

# Think Like An Iowan

Iowans played a significant role during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and abolitionist movement. As the war began, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to enlist for three months to put down the rebellion. Iowa quickly exceeded its quota, and Iowa soldiers fought mainly in the western battles. Whether it be on the battlefield or on the homefront, Iowans played many different roles during this time period.

Use the State Historical Society of Iowa Think Like an Iowan cards to explore the history of remarkable Iowans involved in the Civil War and Underground Railroad movement and use the accompanying questions to help you think about history through multiple perspectives.

Each card (front and back) includes:

- Brief biography about the Iowan
- Questions related to that Iowan's experience



## **General Grenville M. Dodge (1831-1916)**

Grenville Mellen Dodge was born in Massachusetts, but would eventually settle in Council Bluffs, Iowa, after graduating from Norwich University with a degree in civil engineering. When the Civil War began in 1861, he joined the Union Army and served as an officer on the frontier and a pioneering figure in military intelligence during the war. He even served as Ulysses S. Grant's intelligence chief in the Western Theater. He served in several notable assignments, including command of the XVI Corps during the Atlanta Campaign. After the war, he became involved in surveying for railroads, including the Union Pacific. He later served as a U.S. Congressman, businessman and railroad executive who helped direct the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Dodge was later appointed to head a commission investigating the conduct of the Army during the Spanish–American War. He would return home to Iowa and died in Council Bluffs in 1916. He is buried there in Walnut Hill Cemetery. His home, the Grenville M. Dodge House, is a National Historic Landmark.

# Think Like General Dodge

- Why do you think spies, such as the ones organized by Gen. Grenville Dodge during the Civil War, are important during wartime? What kind of skills do you think you would need to become a spy?
- Dodge's spy network, also known as the "Corps of Scouts," included soldiers, unionists, female citizens and formerly-enslaved people in the Confederate territory. Why would Dodge recruit people other than soldiers to be spies? How would their varying roles affect the information they collected?
- How could Dodge's wartime experience impact his ability to help direct construction of the Transcontinental Railroad?
- Who benefited from the creation of the railroad? Why? Who did not benefit? Why?



## Alexander Clark (1826-1891)

Born in Pennsylvania in 1826 as the son of a formerly-enslaved person, Clark was encouraged to pursue an education. When he was 16, he moved to Bloomington (now Muscatine) and opened a barber shop. In 1863, during the American Civil War, Clark helped recruit the "60th Iowa Colored Troops, originally known as the 1st Iowa Infantry, African Descent." Despite being a small minority in the state, by war's end, a total of nearly 1,100 Black men from Iowa and Missouri served in the regiment. Clark enlisted at age 37 and was ranked as sergeant-major, but he could not muster due to a physical defect. In 1867, the Muscatine school board said Clark's daughter, Susan, could not attend the same public school as white children. Clark sued and in 1868, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled in his favor, stating all children could attend a common school. Clark also was instrumental in having the word "white" struck from the Iowa Constitution so all men could vote. His son became the first African American to graduate from the University of Iowa's law school, and Clark himself graduated five years later. Clark was appointed U.S. minister to Liberia.

# Think Like Alexander Clark

- What are ways that being the son of a formerly-enslaved person might have impacted Clark's life?
- Why would Clark be motivated to recruit Black men from Iowa and Missouri to fight in the Civil War for the Union Army? What challenges did they face as soldiers? What advantages did they bring the war?
- How do you think Clark's experience as an African-American soldier during wartime compared to his experience in Muscatine as a Civil War veteran? Do you think he was treated better or worse because of his race? Why?
- Why do you think Clark thought it was unfair that his daughter could not attend her local school because of her race, especially considering the fact that he was a Union Army veteran from the Civil War? Why would he want statewide change?



## **Annie Wittenmyer (1827-1900)**

Sarah "Annie" Turner Wittenmyer was born in Sandy Springs, Ohio. She became an American social reformer, relief worker and writer. She and her husband, William, moved to Keokuk, Iowa, in 1850, and she started a Sunday School and a tuition-free school for underprivileged children. When the Civil War began and reports of suffering soldiers reached the home front, she responded by traveling to military hospitals and describing the horrible conditions she witnessed prompting local support. In 1862, she was appointed as a Sanitary Agent for the Iowa State Sanitary Commission. In 1863, she began advocating for war orphans, helping to create several new Iowa orphanages, including the Iowa Soldiers' Orphans' Home. She tirelessly worked to improve the health of soldiers who were reportedly dying from inadequate diet in hospitals. Following the war, she helped found the Woman's Home Missionary Society and served as the first president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Wittenmyer then returned to medical advocacy for veterans and nurses.

