Channeling John Clare

This early 19th century English poet never saw the North American prairie, but he described the mutilation of Nature in his native Northamptonshire in ways that anticipate the rapacious destruction of the prairie.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE
By Jon Andelson

In 1841, the English poet John Clare (1793-1864) was pronounced insane and committed to an asylum, where he spent the rest of his life. In other ways, also, Clare was not typical of English poets of his generation whose ranks included John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Lord Byron; or of the preceding generation's William Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge; or the next generation's Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Matthew Arnold. Unlike all of them, sons of privilege and mostly educated at Oxford or Cambridge,[1] Clare's origins were strictly plebian. His father was a farm laborer, a "flail thresher." The son in childhood took up his father's farm work, and his education in the local church ended at the age of 12. The father's failing health created economic hardship for the family, and it is speculated that Clare's short five-foot stature may have resulted from malnutrition in childhood. He also worked as a potboy in a public house, a gardener, and a lime burner to try to make ends meet. He married a milk maid. At the age of 25 Clare was compelled to accept parish relief.

Yet John Clare became a poet, and in fact a very fine poet. He wrote about what he knew: rural life, the animals and plants of the English countryside, and the damage to these wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Somehow, he came to the attention of literary England, and his first book of poetry was published when he was 27 by Taylor and Hessey, the firm that had published Keats. As a young writer Clare was lionized as "the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet." His later work was less well-received, however, and for nearly a century and a half he was little more than a footnote in English letters, though his star seems to be rising again. His recent biographer, Jonathan Bate, describes Clare as "the greatest

Northamptonshire workers (a 19th century print). Courtesy of Getty Images

laboring-class poet that England has ever produced. No one has ever written more powerfully of nature, of a rural childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self."[2]

I was introduced to Clare's poetry through a delightful book, *The Nightingale: Notes on a Songbird* (2023, Penguin Books), by Sam Lee. Clare is included because he wrote a poem about nightingales. So did Keats and, it turns out, a lot of poets, English and otherwise. What intrigued me most about Lee's discussion of Clare was his point that Clare was not simply a casual observer of nightingales–and of nature more generally–rather, he wrote about nature from intimate knowledge.

To illustrate what this might mean, let me first quote the opening lines of Keats's famous "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819):

> ***My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains***
> ***My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk***
> ***Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains***
> ***One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:***
> ***'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,***
> ***But being too happy in thy happiness –***
> ***That thou, light winged Dryad of the trees,***
> ***In some melodious plot***
> ***Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,***
> ***Singest of summer in full-throated ease.***

Wonderful verse, but more about Keats than about nightingales. "Ode" is a meditation upon mortality and the transience of the physical life, with the nightingale's song a kind of symbol of immortality.

Clare, in "The Nightingale's Nest" (1835), tells of going in search of the nightingale in a spot "where I've heard her many a merry year":


John Clare, an 1820 painting by William Hilton, oil on canvas

There have I hunted like a very boy,
Creeping on hands and knees through matted thorn
To find her nest and see her feed her young.
And vainly did I many hours employ:
All seemed as hidden as a thought unborn.
And where those crimping fern-leaves ramp among
The hazel's under-boughs, I've nestled down
And watched her while she sung, and her renown
Have made me marvel that so famed a bird
Should have no better dress than russet brown.

Like Keats, Clare is drawn to the nightingale's enchanting song, but he is just as interested in the rest of the bird: its nest, its eggs, its young, its habitat, its unremarkable appearance. Clare gets "on hands and knees" to carefully observe these things, and one can imagine him patiently nestling down in the shrubbery for a glimpse of a particular bird in her particular nest. As Clare anthologist Paul Farley has pointed out, Clare himself noted how differently Keats wrote about nature than he did, who actually witnessed the things he describes.[3]

My purpose here is not to elevate Clare's nature poetry above Keats's. The poems express different sensibilities and are based in different life experiences. Rather, I want to alert readers to a related aspect of Clare's poetry: the attention he paid to the transformation of that nature that he had known in his youth and loved so well. In one untitled poem he laments "the old pond full of flags and fenced around," and in another reports that "the mower tramples on the wild bees' nest." Stronger hints of destructive alterations in the land appear in this stanza from "The Lament of Swordy Well":

I couldn't keep a dust of grit
Nor scarce a grain of sand,
But bags and carts claimed every bit
And now they've got the land.
I used to bring the summer's life
To many a butterfly,
But in oppression's iron strife
Dead tussocks bow and sigh.[4]

What is happening here? Broadly, Clare is lamenting the consequences of the enclosures of "common land" in Northamptonshire–and across England–accomplished by a series of Enclosure Acts that created procedures for converting the traditional open-field system of English agriculture to private, fenced properties. These consequences could include draining wetlands, cutting down trees, cultivating marginal lands, shifting to cash rent, increasing concentration of land ownership, and dispossessing smallholders. By increasing efficiency and productivity, the Enclosure Acts promoted the Agricultural Revolution in England, and at the same time released from agriculture a labor force that became available for the Industrial Revolution.

Clare does more, though, than deplore these changes. In a remarkable poem titled "The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters," he diagnoses the underlying agents of change. I quote only a portion of the longer poem:

Look backward on the days of yore
Upon my injur'd brook;

In fancy con its beauties o'er,
How it had us'd to look.
O then what trees my banks did crown,
What willows flourished here:
Hard as the ax that cut them down
The senseless wretches were.

But the hardened loggers, though "senseless," were ultimately not to blame:

But sweating slaves I do not blame,
Those slaves by wealth decreed;
No: I should hurt their harmless name
To brand 'em wi' the deed.
Although their aching hands did wield
The axe that gave the blow,
Yet 't'was not them that owned the field
Nor plan'd its overthrow.
No, no: the foes that hurt my field
Hurt those poor moilers too,
And thy own bosom knows and feels
Enough to prove it true,
And o poor souls they may complain
But their complainings all
The injured worms that turn again
But turn again to fall.
Their foes and mine are lawless foes
And laws themselves they hold
Which clipt-wing'd justice can't oppose
But forced, yields to gold.
These are the foes of mine and me;
These all our ruin plan'd
Although they never fell'd a tree
Or took a tool in hand.

Clare's birthplace and residence during the early part of his life; his family rented a portion of the cottage (a modern photo of his restored cottage). (Photo courtesy of janeaustensworld.com)

Thus does John Clare boldly call out the wealth-and-power elite of his time and place.

Clare would have well-understood the changes that led to the degradation of the North American tallgrass prairie, changes which were well underway in his own lifetime, though he may not have been aware of them. Good accounts of those changes can be found in John Madson's *Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie* and Cornelia Mutel's *Emerald Horizon: The History of Naure in Iowa.* The changes are handily summed up in two statistics: in 1840, 80 percent of the land that a few years later became the state of Iowa was covered by tallgrass prairie; fast-forward 150 years and less than 0.1 percent of that prairie remained.[5]

As in Clare's Northamptonshire, the degradation of the tallgrass prairie occurred in the name of agriculture. Right from the start, in the 1830s and '40s, wealth-and-power elites manipulated the situation even as ordinary farmers did the menial work to yoke the oxen

The Northamptonshire countryside. Photo courtesy of essentially-england.com

that drew "the plow that broke the plains."[6] The role played in this by powerful institutions – governments, railroads, corporations – is too complex to summarize here, but it has led to the same kinds of environmental costs that Clare noted in Northamptonshire: draining of wetlands, cutting of trees, erosion of soil, loss of biodiversity, and more recently pollution of soil, water, and air by agrochemicals. And, again as in Northamptonshire, these same institutions have undermined small communities and a way of life.

In the Midwest, the latest phases of this process have been dissected in an arresting new book, *Barons: Money, Power, and the Corruption of America's Food Industry* (2024: Island Press), by seventh generation Iowan, Austin Frerick. In detail, Frerick reveals the ways in which a handful of families have acquired disproportionate control over the food the rest of us eat, and in the process become fabulously wealthy. The main through line that connects Frerick's prose about the Midwest and Clare's poetry about Northamptonshire is the way the wealth and power of the few strips autonomy from the many. Perhaps this realization was why John Clare lost his sanity. Reading Frerick's book, I wonder for how much longer we will be able to maintain our own.

ENDNOTES

1 Keats was a partial exception. Although his mother left him a share of an £ 8,000 legacy, he probably never received it. Throughout his short life, money was always in short supply.

2 Jonathan Bate (2003). John Clare: A Biography. New York City: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.

3 Paul Farley (2016), John Clare Poems. London: Faber & Faber Ltd.

4 ibid.

5 Daryl Smith, Iowa prairie: original extent and loss, preservation, and recovery attempts. Journal of the Iowa Academy of Sciences 105(3): 94-108 (1998)

6 The title of a 1936 documentary film by Pare Lorenz about the cultivation of the Great Plains.

Photo courtesy of Jon Andelson

JON ANDELSON is the Publisher of Rootstalk. He is Rosenfield Professor of Social Science (Anthropology) at Grinnell College and co-founder and director emeritus of the College's Center for Prairie Studies.

A beautiful rural landscape typical of Iowa and the Midwest. Photo by Jon Andelson.

Homecoming

It's a familiar trope: a young person departs a small town and heads for the big city, forsaking the precincts of childhood. That was me at eighteen, leaving my Midwestern hometown.

EDITOR'S NOTE
By Mark Baechtel

It's a familiar trope: a young person departs a small town and heads for the big city, forsaking the precincts of childhood. That was me at eighteen, leaving my Midwestern hometown.

Ostensibly, I was just headed for college. In my private thoughts, though, I was shaking the dust of that place off my feet. I don't know if I could have articulated then the reasons for my flight—for flight it was—what I was running from, what I thought I was running to. I told myself I was leaving small-minded meanness behind—the town's suspicion of difference and woundedness, its long memory for fault and failure, its willingness to enforce unstated rules of conduct through humiliation and violence.

Mostly, though, I think I was running from myself.

My childhood and teen years had been marred by the implosion of my dysfunctional family, and there was no part of my hometown that didn't feel haunted. If I was going to be like David Copperfield and be the hero of my own life story, it would have to be somewhere else, where I would *be* free to be someone else. I turned my eyes east.

We want our retrospectives to make sense, to yield a narrative through-line that makes the path taken from *there* to *here* seem coherent, chosen, even fated. I'm no different. I would like to say I left the Midwest guided by a sense of purpose. If I'm honest with myself, though, when I left my hometown, it was blindly, like a bullet leaving an unaimed gun.

After a sputtering start, I eventually landed in Washington, DC, and seventeen years passed. I got my undergraduate degree, found work, and began the long process of growing up, settling down and becoming a functioning adult. I got established in my profession, made friends, got married, got divorced, got into therapy and began to banish the ghosts that, inevitably, I had dragged east with me. I told myself I was getting the adulthood-thing done.

But if getting on in my life—succeeding—was supposed to deliver a sense of satisfaction, then I wasn't doing it. As I moved through the seasons of young adulthood, I hoped for a sense of arrival. I searched—as so many do in our restless society—for my place, my *home*. For some fortunate few, the search is brief. It seems they're born knowing who they are and where they belong. That wasn't me. I moved frequently, looking for a better job, a better apartment in a better neighborhood, a better relationship with a cooler girlfriend, a path that would help me steer closer to whatever most mattered to me at the time. Inevitably, when I looked out the window of whatever place I lived in at the time, I felt discontented. *Not yet,* I thought. *Not here.*

George Dane, the writer-protagonist of Henry James's story "The Great Good Place," longs for an escape from the grind his existence has become—somewhere he can find rest, recovery, a sense of satisfaction w`ith his life and relationships that has eluded him. Had I discovered James's story

I say *feel* rather than *think*, because it was more sensation than thought, something seemingly in my cells that began to wake up amid the sense of space, the quiet that hung over the open landscapes between the widely spaced cities of the plains.

Central Iowa, summer of 2000. Photo by Jon Andelson.

back then, I think I would have said I understood Dane's desire. I felt hemmed in by DC's massive buildings; its endless traffic jams; its miasma of urgent ambition, like the scent of an expensive cologne cut with bus fumes. DC is beautiful and remarkable, a place of power and consequence, but to me then it felt temporary, populated with striving souls on their way to somewhere else and better, a destination they'd leave for once they got their professional ticket punched.

At last, it was my turn to leave. I got a fellowship to the graduate school I had long wanted to attend because it was the prestige place to learn what I wanted to learn. Oddly enough, it was in the Midwest, in Iowa. My new wife and I packed our apartment, loaded our car and a rented truck, and headed west. And as the miles fell away and the country began to spread out around us, I began to feel something unexpected.

I say *feel* rather than *think*, because it was more sensation than thought, something seemingly in my cells that began to wake up amid the sense of space, the quiet that hung over the open landscapes between the widely spaced cities of the plains. It was a feeling centered in my chest—an expanding lightness, a sense of lifting that, dwelt upon, translated into the words *I remember… I remember…*

But the memories were of nothing specific—no person, no thing; no incidents from my life; I would cheerfully have cut those from my brain entirely. Rather, it was a memory of space itself; of distances: the five-mile views across the open country in rural western Ohio where I grew up; the moon pulling up over the limb of the world, pouring out the ordinary miracle of its light like a pewter sea; the morning ceremony of the sunrise, a hosanna of birdsong spilling horizon-to-horizon over a limitless pasture. It was the wind, moving over a bean field like an invisible hand smoothing velvet, or cutting through whatever jacket I might put on against it, bringing the smell of approaching snow from miles away. Not a place, a destination, but the space between places and destinations, the sense that travel wasn't, couldn't be, about efficient transit from one set of map coordinates to another, or from task to task.

The sheer volume of space wouldn't permit it. The country outside the car window lacked the limits of the East's hills and hollows, or the parched drama of the West. Midwestern spaces seemed endless, passing as gentle as a murmur, making travel a time to think, time to talk with the person you were riding with. Setting out to drive any distance across the prairie meant there would be hours to fill, and welcome. Travel was its own point. Commerce wasn't what it had been Out East—a quick exchange of goods for money, followed by a quick exit and a sprint to the next thing. It was a pastime: slower, less deliberate, more social—the sort of transaction the rest of our culture finds risible, fodder for jokes about slow country people and watching paint dry.

If there was any emotion attendant on my return, it was what I felt, not the land. Love is a thing we bring to the landscape, not a thing we find there.

There were many more differences. But there's a danger in warmly rendered inventories. I suspect anyone writing about the place they call home would present their own version of details like these, because when we try to talk about it we slide easily into cadences of praise. We want to love our home place's landscapes. We want to personify them, to see them as kind and welcoming, claiming us as their own.

I wasn't coming back to the Midwest with any such illusions, though. The Midwest didn't care if I loved it, or care that I had run away from it cradling the shattered pieces of my heart. The Midwest hadn't missed me; it didn't care about me at all. That's the nature of places, which have nothing to care with. They are their topography, the landforms and the rivers running through them; the immemorial patterns of the seasons written in storm, flood, drought and growth; the migration of creatures traveling over and evolving upon them, the plants and plantings blasting out their own particular species of blossoms and food, then fainting into senescence. They are proof against pathetic fallacy, which after all is an entirely human construct. If there was any emotion attendant on my return, it was what I felt, not the land. Love is a thing we bring to the landscape, not a thing we find there.

And as I think about this today, I think that's what woke up in me when I arrived. The passion play had ground on without me there to witness it or take part. Walking back into its midst, I discovered something within that made me want to be part of it again. I had wandered long in places far from the prairie, in the precincts where we tell ourselves the naked sword of culture is forged. I had searched there for a great, good place I could belong to, but I had never found it. Instead, I had missed the Midwest the way an amputee misses a limb, sometimes feeling its absence as an ache.

So, when I came to Iowa it was with the sense of homecoming I had longed for but had never found anywhere else. I live now amid the space that once appalled those arriving here from Out East, but which is comforting to me. Here on the prairie, I have room to breathe, to move. The horizon is far, far away, in any direction I turn, the sky above me pure and endless. And though that sky is indifferent to me, I am not indifferent to it.

MARK BAECHTEL received his B.A. in print journalism from The American University in Washington, DC, and his M.F.A. in fiction-writing from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he was selected as an Iowa Arts Fellow. He has nearly 40 years of publishing experience, and is author of *Shaping the Story,* a textbook guide to short-story writing (Longman, 2003). He has taught at the University of Iowa, Grinnell College and various art centers, as well as working as a professional book editor. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines, journals and anthologies, nationally and internationally. He is currently polishing the stories in a collection of short fiction, titled *What Moves and What Is Still*, and is at work on a novel titled *Renovation.*

Pretty but deadly, the yellow-orange fly agaric *(Amanita muscaria var formosa)* is one of the most poisonous mushrooms in the U.S. Photo by Bob Sessions.

Guidebook Games: Exploring the Midwest, One Species at a Time

Blending curiosity with play, Lori Erickson challenges herself to learn about the flora and fauna of the Midwest with a guidebook that turns nature study into a treasure hunt.

ESSAY
By Lori Erickson

A few days ago, I was driving through our neighborhood when I suddenly shrieked with joy, so loud that I was glad no one else was in the car. The cause of my excitement was a plump raccoon lumbering across the road.

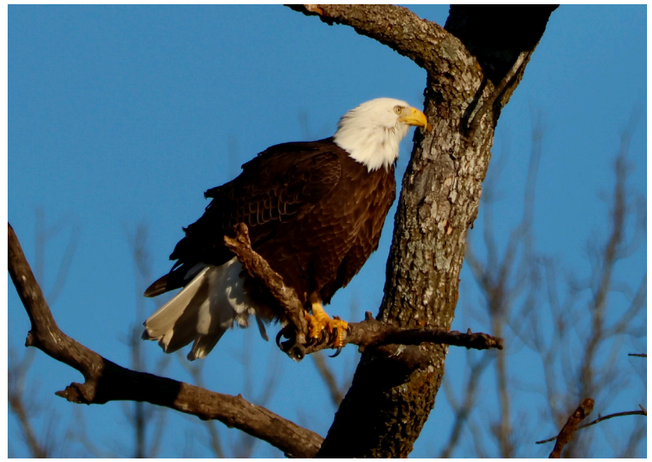
I don't normally get that excited about raccoons, but ever since I took on a new life goal my days have had unexpected moments of pleasure like this. My mission? I want to see every animal and plant listed in the *Kaufman Field Guide to Nature of the Midwest*.

I discovered the book while browsing the gift store at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota. I don't need another guidebook, I thought, but this one looked intriguing, especially once I started flipping through its pages. Instead of being a specialized guide for birds or mushrooms or flowers, it takes a potpourri approach to nature in the Midwest. According to the introduction, the authors' intent "has been to cover those things that people are most likely to notice, so we have exercised a bias toward the most conspicuous plants and animals." That means no wolverines (which are exceedingly rare in the Midwest) or once-in-a-lifetime tropical birds blown off course. Because of my work as a travel writer, I'm on the road a great deal. But lately I've been wanting to learn more about the region in which I live, and so the book seemed just the ticket.

To motivate myself, I've made it into a game. Every time I identify a plant or animal, I write the date and location in my copy of the book, next to its picture. I checked off the easy ones right away: a white-tailed deer, bald eagle, and burr oak. But then it got harder. I realized, to my embarrassment, that I didn't know what ragweed looked like. A lot of people complain about it, especially in the fall as they sneeze away, but I didn't recognize it. Sure enough, both giant ragweed and common ragweed are on page 88, and it didn't take me long to find them in the wild. Check! Check!

As I was reading about ragweed, I happened upon a section that listed the many varieties of goldenrod (which the guidebook explained is mistakenly thought to be an allergen, but actually isn't, at least for most people).

I'd never paid much attention to these yellow flowers before, but my nature quest changed that. One afternoon, I found myself



The bald eagle was one of my first–and easiest–identifications. Photo by Bob Sessions

My guidebook game makes me realize how much I love white pelicans. Photo by Bob Sessions.

mesmerized by a patch of goldenrod in a local park, watching as honeybees and bumblebees flitted from bloom to bloom. It struck me that I'd never truly seen these flowers until now—and suddenly, I was having practically a religious experience marveling at their radiant gold.

On a camping trip to Brunet Island State Park in Wisconsin, I had an encounter with a green heron as I was kayaking through the backwaters of the Chippewa River. It was almost as if the bird knew I was on the lookout for it, because it sat for the longest time on a log near the water, letting me admire its plumage.

I've had one wonderful experience after another thanks to my quest, often with the help of people much more knowledgeable than I am. When my friend Elisabeth pointed out a Mourning Cloak butterfly, for example, I was instantly charmed. With its dusky, velvet-brown wings edged in pale gold, it did indeed look like a mourning cloak, bringing to mind a Victorian widow in a Dickens novel.

