at the Bella Vista school in Venezuela. There, she met and married Bob Rodger.

When the couple returned to Iowa, Eleanor began teaching in the Des Moines school district. In 1966, she turned her attention to other teachers, serving as an elementary consultant until her retirement in 1975.

Widowed four years ago, Eleanor continues an active life—exercising, serving as a deacon in her church, and ringing the doorbells of the sick, the lonely, and the new neighbors who might appreciate a friend.

History is full of people who shot guns, met in assemblies, and made the big decisions. The books need a few more "bell-ringers" like Eleanor Rodger, who set out in small, quiet ways to improve the lives of those around them.

THE Goldfinch

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EDPRESS

EDITOR: Deborah Gore Ohrn
PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR: Christie Dailey
FICTION EDITOR: Steven Blaski
CONSULTING EDITORS: Karen Mason, curator, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries; Charlotte Nelson, administrator, Iowa Commission on the Status of Women; and Louise R. Noun, author, and member, Iowa Women's Hall of Fame.
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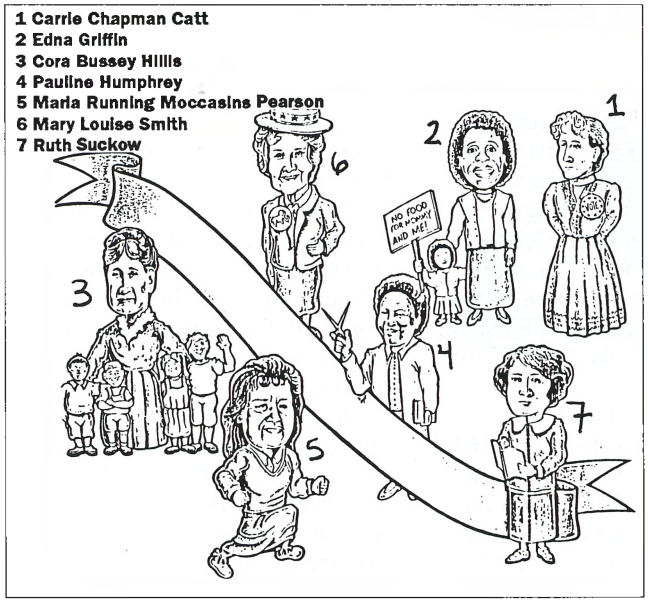
WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT



"Women are absolutely [part] of the history of Iowa but so many times their stories have not been told and have been lost," wrote Mary Louise Smith, one of Iowa's most famous women involved in 20th century politics. Here are some of these stories. This issue highlights only a few of Iowa's 20th-century women of achievement.

These women have devoted their lives to working for human rights, education, equality, and individual rights. They have stepped out beyond the front doors of their homes and broken boundaries, pushed limits, tested laws, and pursued their ideals.

This issue highlights the notable **Iowa women we should all know.** They come from the worlds of politics, art, music, education, sports, business, entertainment, and social work. They represent Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and European Americans.

We'd love to hear about notable women from other ethnic groups. Send us their stories and photographs to: *The Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. We'll try to include more women's stories in upcoming issues.

It's important to tell the story of Iowa's women before the women themselves or their stories are forgotten. ♀

Our cover highlights the many accomplishments of the Iowa women of achievement you'll read about in this issue.

CONTENTS

Features

Iowa Women News	4
Carrie Chapman Catt	8
Edna Griffin	11
Cora Bussey Hillis	14
Rosie's Dinner Party	16
Pauline Humphrey	18
Maria Running Moccasins Pearson	21
Mary Louise Smith	24
Ruth Suckow	26
The Bonney Family	28

Departments

History Makers	2
Answers	30
The Roost	31

Warning: The material you are about to read in this issue about Iowa women of achievement may seem confusing.

Throughout history, most women who marry change their last names to their husband's last names. Names get even trickier when women marry more than once and change their names several times, or combine last names. We've tried our best to make the names of women in this issue clear. Today many women are deciding to keep the names they were given at birth or even make up totally new names of their own. ♀

Breaking the Blue Barrier

DES MOINES—A male police officer once asked Phylliss Henry why she wanted to go into police work involving "blood and guts."

"Why don't you take up nursing instead?" he asked.

This was the kind of **sexist** attitude Des Moines' first female patrol officer faced when she entered the force in 1972. In 1970 there were fewer than 10 women officers on patrol in the entire United States. It took women like Iowa's Phylliss Henry to break the barriers that kept women out of the police force.

Growing up in Des Moines, Phylliss graduated from East High School in 1958 and married Earl Henry, a police officer. Phylliss worked as a **jail matron** in the county sheriff's office where Earl worked for a few years. After her divorce in the late 1960s, Henry moved with her daughters, Shelly and Ellen, to California for a few years. She then returned to Des Moines and in 1971 enrolled in a two-year law enforcement program at Des Moines Area Community College.

Phylliss passed all of the written and physical tests to be a police officer. She lucked out by passing the height and weight requirements (for men!) that prevented most women from becoming patrol officers.

"At the time, women could serve only as jail matrons or as record clerks; they couldn't even be dispatchers because it was thought women would get too emotional over the air during emergencies," Henry said in a newspaper interview.

For 10 years Henry criticized and challenged the sex discrimination she faced at work. She filed legal complaints challenging height and

Ask Goldie

1. What is the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame?
It's an award given to four Iowa women every year. The winners are women—dead or alive—who have contributed their talents and skills to the state. The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women created the Hall of Fame in 1975 to recognize and honor achieving women. In 1972, the Iowa State Legislature created the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women to help assure equality for all Iowa women.

2. Who are the Hall of Famers in this issue of *The Goldfinch*?
Carrie Chapman Catt, Edna Griffin, Cora Bussey Hillis, Mary Louise Smith, Jessie Field Shambaugh, and Ruth Suckow. We wish we could publish something about all of the women who have been honored!

3. How can kids get involved?
Enter the "Write Women Back Into History" essay contest sponsored every year by the Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, the State Historical Society of Iowa, and the Iowa Department of Education. Kids in grades six through nine can participate through their schools. See page 30 for more info. ♀

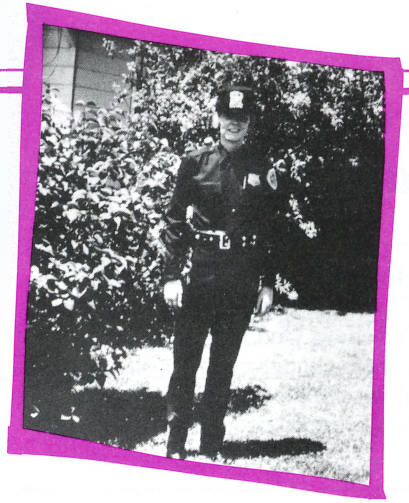
Write Women Back Into History Contest!

jail matron:
a woman who supervises and tends to the needs of women prisoners

weight regulations, the separate lines of promotion for men and women, the rejection of women for certain jobs, and the department's ban on her public speaking.

In 1978 she was promoted to police sergeant. In 1980, Henry was named to the board of the International Association of Women Police. Two years later, she resigned to get a Ph.D. in communication studies at the University of Iowa.

Women's struggle to take on non-traditional jobs like police officer is still being fought. Out of 356 Des Moines police officers today, only 18, or five percent are women. The national average is 10 percent. ♀



Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries

President Bill Clinton nominated Phylliss Henry Iowa's first woman U.S. Marshal. The U.S. Marshal's office provides security for the federal courts, captures fugitives, transports federal prisoners, and coordinates the witness protection program, which protects people whose lives are endangered when they agree to testify in court.

folk artists:
people who create songs, stories, crafts, or food in traditional ways

(MOO-gin) often wore two pairs of glasses to see the fine knots. "I'll do this [lacework] as long as I can," she said after she retired. "I'll tell you what, they'll have to bury me with a needle and thread."

Because of her lacemaking, Genevieve won a $5,000 award as a National Heritage Fellow, one of 17 American **folk artists** honored by the National Endowment for the Arts, in 1984. She is the only Iowa woman to date to win the award.

