

Business in Iowa

How have Iowa-born companies transformed both local and international business?

Some of the first business ventures were the mills along Iowa's rivers that ground grain or cut logs into lumber. Clinton was once reported to have more millionaires per capita than any other city in the nation thanks to the success of several lumber dealers. Private railroads received a bonanza when the federal government provided land grants to four trunk lines. The rails were allocated additional acres along the proposed routes as they completed the required numbers of miles of track. The companies sold the land and used the money to finance line construction.

Coal deposits across southern and central Iowa provided fuel to Iowa railroads, households and a few early businesses. However, Iowa's soft and smoky coal was inferior to the hard anthracite in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. In the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, however, local mines employed hundreds of miners. Many were immigrants from Wales, Italy, Croatia or Sweden and added ethnic diversity to the population. Mining was often part-time work, and the miners had to find other employment. When train engines began shifting to diesel fuel in the 1920s, most of the mines closed and many mining towns disappeared.

Iowa and Agriculture

Agriculture has always been Iowa's major industry and the roots of many of Iowa's first business ventures. The invention of the refrigerated railroad car led to the rise of meat-packing in Iowa. Before refrigeration, livestock dealers had to pay for cattle and hogs to be fed and watered on their way to Chicago stock yards. With refrigeration, slaughter houses in Iowa dressed beef and pork and sent it to eastern cities. Meat packing was the leading manufacturing industry in the state at the turn of the 20th century.

The manufacture of agricultural machinery included some significant Iowa industries and became a major source of employment. John Froelich invented the first gasoline-powered engine mobile in the field. In 1895, along with some business partners from Waterloo, Froelich formed the Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company. After World War I created a demand for the tractor, the company was purchased by John Deere, an Illinois-based company that manufactured a full line of farm implements. Today, the John Deere line of farm and lawn products is known world wide by its distinctive green and yellow color.

Iowa seed companies now do international business. Pioneer Hybrid, founded by Henry A. Wallace, changed the face of corn production first across the Midwest and then the world with its hybrid seed. Hybrid seed has better yields and is drought and disease resistant. However, hybrid seed from one harvest does not retain its vigor if replanted. New seed must be purchased every year, creating an ongoing market for the company. Cross pollinating the selected varieties created work for thousands of teenagers detasslers who every summer walked through the rows removing the tassels from one variety so the ears could be pollinated by the selected alternative. Pioneer was purchased by the DuPont company in Delaware.

The Garst Seed Company successfully partnered with Pioneer to market its product to farmers. The Garst family took the international spotlight when they hosted Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959 on a visit to their Coon Rapids farm during the height of the Cold War. This opened a dialogue between the two superpowers on opportunities for more peaceful coexistence.

Other Iowa Industries

Several manufacturing companies are located in Iowa where their inventors lived and nurtured their businesses. Maytag washing machines had a long history in Newton before production was moved to Mexico. Schaeffer Pens in Ft. Madison produced a fountain pen that became famous world-wide. Winnebago Industries in Forest City flourished under the skillful guidance of inventor John Hansen. Pella Corporation, which mainly manufactures windows and doors, is a pillar in its hometown.

Some major retail companies also have Iowa roots. The Hy-Vee grocery chain was a partnership between Charles Hyde and David Vredenburg in Lamoni. To take advantage of better rail connections, the company moved to Chariton and later the head offices to West Des Moines. Today, Hy-Vee now serves communities across the Midwest with groceries, gasoline and pharmacies. It is the state's largest employer. Casey's and Kum-and-Go provide many small towns with their only source of gasoline, groceries and other food items.

Iowa is also a leader in the insurance industry thanks to some early successes in that industry from Iowans like Frederick Hubbell. A financial genius, Hubbell became involved in banking, real estate and the Des Moines Water Works that led to the creation of Equitable Life Insurance, one of the largest firms of its day. Iowa is home to several other major insurance companies and rivals Connecticut as America's insurance headquarters.

With internet connections and transportation networks, there are many small businesses in Iowa that buy and sell from partners around the world.

Supporting Questions

How have Iowa companies and entrepreneurs contributed the economic landscape of Iowa and the surrounding region?

- ["Beaconsfield Supply Store," 2007 \(Document\)](#)
- ["The Secrets Behind Casey's Success," May 29, 2011 \(Document\)](#)

What contributions have Iowa companies and entrepreneurs made in the national and international business industries?