And when a friend recently invited me to her house in rural Iowa City to watch for wildlife, I said yes enthusiastically—despite the fact it will mean waking up at 4 am to sit silently in the dark by a creek. A wildlife camera there often picks up coyotes, otters, and even the occasional bobcat, so I'm willing to sacrifice some hours of sleep in order to check off some of the Midwest's most charismatic mammals.

Every game needs a set of rules, and here are mine:

- Roadkill doesn't count.
- It also doesn't count if someone else spots something and says, "Lori, look!" and I just see a blur.
- I can't take credit for species I've seen in the past.

One of the surprising things I've learned is how much life there is all around me. In the past I've tended to notice mainly animals, but they fill just a small portion of my guidebook. Instead, the majority of its pages describe wildflowers, invertebrates, trees, fungi, butterflies, and an intimidatingly large selection of grasses.

My new project is perfectly suited to my gadfly sense of curiosity. It's not in-depth, but it's fun. It makes me hopeful that I will finally get clear on the difference between swallows and swifts, which has bedeviled me for years. And it makes me conscious of the beauty and importance of native species as opposed to invasives (here's looking at you, garlic mustard). While the book lists some of these invaders, it focuses on what's been in the Midwest for centuries.

There are going to be some rough patches ahead for me, I know. The North American deer mouse, white-footed deer mouse, and meadow jumping mouse are a looming nightmare of identification. I'm also worried about the twenty pages of fish and the large number of gull and tern species, which look entirely interchangeable. I doubt even their mothers can tell them apart.

Bears pose another problem, as they're sadly rare in eastern Iowa. I may have to see one in another part of the country and fudge (remember, I'm making up the rules for this game, so I'm allowed, especially on the big mammals). And I can count species I see in preserves (such as the bison at Iowa's Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge), while avoiding zoos, which definitely feel like cheating.

My goal of seeing everything in the book is likely to keep me busy for a long time. It will also keep me from relocating to another part of the country, which would involve starting over with a new guidebook. And if I die without seeing a hellbender—also known as a snot otter because of the mucus that covers its skin—or a yellow earth tongue mushroom, well, so be it.

I'm already struck by how much I remember from my identifications, not just the species itself but the place and the weather. Flipping through the book, I think, "Oh yes, the honey locust. That was the afternoon I discovered how much I can sweat without evaporating completely."

I love how a single book is motivating me to get out, to explore, and to notice. And noticing, of course, is one of the most important of all the spiritual disciplines. In the words of Mary Oliver, from her poem "Sometimes":

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.

And, I would add, make a note of it in your guidebook.

This is definitely a gull (beyond that, your guess is as good as mine). Photo by Bob Sessions.

Photo courtesy of Lori Erickson.

LORI ERICKSON grew up on a farm in northeast Iowa and now lives in Iowa City. She's the author of books that include *Every Step Is Home, The Soul of the Family Tree, Near the Exit,* and *Holy Rover*—as well as her own guidebook, *Iowa: Off the Beaten Path.*

Ohio's Cuyahoga River restored.

Two Stories About Water Quality in Iowa

Two stories about water quality in Iowa, one good and one bad, written by the former Non-point Source Coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

ESSAY
By Steve Hopkins

The first story, about Iowa's Grants-to-Counties (GTC) program, is a "good news" story showing how a conversation between two Iowa environmental leaders created a program that has worked to help protect Iowa's groundwater for nearly forty years. Although the GTC program has been under-utilized in recent years, new efforts to better inform Iowans that they can get their private water wells tested for free through their county environmental health departments is one of the ongoing benefits of this program, which was part of the 1987 Groundwater Protection Act.

Another program created through the Groundwater Protection Act was a program to fund the closure of Agricultural Drainage Wells (ADWs) in Iowa. ADWs were wells drilled historically to drain wet soils in north central Iowa so they could be farmed, but which also served as direct conduits of pollution from the land surface to groundwater. After nearly 40 years of funding and work, the last registered Agricultural Drainage Well was closed in 2024.

The second story, about the East Nishnabotna River, is a "bad news" story describing how a water quality catastrophe can happen to a river in Iowa, perhaps any river in Iowa, in just an instant. Iowa has yet to address how to successfully prevent similar catastrophes. This article is a call to action for river protection and restoration in Iowa, drawing upon Ohio's Cuyahoga River as an example of how one of America's most polluted rivers has been fully restored.

PROTECTING GROUNDWATER: THE ORIGIN OF IOWA'S GRANTS-TO-COUNTIES PROGRAM

Thanks to a historic 1987 conversation between two Iowa water quality champions, the idea for the Grants-to-Counties program—one of the first initiatives in Iowa to protect groundwater–was hatched.

In 1987, amidst statewide concerns and headlines about high nitrate levels in Iowa's groundwater and drinking water wells, state representative Paul Johnson was co-writing a piece of landmark water quality legislation called the Groundwater Protection Act. At the same time, Brent Parker, Jasper County Sanitarian, was then president of the Iowa Environmental Health Association—a primary professional organizations of county sanitarians and other environmental health professionals.

The two men had much in common: both were farmers with master's degrees, both were returned Peace Corps volunteers, and both were dedicated to improving Iowa's environment and public health. Paul Johnson, a dairy and Christmas tree farmer from Decorah, had a master's degree in forestry from the University of Michigan and had served in the Peace Corps in Ghana helping local farmers improve their natural resources. Brent Parker, a crop and hog farmer from Newton, had a master's degree in agricultural engineering from Iowa State University and had served in the Peace Corps in Ecuador helping local farmers improve their farming techniques through irrigation.

In the spring of 1987, in his capacity as president of the Iowa Environmental Health Association, Brent Parker met with State Representative Paul Johnson at the State Capitol in Des Moines to discuss practical ways to address Iowa's widespread groundwater problems. Citing abandoned wells and improperly-constructed wells as direct conduits of pollution from land aboveground to the groundwater below, Parker proposed that a program was needed to plug abandoned wells, recondition poorly-constructed wells, and provide free water testing for Iowans whose drinking water came from private water wells.

Johnson agreed that such a program was greatly needed and would serve as a practical way to begin addressing Iowa's serious groundwater water quality prob-

lems. He proposed that if a fund were to be created for such a program, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) could administer the well-plugging and water-testing program. Parker then countered with an idea: why not have county sanitarians do the work of overseeing well-plugging and water testing, since they already issued well construction permits and inspected wells? And, since many counties did not have enough funding to hire a county sanitarian—much less develop an environmental health program–why not offer a grant program to counties that would help all Iowa counties develop their own environmental health program and hire a sanitarian?

Paul Johnson loved the idea and, by the end of the conversation, the plan for a new "Grants to Counties Program" (GTC) was launched. The resulting GTC Program became a part of the new Groundwater Protection Act, which included a minor tax on nitrogen fertilizer to create a fund to support new public water quality initiatives—including the GTC Program and the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University.

Through this conversation, the idea for the GTC Program was launched as a state grant program to enable county environmental health programs to apply for funding to conduct free testing of private water wells for nitrate and E. coli, to plug abandoned wells, and to rehabilitate wells to protect groundwater and improve the public health of Iowans. In 1988 it was codified through the Iowa Code and continues to be implemented today as 567 Iowa Code section 455b.172(5) Chapter 47, "Private Well Sampling, Rehabilitation, and Closure—Grants to Counties".

Since its inception in 1988, the GTC program has funded tens of thousands of private water well tests, plugged thousands of abandoned water wells, and has rehabilitated hundreds of private water wells in Iowa. It serves as an ongoing example of a state program that has worked effectively in serving to protect groundwater and public health.

The resulting GTC Program became a part of the new Groundwater Protection Act, which included a minor tax on nitrogen fertilizer to create a fund to support new public water quality initiatives.

Both men were proud of how a simple idea turned into one of Iowa's first groundwater protection programs. Late in their lives, however, this author heard both men say, "We need to do a lot more".

The above article is based on Brent Parker's recollection of the conversation with Paul Johnson that led to the creation of the GTC Program.

PAUL JOHNSON went on to become Chief of the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service, which was renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) during his tenure as Chief. He also served as Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and became known as one of Iowa's most influential conservationists. He died in February of 2021 at the age of 79.

BRENT PARKER went on to work as a Senior Environmental Engineer and team lead in the onsite wastewater and private well program for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and was nationally known for his work and leadership in the field of environmental health. He died in November of 2022 at the age of 76.

EARTH DAY: CAN WE RESTORE A DEAD RIVER IN IOWA?

I wrote the following Earth Day blog a year ago, right before Earth Day of 2024, two months before retiring from my job as Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). I wrote this piece to share my raw emotions about yet another fish kill in Iowa: not a little fish kill on a small stream, but a massive fertilizer leak that killed off all aquatic life within a 60-mile stretch of the East Nishnabotna River in southwest Iowa.

I decided to write about it with emotion for Earth Day because, in my many years working as Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the DNR tasked with cleaning up Iowa's waters from nonpoint source pollution, I was restricted to writing only about the science of Iowa's water quality (or lack of it), not about how the state's poor water quality affected me personally. But this was personal, because the dead river was the river of my childhood hometown—Atlantic, Iowa. This hit close to my heart

Only a few hours before this blog was to be published for Earth Day of 2024, I received a call from my boss directing me to drop this blog from publication. I was told I couldn't share this blog as a DNR employee because it might interfere with legal action being initiated by DNR against the farm cooperative responsible for the fish kill. I understood the reasoning and dropped the blog.

At the May 2024 meeting of the DNR's Environmental Protection Commission, DNR attorneys argued to the Commission to refer the farm cooperative to the Iowa Attorney General's Office for a harsher than normal penalty. Since DNR environmental fines are limited by code to no higher than $10,000, the attorneys argued that the damage caused to the East Nishnabotna River by the farm cooperative's negligence was so egregious to Iowa's water quality it warranted a stiffer penalty, one that could only be issued by the state Attorney General. Commission members, who are appointed by the Iowa Governor, agreed and voted unanimously to refer the farm cooperative to the Iowa Attorney General for a more significant penalty, one more fitting to the environmental damage done to Iowa waters.

Nearly a year later, as of April 2025, Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird has taken no legal action against the farm cooperative that caused the river kill.

When I heard the news several weeks ago that a 60-mile stretch of the East Nishnabotna River was

Dead fish floating in Iowa's East Nishnabotna River in 2024 (from John Lorenzen, Iowa DNR).

Ohio's Cuyahoga River on fire (from Cleveland State University Library).

entirely dead—with 750,000 fish, turtles, and all other aquatic species killed off by a massive liquid fertilizer spill that made the river toxic–I was devastated. I love all of Iowa's rivers, but the "East Nish" has a special place for me, as it flows through my childhood hometown of Atlantic, in southwest Iowa. Some might find my soft spot for the East Nish laughable, given that it's better known for severe riverbank erosion, river straightening, and muddy water, but I consider my childhood river sacred.

I was also shocked because I learned just how fast damage to our waters can be inflicted. I've been working with watershed projects in Iowa for decades as Nonpoint Source Coordinator for Iowa DNR, as a watershed coordinator, and as a soil conservationist to improve water quality. Most of these projects were long-term, multiple-year efforts trying hard to make incremental progress, so I'm used to slow improvement. However, I was stunned that such a large stretch of river could be completely killed off, all life in it dead, in less than two days. It was heartbreaking.

The East Nish "river kill" (more than simply a "fish kill") reminded me of another infamous event

I was also shocked because I learned just how fast damage to our waters can be inflicted.

in American environmental history: the Cuyahoga River catching fire near Cleveland, Ohio in 1969, forty-five years before the East Nish fish kill. Although the much-maligned and polluted Cuyahoga River had caught fire at other times in its history, the 1969 fire led to protests demanding that something finally be done about it, protests that ended by sparking the first Earth Day in 1970, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that same year, and the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972.

Although the Cuyahoga River had long been treated like a sewer for industrial waste, after that first Earth Day march in 1970, things began to change. The negative attention caused by the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire led to comprehensive water quality improvement efforts over the next 50 years to restore the river and its watershed, which are summarized in a short, educational YouTube video from Ohio EPA.

In 2019, the Cuyahoga was named "River of the Year" by the environmental group American Rivers, 50 years after the notorious fire for which it had become known. Today, it's no longer a dumping site, but a place where you can fish, kayak, and even stand-up paddle.

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Would it be possible for Iowa's East Nishnabotna River to recover like the Cuyahoga River has? At the moment, I simply doubt it. The two rivers are different from each other, the two watersheds are different, and the primary causes of their river catastrophes are different. Perhaps more importantly, I'm not sure we have the same will, motivation, and sense of urgency here in Iowa to restore the East Nish as there had been among Ohioans to fix the Cuyahoga.

How can we restore the health of the East Nishnabotna? Perhaps a start would be adopting improved practices at fertilizer loading sites, such as installing more effective berms and removing access to storm drains at these sites, since storm drains connect directly to our rivers and streams. Along the river corridor, we could install more native prairie buffers and increase riverbank stabilization to reduce chronic riverbank erosion on the East Nish. In the entire river watershed, we could increase investments in widespread adoption of more soil conservation and nutrient reduction practices to greatly improve the biological health and beauty of the East Nish.

I was thinking about the East Nishnabotna River recently while walking through woods and fields near my farm in rural Decorah, where I now live, unsure of what realistic actions could turn around the health of my childhood river, when I heard the sound that so moved native Iowa conservationist Aldo Leopold–the call of a sandhill crane. I was reminded of how Leopold was inspired by ecological restoration efforts that led to the recovery of important native wildlife. He was specifically inspired by the return of sandhill cranes following the restoration of wetlands, their native habitat, and he became emotional upon hearing their haunting, prehistoric call as they returned. Leopold argued that if we as a community

To turn around Iowa's water quality, we need all Iowans to care, to feel deeply in their hearts that our waters are worth it, and to do something about it. We certainly need to study our waters and their pollutants scientifically to clean them up.

keep working diligently and intelligently toward ecological restoration, our lands and waters and the species that inhabit them will eventually recover. If we invest and work diligently, intelligently, and as a community, our dead Iowa river—the East Nishnabotna—can, like the Cuyahoga, be restored.

To turn around Iowa's water quality, we need all Iowans to care, to feel deeply in their hearts that our waters are worth it, and to do something about it. We certainly need to study our waters and their pollutants scientifically to clean them up.

But we also need to WANT to clean them up. We need to feel it in our hearts. *We can do better. Let's get to work.*

STEVE HOPKINS is the former Nonpoint Source Coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. He retired from the DR in May of 2024 after nearly 24 years with the department and 33 years of public service. He now works as a Program Manager and Energy Coach with the nonprofit organization Clean Energy Districts of Iowa, based in Decorah.

Grinnell Family Care Staff.

The Death of the Family Doctor

In towns across America, big medical conglomerates have been pushing out well-established family medical practices, replacing high-touch, personalized healthcare with what amounts to an industrialized medical system aimed at maximizing profits. Family physician J. R. Paulson, M.D., who recently had to close the practice he'd built over 40 years in the town of Grinnell, Iowa, reports from the front-line in this battle.

ESSAY

By J.R. Paulson, MD

Holistic Care

My long-time patient, Mary, an 84-year-old woman, is bought to my office by her daughter Susan. Several weeks before this, Mary had been hospitalized for congestive heart failure, her 5th hospitalization in the last 6 months. She and her daughter are asking for advice. I ask Mary and then her daughter to talk about their concerns. I can already see that Mary looks much frailer than when I last saw her a month ago. She needs assistance getting up on the exam table and I notice that her leg edema has gone from 2 to 3+.[1] Her daughter looks fatigued and depressed.

Mary says she's always very short of breath despite her oxygen use. She has frequent angina with any activity. When she confides that she thinks she's near the end of her rope, Susan sheds a few tears. Mary wonders if she'll still have to keep returning to the hospital for the rest of her life. Her daughter asks if one of the new heart failure drugs advertised on TV would help her mom. She has temporarily moved from Omaha to live with her mother and does not want to put her in a nursing home if it's possible to avoid it. She agrees that her mother has failed a lot over the last several months.

As her family doctor, I know that we have already discussed end-of-life care and that she has already made out her living will and durable power of attorney. We have already discussed hospice, and now we discuss how it may best fit with her desires and values. I know that her husband John died several years ago and that with her strong religious beliefs, she is actually looking forward to being reunited with him in the after-life. I know that Susan is her only child and that she is getting burned out caring for her mom. I am aware that the family is just on the edge of financial survival, especially with Mary's out-of-pocket costs for her many drugs being over $1600 a month. I know that she has lived on her farmstead for over 60 years; I have made home visits there in the past. We then discuss my recommendations. I suggest that she go on hospice. I tell them that she can most likely be kept at home with the support of hospice personnel. She won't have to see the heart doctor in the big city since that doctor really won't have anything to offer. I suggest that she should probably not come to the office anymore, not only because it is difficult for her to get out, but also because she may be exposed to sick patients in the office. Nor does she need to go to the emergency room, where she may have to wait hours and then be seen by a physician who is not familiar with her situation. I tell her daughter Susan that the drug "E" that she saw advertized on TV is a relatively new drug, has been tested on a small number of patients, has a marginal benefit, and will cost them over a thousand dollars a month, since her insurance won't cover it. I also know that Mary has significant kidney failure and that this drug could actually make her heart failure worse.

I know that Mary loves dogs and that her beloved Rex, whom she had for 13 years, died two months ago. Mary was a long-time piano teacher and loves music. I arrange for a therapy dog and a music therapist to visit. Hospice will enlist volunteers to visit Mary to allow Susan to get out periodically for her own health and well-being. Finally, I tell them that besides the hospice nurses, I can and will make home visits whenever needed. I give them my cell number and tell them to call me for

anything, any time, day or night.

Three months later, Mary died peacefully at home with her daughter and friends at the bedside.

As a recently retired family practitioner, I predict that the kind of medicine that I practiced, exemplified by my interactions with Mary, will soon go extinct. We family physicians are going the way of the dodo bird, passenger pigeon, and the dinosaurs. We will go out not with a cataclysmic bang, as the dinosaurs did 65 million years ago, but through retirements, attrition, market forces, and fewer new doctors going into the specialty. I am not a disillusioned romantic, bemoaning the passing of "the good old days" in medicine, but a realist witnessing the loss of a model of medicine that has long benefited both patients and providers.

Having witnessed these changes over almost half a century, I am in a good position to chronicle the seismic changes that have occurred in medicine in the United States over this time. My experiences in small-town rural Iowa are a microcosm of the entire healthcare system.

Mary spent over 60 years on her family's farm, and I see parallels to the gradual disappearance of the diverse farms of the past as these small entities face the socioeconomic forces of "big ag." An earlier article in this periodical by Dan Weeks chronicled the dissolution of small businesses on Main Street in many rural towns and cities. In my view, the nearly complete control of our political system by big money and political lobbying has been a cancer, not only on medicine but on agriculture.

Memories of Grinnell Family Care.

I realize that the family doctor or family practitioner I will describe may be unknown, unfamiliar, and even incomprehensible to many people. Many big city folks have never been treated by a family practitioner but rather have always been seen by an array of specialists, either in the office or in the hospital. To those people, the concept of a single doctor treating 80 to 90 percent of maladies, let alone making a house call, would seem unbelievable. However, many Americans of retirement age watched the TV show Marcus Welby, MD, starring Robert Young. It aired on ABC beginning in September 1969, and ran for seven years, becoming for several years the most watched television show in the country. As a compassionate general practitioner, Marcus Welby was the quintessential family doctor and friend. He was always close to his patients. He and his young assistant, Stephen Kiley, tried to treat patients as individuals although they were living in an age of increasing specialization and indifferent physicians.

When today's older generation was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, many primary care doctors (pediatricians, internists, and general practitioners) had offices in their homes and made home visits if needed. I vividly remember my pediatrician making daily visits to our home to give me a big injection of penicillin in my behind every day for two weeks. I had received a severe burn, and the antibiotics were injected to prevent it from getting infected. Emergency rooms, especially smaller ones, were not usually staffed by physicians, although one would be on call for each specialty. If you cut your hand, you went to your doctor's office for sutures. These doctors were paid in cash and were often quick to refer patients to specialists. These medical warriors made a decent living, but they worked long hours, most continuing to work until they died or could no longer practice. I remember as a college student coming home over Christmas break to have my eighty-plus-year-old ENT remove my tonsils.

In my view, the nearly complete control of our political system by big money and political lobbying has been a cancer, not only on medicine but on agriculture.

A New Specialty

In the 1960s, it became clear that the traditional general practitioner (GP) practices were failing because of the rapid increase in medical knowledge and the growth of other specialties. To be certified as a GP required only one year of a rotating internship to complete training. In 1966, the American Medical Association released the Millis Commission Report[2], which called for a new, better trained cadre of comprehensive physicians that could treat the majority of medical conditions. The report asserted "that illness is usually not an isolated event in a localized part of the body, but is a change in a complex, integrated human being who lives and works in a particular social and family setting, who has a biological/psychological/social history. What is needed and what the medical schools and teaching hospitals must try to develop is a body of information and general principles concerning man as a total, complex, and integrated social being."

