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Bruce E. Mahan

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Mottoes and Slogans of Iowa

“Our liberties we prize, and our rights we will maintain” boldly proclaims a scroll held in the beak of an eagle on the Great Seal of the State of Iowa. And whether considered as “a bit of stilted, bombastic rhetoric, suggestive of the Fourth of July” or as “a noble expression of freemen” it has remained as a sort of official motto of the State for nearly eighty years. It was in February, 1847, that a committee of the State Senate — Thomas H. Benton, Jr., Francis Springer, and Philip P. Bradley — recommended that this motto be made a part of the State seal. It does not appear whether the sentiment was original with some member of the committee or not. The fact that the wood cut of the “First Seal of Iowa” does not bear the motto would seem to indicate that its insertion at least was the work of the committee.

Another well known Iowa motto is the statement chiseled on the block of “marble” contributed by Iowa for the Washington monument. As originally written by Lieutenant Governor Enoch W. Eastman the motto read: “Iowa: the affections of her people, like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable Union.”

This motto is almost as old as the inscription on the State seal. On December 14, 1850, a committee

of three from the State Senate was appointed to confer with a similar committee from the House of Representatives to recommend a suitable inscription for the block of "marble" selected by Josiah H. Bonney of Iowa City from the quarry of Moses B. Root in Van Buren County. Senator George G. Wright, as chairman of this committee, invited several people to suggest appropriate mottoes, and from among the large number received the one submitted by Lieutenant Governor Eastman was adopted. The undimmed popularity of this inscription with the flight of years is silent testimony to the good judgment of the legislative committee in selecting the Eastman motto.

Perhaps one of the best known slogans of the Hawkeye State is the declaration made by Sidney A. Foster in 1886: "In all that is good, Iowa affords the best." The slogan has sometimes appeared with slight variations of wording, but according to Mr. Foster himself the above is the phrasing he used to characterize particularly the business and educational opportunities in Iowa even at a time when there was considerable discontent and depression.

A slogan contest inaugurated in January, 1923, by the Des Moines *Register* awakened widespread interest throughout the State. Prizes amounting to one thousand dollars were offered by this newspaper for the best advertising slogan for Iowa. During a period of five weeks a prize of one hundred dollars was awarded each week to the person who submitted

the best slogan, and the final sweepstakes award of five hundred dollars went to C. W. Christensen of Des Moines for his slogan, "Horace Greeley meant Iowa".

This assertion is based upon the oft-quoted advice of the famous editor of the *New York Tribune* for ambitious young men to seek their fortunes in the West. He once wrote in an editorial, "Go West, young man, and grow up with the country." And there is some historical justification of the slogan, for at least on one occasion his counsel did turn out to mean Iowa. Greeley once told Josiah B. Grinnell, a pioneer clergyman, to "Go West, young man, go West." Eventually, in 1854, Grinnell came to Iowa, and helped to found the city and the college which bear his name.

There have been some critics who insist that all of the mottoes and slogans of Iowa, save perhaps the inscription on the Washington monument, are boastful. Be that as it may, they have all been inspired by loyalty and justifiable State pride. They reflect the confidence of the people of Iowa in the destiny of the Commonwealth.

BRUCE E. MAHAN