Civil War to 1900

Working Women in Iowa

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CONTENTS

Working Women in Iowa

Working Women.............................. 4
From Dawn to Dusk ........................ 5
A Homemaker’s Day ......................... 7
Hired Girls and Boys ....................... 8
Farm Women .................................... 9
Slates and Blackboards ..................... 10
Read a Table .................................. 12
In the Millinery Shop ...................... 13
Good Times: Make Your Own Hat ........ 15
Muscatine’s Pearl Button Factory ........ 16
The People of Iowa: Elizabeth Irish .... 18
Rosie’s Skill Page ............................ 20
History Mystery .............................. 21
History-Makers ............................... 22
Pass It On ..................................... 23

ON THE COVER: These women sort buttons in an Iowa button factory at the turn of the century. By 1900, more and more Iowa women were entering jobs in factories, schools, offices, and businesses.
**ASK WILD ROSIE**

"Rosie, what are census records? What do they tell us about people?"

"A census is an official count of the population. It includes information about age, the number of people working in different jobs, school attendance, and other facts. The United States Census can tell us about the entire U.S. population and about men and women in a specific state like Iowa."

"Rosie, how did the Civil War (1861-1865) affect women workers?"

"Before the war, most women worked in the home. During the war, women had new opportunities for employment. They worked in factories, offices, hospitals, and on farms to replace men who had gone to war."
IOWA WOMEN have always worked. In the early nineteenth century, women's work was largely confined to the home and farm. The traditional role for a woman was that of a wife and mother. From dawn to dusk she cooked, cleaned, sewed, and took care of children. To earn extra money, she sold eggs, butter, baked goods, and chickens. Yet, her labor has not been viewed as work because she was not paid wages.

After the Civil War (1861-1865), most Iowans still lived on farms. The post-war period (1865-1900) brought many changes to the lives of rural Iowans, particularly women. Iowa was no longer considered a frontier where few people lived. Between 1870 and 1900, most Iowa towns were small farming communities. New industries grew in many Iowa towns. They attracted many rural men and women to the city. New methods of communication (like the typewriter and rural free postal delivery) and transportation (railroads) spread ideas and brought people together.

Ideas about women began to change. Once denied the same opportunities to attend schools as men, more and more Iowa women began attending schools and universities. New types of jobs that were outside of the home opened up for women. Few Iowa women were "gainfully employed" (working for an employer and receiving cash wages). Those who did work, flocked to domestic service, teaching, and millinery work. By 1900, many women had left their farms and moved to the city to work in shops, offices, and factories. Other women were entering professional fields where only men were employed. More Iowa women practiced law and medicine, served as county school superintendents, and a few served as bank presidents.

In most jobs, women received less pay than men because laws treated men and women differently. Women could not vote or hold political office until well into the twentieth century. In this *Goldfinch*, you will read about the gains made by working women in Iowa. Their work made it easier for their daughters and for future generations of young women to choose a career.
From Dawn to Dusk

IN 1897, one midwestern woman made 191 pies, 140 cakes, 84 loaves of bread, 729 biscuits, 156 fried cakes, and 1,026 cookies. "This was in addition to caring for her children and doing her regular housework," noted a nineteenth-century magazine.

Most nineteenth-century Iowa women filled their days with similar activities. As wives and mothers, they also served as cooks, doctors, nurses, teachers, seamstresses, and laundresses (people who wash and iron clothing).

In the late nineteenth century, many people still believed the best place for a woman was the home. Magazines and books told women that it was important for them to be domestic (fond of household duties). Few Iowa women were employed outside of the home.

Before 1860, census records did not list homemakers as "gainfully employed." Because these women did not earn wages, their efforts were not considered "work."

Without today's conveniences such as electricity, ready-made clothing, and washing machines, homemakers led busy, and often difficult lives. By taking care of the day-to-day chores of cooking, washing, ironing, and cleaning, women made it possible for men to work outside of the home. Homemakers also made economic contributions to the family income by selling home-made items and food.