A new specialty emerged called Family Practice. It required a vigorous three-year training program in a certified residency and certification of physicians by board exams to be sure that the new training goals were met. The Board of Family Practice was established in 1969 and by 1976 there were over 300 approved residencies.

My Journey

Although after college I thoroughly enjoyed teaching both elementary and secondary school and getting a master's in science education, I realized that my true interests lay in philosophy and the history of science. While considering a career as a PhD in philosophy of science, I realized that at that time there was a glut of PhD's in the US. I then considered the profession of medicine, which I felt was "applied" philosophy of science. To me, being a doctor meant becoming one like Dr. Welby, a holistic practitioner in the relatively new specialty of Family Practice. So, I also applied to medical schools.

I was fortunate that my medical school, Michigan State University, was a relatively new school whose mission was aimed not toward training specialists or future researchers, but toward training primary care doctors. It emphasized a holistic approach to patients in medicine.

Although the new field of Family Practice had lofty goals, the rest of medicine, particularly the specialties, were often antagonistic toward the field for a number of reasons, not the least of which was economic. FPs delivering babies, setting bones, doing surgeries, (for which they were trained), and managing patients in the hospital, took away from their bottom lines. Many fought against the fledgling specialty, but nonetheless, in the following decades the specialty grew, and by 2000, there were 70,000 family practitioners, with 91 percent being board-certified.

Board certification requires: proof of greater knowledge and experience in a specialty; performance and procedure documentation; the passing of a certification examination; as well as a requirement for more than the minimum required continuing medical education required by each state for licensure. However, it soon became a requirement by hospitals and medical clinics for staff privileges. Originally most boards did not require re-certification but granted it for life. The Board of Family Practice was the first specialty to require recertification every seven years. They realized that since medicine is constantly changing, what was true seven years ago probably would either not be true today or else would be significantly modified. For the family practitioner, this required not only comprehensive written exams covering all areas of Family Practice, but also submission of office records and modules of office procedures and data from real life.

During our last year of medical school, we all had to choose what specialty and residency we would apply to. I chose Family Practice because it completely agreed with my goals and values. Next was the choice of residency. Most were based in university or teaching hospitals.

Thus, they were training specialists as well as family prac-

titioners. At that time – and it continues today – Family Practice is put last in the pecking order. The prejudices held in academia and by specialists made FPs feel that they were at the bottom of the specialty ladder, receiving the least respect and fewest resources. For example, on cardiology teaching rounds in the hospital, there is a long-ordered line, starting with the cardiology clinical professor, cardiology fellows, cardiology residents, internal medicine residents and fellows. Last came the FP residents, and medical students. Who do you think got the best cases, most attention, questioning, and teaching?

In 1978, after a thorough search, I chose the Family Practice residency in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. It seemed the best residency in the country at that time, and it lived up to its reputation. As the only residency in the city, we served both hospitals, St. Luke's and Mercy. All the doctors training us were intent on giving us the best experiences and education possible. I was a first assistant on open heart and brain surgery, delivered more babies than the OB residents at the University of Iowa, and took more orthopedic cases than the ortho residents at the University.

Grinnell was a community that referred patients to Cedar Rapids hospitals. Highly recommended by one of my role model professors, Dr. Galbraith, Grinnell offered everything I was looking for in a future practice and community. As a doctor in this community, I would also have an opportunity to teach and proctor first year Rush medical students from Chicago. When Dr. David Ferguson offered me a position in his practice, I jumped on the opportunity. As a well- trained FP physician, I was able to do everything that I was qualified and trained to do, both in and out of the hospital. With further board certifications in sports medicine, hospice and palliative care, I could "practice" medicine, literally from birth to death.

Grinnell Family Care Staff.

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Family Docs in Grinnell

At that time, 1981, each of Grinnell's Family Practice doctors were on a rotating call for the hospital emergency room, including nights and weekends. We delivered our own patients' babies and took care of the newborns, and moms and were the primary care doctors for all hospital admissions.

We consulted surgeons, internists, orthopedists, and other specialists as needed, but saw and managed our patients daily in the hospital. We had a strong family practice section in the hospital, with up to 11 FP physicians on staff at one time. One of the major health goals of our community was for everyone to have an FP physician. A FP could and would usually take care of everyone in the family, literally from cradle to grave, from newborn to old age. It included: Ob/gyn; pediatrics; internal medicine; surgery; and geriatrics. Referrals to the specialists came only from the FPs, and, after seeing the specialist, patients would come back to their primary care doctor. Many of us assisted with surgery and could provide the surgeon with the personal, medical, and family history of the patient if needed, as well as being present with the surgeon in the post-op family conference.

The goal was always what was best for the patient and their families.

As the hospice medical director, I often got referrals from the FPs at the patients' end of life. I was chosen as the hospice medical director because of my strong interest in end-of-life care and because I had become board certified in the new specialty of Hospice and Palliative Care. We managed as many patients as possible at home or in our newly designated hospice rooms in the hospital, if the patient's symptoms could not be managed adequately at home or if the family was becoming too exhausted.

Looking back, I can honestly say that the doctors set the practices, policies, and rules for the hospital. The goal was always what was best for the patient and their families. The hospital administrator and the board had a synergistic relationship with the medical staff. Communication was generally excellent among the physicians. Doctors congregated in the doctors' lounge before or after rounds. We saw our colleagues daily, not only to discuss cases, but to interact socially. As FPs we communicated among ourselves and had journal club meetings at our own homes. We would meet monthly at a different physician's home, meet their family, have snacks, and then discuss various topics and articles over a wide range of topics. If one of us was working at the ER and a question or concern arose about another family practitioner's patient, we just called and discussed the best course of management and follow-up. The FPs would gladly "cover" for one another so that we could attend a child's concert or sporting events or get out of town or even just take a long jog outside of the hospital. I don't ever recall hearing the term burnout.

Changes Coming

I think the first indication of major changes to come, for not only family doctors but all physicians, came in 1984. Most FPs either owned their own practice or were part of small groups, independent of the hospitals and other large organizations. At that time, although insurance companies, Medicare, and Medicaid couldn't and didn't tell you what to charge, they effectively determined the charges physicians could make by telling you what they would pay for or reimburse. I could no longer give free or greatly reduced charges to indigent patients or those without insurance. I vividly remember seeing a young boy from Alaska who was brought in by his father with a fishhook embedded in his eyelid. The family would come to Iowa each August with a truck full of fish and return with a truck full of sweet corn. Since he had no insurance, I surgically removed the hook for three fillets of salmon. Likewise, many Grinnell College students were from out of state and often their insurance would not cover treatment in Iowa because they were "out of network." Usually, our practice did not charge them. I kept quiet about this and never reported these surreptitious encounters.

The Small Town FP

During my third year of residency in Cedar Rapids, I was required to do a three-month rotation in Mechanicsville, a small rural Iowa town about 35 miles from Cedar Rapids. The residency owned a large farmhouse, and residents and their families were to move there and become the family doctor for the entire town. I saw patients in the clinic, in nursing homes, and at patients' homes. The medical residents played on the softball team, participated in the Kiwanis Club, served as school health educators, and were even expected to host the annual hog roast for the entire residency. This rotation exposed residents to what small town rural life and practice would entail. Although I eventually settled in a town of 9000, the relationships were the same. I would take care of my auto mechanic, my banker, and my children's teachers, and see them in the coffee shop or at Walmart. Since I practiced for 42 years, I often took care of my patient's parents and grandparents, and delivered their children.

I knew their personalities, likes, prejudices, hobbies and financial situation.

I confidentially knew their mental health, and their deepest concerns, fears, and joys

Of course, the trust this required was forged during interactions over many years and decades, both in and out of the office. Grinnell's family doctors spent time with our patients, who determined the agenda for the visit. We were often there for the birth of their children, and, at the end of life, we were often with them and their families as they transitioned from this world to the next.

Changes

The scope of family practice underwent a drastic evolution over the next few decades.

First, although helping bring a new life into the world is one of the greatest joys a physician can experience, and early in my career, most family practitioners delivered babies, many eventually decided to give up this part of their practice. For many, the decision was driven by the strain of always being available and on call for the event, whether during office hours, in the middle of the night, or on Christmas day. It was at times exhausting. After the hospital in our town recruited an OB/GYN doctor, only a handful of family doctors elected to continue doing OB.

Second, the hospital began hiring residents from the teaching institutions to cover the ER on weekends, a change which, at the time, we all applauded. In 1979 the specialty of emergency medicine was formed and, within a decade ER doctors took over night and weekend calls completely. Like all double-edged swords, though, this change cuts both ways. It was a blessing to get more sleep and not to have the office disrupted on busy days.

It was a blessing to get more sleep and not to have the office disrupted on busy days.

On the other hand, the ER physicians usually did not know either our patients or the community well. They seldom called us for consultations or to seek advice on managing our patients.

Third, Grinnell Regional Medical Center (GRMC), the previously nonprofit, independent, community-owned small hospital, was taken over by a large for-profit healthcare system, Unity Point. National economic trends within the healthcare industry and political system, coupled with COVID, made this change almost inevitable.

Up to this point, GRMC had achieved national status and recognition not only for its excellent medical care, but for the development of cutting-edge surgical procedures, integrative medicine, and research. GRMC became one of the earliest centers for bariatric surgery, even before Duke University. In collaboration with Grinnell College, GRMC did cutting edge research on infection control by installing copper alloy metals in both the operating suites and patient rooms. Music therapy was integrated into many aspects of patient care and community-created art hung in the hallways and patient rooms. Our independent hospice was thriving both in and out of the hospital. Although Unity Point first espoused local control by the hospital board and doctors, its policies morphed into complete domination. The de facto model was essentially, "It's our way or the highway… or… "That's what we do in Des Moines."

As part of this transition, inpatient hospital care was gradually taken over by a new class of doctors, called hospitalists. These physicians took care of patients only in the hospital, had no office practices, did not know their patients like the FPs did, and importantly, became employees of Unity Point. Family physician care of inpatients was at first discouraged and finally prohibited, except in OB. Within a short period of time, the community FPs, medical staff, and hospital board no longer controlled the fate or direction of medical care in our community.

Hospice

Like most FPs across the country, we in Grinnell had our previous hospital practices diminished or terminated. I thought my hospice practice, which the local community had started as one of the first small rural community hospice programs in Iowa 38 years earlier, would be safe from the large healthcare system. However, it was not.

During the first year after Unity Point acquired our hospital, our community hospice—which provided excellent care and was financially solvent—was left alone. But then administrators started dictating what things I or my nurses could or could not do, what drugs we could use, and what my nurses could or could not carry in their bags to home visits. In addition, they started requiring all of us to do mountains of paperwork. They wanted me to keep a log of every minute I spent related to hospice care. This was in spite of the fact that I was or had been on call 24/7/365 for an average of over 20 patients at a time for over three decades and, had been twice board-certified in Hospice and Palliative care. Unity Point also told me I could no longer care for inpatients in our previously designated hospice rooms. If a hospice patient's symptoms could not be adequately managed or treated at home, or if their family or social support became exhausted, we hospitalized them locally rather than transferring them to a different facility or hospice house in another city. Finally, since I could no longer take care of hospice patients the way I felt they needed to be treated, I resigned as hospice medical director.

Electronic Medical Records

In my opinion, electronic medical records (EMRs) have been responsible for cataclysmic changes in medicine. Like the smart phone, the EMR can confer tremendous benefit as well, through standardization, allowing easy storage and transfer of data from one provider or institution to another, creating templates for histories, diagnosis, and suggesting algorithms for treatment. In addition, such records could be accessible from anywhere in the world.

However, these systems were designed by computer techs and businessmen rather than by doctors. Different and competing systems were developed which often couldn't, or wouldn't, talk to one another. The costs for implementation were huge for physicians' offices and exorbitant for hospitals and large healthcare systems. In addition, the systems were constantly changing and updating. Originally, they were optional, but soon the government and third-party payers began requiring them for "metrics". The things measured included clinical satisfaction; patient satisfaction; technical performance; visit volume by modality; and overall reimbursement by modality. Over time almost all hospitals were using them, and physician offices were penalized financially if they didn't have them. In 2010, 16 percent of hospitals and 28 percent of physician-based offices were using them; by 2020, 96 percent of hospitals and 78 percent ofprivate offices had implemented an EMR. My clinic never switched. As providers we and the patients set the agenda for the office visit, and then dictated what we felt was important and needed for the medical record after the visit.

The typed notes were on the chart, usually within 24 hours. However, our office did have to accept financial penalties for not complying.

Many physicians now feel that EMRs have harmed the relationship they're able to have with their patients. Despite their usefulness, particularly within specialty care,

Dr. Paulson seeing his last patient.

EMRs cannot capture the psychological, social, and spiritual character of a person or their illness. Touted as a timesaver, they have had the opposite effect. A 2022 study by the Mayo Clinic found that physicians spend about 50 percent of their office and hospital time working on EMRs, rather than on direct patient care. Many physicians now spend many extra hours at night and on the weekends completing these forms. No wonder EMRs are cited as a major cause of burnout by most primary care providers.

Another major factor in physician burnout is loss of autonomy. As more and more FPs and other doctors are bought out by or choose to work for a healthcare system, they are now under the control of a new boss. They no longer have a say in how much time they spend with the patient, what metrics they must get and record, and what they can and cannot do. Disillusioned, many family practitioners question why they are still in this profession at all. Many retire early, leave primary care, leave the profession altogether, or worse.

He waited too long to retire.

Many retire early, leave primary care, leave the profession altogether, or worse.

Physicians have the highest suicide rate of any profession; one of my partners committed suicide in his 30s.

Closing My Office Practice

I thought I was safe in my independently owned office practice, as I was still able to run it the way we had since its inception. Despite being 75 years old, I still enjoyed practicing medicine, and I could have continued for several more years. However, three factors led me to close my practice.

First, five of my staff, who had been with Grinnell Family Care for decades, were either approaching 65 or were already there and ready to retire. No new employee could replace their patient knowledge, positive relationships, and loyalty to our style of practice.

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Second, decreasing reimbursements, especially from Medicare, combined with my aging clientele, resulted in an actual financial loss my last two years of practice. I took home a salary less than that of any of my employees.

Third, it became impossible to recruit newly minted family doctors. They wanted nine-to-five hours, no night or weekend call, no nursing home responsibilities, no OB or ER work, and certainly no hospice call or home visits. After a year or more in practice, none would want to buy into a practice, partnership, or clinic.

When asked what they expected for starting compensation, they asked for more than I was making after 40 years of practice, and they often wanted me to pay off all their student loans. When asked how they came up with these expectations, they replied that large healthcare systems were making these offers.

As it became clear that I would have to sell the practice, I reached out to a number of healthcare organizations in the area, including the University of Iowa. No one was interested in buying a large, respected, four-person practice and clinic. Hence on July 1, 2023, I had to close a half-century old family practice.

The Future

These are the realities of medical practice today. When a family doctor or internist spends over an hour with an elderly patient with multiple, complicated chronic medical problems amid serious social, economic, and psychological issues, that doctor gets reimbursed a tiny fraction of what a "specialist" gets for quickly treating a chronic skin lesion with liquid nitrogen or spending five minutes with a patient complaining of knee pain.

In addition, preventative medicine does not make money for big health care networks. Hospitals profit from short office visits, tests and X-ray or CAT scans, and procedures, and by referring patients to specialists. Instead of hiring residency-trained FP's, hospitals improve their bottom line by hiring less-well-trained, although often good, lower-level providers.

The traditional family doctor—that is, a doctor who manages most of the patient's problems, who knows the family, who spends time with the patient, and who emphasizes preventative and holistic care—is going extinct. Beside the issues of the EMR, autonomy, and burnout, the current economics also make the model of the family practitioner problematic.

Conclusion

I will conclude by returning to what I said earlier, comparing medicine and agriculture. Just as the traditional family doctor is disappearing from the landscape, so is the multi-crop, multi-animal, integrated family farmer. More and more, huge economic and political forces control both farming and medicine. Any honest observer can see that both are headed in unsustainable directions. Unfortunately, I see no quick fixes for either. Unless there are significant changes in our current political system, the future is not hopeful for either.

R.I.P. Family Doctor

ENDNOTES

1 https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/12564-edema

2 The Graduate Education of Physicians: the Report of the Citizens Commission on Graduate Medical Education, Commissioned by the American Medical Association Council on Medical Education, 1966, 114 pages. Pgs 45, 51

J.R. PAULSON, MD, was born and raised in Michigan and earned a B.A. in philosophy at the University of Michigan. After getting an M.A. in science education he taught elementary and secondary school before realizing that he really wanted to become a family doctor. He earned an M.D. at Michigan State University, and after completing a residency in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, he, his wife Linda, and their two sons moved to Grinnell, where he practiced holistic and family medicine for forty-two years at Grinnell Family Care before retiring in 2023. He remains active in community education and is a strong advocate for mental health. Paulson can be reached at skydoc@iowatelecom.net.

Prairie grasses and savanna trees in autumn at Grinnell College's Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA).
All photos are courtesy of Emma Kieran Schaefer

Singing the Iowa Ecosytems

Emma Kieran Schaefer's Sowing Songs album seeks a balance between recognizing devastation and finding strength and wisdom in ecosystems themselves — and from Indigenous communities in Iowa and around the world whose knowledge holds the answers we need.

MULTIMEDIA
By Emma Kieran Schaefer

Sowing Songs is an album of original contemporary folk songs about Iowa ecosystems that I wrote during the spring of 2023 for my senior thesis at Grinnell College. Each of these songs look to the land for answers—answers that we might not be able to find or understand with our limited human perspectives. Yet these are answers that we must be open to hearing if we want to create a future in which all living beings have access to a safe, habitable planet. These songs address the devastation to the land since European colonizers arrived, forcibly displacing the Native peoples who had been living on Turtle Island (the name used today by some Native peoples in the U.S. to refer to North America) for thousands of years and whose stewardship of the land in reciprocal and regenerative ways are needed now more than ever.

As settlers spread across Iowa in the 19th century and Native communities were forced from their ancestral territories, another erasure was occurring—the tallgrass prairie which had once covered much of the Iowa landscape began to vanish with the transition to cropland. Today, less than one tenth of one percent of the original tallgrass prairie remains. With industrial agriculture now dominating the land across Iowa, other ecosystems have also been drastically altered as a result. Rivers have been straightened, forests have been cleared, and ancient grasslands have been plowed under to maximize agricultural land. In the short term, this has yielded profit for some people and big agricultural corporations, but at what cost to everyone else? At what cost to the land and waters and living beings that now face the devastating impacts of soil erosion, water toxicity from fertilizers and pesticides, and significant habitat loss? At what cost to future generations?

The Sowing Songs album seeks a balance between recognizing this devastation and finding strength and wisdom in the ecosystems themselves — and from Indigenous communities in

With industrial agriculture now dominating the land across Iowa, other ecosystems have also been drastically altered as a result.

Spring beauties—one of the spring ephemerals Emma Kieran Schaefer praises in *Sowing Songs*

Iowa and around the world whose knowledge holds the answers we need, if only we'll listen. "Broken," the first song in this collection, speaks to this devastation and brokenness—both literal and metaphorical—as the land is broken by the plow and as we face a brokenness on individual and collective levels. It also imagines how prairie seeds that are sown on the land help to restore new native prairie projects, and are also in many ways sewing the broken land back together again. What other "seeds" can we sow in our lives that are hopeful, generative, life-giving? The rest of the songs take the listener on a journey from prairie into forest down to a river, back through the forest, and into the prairie again, where big bluestem—one of the tallest native prairie plants—grows, and which, when summoned in the song, allows us to glimpse a future beyond our present moment. The final song on the album is one I wrote while doing an AgArts Residency at Mustard Seed Community Farm near Ames, Iowa. This farm provides a beautiful example of community-based and regenerative agriculture which allows land, humans, and other living beings to flourish side-by-side.

What was it about these songs that brought people together and empowered them to take action?

Before writing the songs, I began by researching a few different topics. I studied the North American Folk Music Revival of the 1950s-60s, asking the question, "what was it about these songs that brought people together and empowered them to take action?" I also researched the role of music within social movements more broadly, learning about how music can create new worlds by communicating the vision of a movement. Finally, I researched the main ecosystems of Iowa—the prairie, woodlands, wetlands, and oak savannah. By immersing myself in these ecosystems through readings, conversations, and frequent visits to nearby nature preserves, this allowed the land to become the foundation from which *Sowing Songs* emerged.

Emma Kieran Schaefer performing *Sowing Songs*

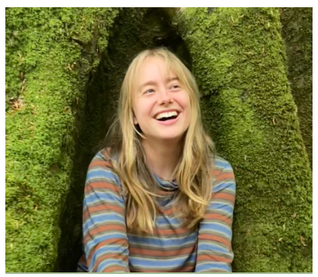
Emma Kieran Schaefer performs *Sowing Songs* at Grinnell's Conard Environmental Research Area (CERA).