Although Genevieve and her husband, Bud, had no children, she tried to hand down the tradition to the next generation of nieces. Her lacework can be seen at the Interstate-80 Welcome Center near Victor, Iowa. It is part of an exhibit called Folk Arts on the Freeway. ♀

—*Steven Ohrn*

Making Lace: Genevieve Nahra Mougin

Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

DAVENPORT—Seven-year-old Genevieve Nahra (NAY-ra) learned how to make knotted lace using an ordinary sewing needle and fine thread from her Lebanese mother. Her parents had immigrated from Lebanon to Illinois. Knotted lace-making was a Lebanese tradition passed down from generation to generation.

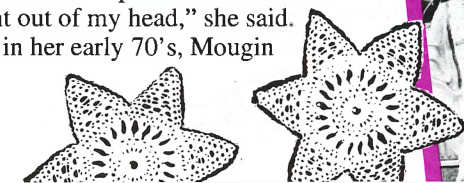
In 1921 the Nahras moved to the Davenport area where Genevieve's father and mother operated an eight-acre vegetable farm to support their 11 children.

Throughtout her life Genevieve continued to perfect her knotted-lace doilies and tablecloths. After she married, she worked full-time, first as a tailor, and then at Detroit, Michigan, and Davenport, Iowa, defense plants.

Genevieve created her knotted-lace without books or patterns. "It comes straight out of my head," she said. While in her early 70's, Mougin

Each of Genevieve Nahra Mougin's unique lace pieces, like spiderwebs, is different.

Steven Ohrn



Setting Records on Skis

DES MOINES—The world went dark for Sheila Holzworth of Des Moines when she was 10 years old. The metal headgear attached to her braces snapped off, gouged her eyes, and blinded her.

Within two months Sheila began learning Braille. She quickly mastered the use of a cane. Soon she joined her family in horseback riding, canoeing, and water-skiing. Sheila ran track at Dowling High School and at Central College in Pella. (She ran with a radio attached to a headband to help guide her.)

In 1981, the International Year of the Disabled, Holzworth scaled Mt. Rainier in Washington with nine other people with disabilities. She entered record books as the "first blind woman to make it to the peak." By the mid-1980s, Sheila had won several medals in water- and snow-skiing events in World Cup and Olympic international competitions for people with disabilities.

The star athlete also received an Outstanding Young American Award from the United States Jaycees. She met with former President George Bush at the White House in 1989.

When she's not competing in an athletic event, Holzworth works at The Principal Financial Group and uses a talking computer.

"I guess I've come to believe that some good must come of the accident which caused my blindness," explained Sheila in a Dowling High School/St. Joseph Education Center publication. "I believe God works through me to help change people's attitudes about blind people and handicapped people in general." ♀

Bev Boyd

Sheila Holzworth poses with her dog, Snapper. Many people who are blind have seeing-eye dogs to guide them, but Snapper is Holzworth's pet and protector.

The Pied Piper of Bowling

OTTUMWA—The first U.S. woman to gain fame as a professional bowler was born in Ottumwa in 1889. Almost 100 years later, Floretta Doty McCutcheon was inducted into the Iowa Sports Hall of Fame in 1988 for her amazing pro-bowling career.

Floretta moved with her family to Colorado when she was two years old. She didn't try bowling until 1923 when her doctor suggested she get in shape. Her husband, Robert, who was starting a women's league at his company talked his wife into trying the sport.

At the time when fewer than 3,000 women were registered bowlers in the United States, McCutcheon tossed her first ball down a lane when she was 35 years old. She scored only a 69 (out of 300).

Three years later she watched the form of Jimmy Smith, the World's Champion Bowler. Trying to imitate his bowling style, Floretta quickly improved her score. In 1927 she beat the champion bowler at his own game and turned pro the next year. From that moment on, life dramatically changed for McCutcheon. She and her husband divorced. Floretta traveled around the country for 10 years giving exhibitions. With her earnings she sent her daughter, Barbara, to the University of Colorado.

Writers called her the "Pied Piper of Bowling" when she and a business partner formed the "Mrs. McCutcheon School of Bowling." Newspapers and bowling alley owners across the United States sponsored the schools. Floretta gave free lessons to women and children.

Some experts believe Floretta Doty McCutcheon taught more than 250,000 women and children to bowl. Her motto: "Let your ball roll. Don't try to throw it."

The Queen of the Ten Pins died in 1967 at the age of 78. ♀

Latina: a girl or woman of Latin-American descent

Latinos: people of Latin-American descent

Anglos: people of English descent

A Community Star

When Ila Plasencia (EYE-la plah-SENS-ee-ya) was in high school, she and 11 other **Latina** girls organized a club called The Twelve Stars. The West Des Moines girls baked cookies, collected scrap metal, and wrote to servicemen during World War II (1939-1945).

I always liked organizing," said Ila Plasencia in a recent interview with *The Goldfinch*. "We weren't allowed to join certain groups. **Latinos** and **Anglos** didn't mix then. As a result of the discrimination I faced in high school, I knew I'd have to make my own way in life."

Born in Earlham, Iowa, in 1928, Ila was named Adelita. But the people in the community changed her name to "Ila" because they said they couldn't pronounce "Adelita." Her parents, Pablo and Pilar, came from Mexico. Ila was the youngest of seven children and grew up speaking Spanish at home and English at school. The family moved to Des Moines to farm when Ila was two years old. In addition to raising corn, pigs, and cows, her father worked at a cement factory with many other Hispanic workers.

Ila's mother died when she was seven and the family moved to West Des Moines. During her teen years and even into her 20s she was a pitcher on the neighborhood girls' softball team. "We played softball down by the railroad in empty lots. I learned leadership, teamwork, and how to win," she said.

After graduating from Valley High School, Ila worked as a clerk-typist for the Department of Agriculture for about five years. She married and then was diagnosed with TB and spent 10 months in a hospital. After she recovered, Plasencia worked as a bookkeeper and later had four children: Paula, Raphael, Brian, and Lisa.

Soon she was organizing events in the community. Ila served as president of the girls' softball organization in West Des Moines. In 1970, 1971, and 1993, she was named Woman of the Year by the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). In 1983, Plasencia organized a folkloric dance troupe, *Los Bailadores Mestizos*. A group of adults and children perform traditional Mexican dances around the state. A year later, Ila was inducted into the Mexican Bowling Hall of Fame.

"I'm good at whatever I do," she said.

But her greatest accomplishment was the creation of Midwest Education Resources Development Fund, Inc. (MERDF). As executive director, she writes grants for funding to help provide scholarships for young Latinos to attend leadership conferences and college. In the past, she offered classes in history, government, and English to new immigrants—more than 200 people studied at MERDF.

According to Ila, some 10,000 Latinos live in Polk County. She helps many new Spanish-speaking Iowans make the adjustment to life in the United States. She helps families set up bank accounts, establish credit, and buy insurance and homes.

Ila also gives public speeches on racism and the Latino community. "We are the most forgotten minority group in the United States," said Ila. "We are left out of the stories."

Ila Plasencia's message to kids who grow up in two cultures: "Be proud of who you are and what you do. You have a gift of having the ability to live in two worlds. Share your culture with others." ♀

This story is available in Spanish. Please contact the editor if you would like a copy.

Deborah Gore Olim

Ila Plasencia is a civil rights leader and activist for the Latino community in Iowa and nationwide.

Carrie Lane Chapman Catt

Working for Women's Right to Vote (1859-1947)

Like children everywhere, Carrie Clinton Lane—who would later be known as Carrie Chapman Catt—understood justice. She knew when people were being fair and when they weren't.

Carrie was 13 before she realized that women were not allowed to vote. Her family had spent many hours that year—1872—discussing the coming election for U.S. President. The candidates were **Ulysses S. Grant** and **Horace Greeley**. Carrie had named her kittens after the candidates, and she named the cutest after the man favored by her parents: Mr. Greeley. On election day, her father and a farm helper dressed in good clothes to go to town to vote.

"Mother, why aren't you changing clothes?" Carrie asked. "Are you going to town in your work dress?"

Her mother laughed. "Why, Carrie, don't you know that women can't vote?"

Carrie was stunned. Years later she said, "I never forgot that . . . injustice done to my mother. I [truly] believe I was born a **suffragist**."

