

National History Day® 2024: Turning Points in History

Topics in Iowa History

Welcome to National History Day in Iowa! This curated list is designed to introduce you to a few of the many topics in Iowa history that would be a great fit for the 2024 theme, Turning Points in History. Topics are organized by subject headings and include short descriptions. Each topic is also linked to free online resources about the topic (including many primary sources)—just click to learn more!

Good luck, and happy History Day!

African American History	
Alexander Clark (1826-1891)	Alexander Clark was a prominent African American businessman who is credited for leading the fight against segregated schools—long before the <i>Brown vs. Board</i> Supreme Court decision. In 1867, he filed a lawsuit when his daughter was not allowed to attend public school in Muscatine. The Iowa Supreme Court ruled in his favor, declaring that schools could not bar children because of their race.
Jack Trice (1902-1923)	Jack Trice was the first African American athlete for Iowa State University. Trice died after his first college football game due to the injuries he sustained while playing. The Iowa State University stadium was later renamed as the Jack Trice Stadium in his memory.
Edna Griffin (1909-2000)	Edna M. Griffin, also known as the “Rosa Parks of Iowa,” was deemed a leader in the Midwest for her efforts to end segregation in the late 1940s. Griffin was refused service by Katz Drug Store due to the color of her skin and she launched a lawsuit against the store. The legal battle ultimately ended with a victory for Griffin, setting a precedent for the Montgomery Bus Boycott that would occur two years later.
Iowa in the Civil War	
John Brown (1800-1859)	John Brown is a controversial historical figure. A prominent abolitionist, Brown believed violence was necessary to free

	enslaved people. His raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia, failed to rouse enslaved people to rebellion, and he was captured and hanged. However, he became a symbol of resistance to slavery throughout the North and an object of deep hatred in the South.
General Grenville Dodge (1831-1916)	General Grenville Dodge joined the Union Army as the Union Pacific Railroad's chief engineer and created a spy network throughout the Civil War, laying the groundwork for future military intelligence operations. Dodge continued his involvement in politics, winning an Iowa congressional seat in Iowa.
Politics and the Law	
Herbert Hoover (1874 -1964)	Iowa native Herbert Hoover served as the 31st President of the United States. Hoover is the only President born in Iowa. Hoover had difficult circumstances throughout his single term, primarily the Great Depression. He previously served as the director of the United States Food Administration during World War I, providing supplies abroad and stabilizing food production on the home front.
Henry Wallace (1888-1965)	Henry Wallace served as the vice president of the United States during World War II. Also served as both the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of Agriculture. Wallace attended Iowa State University before finding a passion for politics and developing a relationship with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.
Robert D. Ray (1928-2018)	Robert Ray served as Iowa's 38th Governor from 1969 to 1983. Governor Ray is perhaps best known for his immigration policies that included welcoming refugees from southeast Asia to Iowa in 1975.
Tinker v. Des Moines	<i>Tinker v. Des Moines</i> was a landmark United States Supreme Court case that took place in 1969. The case dealt with the issue of students' freedom of speech and expression within the school setting. The Court recognized that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."
Iowa Caucuses	For 48 years the Iowa Democratic Party held the first presidential primary in the nation, the Republican Party of Iowa soon followed in 1976. The importance of the Iowa caucuses lies in their ability to shape the narrative surrounding the presidential race.

Native American History	
Meskwaki Nation	The Meskwaki are a Native American tribe that has been historically located throughout the Midwest, including Iowa. The Meskwaki formally lost all lands in 1845 when the federal government displaced them from their territory. Despite this, the tribe maintained a presence in Iowa and in 1856, the Meskwaki began systematically purchasing their land back from the state.
Sioux Tribe	The Sioux are a Native American tribe that was historically located throughout the Great Plains, including northwest Iowa. Among mounting tensions due to American Indian policy and westward expansion, the Santee Band of the Sioux tribe were the last indigenous group to relocate out of the state per a treaty with the federal government in 1851.
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)	
George Washington Carver (1864-1943)	George Washington Carver graduated from and taught at Iowa State College (now Iowa State University). He was the first Black faculty member at ISC. Carver is most well-known for his development of many agricultural products, including peanuts.
John Froelich (1849-1933)	John Froelich was an American inventor known for creating the first internal-combustion traction motor, also known as the tractor.
James Van Allen (1914-2006)	James Van Allen was a scientist born in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. He aided the United States space program throughout the Space Race and more. His inventions were included in the first flight to Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.
Norman Borlaug (1914-2009)	Norman Borlaug was an agricultural leader of the Green Revolution. He aided developing countries with the creation of GMOs that allowed farming practices to be more beneficial in different climates. He is accredited with saving the lives of one billion people from starvation, a feat that landed him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970.
Peggy Whitson (1960-Present)	Peggy Whitson holds the United States record for her time in space, totaling 665 days (more than any woman in the world and more than any American). Throughout her career as an astronaut, Whitson was appointed to numerous positions including first female Commander of the International Space Station in 2007-2008.

Iowa Farm Crisis	<p>In the 1980s, Iowa farm families experienced extreme hardships. The rural population of the state declined and due to a combination of economic, political, and technological factors led to a crisis within the rural communities.</p>
<p>Women's Suffrage</p>	
<p>Arabella Mansfield (1846-1911)</p>	<p>Arabella Mansfield was the first woman lawyer in the United States. She was a pioneer in the women's suffrage movement in Iowa and chaired the first Iowa Suffrage Association state convention. She later became one of the first female college administrators in the United States.</p>
<p>Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947)</p>	<p>Iowan Carrie Chapman Catt was a leading figure for the promotion of women's suffrage. Catt voiced the inequalities women faced and continuously lobbied for equal rights.</p>
<p>Anna B. Lawther (1872-1957)</p>	<p>Anna Lawther was a women's rights activist in Iowa. Lawther was involved in civic and social welfare advocacy, and she worked to secure women's right to vote.</p>