So many people are woven into the fabric of this project for whom I'm incredibly grateful. My academic advisors Dr. John Garrison and Dr. Ross Haenfler, Jon Andelson (who introduced me to the prairie), Cornelia Mutel (author of *The Emerald Horizon*, a book that provided many insights into the history and future of Iowa land), Johnathan Buffalo (who shared his stories and wisdom of what it means to call Iowa home), Stephanie Snow (who reminded me that even amidst turmoil one can find stability in nature), my dear friends (who have been the reason Iowa has felt like home during my college years), and my parents (who made it all possible). My gratitude is vaster than a big wide open Iowa prairie! You can listen to the album here:

linktr.ee/sowingsongs

While most of my research revolved around non-human ecosystems, it was important to me to organize a creative ecosystem of people in the college and community whose voices I value and who have had an impact on me in some way during my time at Grinnell. I shared these songs and these people offered their creative contributions in a concert at Herrick Chapel in May 2023. The voices that are part of this creative ecosystem include Stephanie Snow, Jon Andelson, Arsema Berhane, Maria Eure, Josie Noland, Crys Kaczmarczyk, Joanie Fieser, Tim Widener, Tallulah Pellissier Lloyd, Jordon Ryan, Derin Sivrioglu, and Jenny Sammons. You can watch this performance here:

youtu.be/GlaKswbWep4



EMMA KIERAN SCHAEFER (Grinnell College '23) studied Multimedia Storytelling at Grinnell. She is a singer-songwriter, storyteller, and climate justice advocate passionate about elevating voices and stories that inspire connection to one another and the Earth. As a 2023 Thomas J. Watson Fellow, she journeyed around the world for a year of independent research, learning across many cultures and communities about the healing power of music within the climate crisis. She currently resides in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

Chef Kamal Hammouda in his restaurant's kitchen. Photo by Jon Andelson.

A Muslim in Small-town Iowa

A chance job offer in Des Moines, Iowa, led Kamal Hammouda to a chance visit to a nearby small town, where he later decided to open a restaurant. As a Muslim born in Egypt, he was not sure how things would go. Here he reflects on the challenges and rewards of his thirty years of serving food and building relationships in a small Iowa community.

ESSAY

By Kamal Hammouda

In 1989, I was offered a job in Des Moines, Iowa. The first time I heard of Des Moines before that was in a political science class I took in college in which the *Des Moines Register* was cited in some footnotes in our textbook. I figured it must be a progressive community to have such a reputable newspaper. I also had heard of the Iowa caucuses, an institution I didn't really grasp until I moved to Iowa and became a voting citizen. According to statistics I read when I first arrived, Iowa was then a predominantly rural state of three million people, over 96 percent of whom were white, and most of whom were Christian. As a Muslim from Egypt, this gave me pause, but during my job interview I learned that there was a mosque community a mile from work, which was encouraging. I accepted the job offer.

While driving from Chicago to Des Moines to start the new job, hunger hit me as I was passing Grinnell, a town I had never heard of. I got off the highway and drove into town to find some food. I first came upon the Varsity Newsstand and was amazed by the enormous selection of newspapers and magazines in such a small town, I bought the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Des Moines Register*. I asked the proprietor to recommend a place to eat, and he directed me to The Longhorn. It was crowded and noisy, and diners were welcomed by a host who epitomized hospitality. I enjoyed my simple meal and then walked around town for a while. I was intrigued by the beauty of the architecture and how well-kept the homes were. An interesting little town, I thought to myself.

I drove on to Des Moines and settled in my hotel room to get ready to start my new job the next day. Reading the *Register* that afternoon, I began to have second thoughts about my decision, as both the Des Moines mayor, John "Pat" Dorrian, and Iowa Governor Terry Branstad sounded provincial rather than progressive, to say the least.

As it turned out, Des Moines was not as progressive as I had expected. My family—Laura my wife and sons Mustafa and Adam—moved to Iowa a few weeks later after I found a rental house. I discovered that I had a not-too-friendly neighbor, who described me to her daughter-in-law as "a damn Ay-rab [who] moved next door." Thankfully, her husband was not the same. He seemed happy talking to Mustafa across the fence.

For many years, after I dropped out of engineering school, I had had the goal of opening my own restaurant. Now, during the next few years in Des Moines, I followed guidance I got from a business adviser and worked in the culinary industry in all stations as preparation for opening my own establishment. Three years and a third son later, I thought about Grinnell as a restaurant location, and I began to search for a suitable place there for rent or lease. To start a business, one needs to have a plan and enough capital to finance at least the first 6 month of operation. All I had, as they say, was a wing and a prayer. When I found a place, though, I felt I was ready and, though my plan was vague and I had only $2,000.00 in capital, I took the lease, began to remodel, and started hiring staff. I started learning about the college through my new staff. My first employee, who became in effect son #4, was a great help in both remodeling and running the restaurant, which I named The Last Egyptian. Not surprisingly, after a little over two years of trying to build the business, I lost the lease and ended up with significant debt. But not everything was lost.

In the interim, some of the Muslim students on campus—who hailed from Yemen, Morocco, and the south side of Chicago, among other places—found me and asked me to be their Imam, which is the Muslim prayer leader and "spiritual advisor." I don't believe this was because I was very knowledgeable; more, it was because I was their elder. We began performing the communal prayer in the back of the restau-

rant, and as we got to know one another, it gave me a modicum of a sense of community. The students frequently challenged me by questioning the premise of the sermons I gave after prayer. While I was a practicing Muslim, I was not a scholar in Islam, and that necessitated my studying primary sources to verify who was correct, my challenger or myself. It also made me more aware of the cultural differences we each brought to our practice, which deepened my sense of diversity. Spiritually, I was enriched and became a little better as a Muslim.

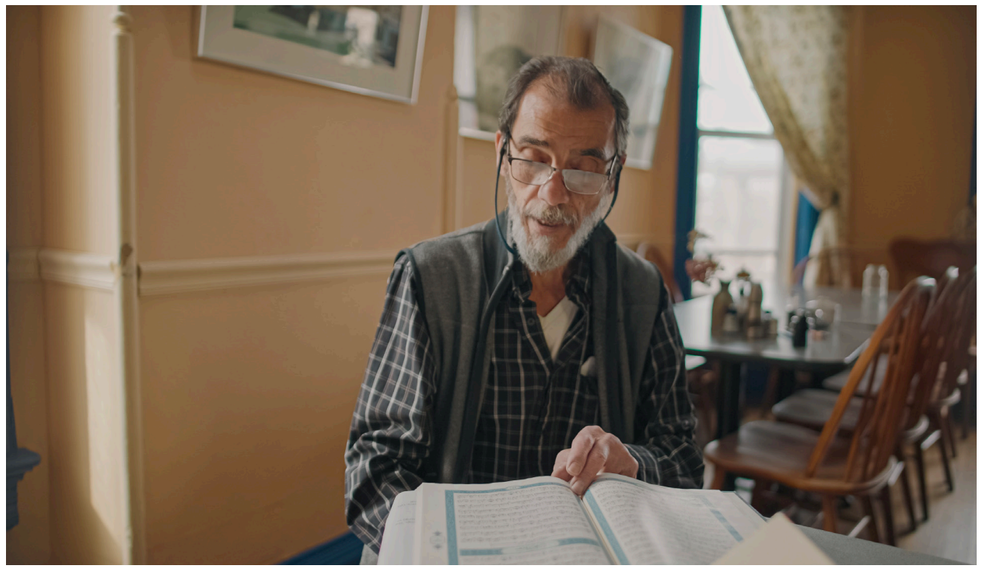
Meanwhile, on the business side, one customer, a college faculty member, and his wife, upon hearing about the loss of The Last Egyptian's lease, suggested that I try again. My response was the obvious: I was broke. The couple suggested drawing up a fundraising proposal and sharing it with select people in the community. Who would finance a failure, I asked? They gave me a list of names and I cautiously reached out to them. We raised only one-third of what I thought was required on the back of this modest proposal. I was apprehensive, but my wife reminded me that the money was many times more than what I had first started our first venture with. So, I agreed to try again.

A dream that began as a business venture ended up as a community affair.

I was very fortunate: the property owner where I wanted to restart was willing to lease with option to buy. Not only that, he agreed to do all the mechanical work needed for the cost of materials, which allowed the modest pledges we received in response to our proposal to go much further. Other community members came forward as I was remodeling and offered physical help. Also significant was the diversity of faith backgrounds of our investors.

Surprisingly, the new restaurant was a financial success from the beginning. Learning from the first experience, I adjusted a few things. Instead of the obscure name of the first endeavor, which meant something only to my wife and me, I named the new restaurant, risen from the ashes of the old one, the Phoenix. I changed the menu to eliminate what didn't fly the first time, and I started experimenting with new recipes that I market-tested on our investors. That made the enterprise more customer-driven, which gave me hope. In fact, many of the customers became friends rather than just customers.

I paid off the building in less than four years and stopped looking for an exit strategy, for I relished the sense of community I had found. Not all of Grinnell embraced me, but those community members who did frequent the restaurant gave me advice and viewed me as just another member of humanity, regardless of my religion or ethnicity. That was gratifying and reassuring.



Kamal Hammouda reciting from the Quran. Photo by Nich Perez.

I had moved my family from Des Moines despite the nay sayers, and that turned out to be the beginning of my communal spiritual journey of growth. The restaurant wasn't without detractors. Some refused to try us for whatever reason they could come up with: we didn't serve pork, the building exterior wasn't nice, I sold drugs, I hired gay people. There were many more. My kids weren't spared, either. They had their share of abuse, but we persisted. Things were going so well that I built an addition. Shortly after we opened, 9/11 happened and the business declined, maybe because I was Muslim.

I continued being the Imam unofficially and led prayers with the students wherever we could find space on campus. A newly appointed College chaplain invited me to join her staff, which I did without pay from the late 1990's to the early 2000's, then officially, so that I could easily use campus vehicles to take students off campus during the high holidays, serving in this capacity till 2015. Through my position I got to meet church leaders in the community, two of whom invited me to give the homily to their congregations, which was very enriching.

I ran for office as an independent candidate for the state house and because I got trolled by some because I'm Muslim, I trailed badly on election day. Later, I ran for mayor to bring a different perspective to the mix, to encourage other entrepreneurs like me to move in and add cultural diversty to the town. I lost, twice. I concluded that the majority don't want change, don't value change, and want only people like them to be in charge.

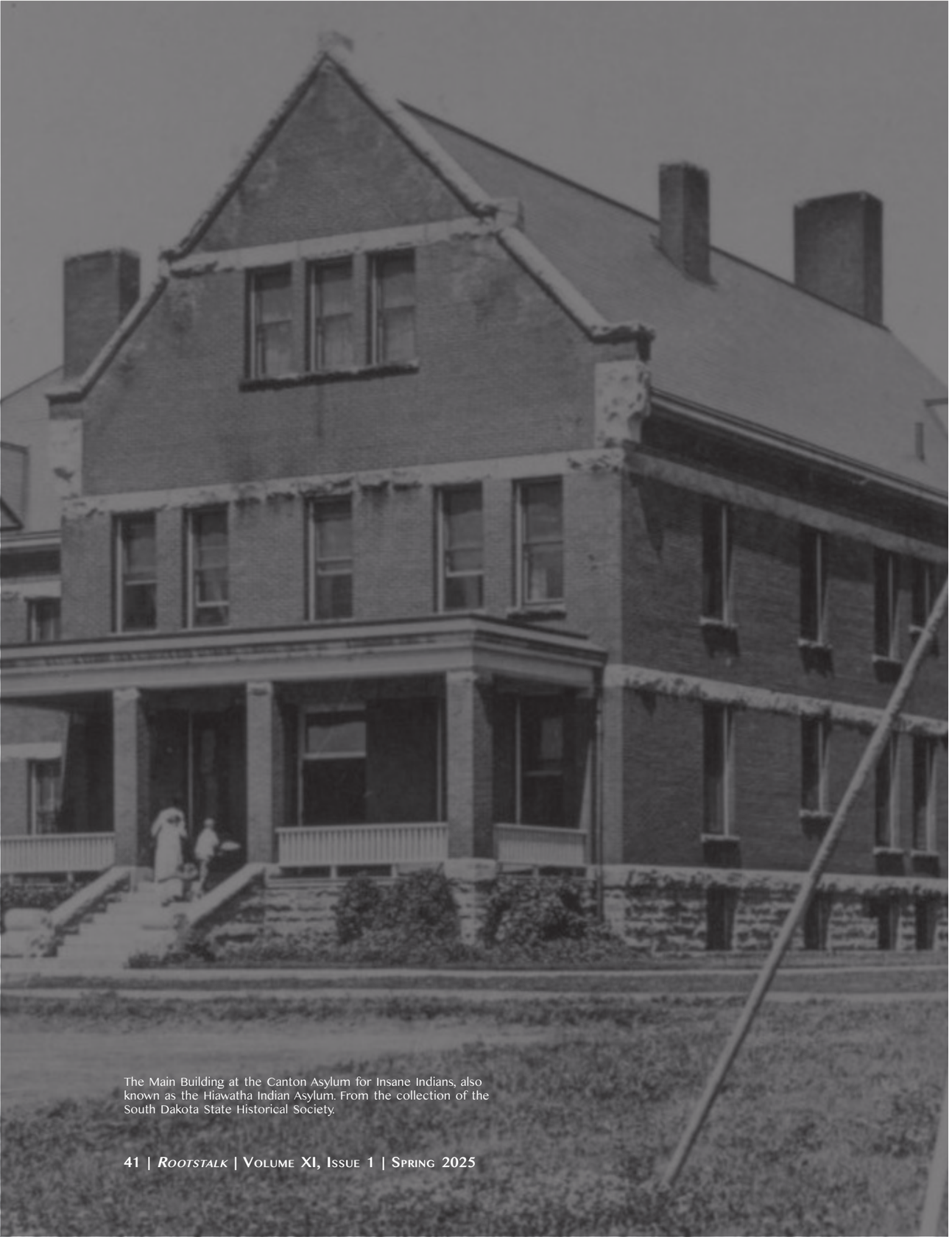
Reflecting now on over 30 years living in Grinnell, decades marked by both failures and successes, what do I feel? Jaded, fulfilled, empty? I'm not sure. But I keep on. Here is what I'm doing: the Quran tells us to share with others from what Allah has given each of us. Financially, I'm not rich but I can cook well, and I have always enjoyed cooking. During the Covid pandemic, I was inspired to give from that wealth. My wife and I decided to start a not-for-profit organization, The Iowa Kitchen, to provide a free weekly meal to those in need. We don't ask questions to "qualify" our diners for a free weekly meal, and we train volunteers to cook and serve. The public, especially our former customers, who are our community members, have been generous in their support. We just completed four years of service and are going strong. As a cook, I feel fulfilled. As the accidental Imam, I still advise whoever seeks my advice. How do I feel? I feel OK. Laura and I raised three wonderful human beings, established an ongoing organization to help mitigate food insecurity, and, through the restaurant, we exposed many community members to different cultures and cuisines.

Personally, despite the many mistakes I have made in life and the bigotry our kids and I have encountered and still encounter, I have gained deep joy from the community that we have built and, overall, I feel good about the life I have led. I feel ready to meet my maker. As I await that inevitable moment, I continue to try to improve myself. It is only too late when we are six feet under.

Until that moment comes, let me cook a meal for whoever comes to visit.

Photo courtesy of Rasheed Hammouda

Born and raised in Egypt, **KAMAL HAMMOUDA** spent time Studying in Great Britain before immigrating in 1976 to the United States, where he studied engineering. Chance led him to become a chef and an Imam, a Muslim religious teacher. He and his wife raised three sons, ran restaurants in Grinnell, Iowa, and upon retiring started a non-profit organization to feed people for free, which continues to this day.



The Main Building at the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, also known as the Hiawatha Indian Asylum. From the collection of the South Dakota State Historical Society.

The Politics of Insanity

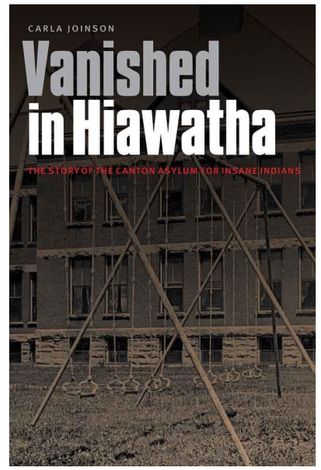
A dark chapter in our government's treatment of its indigenous citizens has a name: the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians. Carla Joinson tells the story.

ESSAY
By Carla Joinson

From its opening on December 31,1902 until its doors slammed shut for good on December 20, 1933, the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians had become a symbol of misery, negligence and abuse. Even today the phrase insane asylum has overtones of horror. For the disenfranchised people who were detained there at the convenience of the U.S. government, it was a place of dread which Native peoples could never have put a name to in their own language. During its operation, the facility provided problematic mental health care to almost 400 patients—only nine of whom had ever been legally committed through a court.

I first came across the Canton Asylum while casually looking on the internet for information about insane asylums in general—places I had mostly associated with Victorian England. I was surprised to learn that these establishments had been as prevalent in the U.S. as they were overseas, and was particularly astounded to see one that specialized in Native American care.

The idea of an asylum for Indians seemed too bizarre to be true, and the snippets of information I saw were almost as puzzling as the idea. At the time there wasn't much to go on—just a few essays and a few quotes from a government report. I couldn't get the place out of my mind, though. I reasoned that the report authenticated the place and would be enough to jumpstart a deeper search. That's when I began the long, long process of following the clues and pathways that eventually led to my book, *Vanished in Hiawatha: The Story of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians* (University of Nebraska Press, 2016).



Cover photo from *Vanished in Hiawatha: The Story of the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians.*

When Indian agent Peter Couchman first suggested an asylum specifically for insane Indians in 1897, it really didn't seem to be such a bad idea. Native peoples were wards of the federal government at the time and faced prejudice on many fronts. They certainly were not welcome in state hospitals already hard pressed to provide services for their non-indigenous citizens who, incidentally, could vote. Why not create a centralized hospital for these unwanted and powerless people who were already on reservations under federal oversight?

Considering the paternalistic attitude toward Indians prevalent at the time in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (almost exclusively referred to as the Indian Bureau) and among lawmakers in Washington, surprisingly few people embraced this suggestion. Most of the supervisors and agents working on reservations held that insanity was quite rare among Indians and that the cases that existed were relatively mild.

To put this in perspective, one reservation superintendent looked at his population of nearly 6,500 people and reported that not one was insane. The Indian Bureau didn't need its own asylum. A survey by the pro-asylum Commissioner of Indian Affairs bore out this view: at the time, just seven Indians were being treated at institutions around the country. In another survey, the Committee on Indian Affairs scraped up "fifty-eight insane Indians, one doubtful, six idiotic, and two partly idiotic" who might require treatment.

Unfortunately, practical observations about the need for an asylum by men in the field didn't trump the "boosterism" prevalent in small towns eager for projects that would enhance their status or grow their economies. South Dakota senator Richard F. Pettigrew thought an asylum would be great for South Dakota, and as chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs he had the clout to help push it through.

Why not create a centralized hospital for these unwanted and powerless people who were already on reservations under federal oversight?

He also knew the perfect person to run it: former congressman and ex-mayor of Canton, South Dakota, Oscar S. Gifford. In turn, Gifford believed Canton would be the perfect site for the asylum and convinced Pettigrew of it. So it was that when the first patient arrived at the new federal insane asylum, Gifford—-an attorney with no background in medicine—-was in charge to welcome him to it. Dr. John Turner was the facility's assistant superintendent.

Anyone digging through the origins and setup of the Canton Asylum (also known locally as Hiawatha Asylum) could predict it wasn't going to go well. And of course it didn't. There weren't many problems at first, considering the asylum had new buildings, very few patients, and the full support and backing of a town full of pride for "the only facility of its kind in the world."

Though he wasn't a psychiatrist, Dr. Turner was a competent physician who unfortunately had to report to Gifford and accept his calls if they disagreed on an issue. Gifford failed to support many of Dr. Turner's instructions for patient care while he was absent (often for days at a time) to pick up new patients in and out-of-state, and didn't back him up with staff. The two finally clashed over the medical treatment of a patient. Gifford forbade an operation, the patient died, and Turner complained enough to get an investigation started. That ultimately led to the ouster of the superintendent, and Gifford was replaced by an actual psychiatrist, Dr. Harry Reid Hummer.

