

“Iowa’s Peace Tradition” Excerpt from *The Goldfinch*, September 1991

Students at Carpenter Elementary School in Monticello, Iowa, recently sent a big package to their pen pals in the Soviet Union. They carefully packed tapes of American music, coins, baseball cards, postcards, and drawings. The pictures you see on these pages arrived from their Soviet pen pals. The subject of the drawings? Global peace.

Jennifer Schneiter, 11, wrote to her pen pal, Olya, in Moscow:

“What’s it like in the Soviet Union? Do you have seasons like we do? Do you have snow? What kind of sports do you have? I have so many questions. What kind of food do you grow in your country? I am writing a letter from the computer we got for Christmas. We have many holidays that we celebrate. What holidays do you celebrate in the Soviet Union? My favorite subjects are Art, Science, and Math. My hobbies are reading, drawing, and swimming. My favorite things to eat are ice cream, popcorn, fruit, chips, watermelon, macaroni, and pizza. I hope that we can write to each other all the time even when school is out.”

Writing letters to people around the world is just one thing to do to support peace.

Soviet kids sent drawings and letters to their pen pals in Monticello, Iowa. Getting to know other kids from around the world is just one of the many ways Iowa students are working for peace.



During Times of War

During the Civil War (1861-1865), one million people were killed, wounded, or lost. About 7,500 Iowa men were drafted (selected for military service). But not all of them went to war. About 1,200 Iowans paid substitutes to take their places. Some Iowans were against the war because they thought it wasted lives and money. They supported peaceful solutions to end conflict. These people were called the Peace Democrats. Some people thought the Peace Democrats were traitors. They were given the unflattering name of "copperheads". (The name comes from the copperhead snake which has a poisonous bite, meaning that their opinions were sharply critical.) Newspaper editor, Dennis Mahoney, of Dubuque, was arrested and put in jail in 1861 for publishing criticisms of the war and of President Abraham Lincoln. He was released after three months in prison only after signing a paper swearing loyalty to the United States.

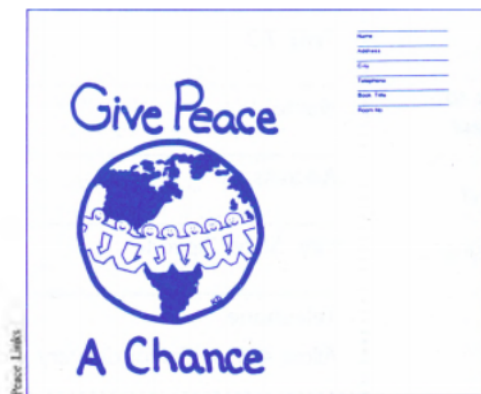
Another Peace Democrat, George C. Talley, of Keokuk County was a Baptist minister who publicly opposed war. He gave many speeches against the war. During a parade, shouting and gunfire broke out. Talley was shot and killed. Talley was one of many people who died supporting peace.

During World War I (1914-1918), millions of people died in Europe and Asia. Many members of religious groups such as the Mennonites and the Society of Friends (Quakers) opposed the war and were conscientious objectors, C.O.'s. Some Iowa Mennonites went to prison rather than serve in the war. By World War II (1939-1945), Civilian Public Service camps were created to house C.O.'s. In Iowa, these camps were located in Crystal Lake, Cherokee, Denison, Ames, Cresco, and Mt. Pleasant. Some 12,000 men worked in 151 of the camps nationwide. Instead of going to war or prison, C.O.'s could live at one of the camps and help garden, cook, can, raise, harvest, or thresh crops, and build shelters. As a result of both World War I and World War II, many people around the world suffered from hunger. Many Iowans such as Herbert Hoover and Dr. Norman Borlaug (BORE-log) helped to feed millions of people. Another Iowan, Roswell Garst, used food to make progress toward peace between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1950's.

Draft resistance appeared again in the 1960s and early 1970s. Draft card burnings, marches, and nonviolent protests made newspaper headlines. Most Iowans support the Persian Gulf War. Many people rallied behind Iowa troops, even if they were against the war. Some took part in anti-war rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and candlelight vigils. When Iowa troops came home, they were welcomed with yellow ribbons and parades.

Peace Today

From the conscientious objectors in the Civil War to the Monticello students today, supporting peace is not always easy. In 1991, for example, a peace pole at a Primghar high school was vandalized. The pole said, "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian. Some people were against planting the peace pole, because they felt that it objected to their participation in the military. People who supported planting the pole said they did not mean to upset anyone. "It was simply to remind people that peace cannot be taken for granted," wrote Deborah Fisch in Primghar's. The O'Brien County Bell, "that it must be worked for, and that all people around the world desire peace. True peace does not simply mean the absence of war. True peace involves justice, freedom, dignity, and the chance to live without prejudice or hunger. Peace is not the absence of one thing, but really the presence of many things."



This winning book jacket was drawn by a student in Primghar, Iowa. The contest was sponsored by the local peace links group, an organization supporting world peace.