Broiled Squirrels and Laundry

People did not buy all of their food at the grocery store. They did not have time-saving prepared foods like cake mixes or TV dinners. Instead, women made most of their meals from "scratch" (unmixed ingredients). Preparing food took a long time. In 1866, Alice Baker, of Muscatine, cooked meals in an iron kettle over a log fire and baked in an outside oven made of bricks. "Twice a week this oven was heated by burning large logs in it," remembered her granddaughter. "Afterward the coals were removed and the heat that remained in the oven was used for baking pies, bread and cakes." Women roasted chickens, broiled squirrels, and baked corn cakes over hot ashes.

Women also spent a great deal of time making clothing for their families. Ready-made clothing was scarce and expensive to buy. "If we had one decent calico dress and a sunbonnet we thought ourselves rich," remembered Genevieve

One of a homemaker's most time-consuming chores was doing the weekly washing. These women did their washing in a large laundry tub and wringer in Wilton Junction in 1900.
Campbell, who lived on a farm near Waverly. “It took a great deal of material to make a dress in those days since the skirts were long and very full.” Harriet Connor Brown spent many hours sewing without a sewing machine: “Men’s shirts, as well as women’s clothes, had to be made at home by hand.”

Washing clothes was no easy task, either. Without running water, many women carried buckets of water from outdoor wells to their homes where they filled large tubs. Clothes were often boiled on the stove, rinsed in cold water, wrung out by hand or machine, and hung to dry. Matilda Bortz wrote that her grandmother washed near the house, then took a pail of clothes down to the Cedar River. “There she would rinse them and then spread them on the green meadow that stretched between the house and the river.” To iron, women used heavy irons that were heated on stove tops.

**Doing Chores and Making Bonnets**

Other household duties included sweeping, dusting, scrubbing floors, making candles and soap, and cleaning carpets. Every day some women swept, dusted, and scrubbed their homes. Soap was usually made every spring. To clean carpets and rugs, a woman threw the floor covering over a clothes line and beat it with a wire carpet beater.

In between chores, women took care of the sick. There were few doctors in rural areas. Using herbs, home remedies, and new patent medicines, women cared for their families the best they could. In the 1860s, Mrs. Winslow’s Tooth Syrup was a popular remedy for toothaches.

To make money of their own, many Iowa women made molasses, cheese, and bonnets. Many washed clothes for other families. Some fed and rented rooms to travelers or more permanent boarders. “All girls knew how to knit stockings and socks,” said one Linn county woman. These home made items were often traded for other supplies.

From dawn to dusk, homemakers worked. Yet, they were not always alone. While the men were working out in the fields or in town, many women worked together at “bees.” They made quilts, husked corn, and cleaned houses.

Women often socialized after the chores were done. “People would sometimes go visiting evenings,” wrote Campbell. “They would get a good supper, fry sausage and have coffee and dough nuts.”
A Homemaker’s Day

Sue Frear was a homemaker who lived in the northwestern town of Sloan, Iowa in the 1890s. She lived with her husband, Edwin, a doctor, and three children. Read the following description of a typical day for Sue Frear. Then answer the questions. (Answers on page 23).

At 4:30 a.m., Sue Frear is awakened by a call for the doctor. Her day begins and she:
1. Builds a fire
2. Cooks breakfast for Edwin
3. Sprinkles clothes to get them ready for ironing
4. Kneads dough that was prepared the night before and sets it aside to rise
5. Scrubs the rough, unpainted floor
6. Inspects the bed for bedbugs and makes the bed
7. Fixes her hair in a knot on her head, puts on her gray, floor-length calico dress, powders her face with a cornstarch puff, and pins a piece of lace at her throat
8. Wakes the children and feeds them a breakfast of oatmeal and milk
9. Makes loaves of bread
10. Heats the iron on the stove
11. Gets the children ready for school
12. Straightens and dusts parlor
13. Rebuilds a fire in the cook stove and bakes bread
14. Mends stockings
15. Begins weekly ironing
16. Cooks a breakfast of eggs for her brother-in-law
17. Cooks the children’s lunch: just-baked bread with wild plum butter, fried potatoes, milk, and applesauce.
18. Finishes ironing and puts clothes away
19. Serves hot coffee to a visiting patient
20. At 4:00 p.m., the children come home from school. She takes care of a child’s skinned knee, mends a coat, and helps with a spelling lesson.
21. At 6:00 p.m., she fixes dinner.
22. Does dishes
23. Sits in a rocking chair to read, but she falls asleep.