- [Fred W. Fitch's Message to the Associated Master Barbers of America, November 1925 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life," January 28, 1945 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Arthur Collins: Radio Wizard," 2002 \(Document\)](#)
- [Excerpt from "In Search of a Better Way: The Lives and Legacies of Gary and Matilda Vermeer," 2008 \(Document\)](#)
- ["At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do," September 11, 2016 \(Document\)](#)

How did Iowa companies and entrepreneurs match the needs of their customers and communities in order to develop and grow?

- [Froelich Tractor in Iowa and South Dakota, 1892 \(Images\)](#)
- [Excerpts from the "Shampoo King" Book, 1981 \(Document\)](#)
- [Fitch Shampoo Advertisements, 1981 \(Documents\)](#)
- ["Fred Fitch's Own Page," 1981 \(Document\)](#)
- [Biography of John Froelich from Iowa Inventors Hall of Fame Pamphlet, 1994 \(Document\)](#)
- [Hy-Vee Historical Timeline, June 2015 \(Document\)](#)

*Printable Image and Document Guide

Additional Resources

Business Entities Search - Iowa Secretary of State

This webpage from the Iowa Secretary of State's website allows the user to enter in the first few letters or words of a business entity name and retrieve a list of all business entities beginning with the same letters. This database contains important business information that is filed with the state.

“Beaconsfield Supply Store,” 2007

Beaconsfield Supply Store

The name Hy-Vee is ubiquitous throughout Iowa and neighboring states. The Beaconsfield Supply Store was the first home of the grocery chain with the “helpful smile in every aisle.” Built in 1916 to serve the small town of Beaconsfield in southern Iowa, the modest brick building was purchased by Charles Hyde and David Vredenburg—Hy and Vee—around 1930. Although both men had other retailing experience, this building represents their first partnership. For three years it provided food and general supplies while operating under three different managers. All the while, Hyde & Vredenburg were opening stores in Iowa and Missouri. After they closed this store in 1933, other retailers operated out of the building until the Beaconsfield Telephone Co-op bought it in 1956. Today, Hy-Vee is Iowa’s largest private employer and operates stores in seven states. Beaconsfield, on the other hand, is Iowa’s smallest incorporated city with a population of just 20. This building stands as a rare remnant of Beaconsfield’s role in Iowa’s Golden Age of Agriculture. It is listed at both the local and state levels of significance. Marilyn Gahm, Hy-Vee History Center Coordinator, prepared the nomination for the City of Beaconsfield.



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, “Beaconsfield Supply Store,” Iowa Heritage Illustrated, pp. 161, 2007

Description

The Beaconsfield Supply Store was known as the first home of “Hy-Vee.” The small brick building was approved to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

[Transcript of “Beaconsfield Supply Store”](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- In the photo, what do you notice about the Beaconsfield store compared to today’s Hy-Vee stores?
- Why does the author of this text point out that there is such a stark difference between the size of the Hy-Vee company and the size of the community of Beaconsfield?
- In the [Hy-Vee historical timeline](#), it states the “friendly smile in every aisle” slogan was introduced in 1963. How do you think this first store in Beaconsfield connects to that slogan?

“The Secrets Behind Casey’s Success,” May 29, 2011



Courtesy of The Des Moines Register, Elbert, David, “The Secrets Behind Casey’s Success,” The Des Moines Register, 29 May 2011

Description

This is an article in The Des Moines Register about the success of Casey’s General Store. The article was published on May 29, 2011 by David Elbert and it focused on Casey’s development over time and how the business has transformed to be successful on a local and regional level.

[Transcript of “The Secrets Behind Casey’s Success” Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of “The Secrets Behind Casey’s Success” Newspaper Article](#)

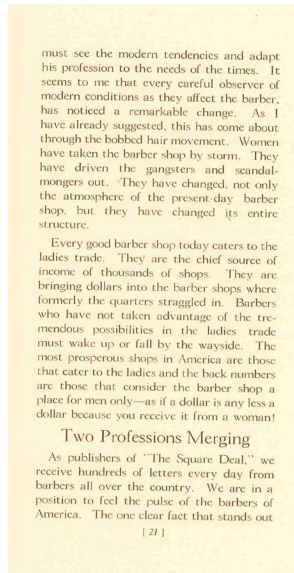
Source-Dependent Questions

- What does Casey’s General Store offer the communities that it serves that is different from its competitors?
- How has Casey’s General Store changed over time to become successful?
- Compare the regional success of Casey’s General Store to that of [Hy-Vee](#). What are the similarities and differences between the two Iowa-born franchises?