Though it might be thought that this would have resolved many problems, the quality of psychiatric care wasn't the actual problem with the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians. Psychiatry was a relatively new field at the turn of the 20th century, and it would almost be laughable to read about acceptable treatments for insanity, if it weren't so sad. Besides liberally used and sometimes horrific restraints, common treatments in most asylums included sedatives; purging through induced vomiting and bowel movements; water therapies that confined patients in bathtubs, sometimes for days; sheet wraps soaked in water that could likewise continue for hours or days; and static electricity sessions. The Canton facility didn't seem to use these therapies excessively or at all and depended mainly on a few types of hydrotherapy and occupational therapy like sewing and garden work. Patients there received just about the same quality of care as patients in other asylums. The problem with the Canton Asylum always had much more to do with the Native American identity of its patients.

Photo of Arch Wolfe, in shackles circa 1893. Wolfe was a Cherokee man who was confined in multiple institutions, including the Canton Asylum, where he died in 1912. Photo courtesy of the Cherokee National Historical Society, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

Even if the asylum had been filled with U.S. citizens, any doctor would have found it difficult to diagnose and treat patients who spoke a number of different languages which the hospital staff didn't speak. During Canton Asylum's history, more than 50 tribes were represented, and though many patients spoke English, many others did not or didn't speak it well.

Anyone digging through the origins and setup of the Canton Asylum (also known locally as Hiawatha Asylum) could predict it wasn't going to go well.

Equally important, Native cultures and practices—which differed even from tribe to tribe—were quite different from that of the medical community from which any doctor assigned to the institution would have hailed. Their ideas and those of the South Dakotan staff concerning appropriate (sane) behavior would have been based almost solely on mainstream U.S. cultural standards. Superintendent Gifford had spent many years in the West and did recognize and allow Native practices like dancing and singing. However, Dr. Hummer was an Easterner through and through. He knew nothing about his patients' culture and had no interest in learning about it.

The problem with the Canton Asylum always had much more to do with the Native American identity of its patients.

The attitude of the superintendent—-and for that matter, most of the Indian Bureau—-had consequences for patients. You can imagine the fear and disorientation they felt when they arrived at the Canton Asylum and staff went to work stripping, bathing, and de-lousing them. If patients wore Native clothing, it would be exchanged for "citizen" garments and men's hair might be cut. To staff all these actions would simply have been practical entry procedures, but they would have cut the patients to the soul. Added to this, the asylum was also a tourist attraction that was open to visitors from 1 – 5 p.m. Wednesdays and Fridays.

This indifference to Native sensibilities had a long history by this time. The earliest settlers recognized the need to interact peaceably with Native peoples, but as they gained dominance that need began to fade. Because the worldviews of Natives and newcomers concerning property, lifestyle, and religion were so different, clashes became inevitable and Native culture was marginalized. Authorities failed to honor treaties with protections for Native peoples, and President Jackson's Indian Removal Act (1830) provided the means to gather them onto reservations. Once there—cut away from their homelands and traditional lifestyles—authorities promptly denied Indians unapproved cultural activities.

By the time Canton Asylum opened in 1902, formerly independent tribes had become domestic dependent nations, and their peoples mere wards of the federal government. The good news was that after years of seeking to annihilate them, the U.S. government now sought to assimilate Indians into mainstream American culture. The bad news was that the new policy of assimilation had another sort of annihilation as its goal—-the erasure of Native customs and culture.

The government achieved part of its goal to stamp out Native autonomy and identity through an astonishingly cruel boarding school system. At least 60,000 children were taken away from their homes—sometimes through abduction—and required to live in boarding schools hundreds of miles away from their homes. These children were forced to speak English exclusively and to use the English names that the schools assigned to them. Many never saw their families again until they graduated, and at least 500 died from disease, abuse, and murder. In one incident, ten girls were stripped to the waist and flogged with a buggy whip for stealing a can of baking powder. Survivors told of solitary confinement, beatings, starvation, and forced manual labor. There were no champions for children, either.

The government's policy was further expressed by its confinement of adults at poverty-level dependence on reservations. Both reservations and schools were overseen or subsidized by federal authorities who could make life-changing decisions for Native peoples—including whether or not they were judged to be sane. Procedures for committing a Native American to the Canton Asylum were simple: Someone in authority on the reservation decided the person was insane, checked with the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to see if Canton could accept a new patient, and initiated commitment if the answer was positive. Patients would arrive to an open-ended stay at the asylum—all without a court order or its superintendent even examining the person first. The odds of victoriously fighting a commitment were certainly stacked against the Indian patient.

It's worth noting that things weren't much better for non-native mentally ill people elsewhere in the country. In many states a person could be committed to an asylum via a certificate from one or two doctors and a letter from a relative. By 1904 the Washington, DC metropolitan police could arrest and detain someone whenever two or more respectable citizens filed an affidavit saying they believed that person to be of unsound mind. Never mind how easy it was for a husband to commit his wife! Unless a person ac-

[Dr. Hummer] knew nothing about his patients' culture and had no interest in learning about it.

cused of insanity had a powerful ally, there wasn't much hope.

Fortunately, as time went on, in the larger culture legal protections for people accused of being insane strengthened through the intervention of increasingly enlightened citizens, the testimonies of former patients who were willing to speak out about their experiences, and huge scandals. These protections didn't extend to the Indian experience, though, and Canton Asylum' superintendent continued to commit and treat patients with near autonomy.

The asylum was inspected at regular intervals like all federal facilities, but inspections concentrated mainly on the buildings, food, and administration. For all intents and purposes, Dr. Hummer could act without serious hindrance from anyone. Even the few inspectors who noted his slipshod management were thwarted by Hummer's smooth rebuttal of their findings and the reality that no one else really wanted his job.

Dr. Hummer presents a curious case study. Though I could find various accounts of his clever dealings with inspectors and naysayers, I could find very little that spoke to his own feelings on any personal level. Inspection reports and interactions with peers and colleagues in the Indian Bureau seemed to indicate that Hummer felt a deep frustration running the institution. There was never enough money, or support, or staff to do the job adequately and these accusations are supported by the inspectors themselves. However, for all his complaints, Dr. Hummer seemed to prefer autonomy over everything.

For a short time, Dr. Hummer worked with Dr. Turner's replacement, Dr. L. M. Hardin. Hummer managed to make Hardin's life so miserable that he finally quit in frustration. After that Hummer fought tooth and nail against accepting medical staff, such as a second doctor, or nurses who might have made his job easier, but also would have brought in some accountability. He routinely pinched pennies on the most basic items so he could make a show of returning money to the government. He never asked for interpreters so he could interact more effectively with his patients. Worst of all, he failed to check on all his patients regularly to actively seek their welfare. Why? And what in the world kept this man tied to the Canton Asylum?

I can only look to his actions and theorize. When he first took the job, Dr. Hummer probably saw a wonderful opportunity. Running an asylum, even a small one, held a lot of prestige and might have led to leadership at a larger asylum. And of course, Canton Asylum was the only one in the world housing Indian patients exclusively. Hummer might have thought he'd first make a name for himself with research and case studies, then move on to bigger and better things. He did present a paper, "Insanity among the Indians," at the 1912 Medico-Psychological Association meeting, but that ended up being the extent of his efforts in scholarship.

It seems clear that he was a man in love with authority, and at this faraway outpost he got a chance to exercise it unchecked. He resented any interference from even the most well-meaning observers, and he demanded complete loyalty from his employees. He additionally allowed himself to waste his time doing administrative tasks that could have been delegated. He allowed no one to answer the phone but himself and wrote all reports, took time to supervise construction projects and deal with such minutia as sending in coal samples. Inspectors noted this tendency and put it down to Hummer's inability to pass authority on to anyone else.

Because he was the only psychiatrist on staff Hummer's decisions were almost never challenged, an ideal situation for someone with a large ego. An inspector noted in 1909 that Dr. Hummer "considered it the rankest impertinence

The Canton Asylum for Insane Indians was torn down long ago, and the place where it stood is now occupied by a municipal golf course. This roadside sign and a bronze plaque are the only tangible evidence the institution ever existed. Photo by Ruth Van Steenwyk of Aberdeen, South Dakota, taken September 3, 2018.

for the attendants to make any suggestions." He could run Canton Asylum like a dictator and manage to fool most of the world into thinking he was doing a good job. Here again, his patient population was at a disadvantage. Few spoke English fluently, and most were uneducated. Some managed to send letters to relatives and even to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, but Hummer easily deflected any complaints or accusations patients made by pointing out that the writers were insane. There were no Native psychiatrists who could challenge him, and even the most loving relatives were hampered by language, distance, and poverty. Few patients received visitors who could raise a stink; they were left to receive whatever care the staff wanted to give them.

It represented an amazing turnaround, then, when in 1933 the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent out press releases with headlines like "Sane Indians in Asylum" and "Director Says Indians 'Chained to Pipes.'" Between 1902 and 1933, the status quo had obviously exploded.

Attendants had mistreated patients in various ways for the entirety of the asylum's life, and this could be addressed through reforms. But even the most determined advocates couldn't change its environment. In 1909 Dr. Turner's replacement, Dr. Hardin, discovered a woman confined to bed in such miserable filth that maggots were crawling around in her feces. This happened while Dr. Hummer was on vacation, and Dr. Hardin did his best during that absence to oust Hummer from his position. Hardin got employees to sign a petition requesting the Indian Bureau investigate the situation and later got a group of employees to swear out nineteen charges against Hummer. They included allegations

It seems clear that he was a man in love with authority, and at this faraway outpost [Dr. Hummer] got a chance to exercise it unchecked.

that Hummer gave patients insufficient rations and overcrowded the dormitories. One allegation specifically charged Hummer with gross neglect in the case of the female patient with maggots.

An inspector did come out and discovered that many of the allegations were true. He told his superiors Dr. Hummer wasn't the right man for the job and should be replaced. Then for the first time the Commissioner of Indian Affairs sent a medical inspector to look at the facility. That inspector also felt there was a significant problem at the institution due to Dr. Hummer's mistakes and temperament. He didn't outright suggest that Hummer resign, but he didn't oppose it, either. He concurrently recommended the Indian Bureau point out Hummer's mistakes and chastise him, and that was the suggestion the Bureau took up. The Commissioner sent Dr. Hummer a stiff letter, and that was the end of it. Dr. Hardin resigned and Dr. Hummer stayed in charge.

Many similar inspections and negative reports followed, but so did glowing reports from friendlier inspectors. One committee from the nearby town of Sioux Falls assured the Indian Bureau that even though language barriers prevented them from actually speaking to the patients, committee members were sure by their attitudes that they were fond of Dr. Hummer and his staff. Canton's local newspaper always gave positive coverage. Hummer seemed invincible, and by 1933 he was entrenched in the local community and its affairs. With a Depression going strong the entire town would do all it could to keep the asylum open, and by that time, as the only medical director the asylum had ever had, Hummer was identified strongly with the asylum.

His patients were still helpless. Even though the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 gave Native peoples citizenship, individual states controlled their right to vote. Many imposed barriers (like literacy tests) to prevent it, and it wasn't until the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 that any significant protections were put in place. Patients and their families were still poor, uneducated, and without medical cultural authorities who could defend their behaviors to outsiders.

But certain critical mindsets had altered. In 1908 a highly educated Yale graduate, Clifford Beers, wrote a book about his experiences in an insane asylum, which began with his being held in a straitjacket for 15 hours when he first arrived and continued with his having to sleep in one for the next three weeks. Beers became a vocal and powerful advocate for mental health care reform. With the advent of the Progressive era, muckraker journalists used their platforms to attack monopolies, child labor, industrial corruption, the rampant adulteration of food and drugs, and the truly stomach-churning practices of the meatpacking industry. Reform was everywhere.

There was even reform for Native Americans. In 1908 an important ruling affirmed their water rights when they moved to reservations, and an examination of tuberculosis among the pop-

ulation found disturbingly high rates, triggering attention to other health issues. Funding for medical services increased enormously, from $40,000 in 1911 to $350,000 by 1918. Even the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was not immune to investigations, with Commissioner Robert Valentine finding himself on the receiving end of two separate examinations instigated by President Taft and the Justice Department, in 1912.

Attitudes toward Native culture were also changing. Reformer John Collier joined a friend at Taos Pueblo in New Mexico in 1921 after appropriations for one of his programs in California dried up. There, Collier was impressed with the Pueblos' culture and appalled at their living conditions. That experience made him a vocal and effective advocate for Indian rights.

Other Progressives managed to raise their voices in support of Indian causes in various magazines, calling the government's treatment of them shameless and legalized robbery. They were attacking not just a person who might have mismanaged a program, but the entire Indian Bureau. In 1926 the Secretary of the Interior ordered a far-reaching investigation of conditions on all reservations and at all boarding schools. Collier and other reformers used the information it uncovered to great advantage in later clashes with the Indian Bureau. And in 1929, an exasperated Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Charles Burke, ordered a thorough investigation into Canton Asylum. This time it wasn't going to be conducted by anyone in the Bureau, friendly colleagues of Dr. Hummer, or even an agency in South Dakota. He asked for a staff psychiatrist from St. Elizabeths (the only other federal insane asylum) in Washington, DC.

The country's—and particularly the government's— changing

Placard which is the only reminder of the indigenous people who died at the Canton Asylum and were buried on its grounds in unmarked graves. Photo by the staff of On Being.

attitude toward Native peoples became critically important for the asylum. When Franklin D. Roosevelt began his first term in 1933, he did so with new ideas, new people, and a New Deal. Progressives and long-time Indian advocates like Harold Ickes and John Collier were appointed Secretary of the Interior and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, respectively. In 1933 as he prepared for his job as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Collier ran across the report from St. Elizabeths which had been gathering dust somewhere in the Indian Bureau. The inspector, Dr. Samuel Silk, had made some horrifying discoveries—-breakdowns in care which included a bedridden patient with a brain tumor padlocked in a room, a ten-year-old boy in a straitjacket padlocked in a room, and an epileptic girl chained to a hot water pipe, to name a few. Dr. Hummer, himself, had already admitted in an American Medical Association survey a couple of years earlier that he didn't have staff meetings, gave no training to nurses or attendants, and provided none for staff performing any kind of therapy. Silk discovered that Dr. Hummer kept few records, and let attendants make stereotyped psychiatric progress notes. One elderly woman on a 12-hour shift was responsible for two floors in the main building and two wards in the hospital.

Though Collier and Ickes were outraged by the findings, they were thwarted in their efforts to act on them by people who wanted to protect Dr. Hummer and/or keep the asylum open. During legal proceedings Dr. Silk went back to the Canton Asylum and found basically the same conditions he had found the first time. He had come with the additional task to re-classify patients so they could take a train to St. Elizabeths, but one of Canton Asylum's supporters managed to get an injunction against the move.

To overcome that obstacle the Department of the Interior began issuing national press releases which quoted details from some of Dr. Silk's findings. Suddenly it became a lot harder to make a case for keeping Canton Asylum open and supporters drifted away.

The government filed (and won) a brief to dismiss the injunction against the removal of asylum patients, Collier fired Hummer, and in late December a train arrived in Canton to take sixty-five patients to St. Elizabeths. The Canton Asylum for Insane Indians had stood firm from December of 1902 until April of 1933, when Collier became Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Once he took over, the facility only survived another eight months.

Canton Asylum's short history is complex and sad. This piece can by no means discuss all the factors that played into committing Native peoples there or the reasons for the dismal conditions that existed. However, one important factor that can't be denied is the Indian identity of its patients. In an era that assumed Native peoples were barbaric and inferior, government authorities were sure to trample over both their rights

In 1929, an exasperated Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Charles Burke, ordered a thorough investigation into Canton Asylum.

and their dignity. Of the 90 patients he examined, Dr. Silk believed only 25 - 30 of them were actually insane.

He believed that a good number of patients were only mildly affected with mental problems and could live on their reservations with their families. He believed that others whom he thought were mentally deficient should go to a facility set up for that sort of patient. Silk also pointed out that Canton's population was being judged "by the standards of the upper class of cultured white people." He asked, "Is it fair to keep them at Canton because some minor difficulty landed them there?

It was a good question. Silk found that many patients had originally come to the asylum because they had caused trouble on their reservations or had gotten drunk or assaulted someone. Dr. Hummer considered these patients mentally deficient because they couldn't read or write, though Silk pointed out that they worked at tasks with little or no supervision once they were at the asylum. Unfortunately, Dr. Hummer liked to keep his patients once he got them and kept them at the asylum whether he considered them insane or developmentally handicapped.

Yet, how could he tell one way or the other? He couldn't speak their languages and didn't ask for interpreters. Patients couldn't take any of the sorts of tests that might have pointed out their real issues. It seemed that Hummer couldn't be bothered to educate himself about Native cultural mores, which might have brought these differences into consideration.

For instance, silence and lowered eyes were perfectly acceptable Native behaviors in any circumstances So were long silences and minimal body movements. Hummer interpreted these things as indicative of low IQ or a mental condition. It's likely that many of Hummer's patients came before him in either a belligerent or confused state, which he would have attributed to insanity. These examples highlight only a few of the problems the culture clash would have created, but it's easy to see that fairness wasn't front and center in the admission process.

In fairness it's also necessary to say that that not every attendant was abusive or unfeeling, and considering the extreme poverty on many reservations, Canton Asylum may have been a better place for some patients to live. Some patients ended up at Canton Asylum because they had health problems their families and reservations couldn't address while the Asylum could. Some patients truly did have psychological conditions or needed help their reservations couldn't give them. For instance, for many years during this era, a medical condition like epilepsy was considered a form of insanity. No matter their race, people with epilepsy too often faced a lifetime in asylums until advances in medicine at last helped control their seizures.

Canton Asylum probably couldn't have existed except in the era it did. Still, its history provides a lesson for any age about how easily the balance of power can be disrupted for any group of people and the consequences when that happens.

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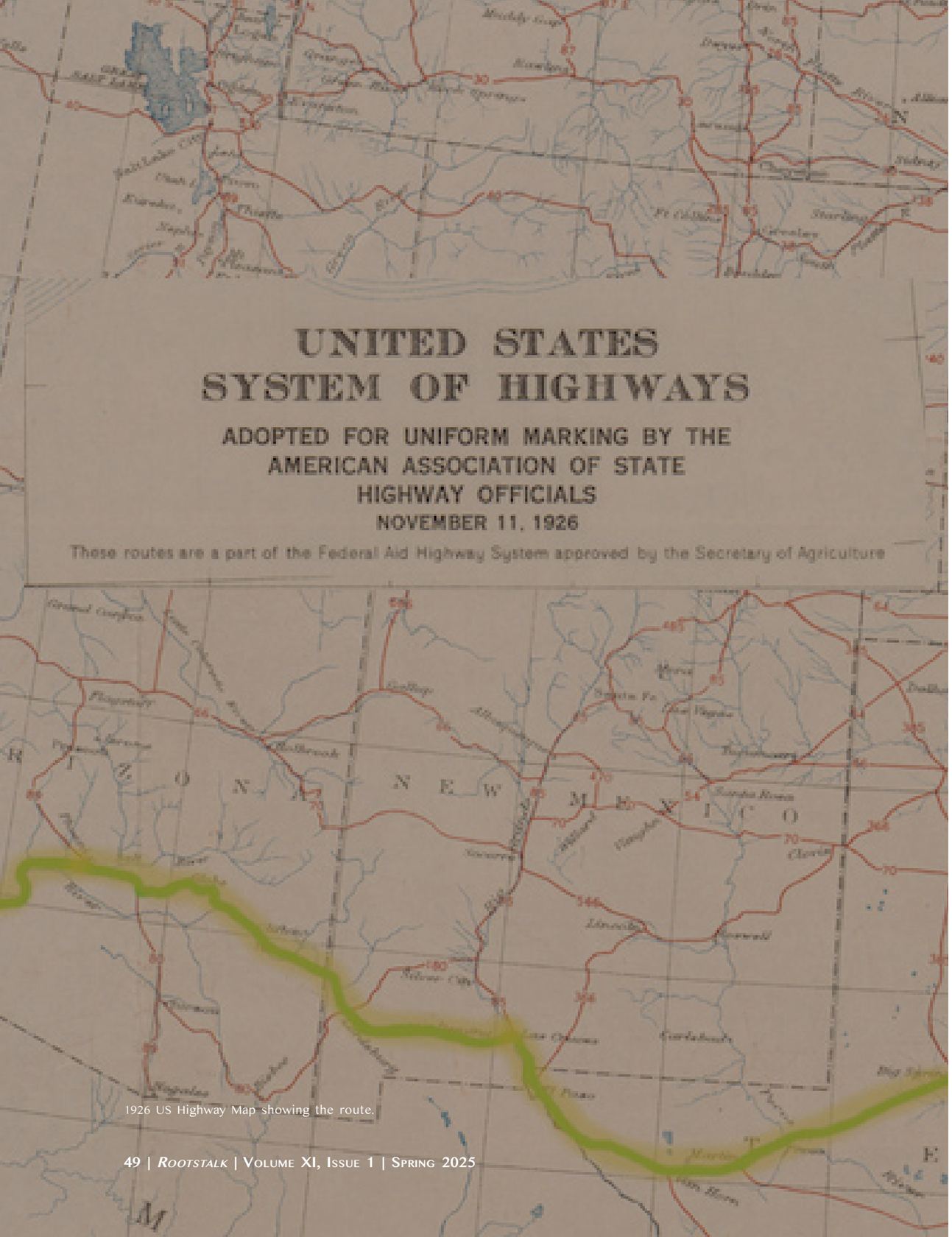
CARLA JOINSON is a freelance writer with a Masters Degree in History. Over the years she has explored topics ranging from, the effects of compassion fatigue in nurses to Civil War food shortages. She also enjoys fiction and is proud of winning one of Deadly Ink's annual short story competitions. Carla continues with her interest in the history of insanity and has published a short e-book, Little Lunatics, about children confined in insane asylums.