Questions
1. How many meals did Sue Frear prepare in one day?_________________________
2. What kinds of foods did she prepare?_____________________________________
3. What did she do for entertainment?_______________________________________
4. Do you think Frear’s day was filled with work? Why or why not?

5. What modern-day appliances do you have in your home that could be used to do Sue Frear’s chores?
E LME KNEESKERN earned $1.50 per week to help neighboring farm women with chores in the late nineteenth century. She worked at farms within nine or ten miles of her family’s home in northeastern Iowa.

Elme was a hired girl, or domestic servant. In 1880 almost one-half of the working women in Iowa were employed as domestic servants. Unlike a maid in a wealthy city family, hired girls in Iowa usually helped local farmers’ wives during the busiest times of the year. During the summer and fall seasons, they helped farm women with the cooking. More meals were served to the extra hired hands (men who were paid to plow and harvest). During the spring and fall, hired girls worked day shifts to help clean houses or harvest crops.

Most hired girls were in their teens, although women of all ages worked as domestic servants. They were often treated like a member of the family. Hired girls sat down and ate with their employers’ families. Others lived with their employers.

One midwestern magazine recommended that the hired girl act as an assistant “in all operations of the kitchen—washing dishes, ironing, baking, sweeping, making beds and cooking meals.” The magazine also suggested that hired girls sew in the afternoons and help the boys milk the cows every night and morning. Iowa hired girls did many of those things.

Young boys were also hired to help farmers. Their responsibilities were different from those of a hired girl. A hired boy’s job did not usually include domestic duties. Instead, boys helped with slaughtering livestock, building and maintaining fences, taking care of crops, and planting trees.

Older women were included in the ranks of domestic servants. Many were paid as domestic servants to wash clothes. In 1873, Mary Hooper of Scott County paid her washer woman 75¢ a week to do the laundry.

For most hired girls, work lasted until they moved to town for a different job, returned to school, moved back in with their families in case of emergency or illness, or got married.
Farm Women

EMILY Hawley Gillespie of rural Manchester, Iowa, farmed with her husband in the late nineteenth century. In addition to her regular housework, child care, sewing, and cooking tasks, Emily had many farming chores. She planted and tended the garden, took care of chickens, picked and preserved fresh berries, canned grapes, made cheese, husked corn, and cooked extra meals for threshers. To earn money, she churned and sold butter, trimmed hats, and raised and sold over 100 turkeys a year.

Like other Iowa farm women, Emily had the traditional duties of a wife and mother. Some of her farm chores provided her with extra money. Many farm women contributed their earnings to the cash income of the farmstead (farmland and buildings). Their work also brought other rewards. When women sold their homemade items, food, and produce, they could spend time socializing with friends and neighbors.

Men and women had separate and different jobs on the farm. While men and boys worked outside building fences, digging wells, planting and harvesting fields, women and girls had other responsibilities. Gardening, taking care of chickens and turkeys, and preparing food were the central farm chores for women.

The division of labor was not so rigid on the farm. Women did help in the fields when their husbands were sick or a hired hand quit. Matilda Paul plowed and milked when her husband became ill. When Matilda husked corn and dug potatoes, she put her youngest child in a large box for safety while she worked. “I shouldered my hoe and have worked out ever since,” Matilda wrote her family. “... I wore a dress with my sunbonnet wrung out in water every few minutes and my dress also wet.”

Some women managed farms themselves when their husbands died or were away from the farm for a long time.

Many people think that farm women were isolated and lonely. But their work brought them in contact with other women. Women often watched each other’s children, sewed for one another, visited town to sell their food and produce, or shared work. Harriet Brown Connor remembered working with a female neighbor. After the men brought a butchered hog into her kitchen, Connor and her friend picked hog guts “all day long.”

With the money Emily Gillespie earned from selling homemade molasses and cheese, she purchased groceries and sewing supplies. Women used their extra income to buy schoolbooks for their children and machinery for the farm. Others even contributed to the purchase of a new farm.
IN EARLIER times, girls were denied an education because some people thought that their bodies were too weak and their brains too small. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, this thinking changed. People believed girls should be educated so that they could be better wives and mothers.