# Think Like Annie Wittenmyer

- Annie Wittenmyer prioritized good hygiene, diet and sanitation in her work. What are the significance of these three things during wartime? How do they affect a soldiers in a camp?
- Wittenmyer served as a Sanitary Agent for the Iowa State Sanitary Commission during the Civil War. What do you think she could do in this role to help Union soldiers?
- What was the significance of Wittenmyer being appointed to a sanitary commission dominated by men? What kind of new perspective could she bring to the commission?
- Three of Wittenmyer's four children did not survive to adulthood. How do you think this affected her later work in creating several new orphanages in Iowa after the war?



## **Elizabeth Fairfax (Unknown-1908)**

Born in Tennessee, Elizabeth Fairfax was an Union Army nurse for the 26th Iowa Infantry during the Civil War. She served as a scout and nurse as she took care of sick and wounded soldiers in camps where stationed. After the war, she settled in Clinton, Iowa, and was well known around town. According to inscription on the back of this cabinet card, "For 24 years, she kept a laundry, and wove rag carpets for a living. By industry and economy she purchased and is now the owner of a little homestead. She has raised two children. Now advanced in years and feeble in health, she is no longer able to maintain herself by her former occupation. To secure a living she now peddles for grocery store, and sells her pictures. She served her country faithfully and is deserving of support." This 1885 photo shows Fairfax wearing a badge from Nathaniel Baker Grand Army of the Republic Post. When she could, the former army nurse attended national encampments of the Grand Army of the Republic. Fairfax also was a charter member of the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Clinton.



# Think Like Elizabeth Fairfax

- Think of the sanitary issues that Annie Wittenmyer fought to fix through her work. What kind of challenges did Elizabeth Fairfax face as she tended to sick and wounded soldiers? How might these challenges affected her work in the camp?
- Fairfax was directly involved with the care and workings of camp life for soldiers. What challenges do you think she faced being a Black woman in an Union Army camp? What benefits did she have in her position?
- Fairfax showed tremendous pride in her role during the war. She cherished her badge from Nathaniel Baker Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) Post and she attended national encampments of the GAR after the war. Why do you think it was significant for her to be around other Civil War veterans, and to be recognized for her service?



## Henry Clay Dean (1822-1887)

Henry Clay Dean was a Methodist Episcopal preacher, lawyer, orator and author who was a critic of the American Civil War and the Lincoln administration. He was born in Pennsylvania, and one of three sons of a stonemason. In 1845, he joined the Methodist Episcopal Conference of Virginia and began to preach. In 1850, Dean, his wife and children moved to Iowa, locating to Pittsburg in Van Buren County. He opposed the extension and continuation of slavery in the nation, but he believed that enslaved people should be freed through government purchase over time. Dean was known as an Iowa Copperhead, also known as "Peace Democrats," who were a faction of Democrats in the Union who opposed the war and wanted an immediate peace settlement with the Confederates. Dean gave speeches against the Lincoln administration, which resulted in a brief prison term for disloyal remarks and threats on his life. With the conclusion of the war, Dean became a spokesman for Democrats in opposition to "radical Republicanism." In 1871, Dean moved to a farm in Putnam County, Missouri.

# Think Like Henry Clay Dean

- Henry Clay Dean gave speeches against the Lincoln administration during the Civil War. Why would he be punished for disloyal remarks?
- Dean considered himself a Copperhead (Peace Democrat) for his stance against the war. He opposed the extension and continuation of slavery in the U.S., but he also wanted an immediate settlement with the Confederates, who defended slavery. How might his stance for “peace” be in conflict with his stance to allow enslavement to continue in the South?
- After the war, Dean became a spokesman for Democrats in opposition to “radical Republicanism,” which they viewed as a too rapid modernization of society. Why do you think Dean and his fellow Copperheads were not in favor of societal change? Do you see any similarities to present-day politics in America?