Citation Information

Elbert, David, “The Secrets Behind Casey’s Success,” *The Des Moines Register*, 29 May 2011. Courtesy of The Des Moines Register

Fred W. Fitch's Message to the Associated Master Barbers of America, November 1925



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Fitch, Fred, "Fred W. Fitch's Message to the Associated Master Barbers of America," November 1925

Description

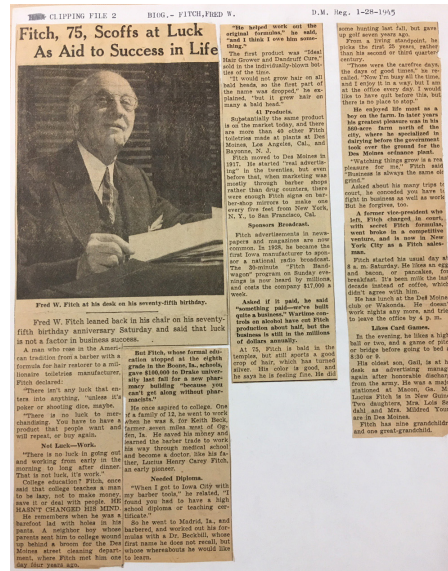
This document is a speech given by Fred Fitch during the conference for the Associated Master Barbers of America in 1925. The speech outlined Fitch's thoughts and plans for the future of the profession.

[Transcript of Fred W. Fitch's Message to the Associated Master Barbers of America](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- In his speech, what revolutions did Fred Fitch suggest needed to occur in order for the profession to be successful?
- How was the concept of specializing in diagnosing skin and scalp conditions revolutionary to the profession? Why did Fitch believe barbers were resistant to this idea?
- How did Fitch's beliefs and revolutionary ideas transform the profession worldwide?

"Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life," January 28, 1945



Courtesy of The Des Moines Register, "Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life," The Des Moines Register, 28 January 1945

Description

This *Des Moines Register* article is a brief biography written about Fred Fitch as he celebrated his 75th birthday. The article outlines some of the major accomplishments in his career.

[Transcript of "Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life" Newspaper Article](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What evidence from this text shows Fred Fitch's impact on the worldwide hair care industry?
- Compare this document to the article about [John Pappajohn](#). Both men are reflecting on their life and careers. How are their business experiences the same? How are they different?
- What connections can you make from this document to the other documents within this text set about Fred Fitch?

Citation Information

"Fitch, 75, Scoffs at Luck As Aid to Success in Life," *The Des Moines Register*, 28 January 1945. Courtesy of The Des Moines Register

"Arthur Collins: Radio Wizard," 2002



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Stearns, Ben, "Arthur Collins: Radio Wizard," pp. 1-4, 2002

Description

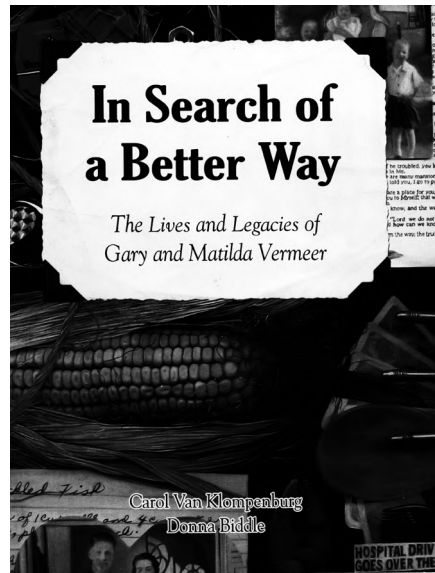
This book is a biography about radio wizard Arthur Collins whose inventions and ideas transformed communication industry in multiple avenues including aeronautics and space communications, military communications, radio and television broadcasting and personal communication.

[Transcript of "Arthur Collins: Radio Wizard"](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What were some of Arthur Collins' greatest accomplishments?
- Why were his inventions and ideas so highly valued?
- How does this source depict Collins having a national and global connection to business? Why would these connections be important?

Excerpt from “In Search of a Better Way: The Lives and Legacies of Gary and Matilda Vermeer,” 2008



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Biddle, Donna and Carol Van Klompenburg, “In Search of a Better Way: The Lives and Legacies of Gary and Matilda Vermeer,” 2008

Description

These excerpts are from a book that highlights the lives of Vermeer Corporation founders Gary and Matilda Vermeer. Vermeer is an Iowa-born company that started in farm and construction equipment and has grown into an international corporation.