Because women took care of children in their role as mother, teaching neatly fit into their “womanly duties.” As men left teaching for...
higher paying work in factories or farming, jobs opened up for women. Women, with less ways to earn cash wages, were paid less than men.

By 1880, teaching was the second most popular employment for Iowa women. Two-thirds of public school teachers were women. Many women wanted to escape what one girl called the "drudgery" of farm work. Others wanted to earn money to help support their family's income, or to pay for a brother or sister's education.

Riding Horseback to School

What was life like for teachers? Let's take a look at Alice Money Lawrence who lived on a farm near Albion. When she was 14 years old, Alice made $1.50 a week for taking care of sheep. She used the money to pay for tuition at the Albion Seminary (school) where she received a teaching certificate in 1866.

Alice's first teaching job was at a school in Grundy County, 16 miles from her home. She rode 45 minutes on horseback each way to school. Twelve students of all ages were in her class, but five left school when harvest began. Older farm boys usually helped with the fall harvest and spring planting. Because so many rural kids had to help with farm chores during these times, there were two school terms: "winter" and "summer." They each were about four months long between the harvest and planting seasons.

In 1868 Alice taught at another school. Teachers often moved from school to school. She instructed 40 students in a one-room Vienna Township schoolhouse. Students learned reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, and geography. They had to memorize many facts.

Students in nineteenth-century schools did not have colorful textbooks and magazines, maps, globes or films. Students brought whatever books they had from home. The only supplies found in most classrooms were slates and the blackboard in the front of the room.

Like other teachers, Alice "boarded" with a family. She paid for rent and food. She disliked these living arrangements because the house was dirty and her hostess could not cook well. Alice spent long hours alone at the schoolhouse reading and writing letters.

Despite its difficulties, teaching was rewarding for Alice. In the late 1860s, she wrote to her sister Sarah in Ohio:

| You ask if I like teaching. Oh, yes, the teaching part but not the discipline. I had to keep all my scholars but one in at recess today, and I had to whip one boy—the first punishment of that kind that has been necessary. Then it is so hard not to like some children better than others, and there are so many little disputes to settle. But I do like teaching. |

In 1869, Alice ended her teaching career. She married a doctor the following year. For many women like Alice, teaching was not a lifetime career. They taught only until they married.

Yet, other women did pursue lifelong careers in education as teachers, principals, and school superintendents. Some women teachers went on to careers in professional fields. Education and teaching had helped to open once-forbidden doors to business, law, and medicine.
# Read a Table

## Iowa Women in Selected Occupations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Women's Population</td>
<td>134,895</td>
<td>1,075,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Women</td>
<td>23,126</td>
<td>106,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Servants</td>
<td>14,772</td>
<td>43,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4,472</td>
<td>19,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milliners</td>
<td>2,408</td>
<td>4,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>8,132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundresses</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>3,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Shopkeepers and clerks</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The shaded area of this table shows the population of women in Iowa and the number of employed women in 1870 and 1900. Above, are the numbers of women employed in selected occupations discussed in this issue of the Goldfinch. Not all occupations are listed. (Remember, many women at the time were working as homemakers even though they did not receive cash wages.) (Answers on page 23.)

### Questions

1. What was the total population of women in Iowa in 1870?
2. How many women were employed in 1870?
3. In 1870, what percentage of the total women's population was employed?
4. In 1900, about what percentage of the total women's population was employed?
5. According to the table, what were the three most popular occupations for women in 1870?
6. What were the three most popular occupations in 1900?
7. Between 1870 and 1900, which occupation did the most women join?
8. What three occupations had the fewest number of female employees in 1870?
9. How many more women doctors were employed in 1900 than in 1870?
Hats were so popular that women would ride their horses into town to buy the newest styles. The hats at this midwestern millinery shop are displayed outside on a tree.