Carrie was to become one of America's best-known women in the early part of the 1900s. Her fame grew out of her ambitious activities for justice; justice for women and peace for the world. Now she is most remembered for her work for women's right to vote.

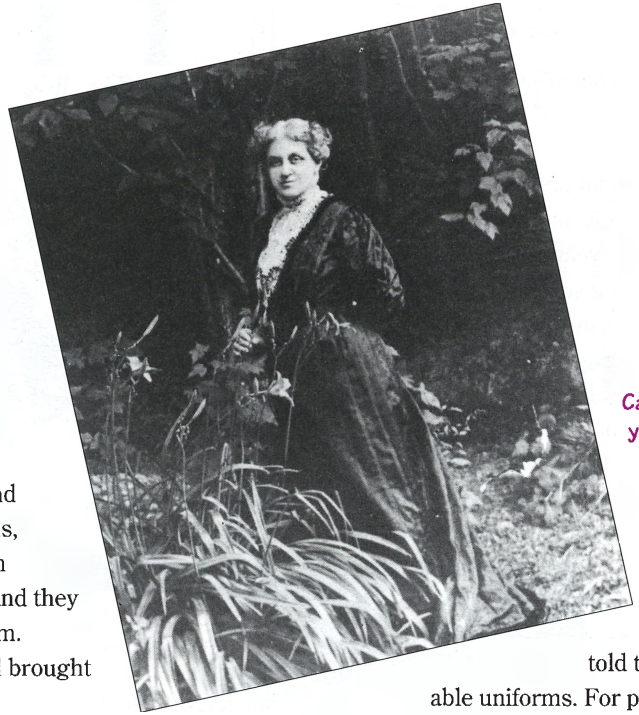
Carrie Clinton Lane was born in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1859. She moved with her family to Iowa when she was seven.

State Historical Society of Iowa

Carrie Chapman Catt devoted her life to working for women's rights in Iowa and around the world.

Ulysses S Grant: Civil War (1861–1865) general of the northern Union Army and U.S. president from 1869–1877. Greeley was a newspaper person and his opponent

suffragist: one who supports extension of the vote



Carrie Chapman Catt at 50 years of age in her garden.

She had two brothers, one older and one younger. Carrie's father, Lucius, built a brick home a few miles from Charles City (population 500) on land they would call Spring Brook Stock Farm. Lucius planted maple saplings he'd brought from Wisconsin.

Carrie's mother, Marie Clinton Lane, had gone to a college for women in Massachusetts (women were not yet allowed into most of the colleges that men attended), and her pleasure in reading was one of the things she taught her daughter. One of Carrie's greatest joys was to take a book to one of the maple trees, climb into the branches, and read for a while.

Carrie's interest in politics and her delight with animals continued as she grew. Her parents probably influenced her in both matters. Her father ran for office several times when she was a teen-ager.

College adventures

After high school, Carrie went to the Iowa State Agricultural College (now Iowa State University). She earned most of the money needed for school, first by teaching, then by washing dishes, and working in the library.

At Iowa State, Chapman made two big changes. There were no exercise classes for women, although men were required to march and drill. Carrie asked the general who taught the drills if he could do the same for women. He welcomed the chance and told the women to make comfortable uniforms. For pretend rifles, he bought broom sticks at the local broom factory.

The second change was about speaking in public. In those days before television and movies, speech-making was a popular entertainment and a way to spread ideas. The Crescent Literary Society had weekly meetings where young men gave three-minute talks to practice their skills at quick thinking. The women were only allowed to recite memorized lines or read a short essay. Carrie organized other friends, and the women formed their own society where they could speak out as the men did.

After college, Carrie studied law for a year and then moved to Mason City to teach. She later became principal and then superintendent of schools.

When she was 26, she married Leo Chapman, the new editor of the *Mason City Republican*. She went to work with him on the paper, writing and editing.

Leo died less than two years later. Carrie moved to Charles City and bought a house where her younger brother could live while he attended high school. She earned a living giving

temperance: movement to stop the use of alcohol

speeches on **temperance** and women's rights.

Working for the right to vote

Carrie began her active work for suffrage in 1885, when she attended conventions in Des Moines and Cedar Rapids. During her life, Carrie served 51 years as an officer in either a state or national group supporting suffrage. Seven of those years she was president of the largest national group, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). She spoke in every county in Iowa, in dozens of states, and eventually in many countries around the world.

In 1890, she married George Catt, a well-to-do engineer who designed bridges. Carrie and George lived in Seattle, Boston, and the New York City area. George Catt died in 1905.

Catt traveled extensively in the 1890s lecturing about woman's suffrage. She served as chairperson of NAWSA from 1895 to 1900, and then as its president until 1904. From 1904 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Catt worked for the international woman's suffrage movement.

In 1915 she served once again as the president of the NAWSA. With Catt at the helm, the association worked hard for the next four years until Congress passed the 19th amendment in 1919 allowing women to vote.

In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution became law . Women could vote! Carrie wrote about women's new right to vote: "Prize it . . . Understand what it means and what it can do for the country."

Visiting Iowa

Catt's last trip to Iowa was on Mother's Day, 1936, for a ceremony in Des Moines. The Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission—a group founded in 1922 by women who had worked for suffrage—raised money for a memorial to honor all of the women who had worked so long and hard to gain the vote. The sculpture was dedicated by Catt on that day in 1936. It is in the hallway of the state capitol.

After Catt's many years of working for woman's suffrage, she turned her attention to international woman's suffrage and world peace. By the end of her career, Carrie had spoken on every continent and in nearly every country. She helped women get the vote in 26 countries.

Carrie Lane Chapman Catt, one of Iowa's most famous women, died at the age of 88 at home in New Rochelle, New York, in 1947. She was nominated to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1975. ♀

ISHS

Carrie Chapman Catt was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in June, 1926, for her work as a suffragist.

Ask Yourself

❶ How did Carrie Chapman Catt support women's right to vote?

❷ What do you admire about Catt?

❸ Can you find other Iowans who have worked for justice? Write your own biographies of others who have supported justice for women and for minority groups or who have worked for peace like Catt.

Edna Williams Griffin

Civil Rights Activist (1909-)

In 1921, 12-year-old Edna Williams and her four younger brothers loved to spend their free time catching bullfrogs and playing on their New Hampshire farm.

But slowly things began to change. Her brothers and the neighbor boys excluded her from their games. She found herself spending a lot of time by herself because there weren't many girls living on nearby farms.

"I was very isolated. In the farm world you don't have a lot of contact with others," she told *The Goldfinch* in a recent interview.

Edna turned to books for companionship and developed an interest in literature and history. She read books about her African-American heritage.

Photos from the collection of Edna W. Griffin

The young scholar would grow up and move to Iowa where she would fight for equal rights for blacks.

Growing up in the North

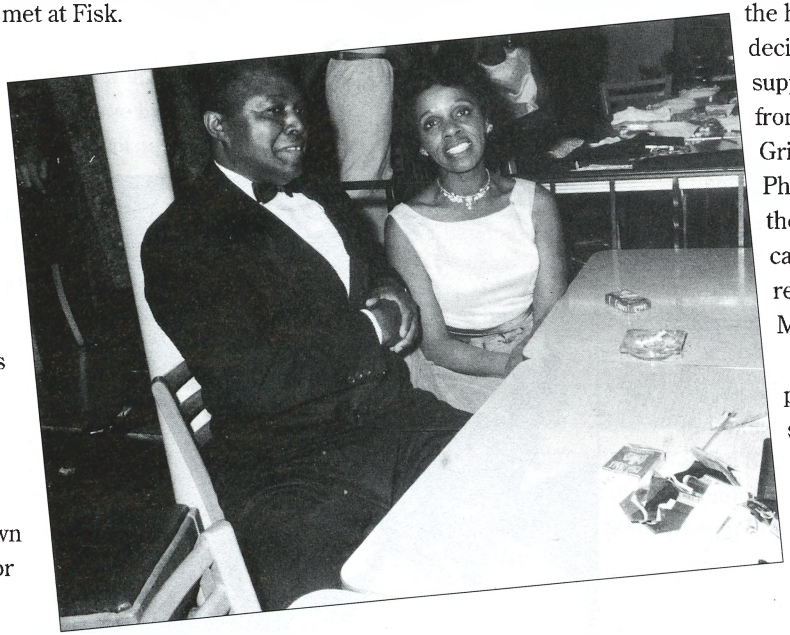
Edna was born in 1909 in Kentucky where her father, Edward H. Williams, trained saddle horses. When Edna was just a baby, the family moved to a farm in Walpole, New Hampshire. Her father continued to train horses and her mother, Henrietta Williams, managed the household and took care of her five children and the hired workers.