[Transcript of Excerpt from “In Search of a Better Way: The Lives and Legacies of Gary and Matilda Vermeer,” 2008](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- In what ways did the Vermeer Corporation impact industry and business on an international level?
- How did the Vermeer Corporation transform and restructure to meet the needs of its customers and communities it served?
- Connecting to other sources in this primary source set, how are the business and industry stories of the Vermeer family and [Arthur Collins](#) similar?

"At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do," September 11, 2016



Courtesy of The Des Moines Register, Patane, Matthew, "At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do,"
The Des Moines Register, 11 September 2016

Description

This 2016 article from *The Des Moines Register* focuses on the life, legacy and success of John Pappajohn. Pappajohn immigrated from Greece at the age of 9 months, and he grew up in Mason City, Iowa. He became a successful businessman in the state and a prolific philanthropist.

[Transcript of "At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do" Newspaper Article](#)

[Printable Excerpt of the "At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do" Newspaper Article](#)

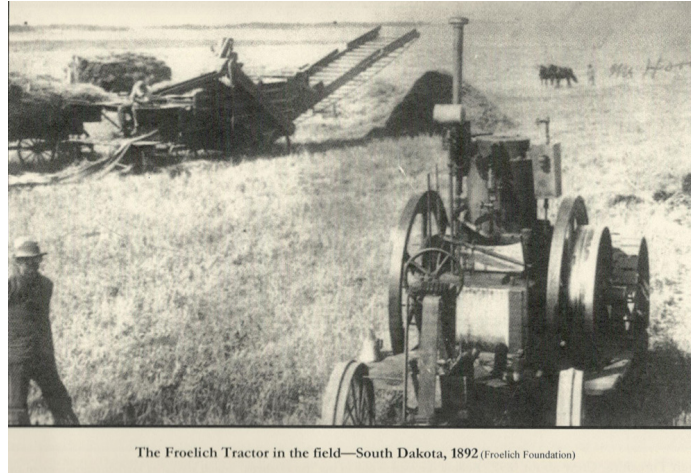
Source-Dependent Questions

- How have John Pappajohn's successes and failures shaped him as an entrepreneur?
- John Pappajohn notes that philanthropy is important to him. Discuss this idea - what are the benefits and drawbacks for entrepreneurs to be philanthropists?
- Compare John Pappajohn's success to that of [Fred W. Fitch](#) and [Gary and Matilda Vermeer](#). What made each successful? Discuss the differences and similarities in each path to success.

Citation Information

Patane, Matthew, "At 88, John Pappajohn Still Works Harder Than You Do," *The Des Moines Register*, 11 September 2016. Courtesy of The Des Moines Register

Froelich Tractor in Iowa and South Dakota, 1892



Courtesy of Froelich Foundation and Museum, "Froelich Tractor Photos, Langford, South Dakota, and Froelich, Iowa," 1892

Description

These photographs show the Froelich Tractor in Iowa and South Dakota in 1892. The tractor was created by John Froelich, an American inventor who lived in Froelich, Iowa, a small village in northeast Iowa. His invention, shown in the photos, was the first stable gasoline/petrol-powered tractor with forward and reverse gears.

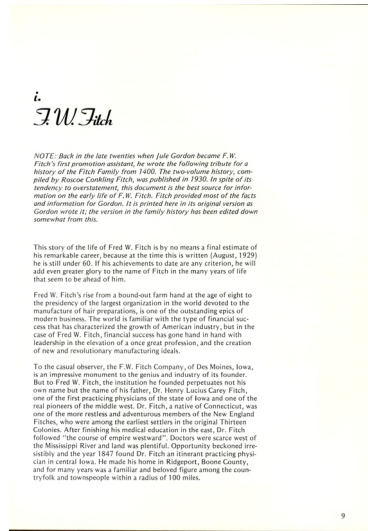
Source-Dependent Questions

- This was the first stable gasoline/petrol-powered tractor with forward and reverse gears, invented in 1892. How did John Froelich's invention and business match the needs of farmers during this time period? How does his invention continue to impact farmers?
- How would this invention revolutionize farming both inside and outside of Iowa? Use details from the photos to support your response.