In the Millinery Shop

TWENTY-YEAR-OLD Elizabeth Wright Heller sold hats in 1880 at Mrs. Ann Swezey’s millinery shop in Marengo, Iowa. “It was fun to sell hats and I had very good luck at it,” Heller recalled. “So I tried them on myself to show them off, and usually made a sale.”

Hats were an important accessory for a nineteenth-century woman’s wardrobe. Women wore a hat or bonnet whenever they left the house. Some women bought a new hat every season or for special occasions. While hats were available from general stores and mail-order catalogs, most women preferred buying individually designed hats at local millinery shops.

A milliner designed, trimmed, and sold hats and bonnets. Most nineteenth-century Iowa millinery shops were owned and managed by women. In the 1870s and 1880s, millinery work
was the third most popular employment for women.

The majority of milliners were single women. However, one study found that almost one-third of Iowa milliners in 1880 were married women.

Owning a millinery shop was one of the few socially accepted ways women could own businesses. Mostly men operated other types of stores. A milliner had a wide variety of duties. She was a buyer, designer, stocker, salesclerk, advertising manager, and accountant.

Milliners were creative in designing hats. Edith Jacks, a nineteenth-century milliner, remembered "fashioning those . . . wire frames with silk or lace; then decorating them with flower and vegetable gardens." Milliners also designed hats with colored feathers, satin ribbons, and clusters of artificial birds and fruit.

Besides hats, millinery shops sold ladies cuffs, collars, gloves, sewing supplies, fashion magazines, and the current dress patterns. The shops provided rural Iowa women with the current fashion styles of eastern cities. An 1873 newspaper advertisement for Pratt and Strub, an Iowa City millinery, read: "Nowhere else are the equals of our millinery offers to be found. We believe we are the only house where original New York Pattern Hats are to be found."

Some milliners traveled to eastern cities to buy new hats. Mrs. Whitcomb, a Hampton milliner, visited Chicago every spring to select new styles. "Pausing from biting off a thread or plying her needle to a bit of straw," remembered Oney Fred Sweet, "she told of her personal contacts with the famous ones of the metropolis."

Women also flocked to local millinery shops to meet friends and socialize. "Every afternoon the narrow space inside the walls of packing boxes was crowded. After school we girls always went there," wrote one novelist. "Married women began to call each other by their first names. In the milliner shop they chattered like girls, laughed, and spoke without thinking."
Make Your Own Hat

If you were a hatmaker in the 1880s, you might braid wet straw to make hats. To make your own hat, you start with a basic cap. You can use something from around the house: a plastic paint bucket, half a basketball, small lampshade, round box, plastic flower pot, sports cap or floppy hat. Or you can make a basic cap by molding papier-mâché over an inflated balloon.

Basic Cap
Materials: large balloon, flour, water, newspaper torn into strips
Steps:
1. Blow up and tie a knot in the stem of a balloon which is about the size and shape of your head.
2. Make the paste by mixing flour and water in a bowl until it is a thick, soupy consistency.
3. Tear newspaper into short, narrow strips. Dip each strip into the paste and mold it around the balloon in a shape of a cap. (See drawing A.) Let the cap dry and harden for at least a day, then pop the balloon.
4. Now you can cut a narrow or wide brim from cardboard and glue it in place to make a basic cap. (See drawing B.)

Large-Brimmed Sunhat
Materials: Basic cap with a large brim, feathers, satin ribbons, piece of lace, artificial flowers or ferns, cotton balls, buttons, small stuffed animals, holiday ornaments.
Step:
1. Pin, glue, sew or paint any of the above materials (or others you can think of) onto the basic cap. (See drawing C.)
Muscatine's Pearl Button Factory

The world's first fresh-water pearl button industry was started in Muscatine, Iowa, in 1891. A German immigrant named John F. Boepple used clam shells from the nearby Mississippi River to make inexpensive pearl buttons, hat pins, and charms. At the time, buttons made from ocean shells were popular, but expensive. Pearl buttons made from shells found in fresh-water rivers were easier to find and cheaper to make.

Within two years, Boepple's Muscatine Button Factory grew from one-room into a two-story brick business employing 100 people. Entire families dug clams and sold shells to the booming button industry. By 1897, there were 53 button-making companies in Muscatine. The town was nicknamed "Pearl City."