Edna and Stanley Griffin, her husband, out for a picnic in 1965. Griffin was so busy working for civil rights throughout the 1960s, that she had few photographs of herself.

When Edna Williams was in her teens, the family moved to Lennox, Massachusetts. She and a neighbor boy were the only African-American students at the high school. The family later moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where she graduated from high school.

After high school, Williams traveled to Nashville, Tennessee, where she studied English and Sociology at Fisk University and graduated in 1933 with an English degree. After graduation, she moved to New York and married Stanley Griffin, whom she had met at Fisk.

In 1947, the couple moved to Des Moines where Stanley enrolled at the College of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery. They had only been in Des Moines for about a year when Griffin realized that many restaurants wouldn't serve African Americans. She decided things needed to change in Des Moines.



Edna and Stanley Griffin enjoying an evening out for dinner. In the 1940s African Americans were not allowed to eat in many European-American owned restaurants. It took people like Edna Griffin to change Iowa's laws.

Taking a stand

Katz Drug Store in downtown Des Moines was well-known for discriminating against African Americans. "The manager boasted about it," Griffin told the *Des Moines Register* in 1983. Griffin decided to make her stand there.

"Efforts had been made by individuals to sue Katz, [but] they didn't know how to do it," she said. "It took what Edna Griffin had to do it!"

On July 7, 1947, Griffin, her 1-1/2-year-old daughter, Phyllis, and a few friends sat down at the lunch counter, ordered cold drinks, and waited.

Although the waitress almost took their order, the fountain manager stopped her, and refused to serve them. Griffin immediately filed a **suit** against the drugstore for discrimination. Other African Americans who had been refused service there followed her example.

Griffin won her case, and Katz Drug Store was found guilty of violating the state's civil rights law and fined $50. The owners appealed the court's decision, and the case went to the Iowa State Supreme Court. While waiting for the high court's decision, Griffin and supporters picketed in front of the store. Griffin's daughter, Phyllis, was among the protesters. She carried a sign that` read "No Food for Mommy & Me."

"Originally we picketed outside," said Griffin, "but people would go through our lines to go into the restaurant, and they wouldn't pay any attention to us."

So, she took the protest inside to get people's attention.

"We organized sit-ins at high noon [on Saturdays] so there were no places for [white customers] to sit down."

Katz Drug Store continued to refuse service to African-American customers, who in turn filed new suits against the store.

On December 13, 1949, the Iowa State Supreme Court ruled against Katz's appeal. Griffin had won her case!

By standing up for her rights, and the rights of African Americans throughout Iowa, Griffin worked to end public discrimination. Her lawsuit was also a warning to other restaurants that had discriminated against blacks.

After she had won the lawsuit, Griffin settled into raising her three children, but never strayed too far from activism. She dedicated much of her life to civil rights and peace organizations.

In the 1960s she organized the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, an organization which encouraged and helped southern African Americans to register to vote. In August 1963, she participated in the historic March on Washington in Washington, D.C., where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

In the early 1980s Griffin also wrote a weekly column, "Strokes and Folks," for *The Iowa State Bystander*, a statewide African-American newspaper published in Des Moines from 1884 to the mid-1980s. In 1985, she was inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame.

Griffin lives in Des Moines and at 84, she isn't as active as she used to be. But her dedication to improving the lives of African-Americans remains a vital part of Iowa history. ♀

—*Amy Ruth*

suit: a case brought before a law court by one person or group against another to settle a dispute between them

While waiting for the high court's decision, Griffin and supporters picketed in front of the store. Griffin's daughter, Phyllis, was among the protesters. She carried a sign that read "No Food for Mommy & Me."

Ask Yourself

❶ How did Edna Griffin win the right for African Americans to be served at Iowa drugstores?

❷ Have you ever been discriminated against? How did it make you feel? How do you think it made Edna feel?

❸ Can you find other Iowans who fought discrimination? Write your own biography.

Iowa Women of Achievement

Cora Bussey Hillis

Children's Rights Supporter (1858-1924)

Cora Bussey Hillis

One hot summer day in 1894, Cora Bussey Hillis' son, Cyrus, spent the day swimming in the Des Moines River with his friends. The river was a favorite spot for children, but swimming there was dangerous. Every summer someone drowned. Cora worried for a long time that day. The worry helped her decide to try to change things. The children of Des Moines needed a safe place to swim.

Cora talked to many people about this problem. They helped her, and soon money was raised. A bathhouse was built on the river bank. Adults watched over the swimming area, and children who didn't own a bathing suit could rent one.

The swimming area was a success. Cora Bussey Hillis decided to do more.

congress: meeting

Mothers educate themselves

Cora Bussey was born in 1858 in Bloomfield, near the Missouri border. When she was 25 years old, she and her husband, Isaac Hillis, settled in Des Moines. Cora was a busy mother. She cared for five children and a younger sister. She went to Washington, D.C. for a mothers **congress**. The other women there wanted to help parents and teachers improve child-rearing. Cora invited the congress to meet in Des Moines the next year.

Hillis went back to Iowa and organized Mothers Clubs across the state. By May 1900, Iowa had 644 Mothers Clubs. These clubs had many projects. Some collected clothes for needy children. Others worked for better health and safety at schools. Some planned ways to improve home and family care. Many women came to the 1900 Mothers Congress.

Cora thought of more ideas to help children.

Young law-breakers

Imagine being a child in 1900. If you committed a crime, you would be treated like an adult. You would be put in jail and go to court, like an adult. If you were found guilty, you would be sent to prison with adults. Cora felt this was wrong. Children could not be expected to behave like adults, so they

should not be punished like adults.

Hillis wrote about children in trouble with the law: "In Des Moines we have a miserable system of taking care of these little folks. The only place for the detention of these young people is one small room, the most of which is cut up into [little] holes just large enough for a cot and a chair. In these, the children sleep and during the day are all allowed to mingle in the small remaining space. . . . There have been as many as 30 there at once. These children are fed but black coffee with bread and molasses with soup for dinner."

Cora wanted a juvenile court for young people separate from the adult court and jails. Children would stay in special homes where they would be guarded by trained probation officers instead of police.

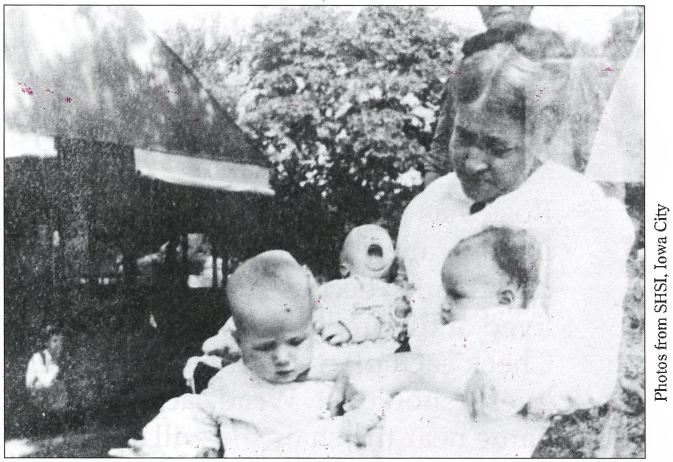
Other states had juvenile courts that worked well. Hillis asked many people to help her persuade the Iowa government to vote for a juvenile court, too. Ministers gave sermons, and labor unions and clubs asked their members to help. Cora's efforts convinced legislators to pass the Juvenile Court Bill. This was a victory for Hillis and the children of Iowa.

The juvenile court changed in 1967 so that children could have all of the rights that adults have. Before that time, the judges tried to make the best decisions for the children. Now, lawyers make many decisions for the children.

