

Iowa: a state at work

Iowans of all ages have worked throughout the state's history. As industries, labor laws, and the environment have changed, Iowans have adapted their skills and talents to make a living and support their families.

The Ioway Indians (also called Iowa Indians) lived in Iowa before European-American settlers came here in the 1830s. They lived in villages along major rivers such as the Mississippi and the Missouri.

In this tribe, work was divided between clans. "Every clan, Bear or Buffalo for example, had a special job to do," said Lance Foster, a graduate student at Iowa State University and a member of the Ioway tribe. "The Bear Clan would lead people in hunts and also act as police. The Buffalo Clan tended to be farmers. Although everyone planted something, the Buffalo were the leaders."

In the Ioway tribe, specialists worked at different tasks. Some people made arrows and others made drums. "Usually you paid them in something like horses or goods," Foster said. "There wasn't any money. It was all about trade."

Women were the caretakers

of families and the farmers who cultivated the fields. "They were considered the heart of the nation," Foster said. "The men were mainly for the defense of the tribe."

Children were given responsibilities when they were as young as five years old. Boys hunted birds and rabbits for food. Girls helped their mothers in the fields and learned to sew by making doll clothes. All children were made to feel good about their contributions, Foster said.

"The most respected people were the ones who worked for the good of all people," Foster told *The Goldfinch*.

Today, members of the Ioway tribe live mainly in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. They work in a variety of jobs on and off the **reser-**

vation, but still have responsibilities to the tribe.

"They always try to make time during pow wows, ceremonies, and funerals for traditional roles of work," Foster said. Some people cook feasts while others might be responsible for making drums or other objects.



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In the Ioway tribe, work was divided between clans.

reservation — land reserved for Native Americans

New workers arrive

The United States government moved Native American tribes out of Iowa by the mid-1830s and European-American settlers moved in.

Most early industries were home-based, and revolved around agriculture. Families farmed and grew or made what they needed to survive, including most of their food, soap, candles, and clothes. Farmers traded their produce and crops for sugar, coffee, and other items they could not grow.

As more and more settlers came, they needed lumber for construction and fuel. The lumber industry grew quickly until forests were depleted.

As towns sprung up around the state, businesses and services grew, too. People found jobs in general stores, small workshops, saloons, and hotels. Some worked as teachers, lawyers, carpenters, doctors, blacksmiths, mill workers, hatmakers, and dressmakers.

Stores would often open as early as 6 a.m. and some days might not close until midnight. A farm family might come to town once or twice a month and

would spend the entire day shopping, trading, and socializing. After 1910, the car made it easier to travel and rural families came to town more often. After 1950, the television kept people at home. Many businesses adjusted their hours to keep up with the changes brought by these inventions.

Town kids often worked in the family business after school and on Saturdays. They might sweep shop floors, run errands, and wait on customers. Farm kids also worked long hours in their parents' business — the farm. Most parents did not pay their children for work. A child's labor was often necessary to the financial well-being of the family.

In the late 1800s, farm families employed hired hands who helped in the fields or with domestic chores in exchange for wages, room, and board.

EMPLOYERS' REGISTRY. WORKMEN SUPPLIED.

The American Emigrant Company has Agencies widely extended through Great Britain, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Belgium and Switzerland, which enables it to place any information regarding America or American affairs directly in the hands of the people of those countries.

Great numbers of European Workmen, desirous of emigrating to America, are very ignorant of the localities in which they can most profitably settle themselves, and the definite inducements which special districts present for the employment of their labor. Many others, comprising the most desirable class of Mechanics, who are diligent and thrifty, and therefore the most prosperous in their native country, are unwilling to come to the United States without the assurance of a specified employment, the conditions and advantages of which will be definitely explained and guaranteed to them before they start.

To meet this necessity, the American Emigrant Company has determined to open a Registry at its various Agencies, in which will be recorded a description of the class and number of men wanted by the employers of labor in America who avail themselves of it. Transcripts of this Registry will be transmitted to the various Central Agencies of the Company in Europe, and by them circulated through all their sub-Agencies. By this means European workmen will be informed, not only of the places where their labor is most demanded and the wages it commands, but of the very Companies or Individuals who are ready to employ them.

The American Emigrant Company

At its Central Office, in New York, receives all Emigrants, coming to its care, on their arrival, and directs them to those sections of the country in which applications for labor have been made, and the men thus directed to a given section will be distributed through the Company's local Agents in the interior, amongst employers. The effect of this system will be to induce a supply of the special kind of labor most wanted in each separate locality, and to lead operatives of a better class than ordinarily emigrate, to come to the United States.