While Iowa was an agricultural state, industries were growing rapidly. The button industry was ranked as the fourth largest in the state for employing women workers. By 1900, more than 21,000 women held manufacturing and mechanical jobs. The 1900 census, for example, showed that women worked in carpet, boot and shoe factories, in knitting mills, and as glove makers and button makers.

In the Muscatine Button Factory, like most late-nineteenth century factories, men and women were segregated (separated) and had different jobs. People believed men should have the more physically demanding jobs. Traditional views about "men's work" and "women's work" also divided men and women.

In the button factory, men pulled the shells out of large vats and removed the remaining clam meat. Then they cut shells using automatic saw machines. Boys as young as 14 served as apprentice button cutters.

Some women worked machines that drilled...
Most women workers in button factories spent ten hours a day sorting buttons and placing them in boxes. holes or polished buttons, but most women and girls were employed as sorters and button carders. Sorters separated and counted finished buttons. Carders included many married women and girls. They worked at home and sewed the finished buttons onto cardboard pieces. Their work was often repetitive (doing the same thing over and over) and dull.

Women were paid not by the number of hours they worked, but by the number of buttons they drilled, polished, sorted, or sewed. This form of payment called piece rate was common in most turn-of-the-century industries. It encouraged women to work faster and longer and to bring work home after hours. Employees already worked ten to twelve hours a day.

Button factory work was often hazardous for both men and women. Iowa was one of the few states in the U.S. with no laws concerning workers' health and safety in the late nineteenth century. Employees breathed thick shell dust that caused lung diseases. Drilling and pressing machines often cut off or gashed fingers.

Women were slowly stepping out of the home into the public work world. Like the women employed at the Muscatine Button Factory, many found their work tiring, low paying, and sometimes dangerous.

Based on interviews with employers and employees in Iowa button factories around the turn of the century, O.D. Longstreth wrote a report in 1906. Read about the working conditions for women in button factories. Then answer the questions. (Answers on page 23.)

The inspiration and excitement of the crowd are very attractive to the young women. Where the button factories are established girls much prefer the factory to domestic employment.

The work which the women do in this business has been done by them since the industry started. The men have come to regard it as women's work... The employers regard the women as more refined and [skillful] at the machine work than man could possibly be. Since [the employer] can [hire] female labor cheaper than male help, he naturally encourages this view of the proper sphere. The work [requires] great accuracy, quickness of judgment and speed... and coordination of the mind, eye, hand, and body... this constantly for ten hours daily, must cause nervous harm...

Questions
1. According to employers, why are women good factory workers?
2. Why do you think women wanted to work in a factory?
3. Compare working in a button factory to working as a domestic servant. Which would you rather do? Why?
WHAT DO you want to be when you grow up? Today you have a lot of career options. Astronaut, scientist, doctor, homemaker, writer, lawyer, farmer, professor, actor...the list goes on and on. Nineteenth-century women, on the other hand, had fewer choices. Few jobs were open to women in the professional fields such as medicine and law. These jobs usually required many years of education and specialized training. Look at the table on page 12 to see how many women doctors and lawyers were in Iowa in 1870 and 1900.
By this time, more women were entering universities and male-dominated professional fields. One such strong-minded, independent woman was Elizabeth Irish. She defied women's traditional role when in 1895, she founded a School of Shorthand and Typing in Iowa City which later became Irish's University Business College. Irish ran the school for 45 years until her retirement in 1940 at the age of 84. One writer said that Elizabeth Irish was “ahead of her time in demonstrating what a purposeful, well-trained female could accomplish in a so-called man’s world.”

WANTED—Scholars in touch typewriting. Take a course in touch typewriting at Irish’s University Business College.

This advertisement appeared in the Iowa City Daily Republican in 1901. Students of all ages came to Elizabeth Irish’s school to take classes in Shorthand, Bookkeeping, Spelling, Business Arithmetic, and Typewriting. Boys and girls as young as 11 years old wanted business training to become a typist, clerk, or stenographer (person who uses shorthand to transcribe or take dictation).

By the late-nineteenth century, office work became an acceptable job for women. Census records show there were 1,956 female stenographers and typewriters (people who typed) in Iowa in 1900.