Learning from small children

Hillis began thinking about the advice women received on raising children. She learned that much of it came from imagining and not from watching and studying real children. In fact, more was known about raising animals than raising children.

So Cora helped establish the Child Welfare Research Station at the University of Iowa in Iowa City in 1917. Here, adults could learn more about the ways children grow. The researchers could find better ways to care for children from baby years into the teens. Iowa parents could take better care of their children. Cora fought for many years to get this project started.



Photos from SHSI, Iowa City

Cora Bussey Hillis organized the first Parent Teachers Association (PTA) branch in Iowa. Hillis Elementary School in Des Moines is named for this famous children's rights leader.

Then the United States entered World War I. Many young men wanted to fight, but a lot of them could not pass the physical exam. In one day in Des Moines, 259 young men were tested, but 209 failed. Most of their problems were physical handicaps from poor diets and childcare. This helped Cora win her battle. The bill was passed.

Cora Bussey Hillis promoted good child care until her death in 1924. She helped Iowa's children and parents in many ways. ♀

—*Elise Schebler Dawson*

Ask Yourself

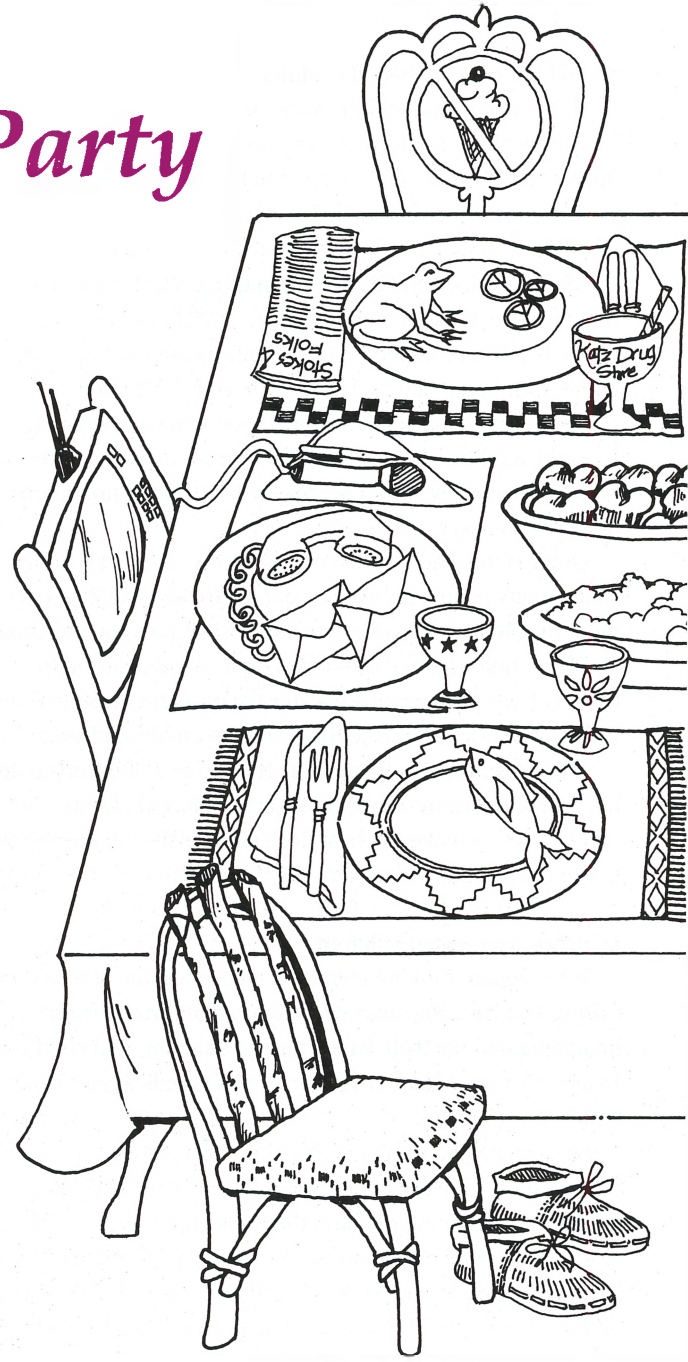
❶ How did Mothers Clubs improve the care of children?

❷ What did Cora Bussey Hillis do to support children's rights?

❸ Can you draw, paint, or make a puppet of Cora Bussey Hillis? Write a speech for her to give about her life.

Rosie's Dinner Party

Rosie has invited seven remarkable Iowa women over for a dinner. (Yes, in her dreams, because these women have lived at different times in Iowa history.) Check each place for clues on where the guests should sit. Write each guest's name near the chair she will sit in.



Ask Yourself

1 What do the items at each place represent?
2 Pretend that you've been invited to the dinner party, too. Draw something that represents you on your place setting. What questions would you ask these women if you could talk to them?
3 Whom would you invite to the dinner party? Why?

ROSIE'S CHALLENGE: Write a play using these characters. What would the women talk about at the dinner party? It doesn't matter how long your play is. If you send us a play with all of these women as characters and a dinner party as the setting, we'll give you a free subscription to *The Goldfinch*. Send your "Rosie's Dinner Party" play to *The Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. ♀

Art by Mary Moye-Rowley

Pauline Humphrey

Of dreams and beauty shops (1906 - 1993)

Pauline Robinson Brown wanted to open a beauty school in Des Moines in the 1930s. Because she was an African-American woman, business opportunities were hard to find. Despite this, Pauline opened Crescent School of Beauty Culture in 1939. She was the first African-American to own and operate a certified **cosmetology** school in Iowa. She was also the first African-American woman certified to teach cosmetology in Iowa.

Pauline was born Myrise Pauline Robinson in 1906 in Des Moines. Because her parents, Myrise and Eliza Robinson, divorced when she was very young, she never knew her father. Pauline lived in Des Moines with her grandparents, Julia and Frank Diggs, and saw her mother when she came for visits.

Pauline Humphrey (on the right) with one of her students.

Pauline's education began at a very young age. Her grandparents couldn't stay home from work to take care of her, so Pauline started school at age four.

After graduating from East High School in 1922, Pauline studied physical education at the University of Iowa in Iowa City for two years. When her grandparents could no longer pay her tuition, she left school and married William Brown. When she and her husband divorced, she decided to enroll in cosmetology school.

"She made up her mind to be independent," said Pauline's daughter, Barbara James. "She always used to tell me 'You must be ready to hold your own so that whatever you go into, you go into it as a whole person.'"

When no school in Iowa would admit her because she was African American, Brown moved to Chicago with Barbara and studied cosmetology at Madame C.J. Walker's cosmetology school from 1934 to 1935. Walker was a leader in the development of African-American beauty culture and from her, Pauline learned how to care for the special beauty needs of African-American women. She learned techniques to straighten curly hair using irons and about special shampoos and oils needed

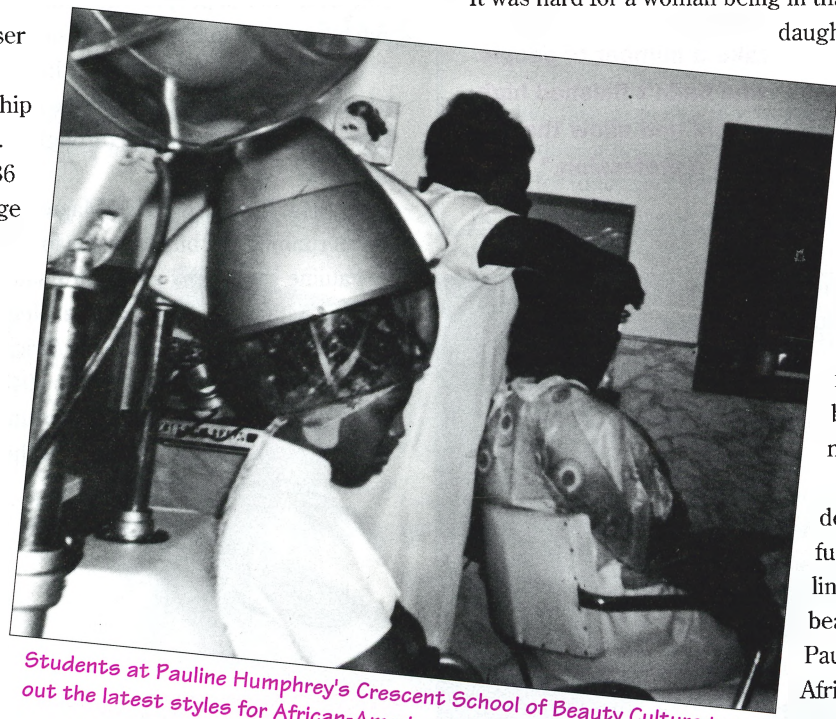
cosmetology: the art or practice of taking care of skin, hair, nails, and body

to keep hair healthy.