1926 US Highway Map showing the route.

Miriam McFate Travel Journal - 1926

In 1926 my grandparents, Clarence and Miriam Abia McFate of rural Poweshiek County, Iowa, built a 'home' on the back of what I believe was a Model TT Ford truck and moved the family (3 adults, 5 children, and a dog) to Long Beach, California. They traveled 2800+ miles over the span of 41 days, about 35 of those moving from camp-to-camp.

JOURNAL
By Mark McFate

The following text is taken from a transcript[1] of my grandmother Miriam's original journal.

This abridged Rootstalk edition of the family's travel ends on November 5 as the family passes from Missouri into Arkansas. Their travel through Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona has been omitted from this version of the text to better manage the length of the article. The daily transcript resumes on November 24 as the travelers pass from Arizona into California and the last days of their journey west.

Content has been sparingly edited for clarity – mostly things like placenames and probable transcription errors – and presentation.

The full text of the original transcript, with minimal edits plus additional insights and updates, can be found at 1926.mcfate.family, and a searchable McFate family tree is also available as part of tree.mcfate.family.

Foreword: Resourceful and Perseverant

I remember my father as the consumate DIYer, a genuine Jack-of-All-Trades, and master of many! Having read grandma's journal many times I see his skills and spirit were inherited, and passed on to me – albeit with less mastery. Whether that's a good thing or bad in my case, and in these complex times, I'm still uncertain.

The McFate family, like so many others "back in the day", was resourceful. Perhaps a testament to a simpilier time? Certainly a quality that served them well in both daily life, and as they ventured forth.

When compiling this text, and preparing content for 1926.mcfate.family, I counted 53 entries mentioning breakdowns – and subsequent repairs – related to tires, wheels, oil, electrical systems, and the engine of their Ford. They overcame all these things without significant assistance from others.

They were clearly persevevant, averaging 75 miles per day over 35 days of travel - a 9.4 MPH moving average - while managing to feed themselves (and others), shooting game near the roadside when it was acceptable to do so. They prepared most of their own meals, setup and broke camp 34 times, and even crafted simple toys for the kids to keep them occupied. Grandma had a hand in all of this while observing and recording innumerable details as you will see in her writing.

They were remarkably resourceful and perseverant, necessities of a simpiler life in a simplier time, and I envy that.

With the auto route traveling west, in a house built on a Ford with all modern convenience of camp life. Our house is equipped with a gasoline stove for cooking, a small wood heater for heating, 1 small medicine cabinet, with all necessities of a young hospital. Folding table and chairs, 1 day bed, used in day time as a seat and a place for our bed covers, when not in use. One cupboard and all cooking utensils including a pressure cooker. We fasten tent and camp cots on outside.

All in all we have a very comfortable way to travel. Not too fast but just fast enough for the most enjoyable time of our lives.

Following you will find each day's drive as we journey on.

-Miriam Abia McFate, *initial journal entry from Monday, October 18, 1926*

The family traveling west:

Miriam and Clarence McFate
Grover Tahash (brother of Miriam)
Mildred - age 14
Kenneth - age 12
Velma - age 8
Delmar - age 6 (the author's father)
Beulah - age 4
Jimmie the dog (and later on, Dallas, a terrier pup)

Monday, October 18, 1926

"Bid all good-bye." Left [home, in Sheridan Township, Poweshiek County, Iowa] at 1:47. Drove to the River-to-River Road and pulled to the road side[2] to wait for Clarence, who had gone into Grinnell. Built the fire as it was cold. Kept real comfee. Waited 1 hour. Soon got the move. Stopped at Victor for gas and oil. Got our groceries. Left Victor at 4:25. Drove to Ladora, Iowa. Pulled onto a free campground. Got our supper and went to bed. Did not use the tent. All bunked together. Pretty near the [railroad] track, so didn't really enjoy our rest. Has been cold and cloudy all day.

This 1926 image from *https://www.modeltcentral.com/model-t-ford-campers.html* is NOT a photo of the McFate party, but it depicts somewhat how I imagine they traveled and camped along the route.

Tuesday, October 19, 1926

Got up at 4:00. Got breakfast and ready for the road.

Started at 5:45. Just daylight. Had to detour south of Marengo. Had trouble with an oil leak. Drove through[3] a very hilly stretch of country. Detoured from Marengo through Williamsburg on to Iowa City. Sure had some hills got in Iowa City at 9:22 most of the way dirt roads, left Iowa City at 9:30. Drove on to a West Liberty, Iowa, campground at 10:55. Fixed a new gasket in the car to stop the oil leak. Ate dinner, started again at 12:30. Got in Davenport at 3:30. Sure have fine farm land around Davenport. Drove over pavement for 13 miles before reaching here. Crossed the Mississippi at 4:00. The children got their first glimpse of an elevated railroad. This is quite some city. Got our first taste of traffic.

Stopped in Rock Island, Illinois, for gas and oil. Discovered we had left our tent over on the Iowa side. Took it off to look at the oil and forgot to put it back. Had to drive back after it. A black cat crossed our pathway during our drive into Davenport and I suppose if we were superstitious our tent would have been gone. Drove on until dark. Engine missed, no lights, so pulled up to a farm house. Asked to camp in barn yard. These people are afraid we would steal their farm so we had to drive to another house. These people were civilized and let us in.

Went into camp at 6:25 put up the tent. Got supper, popped a pan of pop-corn. Went to bed. Had a good rest.

Is sprinkling so suppose will have more rain.

Cold and chilly all day.

Wednesday, October 20, 1926

Got up at 5:00. Did not rain much. Got breakfast. Boys located the trouble, short somewhere in the engine. Sure are fine people here, gave us a pan of pears and a pan of onions. Started at 7:30. Drove on to Aledo, Illinois. Stopped and got some groceries, left Aledo at 8:55, stopped for gas and oil at a filling station four miles this side of Little York, Illinois. Drove on to Monmouth, Illinois, stopped at 11:00 and oiled up, fixed the left hind tire. It slipped forward about an inch, was afraid it would damage the valve. Started again at 11:25. Stopped for dinner 12:30 and discovered we had left our dog. Every dog has his day so suppose this will be Jimmie's. Eat our dinner and started on.

To show you how good and smooth these roads are will tell you what I did, I peeled potatoes. Started the fire in the heater and put the potatoes on to boil.

Clarence is at the wheel, coaxing the Lizzie on about as fast as it will travel. Will have potatoes ready to eat when we stop for dinner.

Stopped for dinner 12:30 and discovered we had left our dog. Every dog has his day so suppose this will be Jimmie's.

Eat our dinner and started on. Seen lots of threshing yet to be done. Lots of grain growing in the field. Fine country and fine farm dwellings along this road. The road runs in all directions. Not like they do in Iowa. Could see lots of three cornered fields. They are not particular about every road going straight with the direction, but they sure have real roads.

We stopped in Good Hope, Illinois, and oiled up the truss rods at 1:55, put another lug on the tire that kept slipping, and went on.

Passed Macomb, Illinois, a city of 8,000 population at 2:30, drove on till 5:30, stopped at Fredricks, Illinois. No camp ground so pulled up on the side of the road by an oil station.

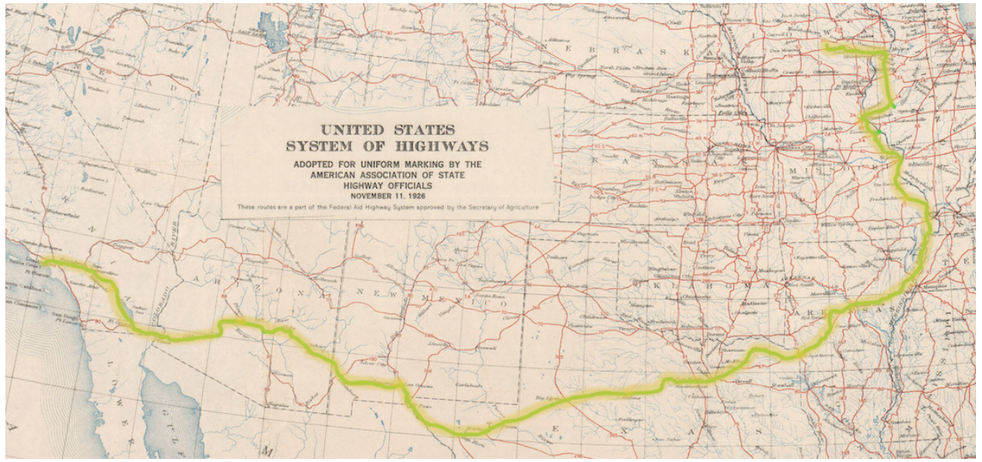
No camp ground so pulled up on the side of the road by an oil station.

Found out the levee on the Illinois River had gave way flooding Beardstown. So are undecided about what to do, got our supper. Grover and Clarence went up to town to see what they could find out about the other side. Went to bed.

Sun shone a little this afternoon but is still cold.

Thursday, October 21, 1926

Didn't find out much last night So got breakfast. Grover, Clarence, Mildred and Kenneth walked down to the ferry to see what it looks like. Have three miles to walk before we can find out anything. Seems as tho 2 no one in this town knows much. This burg is sure among the hills. They told us the water was so high that the streets in this town were under water, three miles from the main river. Have had rains thro here just lately. Had a heavy frost here last night. But the sunshines nice and bright this morning. The folks just returned and we can't make it across so will drive around thro Quincy, Illinois. It makes a long drive around, but guess its the long way for us this time.



1926 US Highway Map showing the route.

The river was sure wild. Beardstown on the other side is all under water. The levee broke and just played cane with this route. One man the folks talked with said you had to wear boots to get to the Hotel. Started 9:30. Drove back to Rushville nine miles. Drove on to Mt. Sterling, Illinois. Stopped at 11:30 This is quite a nice little town. Passed a real apple orchard. Looked like enough apples in this one orchard to supply all United States.

Nice laying farm land around Mt. Sterling. Good corn. This is in Brown County. We stopped in Clayton, Illinois, for dinner [at] 12:15. 1:00 drove on. At Camp Point, Illinois, one sign read, "Go slow, see our city. Go fast and you'll see our jail." There are little towns about the size of Newburg, Iowa. Drove from 10:00 this morning till 2:30 this afternoon without throwing into low.

Passed the Moorma's Mineral Mixture Experimental Station. This was quite a sight. Had 12 different hog houses, each house had hog tight fence. Each lot had 8 or 10 hogs. You could see the difference too. Some were lots better than others. Had nice building every where on this farm. This is north of Quincy, Illinois.

Corn is badly blown down near Quincy. Had two bad bridge detours just before entering this city. One place was so narrow we almost ripped the left side curtain off. Went into Quincy at 3:00 Took 20 minutes to drive thro here. population in 39,131. Had to pay 40 cents toll to cross the bridge. The old Mississippi river is surely a wonderful sight. The children seen their first steamer, tow boat and barges today.

This puts us over on the Missouri side. Gas [is] 2 cents higher on this side of the river. Drove on over a very hilly stretch of road. Came up a very steep hill across the railroad, a very dangerous one too. Are traveling on the ridge of the Ozarks.

Missouri is surely awful rough. Stones and bluffs. We pulled into camp at Palmyra, Missouri, at 6:00. Another party here from Louisiana. Got supper. Went to bed. Sun shone a little today.

Friday, October 22, 1926

Ready to travel 7:30. Drove through a very hilly stretch. Lots of corn in the shock through this district. The farms are close together, buildings very small. Pears through here 50 cents a bushel, every farm has a small pond, lots of timber also. Good paved roads from Palmyra to Hannibal, Missouri.

Hannibal is some city, it has one of the largest shoe manufacturing plants in the world. It is built right in the bluffs. The street we came down, every house has from ten to twenty steps before you could enter the door. Nice large houses, most of them are new. Lots of negroes here. Stopped here to find out about the roads, one dose of having to drive back is enough. Changed tires, had one rim cut. Population is 19,306, left Hannibal [at] 10:00.

Hills and then more hills, the road here winds around through the hills. Little land that would do for farming here, you can look out any direction and see timber for miles and miles, don't know what they are making a living from. Mostly cows and chickens, I think are their main stave. Lot of people living along the roads here just the same.

Had our first blowout just outside New London, Missouri. Most everybody in Missouri raises geese and ducks, and lots of chickens too. Got our first glimpse of a real rock bluff. The roads through here are very good, mostly rock and gravel. Got dinner while the boys fixed the tire. Stopped [at] 10:20 put the tire on, discovered it had another leak, so had to take it off again.

Left at 1:00. Over one and a half miles of new road just opened. Of course our luck isn't all good luck, so into a chuck hole we went, had to push out. Got it started and on again, soon drove onto pavement this makes us all feel better. Drove over pavement for about three miles, then on to a detour round and round the sharpest corners, twist and turns. This road took us out into the Ozarks again. Came around one corner and over a bridge so sharp it was almost an impossibility. The roads are well marked and it's a blessed good thing too, because it would be almost impossible to avoid serious accidents if it was not for these warnings. These roads are full of sharp rocks, people here call them cobble stones. Had more tire trouble with the same tire, nothing more than we expected this time. Had to change tires again, had a dickens of a time this time. Boys are getting disgusted with our tires, so it won't be long before we hit each bump twice (hard tires, see). [They're] getting pretty sour over the matter, so I'm making a little chocolate fudge to sweeten them up a little, when the trouble is over.

Fixed at last, drove on, luck follows most fools and so it is with us. We came upon a construction gang putting in new pavement, and… O-boy of all the bumps and thumps we did get, things out of the cupboard and cabinet just flew, luck was with us nothing broke. But Oh! what a mess, had to stop and straighten things around.

On again into Frankford, Missouri, stopped here for gas and oil.

Have a detour from here to

O-boy of all the bumps and thumps we did get, things out of the cupboard and cabinet just flew, luck was with us nothing broke. But Oh! what a mess, had to stop and straighten things around.

Louisiana, Missouri, won't make much mileage today, we are 120 miles yet from St. Louis. These detours sure do take in the miles over everything. This state is chuck full of rock. Never did see so many before in all our lives. Lots of people living through here, but guess they don't know there are lots better places to live. All a fellow has to do is get away from home to realize how big this world is and how little of it we have seen.

Down again, went through a chuck hole before we got out of town, the spare tires drug till the strap broke, so had to stop again. Made another effort to remove ourselves from this God forsaken country, didn't have any better luck this time. Had to push, but that didn't do any good. They monkeyed with the engine, finally found we were having timer trouble. Cranked it, and the little old Ford rambles on once more.

When you're not going up you're going down in this state. Go two miles to get one. On we go, up hill and down round and round. We have all of Missouri we care for. Thump, thump down goes the tire again. This is the third time today, don't think we'll get much further today. Change to another tire, maybe this one will take us into camp.

On we go [and] have 5 miles to go before we reach a campground. It is growing dark, it soon overtakes one in these hills. Drove up one grade, a gradual climb for one mile before we entered Louisiana, Missouri. Got dark and we had quite a time finding a campground. Finally got settled for the night, 6:30.

We saw the old fashioned rail fences today, on our whole day's drive, have seen very few desirable places to live. The only place we saw any corn was in the low lands or along the bottom of some creek or river. You can see along these where the water has been very high.

As for thrills, Missouri has some, as you can't see very far ahead at a time and lots of time you come unto unexpected curves, lots of narrow bridges. There was hardly a cross road entering on the road we traveled. Don't know how these people reach this one and only main road. They told us in Frankford, Missouri, we couldn't miss the road and I guess we couldn't as it was the only one.

This has been a bright sun shiny day, but cold in the wind.

There was hardly a cross road entering on the road we traveled. Don't know how these people reach this one and only main road. They told us in Frankford, Missouri, we couldn't miss the road and I guess we couldn't as it was the only one.

Saturday, October 23, 1926

This morning finds us up and ready to start. This is a nice campground, on a corner block, 27 blocks from the heart of the city. The city lies on the Mississippi and has a population of 5,000, lots of Negroes here. The Starks Brothers Nursery, one of the largest in the U.S. is located 5 miles from this city. We were lucky enough to camp on the corner, where the men wait for the bus. This is a six wheel tractor bus owned and operated by the Stark brothers for the sole purpose of taking their help to and from work. There was 25 or 30 men in this bus. Don't know how many more they pick up, but had room for many more.

Left the campground at 7:20 drove back into the city. This is an awful smoky city, can't see more than 6 blocks ahead. Stopped at a filling station for gas and air, while here saw 3 more Stark Brothers buses, 2 of these buses were for women. None quite as large as the first one.

91 miles from St. Louis left at 7:50. Traveling on U.S. number 61, from here had to stop at a railroad crossing just out of time. The bluffs along here 150 ft. high, as near as we could judge. These are the highest we have seen. This road took us for a mile right along the Mississippi river. This was a wonderful sight. Had a nice level stretch for about 3 miles, then we came into a more rolling country, then into the hills, but nothing like yesterday.

More farming through here than we have seen since we got in Missouri. The corn is fair. Some oats in the shock yet, growing here just the same as in Illinois. Lots of pears and apples here. Drove along one creek this morning that was quite a sight for us. The bottom was layers of flat white rock. Water as clear as a crystal. Drove on into the bluffs, drove out again onto the level just before we struck the town Eolia. Think this mostly Negroes, the name surely is a Negro name at any rate.

Stopped and got some groceries. On again [at] 9:55, 35 miles more to pavement. Have had a real wind storm south of Eolia, the corn for a short stretch is completely flat. Up hill and down all the way from Eolia to Flinthill, lots of fields of soybean and alfalfa here. Had to stop along the road to fix the lugs on the hind wheels, we are having trouble keeping them from slipping. This goes to show we are traveling over rough roads. These roads are natural rock, crushed rock, and gravel.

Passed a log cabin on our way this morning. Lots of rail fences through here. We crossed Cuivre River, where the corn had been completely submerged. The corn in these fields are worthless. 11:36 had to stop along the road, coming up a long grade, for a flat tire. When we stopped discovered the other tire was about off. Got dinner while the boys fixed them up. Ate dinner, started again [at] 12:15. We are one mile from the town of Troy, Missouri. Stopped for gas in Troy.

On we go, up hill and down. Country about the same from Troy to Moscow. Detour from here to Old Monroe, every bridge we have crossed in Missouri has been very narrow just room enough for one rig. I think they have been saving on bridge material. The farther south and east we go the poorer gets the corn.

Whiz ——— out goes a tire. Stopped [at] 2:00, O Boy! This is great. You don't know the half of touring till you have lots of this kind of luck. The kids are making good use of these Missouri stones, using someone's chicken coop as a target. Tire changed and gone again [at] 2:20. Lots of fall seeding being done through this section.

We rounded a curve over a bridge and up a steep rocky grade. Got half way up and pushed into low, it refused to take hold. So here we are stalled again. Blocked our wheels, lightened our low band, gave her a push, hopped in and on we go.

The country south of old Monroe is more level, more farming done through here. Lots of Jersey cows through all sections which we have passed through. Came unto the pavement 41 miles from St. Louis at 2:10. Oh Joy! We're all glad. This land right through here lays as nice as any Iowa land. Better farms and things look more prosperous.

Bang! Bang! Blow out! We're having a lovely time, believe this or not. This gives me lots of time to jot down all I would like to write. This all happened 20 minutes after we hit the pavement, guess we all felt too hilarious over better roads. I have often wondered why some people speak of Missouri as misery, I know the reason now.

Things all patched up and ready to ramble again. 2:45 it is sprinkling again. Lots of cars on this road, and this is paved clear to Kansas City. Stopped at the first filling station, fixed up some tires started on, 3:15. This road runs right along the railroad track, up hill and down, just the same way only we're on pavement and don't notice it quite so much. This has been a nice drive to St. Charles, the farm land through here is about the same.

Drove into the campground at 5:30, set up tent, got supper.

Popped corn and spent the evening laughing over our days drive. Camped within one half mile of the Missouri River, could see both the railroad and drive bridge. These are large 5 span bridges. We sure do enjoy these sights.

Went to bed.

Steady rain most of the night.