To sustain the heavy cost of this extensive arrangement, by which the entire working population of Europe is approached and addressed by American employers, and immediate communication is opened between the parties, a small fee of ONE DOLLAR for each workman applied for with liberal reductions in case of large numbers, is demanded. This payment, which will not be sufficient to pay the actual expense attending the working of the immense machinery employed, will be cheerfully made by any intelligent employer who wants a supply of good labor or Cities, Villages, or small communities may send forward combined applications for operatives in such a way as would, at trifling cost, procure a large list of the description of men most urgently required. Or, those who choose can have contracts made in Europe with emigrants coming to this country on their own means, before they leave their homes, by which their services can be secured for a given time after their arrival here. Or, the people of special localities can combine in contracting in this way for a number of workmen to be employed in those localities. Or, individuals, corporations, or communities, can have any number or variety of workmen furnished by advancing the expenses of their emigration, under the law to "encourage immigration."

The Agents of the Company will explain the conditions on which these various services will be rendered.

F. C. D. McKAY, Agent, Des Moines.

This 1860s poster advertises a kind of employment agency that matched immigrant workers with available jobs in Iowa and the rest of the country.

Industrialization in Iowa

After the 1870s, industries and work changed even more in Iowa. The state's expanding railway network meant more products could be transported quickly and more efficiently to other parts of the country. Refrigerated rail cars kept products from spoiling. Soon, booming businesses and major

industries grew around the state as people manufactured goods and shipped them across the country to be sold.

By the turn of the century, more and more Iowans left rural areas to find jobs in cities. In 1900, Iowa boasted more than 14,000 manufacturing businesses statewide. In these factories, workers made everything from buttons and butter to meat products and overalls. Factory work was hard and working conditions were often very poor, leading to many work-related accidents and deaths. Workers formed unions and demanded better wages and working conditions.

Progress and unemployment

Inventions and other technological advances often put people out of one line of work, and into another. With the introduction and growing popularity of the automobile, blacksmiths and carriage makers soon had to find other ways to earn their keep. Often, they converted their shops into garages and learned how to fix cars and motorized farm equipment.

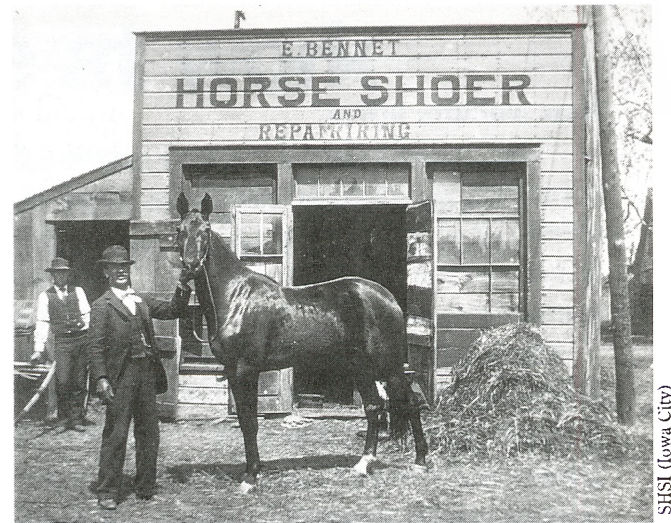
Everett Ludley, who grew up

in northeastern Iowa, remembers how the automobile changed the businesses district in Manchester, Iowa.

“Hennesey’s Livery Stable was converted to a car agency,” he wrote in 1989. “Billie Burk’s Blacksmith Shop became a machine shop. In both, the smell of horse manure was replaced by the smell of oil and grease.”

New technologies also created new jobs. Frederick Maytag made washing machines in Newton beginning in 1909. As Maytag perfected the machines, the demand for the product increased, and more and more people found jobs in the Maytag factory.

Industries have continued to grow throughout the state’s history. From coal mining and meat packing to insurance and publishing, Iowans have worked in a variety of manufacturing and service positions and have marketed Iowa products throughout the world.



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New inventions meant new jobs. The car drove blacksmiths, like E. Bennet, whose Jasper County shop is pictured above, out of business when it replaced horses as primary mode of transportation.

In 1994, 1,508,000 Iowans were employed in the state. That’s enough people to fill the seats in Des Moines’ Sec Taylor Stadium ten times! Of that number, 94,000 were young people between the ages of 16 and 19.

Young people under age 16, who are not included in official labor statistics, also work hard. Like kids in the early part of Iowa’s history, they do chores at home, hold part-time jobs such as delivering newspapers and baby-sitting, and participate in other wage-earning activities. ▲