When she arrived back in Des Moines in 1936, Brown opened a beauty shop and began to save money to start her own school.

"She wanted a school to enable other people to make a living and have a certain amount of freedom," said her daughter. "The school was really a dream she had for herself."

She was getting closer to her dream, but she needed her instructorship before she could teach. Sometime between 1936 and 1939 the Fort Dodge Beauty Academy admitted her, and she spent nine months there studying beauty techniques for European-American and African-American women, even though most beauty shops in those days were **segregated**. For her final exam, Brown styled the hair of a white woman and thought she had done a terrible job. The examiners disagreed, and Pauline was certified to teach.



Students at Pauline Humphrey's Crescent School of Beauty Culture try out the latest styles for African-American women.

On February 2, 1939, Pauline opened the Crescent School of Beauty Culture in Des Moines. In those days it was extremely difficult for a woman, especially a woman of color, to go into business. Many people weren't willing to rent business property to African Americans and loans were almost unheard of. Pauline also had trouble with the suppliers who sold her the beauty products she needed to run her school. Businessmen in those days didn't want to share the business world with women, and often wouldn't sell them the products they needed.

segregated: people of different racial groups were separated

"It was hard for a woman being in that position," her daughter Barbara recalled. "She fought the racial fights and also gender fights."

But Brown didn't give up and became one of only a few women distributors in Iowa. Her business was a distributorship for several lines of beauty products for men and women.

Pauline also developed and successfully marketed her own line of cosmetics and beauty products, Myrise Paulé, the only local African-American cosmetic line in Iowa. She sold cologne, lipstick, mascara, face powder and cream in her school as well as in drugstores, grocery stores, and beauty shops.

Although the school was a success, it did not make enough money to support itself. Brown used the profits from her cosmetics and other business enterprises to expand and improve the school. Her business outgrew its original building and moved to two larger facilities.

entrepreneur: one who starts, owns, and manages a business

"She thought education was a lifetime process," said her daughter. "She had a great impact in that she was able to take a number of people who hadn't finished high school and allow them to have a profession."

A true **entrepreneur**, Brown also started and leased a chain of beauty shops around Iowa. Several times a year she held seminars and clinics for barbers and beauticians to update them about the concerns and trends of their industry.

"She thought education was a lifetime process," said her daughter. "She had a great impact in that she was able to take a number of people who hadn't finished high school and allow them to have a profession."

Students came from all over the United States, the Virgin Islands, and Africa to study at the Crescent Beauty schools. Her students have worked throughout the United States and in Africa.

In 1944, Pauline married Major Humphrey, who joined her in running the business she loved.

Pauline Humphrey also coordinated the state and regional chapters of the National Negro Beauty School and started the first beauty shop for African-American women in the U.S. Women's Army Corps in 1943 at Fort Des Moines.

After giving a lifetime of opportunities to others, Pauline Humphrey died in March, 1993, at the age of 87.

—*Amy Ruth* ♀

Photos from the collection of Barbara James

A professional photographer came to Pauline's house to take this picture of her when she was a young girl.

Ask Yourself

❶ Why did Pauline Brown Humphrey have such a difficult time starting her own beauty school?

❷ Explain how Humphrey faced two kinds of discrimination: gender and racial.

❸ Can you interview older people in your family or community to find out if they have faced discrimination? Write your own oral history interview.

Maria Running Moccasins Pearson

Indian Rights Activist
(1932-)

Her mother named her "Running Moccasins" (or "Feet That Go Fast") because once her feet hit the floor, they never stopped.

The Winnebago call her "Woman Stepping Into Water." The Arapaho named her "Whirlwind Woman."

She is Maria Pearson, a Yankton Sioux who has lived in Iowa for the last 35 years. Born in 1932 in Springfield, South Dakota, on the edge of an Indian reservation, she is now an elder in her tribe. But the name "Running Moccasins" still suits her. She's raised six children, has 21 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. She is president of the Governor's Interstate Indian Council, serves on the Transportation Research Board, chairs the Indian Advisory Council of the State Archeologist's Office and State Historical Society, and is the Governor's Liaison for Indian Affairs.

Maria Running Moccasins Pearson enjoying family time with Nick, her grandson, and Darlene, her daughter.

Maria's efforts on behalf of American Indians take her across the nation and around the world. She was responsible for the first law in the United States enacted to protect ancient burial sites (see page 23). She works to combat alcoholism and substance abuse. Pearson's an ambassador for her culture. Her moccasins rarely slow down.

Being an elder, Maria said, laughing, "means that I'm getting old. And it means," she continued, "that soon I'll be making preparations for my spirit journey."

Maria explained this preparation as a time of separation from the material aspects of life. A time of concentration on spiritual matters.

"As Indians, we live with that detachment," Pearson said. "We do not become attached [to things], or try to own. That's where we're different from most non-Indians. They have a drastic need to own Mother Earth, try to own everything."

One of Maria's grandsons, Nick Jensen, 12, added another perspective to what it means for his grandmother to be an elder among the Yankton Sioux.

"Elders are older people who speak with wisdom," Nick said. "They pass down our heritage and our traditions." Most of the time Nick isn't supposed to look elders in the eye—to show respect. "Except," he qualified, "when it's your grandma!"

Nick, who is in the seventh grade at Ames Middle School,

Photo from the collection of Maria Running Moccasins Pearson

was given his Indian name, "Yellow Haired Fox," in a ceremony when he was eight years old. But his education on what it means to be an Indian began when he was much younger.

"The rituals, the teaching, begin at a young age," Maria said. "We teach our traditions to our children. Ongoing. Every day. We relate stories to our children. Teach them the basic philosophy that they are Indian."

"And to be proud of it," Nick added.

Spiritual beliefs

The philosophy Maria described is rooted in the spiritual beliefs of her people. "We teach our children to pray; to be aware of the Creator in everything," Maria began. "They are related to the trees, and the grass, and the birds." Everything and everyone comes from Mother Earth, she explained. "When your grandparents pass away and go back to Mother Earth, the elements of their bodies become food for the worms and insects, which in turn become food for the birds. And [their bodies] become food for the grass, plant life.

Maria and Nick at a restaurant in their hometown of Ames.

"The plant life, Maria continued, "in turn generates the oxygen that you breathe. So you're breathing your grandparents and great-grandparents. The birds become food for the four-leggeds. The four-leggeds become food for the two leggeds—and so goes the cycle of life . . ."

"Over and over and over again," Nick concluded.

"Over and over and over again," Maria agreed.

Maria also is a pipe carrier among her people. "It just means I pray with a pipe," she said. "It's a way of life. Like praying with a rosary if you are Catholic." Then she began a story explaining the significance of the pipe.

"When the White Buffalo Calf Woman came to the Sioux people and brought the pipe from the Creator for us as a symbol to live by, the Creator was happy with his people. And she told us how to pray with the pipe. She told all of the Sioux people," Maria said.

Nick, too, is learning the rituals involved in carrying the pipe. "I'm a pipe carrier," he asserted.

"He prays with his grandparents when he prays," Maria said. "He is just being taught."

On the same day Nick received his Indian name, he also earned the privilege of carrying an eagle feather. That means, according to Nick, that he is a "warrior in a spiritual battle."

The eagle is sacred, he explained. "It is a beautiful bird. Powerful. It represents wisdom. It can see all. Grandma told me all about my feather when I got it," Nick said. For Nick, the feather represents his part in "supporting the earth and guarding against evil things — evil spirits like revenge and jealousy."