## **Mattie Burbage (1834-1899)**

Mattie D. Burbage served as the first president of the Iowa Department of the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), an auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) organized nationally in 1883 to serve the country's Civil War veterans. The WRC is one of the many women's organizations that were founded after the American Civil War. From 1879, membership to the WRC was open to women anywhere around the country that could prove loyalty to the Union during the war. WRC posts across the country included white and African-American women as members. The organization was designed to assist the GAR, promote and help run Memorial Day events (alongside the GAR), petition the federal government for nurses pensions and promote patriotic education. Not much else is known about the life of Iowa WRC president, Mattie D. Burbage. She married James Burbage in 1894, but died a few years later in 1899. She is buried at Agency Cemetery in Wapello County, Iowa.

# Think Like Mattie Burbage

- What's the purpose of creating the Women's Relief Corps (WRC), a national auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), in 1883 to serve the country's Civil War veterans? What reasons would there be to create a state chapter in Iowa?
- Part of the WRC's work included petitioning the federal government for nurses pensions. Why do you think this was a priority for the organization? What advantage could they bring to the cause as an advocate? Why might they have found opposition to their cause?
- The WRC also worked to promote patriotic education. Why might this be significant after the American Civil War? Who would benefit from this kind of education?



## John Williamson, Anna and John Cook and Other Iowans

Historians know the names of more than 100 Iowans who helped in one way or another with the Underground Railroad. Among the best-known are J.B. Grinnell (see card), James Jordan near West Des Moines, Anna and John Cook of “Quaker Divide” near Earlham and John Williamson near Council Bluffs. A main route across the state for the movement started in southwest Iowa near Council Bluffs where Williamson, a free Black man, helped those fleeing enslavement on their road to freedom. Rev. George Hitchcock, a Congregationalist minister, passed along “passengers” to the next stop. Many who helped freedom seekers escape from enslavement, even though it was against the law to do so, were driven by a religious and moral belief that enslaving people was wrong. In Iowa, Quakers played a leading role in this abolitionist movement. It is impossible to know the numbers of people the Underground Railroad assisted. Individual families also responded when asked for help. Free Black residents in Iowa, particularly in southeast, were often involved.

The William Maxson home, located in Springdale, Iowa, was an Underground Railroad station in the mid 1800's. The home was where abolitionist John Brown trained with his men for the raid on Harpers Ferry. The house has since been torn down, but was near Springdale, which was home to Quakers and a center of abolitionism. Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa

# Think Like Iowa Participants in Underground Railroad

- List the benefits and the risks of being involved with the Underground Railroad in Iowa. What reasons might someone have chosen to help? What reasons might have discouraged someone from taking part?
- Why are there not many written records detailing the people and the places associated with the Underground Railroad in Iowa?
- Iowans who participated in the Underground Railroad had to make many difficult decisions. Have you had to make any difficult choices? If so, what was it about, and how was it resolved?



## **Josiah Grinnell (1821-1891)**

Josiah Bushnell Grinnell – better known as J.B. – was born in Vermont in 1821. He grew up a farm boy, working in the fields in the spring and summer and attending school only in the winter. He began teaching in a one-room schoolhouse by the age of 16. After spending a few years teaching, he left Vermont to attend Oneida Institute in New York, a radical institution that opposed slavery. It was there that Grinnell became a staunch abolitionist, which eventually forced him out West after facing backlash from anti-slavery sermons he gave in Washington, D.C. He would remain vocally opposed to enslavement for his whole life, even founding the town of Grinnell, Iowa, based on this tenet. He once hosted abolitionist John Brown in Grinnell as Brown was bringing several freedom seekers along the Underground Railroad to Canada. With the founding of the town, Grinnell also founded “Grinnell University,” although it was a university only in name. He persuaded Iowa College to move to Grinnell from Davenport. Grinnell also served in the U.S. Congress.



# Think Like Josiah Grinnell

- Josiah Grinnell and Alexander Clark led two very different lives, but both greatly influenced Iowa. What was different about their upbringings? What was similar? How did their backgrounds influence their decisions?
- Grinnell was vocal about his anti-slavery views, including creating sermons and constructing a town on this tenet. In what ways do you think abolitionists differed on the strategies and goals of their movement? Why do you think they disagreed or agreed with Grinnell's approach?
- Grinnell was a well-educated white man with significant wealth. How do you think his privilege allowed him to be a more vocal – and better remembered – abolitionist in the state? Why might others who were abolitionists not be as well known in Iowa history?