Irish’s school began in one room with ten students. How did she found the school? “In the business world I found many people who failed through lack of thorough training in their line of work which should have given them . . . self-reliance and that high moral standard which should be [obtained] in business,” said Irish.

Like most other professional women, Irish had received a good education. She attended a seminary (school) for ladies and graduated from a college and school of shorthand.

Irish held a number of jobs before she opened her Iowa City school. She was a bookkeeper and cashier at two California newspapers, a chief clerk at the U.S. Mint in San Francisco, and a stenographer in Nevada. She established a business school in Reno, Nevada, before returning to Iowa City in 1893.

While her business school was in operation, Irish periodically traveled to the West. Her cousin, Jane, ran the business school in Elizabeth’s absence. Jane wrote Elizabeth many letters with news of the school. On June 22, 1902 Jane wrote Elizabeth, “The dictation class [is] doing nicely. But it is like pulling teeth to make Amy Hands move her pen more than 2 words a minute.” The following month Jane reports, “I think from all inquiries we will have a big school in September for there are a great many talking of coming both for shorthand and bookkeeping.” In another letter to Elizabeth, Jane writes, “Yesterday I sent Annie Kutcher to work for the lumber company to work on the typewriter. She did very well.”

Using their training at Irish’s University Business College, many Iowa women entered the working world of the office. By the time of Irish’s death in 1952, some 12,000 students had been trained at her school.
Iowa Women, Civil War to 1900

1869
Arabella Mansfield of Mt. Pleasant becomes first woman lawyer in U.S.

1873
Iowa law says married women have the right to keep their own wages.

1883
Carrie Chapman Catt, of Mason City and a nationally-known supporter of women's right to vote, becomes superintendent of Mason City schools.

1892
First women graduate from the University of Iowa medical school

1894
Women granted right to vote in local elections only

1860
1861-1865
Civil War

1870
Iowa women begin to organize to gain the right to vote.

1900

In late-nineteenth century Iowa, only males could vote in elections. It was considered "unladylike" for a woman to want to vote. Not until 1920 would all U.S. women be granted the right to vote. This time line shows a few of the advances Iowa women made in the years between the Civil War and the turn of the century. Study the time line above and answer the questions. (Answers and more activity suggestions about women's legal rights are on page 23.)

Questions
1. Who was the first woman lawyer in the U.S.? ________________________________
2. When did women begin to organize to gain the right to vote? __________________
3. When did the first women graduate from the University of Iowa medical school? __________
4. Before what year, did women have to turn their wages over to their husbands? __________
5. What event happened in 1894? ____________________________
CLUES:
1. The clam shell on top has been opened. The clam meat has been scraped out.
2. The clam could be either a yellow back, pocket book, warty back, pig toe, blue point, or elephant’s ear.
3. A lathe (LAYth; machine that holds and drills a shell) cut out circles, called blanks, from the shell in the middle.
4. The blanks on the bottom came from the holes. **What are the blanks made into?**
   *(Answer on page 23.)*
BE A HISTORY-MAKER! The *Goldfinch* is a magazine about the history of Iowa. Wild Rosie wants to know what you’ve discovered about Iowa’s past. Has your class worked on special projects about Iowa history? Are you helping to save something that’s old? Have you found an old letter, diary, photograph, or object that tells something about the past? In the next two issues of the *Goldfinch* we’ll look at Iowa’s constitution and arts and literature. Send your stories, letters, or artwork to the *Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. If we can we’ll print it in the History-Makers section.

DEAR READERS: The story below was written by Maria Brown, who was in 8th grade at West Middle School in Muscatine last school year. Maria’s story was a finalist in the 1986 “Write Women Back into History” contest. Maria’s story tells about her grandmother’s life in Iowa in the early twentieth century.

by Maria Brown

After interviewing my grandmother, Frances Foster Brown, I realized that not only men, but also women were the pioneers of America. When she was about two or three, she and her family moved from Bennet, Nebraska to Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. They moved onto her grandfather’s farm. She did some jobs on the farm, like feeding the chickens and working in the garden. Her father wouldn’t let her do much, because she was a girl, but that didn’t bother her much because she liked to work in the house.