Came unto the pavement 41 miles from St. Louis at 2:10. Oh Joy! We're all glad. This land right through here lays as nice as any Iowa land. Better farms and things look more prosperous.

Sunday, October 24, 1926

Started this morning at 9:00. Drove 7 or 8 blocks, crossed the river, 50 cents toll for our gang on this bridge. This is some muddy old river, about 1/4 mile wide, 18 miles from St. Louis, good pavement all the way. Still traveling over hills and around curves. Filling stations, bill boards and eating houses every few miles. If one goes hungry, runs out of gas, or loses his way, it surely is his own fault.

Hundreds and hundreds of cars on this drive pass us going both ways, 8 miles from the heart of St. Louis. Have no free campgrounds here, 50 cents a day, some places a dollar. Pulled into the Sundown camp and parked, will stay here while Clarence and Grover locate the folks. Had our dinner, kids are trying to enjoy themselves while waiting 1 [and] 1/2 hours.

Honk! Honk! Here comes Jack and Mr. Carnes, we got into their car, dirt and all and away we went into the city. And I'll say, "St. Louis is a real city". Traffic of every description, and this is Sunday. Don't know what it is like on a week day.

We finally got down to the house and we are all glad. Spent the rest of the day visiting.

Monday, October 25, 1926

Didn't get up so early, we all enjoyed our night's rest. Went out to camp, gathered up our dirty clothes and brought them back and washed.

Clarence, Jack and Grover have been out seeing the city and looking for some tires to suit their needs. We girls are going sight seeing tomorrow.

Tuesday, October 26, 1926

This is another day in the city, and nothing much to do today but visit. The boys did not find what they wanted, so we girls will have to wait for our trip till tomorrow.

Essie and I went down to their part of the city, this is one of the suburbs. There is all kind of stores, any direction you may care to go.

Did not go to bed till midnight.

Wednesday, October 27, 1926

This morning Jack took Clarence and I out to see the city, and we saw a most wonderful sight. First we took the street car down to the heart of the city. I wouldn't dare say how many cars and busses this city operates, but it surely is an enormous number. The street car company alone employs 5,000 motor men and conductors.

We got off the street car and went into Woolworths Ten Cent Store. Such a variety I never did see. One wonders where so many things come from and how they can get so many different things in one store. This store has four floors, each floor loaded with 10 cent articles. You only have to stay a few minutes to get an idea of how these kind of stores are patronized. We left this store and went on to one of the larger department stores. Here we got our first ride on a moving stairway. This surely was a new idea.

There was two stairways, one going up and one going down. If you wanted to go up, all you had to do was step on and stand perfectly still and up you would go. All one did was be in readiness to take a step or two right at the top of the landing so you wouldn't loose your balance. These have steps just like ordinary stairways, only not such a straight steep step. This gives the party ahead a chance to step up to let the person behind have a chance to step on.

This is an ideal rest for weary

Photo in St. Louis's Forest Park. Left to Right: Beulah, cousins Francis (age 1) and Hazel (age 6), Delmar, and Velma.

We left this store and went on to one of the larger department stores. Here we got our first ride on a moving stairway. This surely was a new idea.

shoppers. We went up three floors then we took an elevator. Have been in these before so this was no thrill.

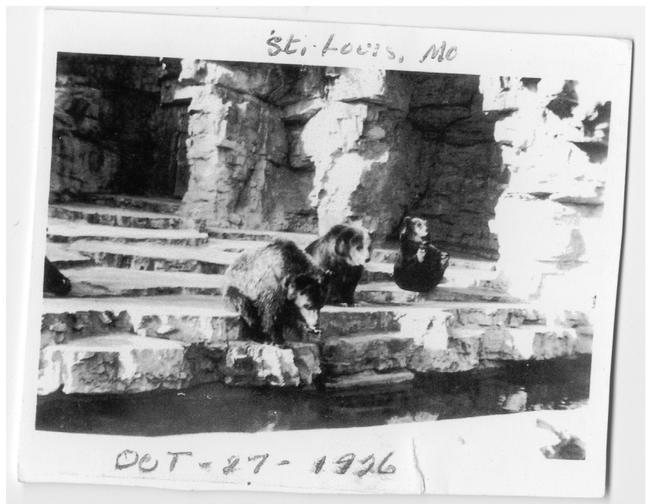
We went from here to the Railway Exchange Building, this is next to the tallest building in St. Louis. The Bell Telephone [building] is considered the tallest. We took the elevator and up we went 21 stories. That took us up to the top story, but still this didn't quite satisfy us, so we paid 25 cents a piece for a ticket to go to the roof. This entrance took us out onto the next roof, then we climbed two flights of stairs. Oh my! How the wind did blow, had to hold our hats to keep them from blowing away. This put us up above the city. We could see for miles and miles in all directions. This was well worth the price and a sight we'll never forget. We could see the old Mississippi winding its way through two cities, [East] St. Louis, Illinois, on the other side of the river is a large city all its own. When we looked out over the city, people and automobiles look like miniature toys. We could see cars passing over the bridges between the two cities, and it surely made one think of a busy ant hill. If one has ever stopped to watch these busy little fellows, you have an idea of how things looked to us from this point. We came back to the elevator, and down we came.

The elevators are mostly run by Negro girls. I'm afraid this kind of job would make me seasick, but suppose a person would get used to it.

We spent all forenoon bumming around looking at the sights. Got back in time for dinner.

After dinner Mr. Carnes took the children and us out to Forest Park, this is one of the largest parks in the state. They have a large zoo here too, the kiddies all enjoyed seeing the animals, especially the bears. Had four different kinds. Nature itself could have produced no better homes for these animals. These pits were built in the side of a hill, just like a place in the wilderness where bears would habitat. Large openings in the rock lead back into their dens. Each den had a stream of running water, they seemed perfectly contented. We saw most every kind of bird there was, had a house built purposely for these. This is a beautiful park with some of the loveliest drives we ever had an opportunity to drive over. This park consists of 1,500 acres. This was the park in which the Worlds Exposition was held in 1904. We spent most of the afternoon here and we have enjoyed this day.

Went visiting in the evening, over to Kesters, these are the people who were with Jack and Essie when they visited with us this summer. Went to bed late.



At the St. Louis Zoo. Notice the bear that has a hold of his toes. We had been throwing bread to them. They would sit up and beg. When we didn't pay much attention to them, they would perform and try to attract our attention. That was the way I caught this one.

Thursday, October 28, 1926

This day finds us ready for another sight seeing day in the city. Mr. Carnes took the children, Essie and I in his Nash car, the boys took the Ford and away we went to the Chain of Rocks. This is on the Mississippi River, out from the city about 12 miles. It is where the water is purified for use in the city.

We drove up on the main heights to take a look over all. This was a very pleasing sight. We could see where the Missouri and the Mississippi came together.

The water is pumped from the river into large vats or tanks. Lime and iron and other purifying chemicals are added to these. We could see where a large stream of lime and another stream of iron were running into the vats to be carried on into the water.

We went into the pumping station, and of all the wonderful pieces of machinery we beheld. To give you some idea of the size and capacity of these pumps, will give a few figures we got at the station. Each pump will deliver 30 million gallons of water in 24 hours. Each pump is 375 horse power. These were installed in 1895 by the Allis Chalmers Co. They are of the crank and fly wheel type. We stood and watched these pumps while in action. Down below us 45 or 50 feet was a large room containing machinery to operate these pumps. There are eight in all, but not all are used at one time. They can use one or any number that is needed at any time. There are three of these pumping stations.

This is the number of gallons of water pumped at each station a week:

Chain of Rocks - 840,790,000.
Bissella Point - 496,118,020.
Baden - 314,751,600.

This gives one some idea of the amount of water it takes for use in this city. This water is run through these purifying tanks, then run into a large outside tank, there are 8 of these 28,835 rods[4] in length and width, and 8 feet deep. Each one contains different chemicals and is let from one tank to the other during the process. One can easily see the difference in each tank of water. It is finally pumped into a clearing station before it is forced into the city for use.

'This was taken along the Mississippi River. These men just came across in a motor boat and I took this just as they were landing. This was a wonderful sight. We could see from the place where we were standing where the Missouri River entered into the Mississippi. The dark place on the other side where I marked the arrow was an island.'

No one can realize the vast importance of these purifying plants, until they see this awful muddy water that comes from the Mississippi. We were very fortunate to be there at a time when they were cleaning one of these receiving tanks. It is amazing, the mud and sediment that collects in these tanks. The mud was from four to five feet deep in places. A part of this tank had been cleaned. They had tractors and team busy at work removing this mud. These are cleaned every 6 months.

The men that invented these chemicals for purifying were brothers. They have worked so long and unceasingly at this one thing, that both have lost their mind. It surely seems a pity that when one works so faithfully for the welfare of others and accomplishes such a wonderful feat as this one is, not to be able to enjoy the reward for such a service.

We have had a wonderful time and have learned a lot. We left here and drove out to camp for dinner. Had a good picnic dinner. Cleaned up things and came back to Jack's. On our way home we got a chance to see the city after it was all lit up. This is one thing St. Louis has failed on, it has a poor lighting system. Have some electric lights and some gas lights. A man lights these gas lights about 4:30 in the afternoon, and turns them out again in the morning. New electric lights are being installed, so they expect to have better service soon.

Traffic is terrible in this city after 5:00. This is the time of day when people are ready to go home from work. Was glad to get home safely.

This has been an unlucky day for people in this flat. One of the motormen that stays here, ran over [a] Negro woman tonight about 6:00. Did not kill her instantly but they say she cannot live.

Clarence and Jack went down

town and while there Jack was trying to help some of the boys from his street car run remove a wrecked auto from the street. It had been hit by a street car. In some way Jack got his right leg pinned in between the car and a water plug. He came very near having it broken. Has got a very bad bruise.

Friday, October 29, 1926

This has been a really gloomy day in the city, very hazy [and] looks like rain. Clarence and Jack went down to the auto club to get a routing out of St. Louis.

Have tires changed and we are ready to ramble. They went out to camp and brought back our Ford, we start traveling again tomorrow.

We have had a wonderful time while here. Boys went down to the bowling alley after supper, we girls went to bed.

Rained most of the night.

Saturday, October 30, 1926

Bid Essie and the kiddies goodbye. We are leaving in the rain, Jack went with us as far as the outskirts of the city. Left here [at] 7:00.

We traveled all forenoon through just such country as we had north of St. Louis. Rained till 10:00. Have had quite a lot of brake trouble this morning. The brake bands we put in proved to be a little too heavy. Ate dinner at 12:20, at a filling station 5 miles from Bonne Terre, Missouri.

Have traveled on the ridge of the Ozarks, over good pavement all morning. This country is full of timber. We have surely seen Mother Nature dressed in her best. The trees in all the colors are beautiful, beyond description.

We have surely seen Mother Nature dressed in her best. The trees in all the colors are beautiful, beyond description.

Most oak, walnut, ash, hickory and some pine found in these timbers. Lots of it has been cut over. The road winds round and round, timber on both sides. No farming land through here at all. Wish you all were here to make the drive with us, as it surely is grand.

We passed a very interesting place near Bonne Terre, Missouri. We first noticed enormous piles of sand, we wondered what they were doing with such a quantity of sand. Curiosity got the best of us so we stopped and asked a man who was passing us. He told us it was waste from the lead mines. This one mound covered three or four acres, it was about a 150 feet high. A track was built up to the top of this and a long tunnel like house over the track. Through this the sand is hauled and dumped on top of the mound. We could see several other mines from our Ford, but they were further away than the first one. This sand is a lead color, not like ordinary sand.

We passed on into another little town, this is through the lead and iron mines. We could easily see the difference, the iron mines have red waste soil, while the lead is a gray waste. The country through here is vastly populated, all houses built in this town are very small. We could see the shafts leading into the mines here.

Left this town on dirt roads. This road was full of chuck holes and we had to drive slow up hill and down, it jolted the bottom of our cupboard loose and we nearly lost our fruit.

People do more farming through this section. Have 26 miles of this dirt road to travel. Didn't make a town by dark so pulled into a school yard to camp. The water is running across a low place in the road near our camp. Bluffs and timber all around us.

We had a look into an Ozark Mountain school. I tell you it is not much like our Iowa rural schools either. Have long bench like seats and desk, no shades or curtains at the windows. In the center of the room is an oblong wood heater. Back in the corner of the room was piled a number of sticks of stove wood. This is the only room they have, no cloak room of any kind. The children thought they would not care to attend school here.

We got our supper and went to bed early.

Has been cold and gloomy all day. Looks like it might rain some more.

Sunday, October 31, 1926

Got up early. Did not rain, so we are all glad, ready to start at 7:00. Drove for about 8 miles and off goes a tire. These roads are awful, worst we have struck. Fixed it as best we could, drove on till we came to another oil station, one mile this side of Fredericktown.

Pulled up here and debated about what to do. Boys went up town to see if they could find something to help us out of our difficulty, came back nothing doing. Grover took the bus and went back to Flat River, Missouri, this is back 30 miles, to see if he could

This photo was noted as taken on November 15, presumably near Odessa, TX. Perhaps this is indicative of the route's condition in many areas?

pick up something. He got back at 11:00 that night, no tires.

Went to bed has been a nice day.

Sun has shone bright all day.

Monday, November 1, 1926

Did not get up very early. Got breakfast. We did up our work, changed things around in our house.

Boys went back up town, came back with new wheels, tires and tubes. These are real truck tires, 34 X 5. So we are in hopes our tire trouble ends here, changed wheels, this took some time.

Left here 3:46. Have 40 miles af pavement ahead of us, no town now for 24 miles. There are 7 filling stations in this 24 mile stretch. The country is about the same. We drive through a stretch of timber then out onto a little level stretch. Here will be a small farm, then back into the timber we go again. It is this way all along.

This is the only road we can see, it is wide and well paved. Lots of grades, we pulled one grade this afternoon in low for one mile and a half, not steep but winding up. This has been our hardest pull so far. Many places we can look ahead and see 2 or 3 'S' shaped curves ahead. Most of the road is built to avoid the worst hills, so it runs in all directions. We drove on till dark forced us to seek a camping place.

Drove for about 8 miles and off goes a tire. These roads are awful, worst we have struck. Fixed it as best we could, drove on till we came to another oil station, one mile this side of Fredericktown.

Pulled into a filling station to camp again, near Millerville, Missouri. Not many tourist camps in Missouri. Got our supper and went to bed.

Sun shone all day, but the wind has been disagreeable.

Tuesday, November 2, 1926

Up at 5:00, got breakfast. Just as I was ready to call the rest, rap a tap, tap at our door. I opened it and there stood 2 boys about 18 years old. They had slept in a car all night and were about frozen. Qne had a light cap and a sweater, the other had no coat of any kind, his cap was just an auto visor. They were hiking to St. Louis. I let them in, when they got warm they went their way.

It froze water here last night. This is something very unusual for this time of year the station keeper told us.

Ready to leave here at 7:00. Stopped in Jackson [at] 7:40 for groceries, Fixed the brake rods again. On gravel roads again. Drove on to Cape Girardeau. Country through here about the same, have 10 miles of pavement from here. More farming done through this section, quite a lot af corn, but not extra good.

Passed the Marquetta Cement Plant, and this is in a lime rock bluff. We could see the chunks they had blasted out ready to grind up. Lots of rocky bluffs as we drive along. Left the town of Fornbelt, Missouri. On dirt and gravel roads again. Had to stop and put some little do-dad on our engine to make it work better. On we go again. Still going up and coasting down. Engine stopped on us again, had quite a time to locate the trouble. Found a wire broke in the switch. Ate our dinner, started again [at] 1:00.

Drove on into a very level

Saw our first cotton fields this afternoon. Stopped and picked enough to send some back to the kids.

stretch. This land lays about like our finest land in Iowa. Saw our first cotton fields this afternoon. Stopped and picked enough to send some back to the kids.

This is planted in rows 2 feet apart and about 12 inches apart in the row, grows about 3 feet in height.

Everyone from the Mammy to the little children picks cotton. They have a long sack tied around their shoulders. This they drag along behind them. They pick it off and poke it in the sack. In each field is 1 or 2 wagons with a square rack on it. Each wagon has a pair of scales on it. In this they dump the cotton, it is hauled to the cotton gin this way.

Passed a lot of wagons as we go along, they load on all they can, pile up bang boards as high as it is safe to do so. Some haul awful big loads. There is hundreds of acres of cotton through here.

Lots of young peach orchards all through the southern part of Missouri. We have come out on a level stretch again. Our road now lays as level ahead of us as it has been rough behind us.

All houses through this section are tumble down affairs. Every house is built up on cement blocks, no other foundations of any kind, you can see clear under every one. Most of these are Negro homes. They don't know what paint is here in Missouri.

It would make you laugh to see them pick corn here, they only use a double box with 2 bang boards on the side, they straddle one row, then they pick up the down row. Most always see 2 at a wagon. Everyone we see working, works at it as though they hated the sight of corn. I would rather pick their corn then their cotton, this looks as though it would be an everlasting back breaking affair.

It is considered a good days work to pick 250 or 300 pounds of cotton. A good clean cotton picker can get 23-1/2 cents a pound, but he has got to be better than the average picker. 1,500 to 2,000 pounds to the acre is considered a good crop. They raise cotton here like we do corn in Iowa.

Pulled into camp on a vacant lot at New Madrid, Missouri. Have to work on our engine tomorrow. Three other parties here tonight.

Wednesday, November 3, 1926

Didn't get up very early this morning, got breakfast. The boys started work on the car. When along came two women tourists from Chicago, en route to Plant City, Florida. They were having trouble with their Ford. Stopped to find out where the garage was. Grover looked the things over, found out it was dangerous to drive it. The whole dashboard was broken so badly, they could hardly steer it. He went up town and got a new board and fixed it for them. We girls had company for 4 or 5 hours.

I washed our dirty clothes today. Lots of tourists going both ways. We are on the main highway so [we] see them all.

Have had a disagreeable south wind all day.

Thursday, November 4, 1926

Got up at 7:00. We did up our work, wrote some letters, helped the kiddies make some doll clothes. The boys got the engine together, but couldn't get it started. Will try again tomorrow. Have new neighbors for tonight, an old, old man and woman driving an old horse with a dilapidated wagon, They look as though they were nearly froze, I think they are pretty old for such jaunts.

This photo, presumably taken November 15 near Odessa, TX, appears to include Beulah and Delmar seated in the foreground, with Kenneth and Velma standing behind.

She begged coffee, enough for their supper. They wanted some meat, but did let them have this. She looks as though she might be part Gypsy. Hope the sun shines tomorrow for their sake, if not for ours.

Friday, November 5, 1926

Had to pay a $1.00 to have this old Ford pulled to get it started. Picked up and ready to leave here. The old lady begged some more coffee this morning. They just about froze last night. Had a heavy frost here, but the sun shines bright, so it will be warm after while. Gave them what wood we had left and a dollar bill. Maybe one good turn will bring us one. Poor old folks like this are to be pitied.

Left at 9:20, drove on through a very level stretch of country, about the same amount of corn and cotton raised here. Large patches of sunflowers too. No wonder they have nicknamed Missouri the "Hound Dog State", it surely is one. Everyone has 2 or 3. We don't see many horses, but lots of mules. All buildings and fences are ramshackle, don't see how people live in them. Wherever they use any paint it is of the most brilliant hues.

Have passed load after load of cotton going to the gins. Every way you look you can see Negroes at work picking, they have to pick this every 2 weeks. The bolls do not all burst open at one time, you can easily tell where it was picked a week ago. The white blossoms are scattered here and there, then where they are picking it looks like rows of little brown bare trees, and where they haven't picked it is just a confusion of white blossoms. Wish you could see these cotton fields, as it is surely is a sight.

No wonder they have nicknamed Missouri the "Hound Dog State", it surely is one. Everyone has 2 or 3. We don't see many horses, but lots of mules. All buildings and fences are ramshackle, don't see how people live in them.

We passed a great large transportation truck in the ditch this morning. I think the driver must have fallen asleep, as it was not a bad place and he was off on the wrong side of the road. It looked as if he had driven right into it. At any rate it will be a big job to get it back on the road.

This abridged Rootstalk edition of the family's travel is abbreviated here as the family passes from Missouri into Arkansas. Their travel through Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona has been omitted from this version of the text to better manage the length of the article. The daily transcript resumes on November 24 as the travelers pass from Arizona into California and the last days of their journey west.

The full text of the original transcript, along with additional insights, statistics, and updates, can be found at 1926.mcfate.family, and a searchable McFate family tree is also available as part of tree.mcfate.family.

November 5-23, 1926 - Arkansas, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona

Arkansas

A summary of travel through Arkansas included mention of cotton, cotton gins, and saw mills. Some of the farm land looked poor and neglected. They passed through an area with wheat, the first they'd seen since Illinois, and an area of irrigated rice.