Citation Information

"Froelich Tractor Photos, Langford, South Dakota, and Froelich, Iowa," 1892. Courtesy of Froelich Foundation and Museum

Excerpts from the “Shampoo King” Book, 1981



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Rehder, Denny, “The Shampoo King,” pp. 9, 13-15, 1981

Description

This document includes excerpts from the book “Shampoo King,” which outlines the career of Fred Fitch. Fitch created hair products and revolutionized his industry, which led to great success nationally and internationally.

Transcript of Excerpts from the “Shampoo King” Book, 1981

Source-Dependent Questions

- Why did Fred Fitch choose the hair industry for his profession?
- How did a conversation between Fitch and Dr. Breckbill propel Fitch into his business success?
- How were Fitch’s ideas, as well as his dandruff remover product, revolutionary to his profession?

Fitch Shampoo Advertisements, 1981



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Rehder, Denny, "The Shampoo King," pp. 51-52, 1981

Description

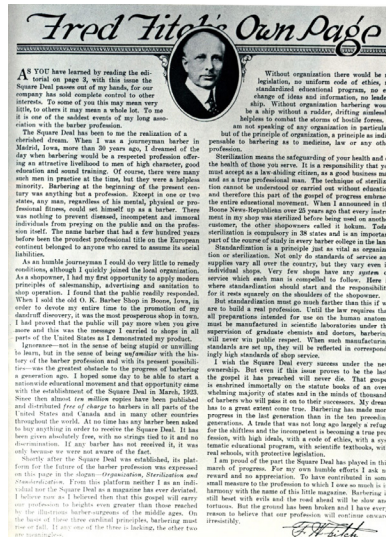
Within the book "The Shampoo King," there are a series of example advertisements for various products produced by Fred Fitch's company that had been used in various media forms. Two of the advertisements are shown and one provides instruction as to how to apply Fitch's shampoo.

[Transcript of Fitch Shampoo Advertisements](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- To whom were these advertisements directed toward? What was the purpose of each advertisement?
- How did these advertisements promote the changes that Fred Fitch felt were important to the hair care profession?
- What are the connections to what you have read so far about [Fitch](#) and the information conveyed in each advertisement?

“Fred Fitch’s Own Page,” 1981



Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Rehder, Denny, “The Shampoo King,” pp. 22, 1981

Description

This editorial was originally published in an issue of the magazine *Square Deal*, which Fred W. Fitch’s company sold to another publisher. Fitch discusses three main major ideas that he believed would revolutionize the profession.

Transcript of “Fred Fitch’s Own Page”

Source-Dependent Questions

- What were the three ideas Fred Fitch mentions which would help revolutionize and propel the hair care profession forward?
- How do Fitch’s ideas of “organization sterilization and standardization” revolutionize the hair care industry at the time?
- How does this editorial written by Fitch support and connect to his [speech to the Associated Master Barbers of America](#)?

Biography of John Froelich from Iowa Inventors Hall of Fame Pamphlet, 1994



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1994

Description

This document is a brief biography of John Froelich, who was inducted into the Iowa Inventors Hall of Fame in 1991. Froelich was an American inventor who lived in Froelich, Iowa, a small village in northeast Iowa. He is best known for inventing the first stable gasoline/petrol-powered tractor with forward and reverse gears.

[Transcript of John Froelich's Biography from Iowa Inventors Hall of Fame Pamphlet](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- John Froelich founded the Waterloo Gasoline Traction Engine Company in 1893, one year after he invented the stable gasoline/petrol-powered tractor with forward and reverse gears. This company was purchased by John Deere in 1918. Explain how John Froelich's foresight into the changing needs of farmer led to his company's growth and eventual purchase by John Deere?
- Compare John Froelich's inventions to that of [Arthur Collins](#). While they lived in different eras, what is similar between them and their inventions? What was each man responding to in their eras? How did their inventions help to society develop and grow?

Hy-Vee Historical Timeline, June 2015



Courtesy of Hy-Vee, "Hy-Vee Seasons," Hy-Vee, Inc., Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 58-61, June 2015

Description

This document is an 85-year-old timeline of the history of development and changes to Hy-Vee.

[Transcript of Hy-Vee's Historical Timeline](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What were some of the innovations Hy-Vee introduced over time?
- How have those innovations matched the changing needs of consumers?
- How does this timeline for Hy-Vee show its impact on communities both locally and regionally?

Citation Information

"Hy-Vee Seasons," Hy-Vee, Inc., Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 58-61, June 2015. Courtesy of Hy-Vee