She went to Prairie Gem country school for a couple of years. This was a one-room school house. Then she went to another school and she graduated at the top of her class. There were about 15-20 kids in a class.

Sports and extracurricular activities were open to boys and girls. My grandmother was in the Glee Club and on the basketball team. She had a funny story to tell about her experience at one of the games she played in. They wore bloomers then (loose, wide pants with elastic at the knees). As she jumped up, her bloomers dropped and she ran off the court with her bloomers at her ankles. I’m glad the styles have changed!

After she graduated from high school, she went to college. Then she taught school at New London for five years. She was lucky to find a job in a town school. She was ready to stop teaching when she married my grandfather. She couldn’t teach after she was married. People thought that if you were married, then you wouldn’t pay much attention to your teaching. That’s one of the differences between teachers now and teachers then.

After they were married, my grandparents moved to a farm and had two children. My grandmother stayed at home and did the usual stuff any woman had to do then. She was lucky because they had a gas-powered washing machine. She never had to wash clothes by hand.

Women never played a part in politics. They were just supposed to stay at home and take care of the kids and the house. I think that women played a big part in the growing of America. I don’t think that I would have liked to do everything by hand and not have electricity. Women had to take care of a lot of things, and I don’t think they get enough credit for what they did.
Count 'Em Up!
Take your own census. Ask your friends or classmates what they would like to be when they grow up. Add up the total for each occupation. Make a table like the one on page 12. You can ask each other questions.

Books to Read
Women Shaping History by Denise DeClue (Milwaukee: Raintree Publishers, 1979) Grades 4-6. This book provides a history of women from colonial times to the 1970s. Learn about how women won the vote in 1920 and what today's women's movement is all about.

Significant American Women edited by Ida S. Meltzer (Chicago: Childrens Press, 1975) Grades 5 and up. This book has short biographical notes about many famous American women from 1600 to the present.

The Right to Vote
In the 1860s Mrs. Phoebe Palmer wrote an essay supporting women's suffrage (right to vote) in the Des Moines Register. Many people in the nineteenth century opposed women's suffrage because of the following reasons. Do you agree with them? Why or why not?
1. Women are physically inferior to men.
2. If women voted they would be subject to military duty.
3. Women don't know enough about government affairs.
4. Politics is no place for women.
5. If women voted, they would neglect their household duties.
6. If women voted, their "womanly natures" would be destroyed.
7. Most women don't want the right to vote—they have all the rights they want.

Goldfinch Oldfinches
Read more about this time in Iowa history in earlier Goldfinch issues: "Iowa in 1885" and "Going to School in Iowa" ($1.50 each, plus $1.00 postage and handling for 1-10 issues, and $2.00 for 11 or more. Address on page 2.)

Be a History-Maker!
The Goldfinch is eager to publish history-related letters, artwork, and other submissions by young people. Encourage those you know to become "History-Makers." See page 22 for more details.

Answers

Homemaker, page 7: 1. 5; 2. Bread, oatmeal, eggs, fried potatoes, milk, and applesauce; 3. read; 4. Yes, she cleaned, cooked, ironed, and sewed; 5. Examples of a few: microwave oven, electric iron, sewing machine.


Buttons, page 17: 1. Women are more skilled in hand work, paid lower wages; 2. wages, could work at home, work with other women.

Skills, page 20: 1. Arabella Mansfield; 2. 1870; 3. 1872; 4. 1873; 5. women vote in local elections.

History-Makers, page 22: The blanks were made into pearl buttons, hat pins, and charms.
“In 1868 . . . Alexander Clark, a barber in [Muscatine], brought a suit against the school board on the ground that his twelve-year-old daughter Susan was refused admission into the grammar school attended by the white children solely [because she was black].”

(Leola Nelson Bergmann,
In *The Negro in Iowa*, SHSI: Iowa City, 1969, p. 50)

Next year marks the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution. The Constitution of Iowa was modeled after our national constitution. In the next issue of the *Goldfinch* read about constitutional issues and Iowa. We’ll have a play about segregation, newspaper excerpts about freedom of speech, and articles about students rights and freedom of religion.