Passing through Little Rock, AR, they were impressed by the capitol, the railroad bridge and separate bridges for street cars and for automobiles… "the best river bridges we have crossed. Lots of nice homes with names." Hot Springs was described as a lovely city with four magnificent hotels, bath houses, drinking fountains along one street providing steaming water; many crippled people here.

They encountered an area of high bluffs and large fir trees – "our first real mountain roads", and "drove 15 miles without passing a gas station, the greatest distance since leaving home." They mention Cotton and corn growing here, but the fields are very rocky.

Texas

On November 9 they crossed into Texas at Texarkana, "a nice clean city." Country more level than Arkansas, lots of cotton.

Paris, Texas, population 16,000 mentioned as "sure a fine city – cotton everywhere here." More cotton around Greenville; people here travel in covered wagons, have seen a great number; the men all have long moustaches and wear "real Texas hats we often see in pictures."

On November 11 they passed through Dallas – "a big old city" population 177,000. Gas for cars is sold everywhere, price 13 to 21 cents, lots of competition. Got to Fort Worth, a big city, but Miriam didn't include population numbers.

There are many references to prairie, but much of it was probably short-grass prairie, not like the tallgrass prairie in Iowa, and some of what they called prairie seems thistly and scrubby. There are also plenty of lime-

stone outcroppings, moving her to write "Texas isn't all prairie" and "much of the land west of Ft. Worth is good for nothing but pasture."

On November 12 near Ranger, Texas they spotted oil wells and a refinery. They mentioned "timber country here"; got to Cisco, TX, "about as large as Grinnell." Abilene, was their last real city until they got to El Paso and they were "back in cotton country." Around Colorado City, TX, there were massive painted signs on boulders with religious messages. Then, more cotton country; not much to see west of Westbrook TX, with few cars coming or going. Near Stanton, TX… Wide open barren country, nothing much but sage brush, shrubs and grass, "just one vast prairie."

In one 3 mile stretch they passed one filling station and one ranch house. "The only living thing we saw was a small white goat that maybe strayed from the flock. Didn't even see any birds."

Came to place where grass was very short and few shrubs, got first glimpse of prairie dogs.[5]

Got to the Rio Grande, another cotton area, including the Algodon Plantation of 5000 acres. Lots of Mexicans lived here, she observed, in little flat-roofed houses made from mud bricks (adobe). Along the Rio Grande approach El Paso seemed really nice – "If one had seen only this part of Texas, they would think Texas was a garden of Eden" – lots of big cottonwoods provide shade, and nice houses. El Paso – a town of 90,000 [2020 census was 678,000].

Reached Mesquite, TX, the boundary between TX and NM… "We bid old Texas goodbye. Don't know whether she was as glad to see us go as we were to leave or not. We sure were glad to get to another state even if it was full of Mexicans" who were picking cotton.

New Mexico

Well into New Mexico they "finally come to a stretch that we can call desert... Mostly sand, very short grass growing in spots, no trees or bushes. A little farther on came to an area with a lot of century plants and sagebrush. They're building a new road through here, but it isn't open yet and there are lots of detours.

"The sun shines so hot. The road is awful dusty. It is very hard for us to believe Thanksgiving and Christmas are so near. When we pass through the towns and see all the Christmas displays it seems funny to us...

Gila River – some ag here: cotton, corn and alfalfa. Several settlements of Indians – very poor, dirty, ragged.

Arizona

Long distances were mentioned in Arizona, terrible dust in the desert; cactuses of different varieties. Lots of Mexicans and lots of mountains were mentioned in Arizona.

Near Mesa, AZ, saw first oranges growing. Lots of people raising bees. Water from the Roosevelt Dam. The country between Mesa and Tempe is very nice, then Tempe to near Phoenix is desert again, then near Phoenix the country looks better again.

Delmar sitting on a fence rail holding Dallas, the pup that Kenneth found in a gunny sack.

"Great herds of stock cattle and milk cows too. We have seen many herds of sheep this morning, thousands in a flock. Each flock has a herdsman, they live in a little tent right out in the field. They stay with the sheep night and day."

"We crossed the Aqua Fria River, this river was perfectly dry. Like all the rest it is a shallow one and very wide." The bridge across it is 1/2-mile long.

The unabridged content of the journal resumes here as the family passes from Arizona into California for the remaining four days of their journey.

The full text of the original transcript, along with additional insights, statistics, and updates, can be found at 1926.mcfate.family, and a searchable McFate family tree is also available as part of tree.mcfate.family.

Wednesday, November 24, 1926

Nice and warm again this morning. Do not need any fires here. The sun is just coming over the mountains [at] 7:55. We have carbon to clean out of the Ford this morning, so will not get a good start for this day.

The mountains through here are a part of the Sierra Nevada. Did not start till 8:30. Drove out of this little railroad town into the desert. The grades on the railway are so steep they have an engine that stays at this little burg. They use it for an extra, it pulls up one grade and pushes the next freight back. This is what helps to make our mountain freight rate so high.

Drove on over more desert till we reach Dome, Arizona, 39 miles. Here we had to pass through some hills. We won't call them mountains now since we passed through the real ones Sunday. Have found out since [that] the elevation of the mountains are 4,800 feet. This is the highest point we had to pass.

From Dome to Yuma it is 26 miles. This is all desert except 3 or 4 miles through these hills. The Yuma desert is more like we think it should be. Nothing, only a very little desert grass and sand.

Stopped along here to help a man get his car started, then we drove on to Yuma. This is quite a large city for a desert city.

We crossed the Colorado River here. This is not a very large river, little larger than the Iowa. It is not as deep but is wider. The water is very red too.

Crossed the bridge at 2:30. Here we were held for inspection again. This time it was for plant inspection. Everyone has to be inspected before crossing the line. They do this to keep out plant disease and all destructive germ and bugs to plant life. We had to open all our suitcases, bags, boxes, and cupboard. They inspect everything. We had nothing, so they turned us loose. We were glad too because we have had no dinner.

We stopped a short distance from the inspection station and ate our dinner. This was our first dinner in California. We drove 6 miles thro the Colorado River valley. This is mostly farmed by Mexicans and Indians. They raise quite a lot of cotton.

We drove into the foot hills and desert again. Next town is 15 miles. Roads are very sandy. Lots of loose gravel. We finally came to a place where they were oiling the roads (what a blessing). This is all desert, just about the same as we have come through.

Drove on and on. We have come to a stretch of country where they have the sand storms we have heard so much about. The sand is piled in drifts. Some places 50 or 100 feet in height. I doubt whether a person could drive when the sand was blowing hard. It looks to me like it would be like driving in a blizzard. The wind is blowing a little this afternoon. It blows little drifts across the road, with just a little wind. This sandy area covers 10 or 15 miles.

The old road is lying right along this one. It is called a corduroy road. It is made of ties or slabs wound or tied together to form a road. Just room for one car. Every so often there would be a lap in this road, making it wide enough for two cars. On these laps were where one car had to wait for the others to pass. These laps were about 40 or 50 rods 3 apart.

Some of this road now is completely covered with sand. We are satisfied now that California is the only state through which we have come that has a desert like we expected to find.

We drove on till dark, pulled into a filling station camp, 9 miles east of Holtville, California. This is the gateway to the Imperial Valley. We can hear the water fall over the dam in the irrigation ditch from our camp. A Negro man and wife keep this station. They are real sociable people.

Thursday, November 25, 1926 - Thanksgiving Day

This surely does not seem like Thanksgiving to us. We could sooner believe it is the Fourth of July, it is so warm.

We started at 7:30. This valley is all farmed, they have 2,000 acres of head lettuce through the valley. Doesn't this sound fishy? Nevertheless it is true. Japanese at work everywhere. Some hoeing, some plowing and in other parts they were picking and packing. This all belongs to a company. They work this a good bit like the sweet corn at home. It sure is some sight. On the other side of our road are acres of grapes.

We stopped in Holtville for gas, 20 cents. Drove on through this valley all forenoon. Saw lots of stock, chickens, lettuce and fruit. Stopped about 7 miles east of Kane Spring, California, to fix a rod again. Got dinner while the boys were fixing it.

Sun sure shines hot out here on the desert. A shade is a blessing here. We had been told that California sun shine was a scorcher but never would believe it till today.

Drove on at 1:20. Drove on to some public scales to weigh our rig. The boys have been crazy to know just how much this has weighed. So thot we would find out free of charge. Clarence had just got it weighed when some fellow stepped around and charge him 25 cents. They thought it 25 cents worth of satisfaction anyway. Weighed 4900 lbs. without

Sign up along the way about duck hunting. Charge $3.00 a day for shooting ducks. They are so thick they claim you can't help but hit some. We were just 5 miles from where they were so thick, but was afraid if Grover went we'd be minus another gun.

Clarence and Kenneth.

After leaving here we came into a strip of desert again. We drove for 45 miles over real desert. Off to our north lay the Salton Sea. We drove all afternoon in sight of this. Came within a short distance of the shore, this was at the west end of it. It has no inlet nor does it have an outlet. Its water supply comes from springs. It is a great game resort. Sign up along the way about duck hunting. Charge $3.00 a day for shooting ducks. They are so thick they claim you can't help but hit some. We were just 5 miles from where they were so thick, but was afraid if Grover went we'd be minus another gun.[6]

After we left the sea, we came in to another valley. Here we passed great orange groves with yellow ones and green ones on the same trees. Grapes, dates, asparagus and onions all growing here. Acres and acres of them. This is at the foot of the mountains.

We can drive along and see spots of desert, drive a little ways further and see fields of splendid crops. This is where it has been claimed and where it has not. You'll never believe this till you see it with your own eyes. It sounds just like a fairy tale. It is amazing what a little water will do. To see the soil you would say it was impossible, it is such very fine sand.

This now is called the Coachella Valley. Lots of dairies here. This is a great date country. Fresh dates, 15 cents a pound.

The sun has dropped behind the mountains, so we will have to find a roost. Drove on to the little town of Coachella and found a campground, 6:00. This is not a very large place. Mostly Japanese and Mexicans. 6 other parties on the ground tonight.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Friday, November 26, 1926

It is cooler here this morning. It sure makes a difference down in a valley here in this country. Ready to go [at] 7:05.

This valley is watered from water that comes down from the San Joaquin Mountains. As we pass out of the city we could see the clouds sailing across the mountain tops. Some times we could see the peaks very clear, then a cloud came floating along and the mountain tops were invisible. We enjoyed watching them come and go. These mountains are all rock. 3 miles from Coachella to Indio is very nice country. Dates, grapefruit and onions are the main crops.

After we left Indo we came into more desert and sand hills again. This land through here sells for $30.00 an acre. From here we have a raise of 1,800 feet but it is so gradual one can hardly notice it. If it wasn't that we could look back and see the grade, one would hardly believe it. Nothing interesting along this strip.

We are 42 miles from Banning Mountains. Mountains all around us now. To look ahead it seems like it would be impossible to ever get across them. Most all the peaks here are hidden by clouds.

There is one fertile spot through here where they have English walnut groves. Here they have artesian wells for water supply.

We have drove for miles and still our mountains are in the distance. It looks as if you could drive into them in just a few minutes. We can drive and drive and still they look the same. This grade does not have such sharp curves, it winds up but more gradual and longer space between each curve.

15 miles to Banning. We drove through Vista Canyon. The wind is blowing a gale through here. It isn't a warm wind either. Right at the lowest spot in this canyon is a little fertile place. A big sign board here telling about the all-year summer resort. Just a little village all by itself. The Southern Pacific Railway runs through here.

The rocks in the highest peaks glisten like they had snow on them. We never did get to see the highest peak here as it was completely covered with clouds. This is called the Crystal Mountains. One of the most beautiful things we ever saw or expect to see, was a rainbow flashing up the mountain side. Sometimes we cannot see all the tops on account of passing clouds. Never have seen the color so brilliant. This seems to come right up out of the desert on this side of the mountains. This truly is a wonderful sight.

Left to right: Delmar, Velma and Beulah. Date and location are unknown, but the terrain and vegetation reminded me of portions of Iowa, Illinois or Missouri.

We stopped at a service station a short distance on. One can tell by the trees here, that they have some terrific wind, it always blows from the same direction. The tree branches, leaves and trunk are all inclined to lean one way.

Many nuts grown here, almonds, pecans and walnuts. We met our first California shower as we came into Banning. Fruit orchards now line both sides of our road. Rows and rows just as far as one can see, prunes, dates, lemons, oranges and apricots.

Drove on to Beaumont. Country practically the same. Stopped here for some groceries. Stopped for dinner 12:50.

Drove on to the mountains. This is where we have to finish the coast range. Up we go for 3 or 4 miles, then we came down about 6 miles. The up grade was not bad here. Have great deep cuts through here, some about 70 feet deep. Canyon on our other side is hundreds of feet down.

This is the San Jacinto Valley. It is not as fertile as some of the other vallys have been. More stock and chickens through this one. In this valley we saw them putting in some small grain (not sure what kind). They use 8 horses abreast to disk. Lots of alfalfa grown all through here.

Drove on and on. Passed orange groves as we reached our next town. Here we got a chance to see their smudge pots. Between every tree was a big lamp, looks like an incubator light only they are as large as good size dishpan. They burn crude oil in these if they think they are in danger of frost.

Have passed places with great hedges of red roses around the yards. This sure is a very pretty sight. Many young fruit trees just set out. Have left the more settled parts again. This country is all divided into lots and tracts. Not many buildings yet.

As we came closer to Riverside, California, we came into the real orange district. There are thousands of bushels of oranges hanging on the trees. You'll never believe there is such a number till you can see them with your own eyes. Orchards of lemons and apricots too.

Riverside is a beautiful city. We drove on through the city and on

We have had a most wonderful time. Fine weather and very good roads for such great distances. Have traveled 2,809 miles. Have seen real good country and some real poor country. So taking all in all we are very glad we did not miss the one chance of a life time.

through several little suburbs, one never knows when you leave one town and enter another. Finally came out into the hills again.

We drove along till the sun lowered behind the mountains. We pulled into camp at a filling station. Gave our selves a good cleaning, ready for the last lap of our journey.

Looks very rainy. Went to Bed.

Saturday, November 27, 1926

Rained like everything last night. This was like one of Iowa's down pours, only it was not accompanied with any thunder or lighting. We got things straightened around and on we go [at] 8:45.

From here we have another up grade climb of 3 miles. Deep canyons and deep cuts all along here. Fruit all the way. Great oil wells in the distance. Fruit packing company in every town.

Drove on to Anaheim, California. This is a nice little city. Stopped here for a few things. We drove on again, country all about the same. Fruit trees everywhere.

Finally came into sight of Long Beach. Here we had the first look at oil wells. Hundreds of them so close together you could not count them. This is what they call Signal Hill. Have 12 miles yet till we reach Long Beach. No one knows how slow this old Ford is traveling now.

Reached our destination at 12:30. Everybody is happy, ate our dinner and visited. We just had to go down and take a look at the old Pacific. So about 3:30 Bernard took mother, Clarence, Kenneth, Mildred and I down to the beach. Here we beheld a wonderful sight. Did not realize it could make such a roaring noise. It sounds just like a raging wind storm back in Iowa. Clarence nor I think we would care much for the ocean. It is wonderful, but there is some thing about it that makes one feel as though it was such a big monster thing, and was really something you need fear. You can stand and watch the breakers dash themselves into waves and come rolling into the edge of the beach. It is all a fine view. Great houses are built right on the beach, but I would not care for any of them. We stayed a little while then came back.

The folks are about 6 miles from the Beach. Had our supper and ready for bed. We are all glad we do not have to think of traveling any further for a while. We have had a most wonderful time. Fine weather and very good roads for such great distances. Have traveled 2,809 miles. Have seen real good country and some real poor country. So taking all in all we are very glad we did not miss the one chance of a life time.

What little we have seen of California is wonderful.

Some of these little items that these books contain will sound pretty sketchy, but if the opportunity ever comes to any of you, take this trip and see it all with your own eyes (you know seeing is believing). AMEN.

Afterword

My cousins who know this story tell me that the family moved to California in 1926 "to pick fruit". As you read, they stopped in St. Louis, Missouri, to visit the family of Miraim's older sister, Essie. In Long Beach they were reunited with my paternal great grandparents, Mary (Wintermute) and Miles Addison Tahash, and the youngest of Miriam's siblings, Zona and Blanche Tahash.

My father always told me that he attended grade school, grade 2 and perhaps 3, in Long Beach before the family returned to Iowa, presumably in the summer of 1929. My aunt Leona was born in April 1929 and her birth records indicate the family was still in the Los Angeles area at that time.

I do know the trip began a few months after the passing of my paternal great-grandfather, Samuel T. McFate. A plat map of Sheridan Township in Poweshiek County from 1927 shows Samuel as the owner of the property from which they departed, and perhaps to which they returned.

When my dad and I would drive past the old McFate farmstead, a parcel now adjacent to US 63 in northern Poweshiek County, he often told me that it was lost in an abrupt foreclosure by the bank, presumably on Monday, October 28, 1929. He said Grandpa drove to town that day to pay off the mortgage, but the bank was closed, taking the property with it. Dad always said he would buy the place back if he ever won the lottery. I believe the family then moved to Tama, Iowa, but am uncertain of exactly where. Dad told me he learned to swim when Grandpa threw him into a pond (a bonafide sink-or-swim process of learning) located just west of Tama, so I assume they had settled nearby.

I'm told that Grandma kept a journal of the return trip as well, but I don't believe it was ever transcribed, and it was believed to be in the posession of my aunt Beulah when she passed in 1996. The whereabouts of that journal remain unknown.

My sister, Marlene, is largely responsible for gathering and compiling much of the family history now in my posession. Over time I hope to honor her memory by adding to this story and the family tree documents she left me. I invite you to join me in that endeavor, and encourage you to take insterest in your own family history, too.

ENDNOTES

1 The transcript was created in 1991 by my aunt Rachel – the youngest of the McFate siblings, born in May 1933 a few years after the family had returned from California to live in Tama, Iowa – and her daughter, Danett, using a personal computer. Photos were provided to me in 2025 by Rachel's oldest daughter, Debra, and I believe the photos were largely taken by Mildred, the eldest of the children making the trip west. Mildred also contributed many of the photo captions, handwritten on the verso of each photo, sometime shortly after the transcript was created.

2 This location is almost certainly along old US 32, the 'River-to-River Road', in central Poweshiek County on what is now 'Diagonal Road' roughly 2 miles west of Malcom, Iowa. Based on highway maps from that era, it appears that old US 32 (which later became US 6) closely followed the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad in the region.

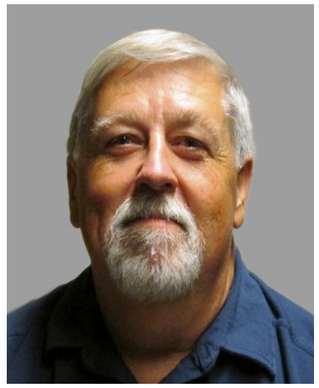
3 Both the terms *through* and its shorter equivalent, *thro*, appear in the transcript of Miriam's journal. It's uncertain if both appear in the original manuscript, so both are presented in this text as they appear in the transcript.

4 The term *rod*, a unit of measurment equivalent to 16.5 feet or 1/320th of a mile, is used a few times in this journal. See Wikipedia for a more complete explanation including the origins and history of the term.

5 Prairie dogs live in short and mixed grass prairie, not in tallgrass prairie, so this confirms that the 'prairie' Miriam refers to in Texas and beyond is unlike that in Iowa.

6 This refers to a journal entry from November 20 which reads: 'Drove on till we spied a big jack rabbit sitting about 8 rods from the road. We stopped. Grover shot at him 5 times with a rifle. He missed him every time. He was so mad to think he could not hit it, he threw his gun just as far as he could send it. It sure made us laugh. So someday someone will find a perfectly good rifle and wonder who lost it.'

MIRIAM ABIA MCFATE was born Miriam Abia Tahash on June 12, 1894, the sixth child of Miles and Mary Amanda (Wintermute) Tahash, near Lynnville, Iowa. She was a remarkable artist and craftsperson, producing blue ribbon embroidery as detailed as any modern photograph. She did so as the head of a busy household where she and husband, Clarence, raised seven children.



MARK MCFATE is the Grinnell College Libraries' Digital Library Applications Developer, responsible for managing Digital.Grinnell.edu and assisting with other online and digital works including this digital edition of Rootstalk. In his spare time, Mark enjoys volunteering by infusing technology into the commuinty via Toledo, Iowa's Wieting Theatre and other local endeavors. He's an avid geocacher (player name is "SummittDweller") and enjoys projects that combine his background in engineering with interests in technology and the outdoors, projects like Tama-Toledo HAT.

Clarence and Miriam McFate are Mark's paternal grandparents. A more complete and searchable family tree is also available (and evolving) online at tree.mcfate.family.