There isn't a certain age Nick must reach, or specific tasks he must accomplish to make him a true warrior. "When he gets everything accomplished, he becomes a warrior," Maria said. "Indians do not have times. [Other people] have times. For us, everything happens in its *right* time."

When Nick becomes a warrior, the transition will be marked by a change in his name. Instead of "Yellow Haired Fox," ("It means I'm younger, when I have an animal in my

Photo by Millie Frese

name like that," Nick said.) he will be known as "Yellow Hair" — the name of great-great-great grandfather.

Maria says it "makes a grandmother's heart happy" to see the young grow up. To see the whole process from children to grandchildren and on through the generations. "I see a lot of culture coming back," she said. "It needs to. Children can easily get lost; feel isolated. There needs to be that home tie," she stated.

"If you don't know your history," Maria said, "you will never know where you are going. You will never know your future, either, because you'll end up making the same mistakes you always make."

Maria is certain that Nick is sure of his identity within the context of the history of his people. "He knows who he is," she states. "Nobody else can tell him."

Nick began following in his grandmother's footsteps as ambassador for his culture when he was in elementary school. When it was his turn for "Show and Tell," he took his grandma.

"We took along my outfit, told about our ways, showed pottery, beadwork, and dances," Nick remembered. "The kids were surprised at what Indians are really like!" Surprised to discover that Indian kids — like Nick — collect baseball cards and model trains, wear blue jeans and T-shirts and play computer games like everyone else, while belonging to a culture that is foreign to most other children.

Nick said that the best thing about his grandma is "That she has so much knowledge — and she takes time to explain it. She never gets an aggravated voice — even if she has to tell me things many times.

"Grandma will always support me," Nick said. "She'll always be there to back me up." ♀

—Millie Frese

Ask Yourself

❶ How does Maria's name Running Moccasins fit her life?

❷ What does Pearson do as an elder in her tribe?

Protecting Indian Burial Sites

Maria Pearson was a key figure in convincing Iowa's legislators to pass a law protecting ancient Indian burial sites. In 1976, the State Legislature gave the Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA) the responsibility to protect Iowa's ancient burial grounds, making Iowa the first state in the nation to pass such a law. Before 1976, there was no legal protection for Indian burial grounds like there was for other cemeteries.

Today, many of Iowa's ancient burial grounds are threatened by soil erosion, and human activity such as construction and vandalism. The OSA monitors and protects already discovered burial sites and examines and verifies newly found burial grounds. The OSA's main job is to preserve sites. If this is impossible, the office may have to dig up the burial ground and move the graves to another site.

When ancient human remains (150 years old or older) are found, the OSA analyzes them and then reburies them in one of four state-owned cemeteries created especially for that purpose. The Indian Advisory Committee that works as a liaison between the OSA and the Indian community, determines an appropriate ceremony to accompany the burial.

Although Indians have had to adapt over the years to changes in this country's non-Indian American culture, their burial ceremonies have stayed the same. Indian burial grounds have been sacred sites to Indians for hundreds of years.

"We Indians respect our ancestors," Maria Pearson wrote in The Ind*ian Point of View: Exhumation and Reburial.* "They are present in our ceremonies, and we call upon them to help to live our lives helping one another." ♀

— Amy Ruth

MARY LOUISE SMITH

Political Worker

(1914-)

What do **you** want to be when you grow up? A teacher? A business person? The President? Kids today can be almost anything they want to be with some effort. You have so many choices!

Mary Louise Epperson Smith is an Iowa woman who wanted choices—for herself to become a politician and for other women to become what they dreamed.

Mary Louise was born October 6, 1914, in Eddyville, Iowa, into an active family. Her father, Frank, was a banker. He was involved in local and county politics for the Republican party. Her mother, Louise, took care of the family and was involved in community work. They encouraged Mary Louise and her older sister, Lynette, to study and go to college.

Mary Louise Smith (far left) at the 1968 Republican Women's Convention with other leading Republican women.

Many girls did not go to college at the time. They stayed home and raised families. Mary Louise remembers, "There was never any suggestion from my parents that you shouldn't do [something] because you were a girl." Her parents taught her she was equal to everyone. She could have any career if she prepared herself and studied.

Mary Louise did study hard. She finished high school early and went to the University of Iowa. There she met Elmer M. Smith, a medical student she married in 1934. Mary Louise graduated in 1935 with a degree in social work administration.

The day after she received her degree, Mary Louise went to work for the Iowa Emergency Relief Administration in Davenport and later moved to State Center. Mary Louise had three children. She cared for her family as a single parent while Elmer served in the military during World War II.

Photo from Capital and Glogan

When her husband returned from the war, the family moved to Eagle Grove. Mary Louise loved her family and was happy to care for them but wanted to do more for the country, community, and herself. In Eagle Grove, Mary Louise first became involved in politics.

She answered phones, mailed letters, and campaigned door-to-door for a local Republican politician. Later she represented her county as vice chairperson of the county Republican party. Smith believed, "If I was going to spend time doing volunteer work in the area of politics, then I wanted it to be worthwhile. I had something to say about the organization and the direction the party was going."

Mary Louise Smith has dedicated more than 40 years of her life to public service. Here she was in 1974.

State and national politics

When the family moved to Des Moines, the state's capital city, Mary Louise had the opportunity to work in state and national politics. Her children were growing up, and her retired husband supported her decision. She decided to learn more about how state and national politics worked by volunteering.

She later was elected as state vice-chairperson of the Iowa Presidential Campaign in 1964. That same year she served on the Republican National Committee.

Smith has held many important positions in the Republican party. In 1976 at the Republican Convention in Kansas City she became the first woman to serve as chairperson of a national party convention. Mary Louise feels that, "a woman who is first in any field has an unmistakable extra responsibility. If she fails or succeeds, it affects other women." Mary Louise succeeded in her roles and provided leadership and support for other women.

After moving to Washington, D.C., in 1974 to serve as chair of the Republican National Committee. Mary Louise became well known by speaking in public, appearing on TV and traveling. In 1974, she traveled more than 38,000 miles throughout the United States to "turn people back on to politics."

But reporters were not used to seeing a woman in this role and sometimes asked her questions about her clothes instead of her views.

In 1977, Mary Louise resigned from her national duties and headed home to Des Moines where her husband and children were living. This same year she was named to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame for her accomplishments. She continued encouraging people to take part in politics.

Working for peace and women remain important to Smith. She helped found the Iowa Peace Insitute and the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa. She serves on the boards of Planned Parenthood of Greater Iowa and the University of Iowa Foundation.

Mary Louise has advice for all kids: "Pay close attention to your government lessons to learn the political processes of your country. Learn what's happening around you and get involved."

Maybe someday you will choose a career in politics, like Mary Louise Smith did! ♀

—Sherri Dagel

Ask Yourself

❶ How did Mary Louise Smith get involved in politics?

❷ What challenges did she face in politics?

❸ Can you find other Iowa women who have been involved in politics? Write your own biographies of them.

Photo from SHSI

Ruth Suckow
Writer
(1892-1960)

Seven-year-old Ruth Suckow *(pronounced SOOK-oh)* loved to play in her father's study—a room that was sometimes lively, sometimes quiet, but always well-stocked with stories, imagination, and inspiration. Careful not to disturb her father while he wrote his Sunday sermon, Ruth would write and illustrate her own stories in little black and red notebooks.

Ruth didn't know it then, but this was the beginning of an impressive writing career that would span four decades of her adult life.

Ruth Suckow was born in Hawarden, Iowa, in 1892 into a family with a German-American heritage. Her parents, William J. Suckow, a Congregational minister, and Anna Kluckhohn Suckow, raised Ruth and her older sister, Emma, in small rural Iowa communities and towns, including Earlville, Algona, Fort Dodge, Manchester, and Grinnell.

During her childhood travels, Ruth learned to observe the people and landscapes around her. In later years, she used her memories of Iowa's countryside and rural people in her poems, short stories, and novels. Ruth saw a beauty in Iowa and Iowans that she captured and shared with the rest of the world.

The Suckow family posed for this portrait in Hawarden, about 1987. Ruth sits by her father on the floor, and her older sister, Emma, stands next to their mother.

As a child, Ruth formed special friendships with older women and would often visit and chat with them over dinner. It was in an old kitchen, over bowls of mush and milk, that a young Ruth heard stories about the early **suffrage** movement. Not surprisingly, she grew up to write about the emotional and physical lives of Iowa women, both young and old. She made her women characters strong and independent during a time when much of the world thought women were "weak" and "fragile."

Because their parents were open-minded and believed in equality between men and women (something unusual for the turn of the century), Ruth and her sister grew up in a

suffrage: the right to vote

loving home filled with activity and opportunity.

Most importantly, the Suckows encouraged their daughters to read and appreciate art and literature. During the evening hours, the family would gather in the study where Rev. Suckow would read aloud from favorite novels. In their spare time, Emma and Ruth could read whatever they wanted, something not many parents of the time would have allowed.

As young women, Ruth and Emma attended Grinnell College. Ruth also studied at the Curry School of Expression in Boston, and received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from the University of Denver in 1917 and 1918.

The Suckow sisters were part of a growing group of young women who were college educated. Although these women could expect that their lives would be different from the lives of their mothers and grandmothers, women were still not considered equal to men and were denied the same rights and opportunities.

Ruth amidst beehives at her Earlville apiary. She raised bees and sold honey between 1919 and 1925. She sold her business in 1926 to write full time.

Writing and beekeeping

When she finished her university studies, Ruth began to publish some of her writing. Her poem, "An Old Woman in a Garden," was published in *Touchstone* magazine in 1918. Although Ruth loved to write, she knew she would need to rely on something else to support herself. She cleverly learned the seasonal trade of beekeeping while living in Colorado. In 1919, she and her father opened an **apiary** in Earlville where Ruth spent the next six years raising bees and selling honey during the summer months. When her apiary work was done for the year, Ruth was free to write full time during the winter months. Sometimes she traveled to New York—"the place to be" if you were a writer.

Photos from Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries

It was during this time that Ruth began to impress other writers and editors. Her stories began to appear in such popular magazines as *The Smart Set.* In 1924, she published her first novel, *Country People.* The 1920s were a busy time for Ruth, who published a total of 30 short stories and five novels in that decade. In 1929, she married Ferner Nuhn, also an Iowa writer. The couple lived in several states during the next 30 years but always considered Iowa their home.

Besides a distinguished writing career, Ruth was recognized for enhancing the lives of Iowa women through her portrayal of strong women in her fiction. She was named Iowa's Woman of the Year in 1934 and named to the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1978.

Ruth continued to write regularly until her death in 1960. Although many of her books are out of print, The University of Iowa Press reprinted some of her stories in *A Ruth Suckow Omnibus,* in 1988. Some of Ruth Suckow's other works include *Country People, The Bonney Family, Iowa Interiors,* and *The Odyssey of a Nice Girl.*

—*Amy Ruth*

apiary: a place where bees are kept

Ask Yourself

❶ How did Ruth Suckow's upbringing affect her as a writer?

❷ How did she portray women?

❸ Can you find other Iowa writers who wrote about Iowa? How did growing up in Iowa affect their writing? Write your own biographies.

by Ruth Suckow

The Bonney Family

***The Bonney Family* was first published in 1928 and tells the story of a midwestern family in the early 1900s. The Bonney family's situation is similar to Suckow's own family: Mr. Bonney was a Congregational minister and moved his family around quite a bit. True to her commitment to show strong and positive female characters in her stories, Suckow wrote about Sarah Bonney's struggle to find her place in the world. In the following excerpt, Sarah, a young teen-ager, and her mother are talking about the Endeavor, a church group for girls. Sarah doesn't want to join, although her father has encouraged her to attend the meetings.**

"Mother, dad wants all of us girls to join the Endeavor now."

"Well?"

"Well, I've been thinking it over," Sarah said, feeling blunt and clumsy. "I guess maybe I'd better not."

"Why do you say that? Aren't you girls old enough to be members now?"

"Oh, I guess we're old enough, as long as there isn't any Intermediate."

"Well. Then I don't know that I see your trouble."

Sarah leaned against the table, scowling and getting red. She said gruffly: "Well, there are some things I don't like in that pledge. Nobody that takes it means to keep it —"

"Oh, Sarah, isn't that a pretty sweeping statement?"

"Well, I don't see that they do. Unless Lyddy Towle does, and I don't know who'd want to do the way she does. It says to 'attend all the Sunday and mid-week services of my church unless I have some reason I can conscientiously give to my Lord and Master.' Well, I'd like to know how many of those kids ever go to prayer-meeting. I s'pose that's what 'mid-week services' are. Warren doesn't—except when dad sends him over to play the organ."

Mrs. Bonney looked at her. She might have expected something

like this from Warren—he had already had stormy times with his father—but not from Sarah, who always went methodically to the Christian Endeavor after having learned her verse of scripture for the roll-call, and who loved to help Miss Reed in the primary department. . . .

Sarah blurted out: "I don't know whether I can take that pledge." She scowled still harder, but spoke a little pleadingly. "I don't know—well, whether I believe much of it or not. If it's like what the physical geography says—"

"If what's like?" her mother demanded.

"Well, the world, I guess. I mean all that it tells about the different ages, and ice ages, and then all those stars. Well," Sarah said scowling, "if Jesus came to tell the world about God, and the world's just one planet and there's all the rest of those stars, why, what did he have to do—get born on all those planets—?"

"Oh, goodness, Sarah!"

"Well, mother, it makes you wonder, now, I tell you! You read all those little slips from the Endeavor topics and everything—well, if that other's true, then all this can't be, and I don't see how you're going to know which is and which isn't. Anyway, I just can't join the Endeavor."

She stared gloomily out of the window. Mrs. Bonney did not say anything for a moment. She felt at a loss in this kind of speculation, and would have smiled if she had not seen that Sarah was fiercely in earnest. People had to think these things out for themselves, and she did not want to interfere. ♀

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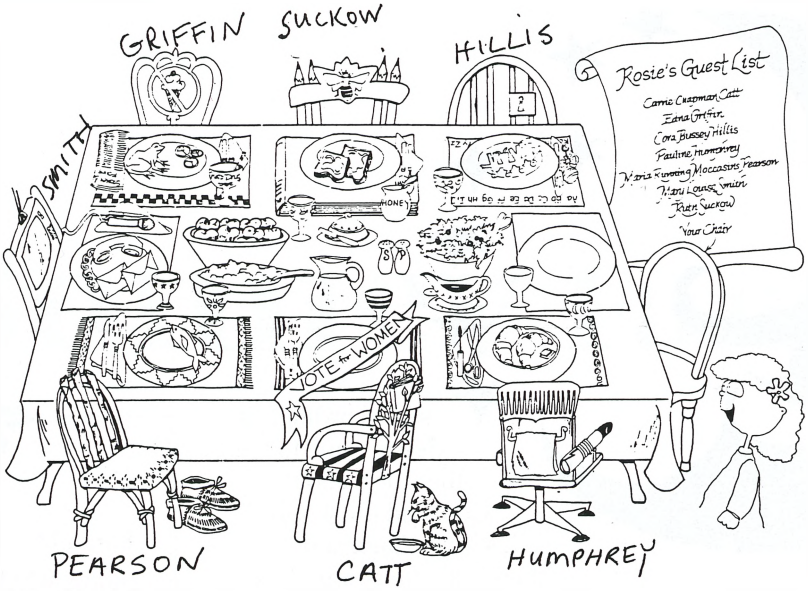
Answers

Pages 16-17:



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I WANT TO BE THE FIRST WOMAN TO VOYAGE BEYOND OUR GALAXY!
CAPTAIN ROSIE OF THE 21ST CENTURY
ZOOOMING THROUGH SPACE AT WARP SPEEDS!
VISITING NEW PLANETS!
MEETING NEW LIFE FORMS!!
BOLDLY GOING WHERE NO WOMAN HAS GONE BEFORE!
WELL... WHAT'LL HAPPEN TO ME?!!
YOU'LL BE MY FIRST OFFICER.
SO, IF YOU GET ZAPPED I BECOME CAPTAIN... COOOL!
JERRY BROWN

"Women are absolutely [part] of the history of Iowa but so many times their stories have not been told and have been lost."—Mary Louise Smith

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