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RINGGOLD COUNTY HISTORY



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RINGGOLD COUNTY HISTORY

IOWA

Compiled and written by
The Iowa Writers' Program
Of the Work Projects Administration
In the State of Iowa

Jessie M. Parker,
State Superintendent of Public Instruction,
State-wide Sponsor of the
Iowa Writers' Program

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Mount Ayr, Iowa

1942

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FOREWORD

Man's kinship with the land has been the theme of Ringgold County's development from the very first date of settlement. In compiling and writing this Ringgold County History, the Writer's Program of the Iowa WPA has well preserved that theme for us.

At this time, when we need all that we have of our solid traditions in the American way of life, I am particularly glad to present this volume. The reader will find it a careful portrait of our county's growth, worked out from sources that have been painstakingly checked for their accuracy.

Vera F. Dickens.

County Superintendent of Schools
Ringgold County

INTRODUCTION

Ringgold County, in the western half of the extreme southern row of Iowa counties, was out of the pathway of pioneer cross-state travel, and grew slowly. But the county built its foundation on homemakers who wanted fertile acres, large barns, grazing cattle, and comfortable houses rather than on the promoters who sought land chiefly to resell it at a good profit. The homeseekers came from Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, the New England states, and the already well-settled areas of eastern Iowa. A few came in from the west, from the gold fields of California and Colorado.

Ringgold County was opened to settlement in May 1843, but no settlers rushed in to stake claims as they had in other parts of Iowa. The only trail which crossed even a portion of the county was the Dragoon Trace, an old Indian and buffalo trail which the soldiers used during the few years that the second Fort Des Moines at the forks of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers was in existence. Few except the Pottawattamie Indians were familiar with the groves and prairie that later were included in the county.

Ringgold County was Sac and Fox land until 1830 when, on July 15, these tribes ceded their land in this region to the United States. The western part of the county was included within the limits of the reservation set aside for the Pottawattamie on September 26, 1833. The eastern portion was a part of the Sac and Fox land until their cession to the United States, October 11, 1842. About four years later the Pottawattamie Nation ceded their Iowa reservation to the United States in a treaty dated June 5 and 17, 1846.

CHAPTER 1

ENTERING THE WILDERNESS

In 1837 Missouri had its northern boundary line run again from the Des Moines River due west to the Missouri. John A. Sullivan had mentioned the Des Moines Rapids in the Mississippi when he had run the line in 1821, the year Missouri became a State. Now the surveyors, thinking the Des Moines Rapids were the little ripples in the Des Moines River at Keosauqua, ran the line ten miles north of Sullivan's line. Dispute immediately arose between Iowa and Missouri when a Missouri sheriff tried to collect taxes from people living in the strip that Missouri claimed. For a brief time actual warfare seemed imminent; then the two states put the matter in the hands of the United States Supreme Court. No decision was made until 1849.

In the meantime several Missouri families moved into the disputed strip, closer to what they thought was the northern boundary of Missouri. Charles H. Schooler, the first settler in the county, who had come to Missouri from Ohio in 1840, moved his family in August 1845 to what was some day to be Lotts Creek Township, Ringgold County. Although the boundary dispute settlement was still hanging fire, he was sure he had settled in Missouri. The Schoolers were the only white family in the section until James M. Tethrow took a claim nearby in 1848. He, too, believed he was moving into northern Missouri. The two families were not joined by other settlers until a year after the county was established in 1847 and named for Major Samuel Ringgold, one of the heroes of the Mexican War. The county was then attached to Pottawattamie County for its civil jurisdiction and was not further organized for four years.

During this interval a few settlers came in. One of them, Charles K. Grimes, later the founder of Eugene, arrived in May 1858 and settled in what was to become Tingley Township. The latchstring at the Grimes' home was always out. Eleven families, at different times, were sheltered at their cabin until they could build homes of their own. Indians, too, felt free to call whenever they liked.

In 1849, the year after Grimes' arrival, the United States Supreme Court handed down a boundary decision favoring the Sullivan line run in 1816. This added about a fourth to Ringgold County's area -- the southern portion that Missouri had claimed. During 1850 iron posts were set every ten miles along the State boundary line separating Iowa from Missouri. Three of them were placed in Ringgold County, one each in Lotts Creek, Riley, and Clinton Townships.

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During 1850 a small group of settlers got together in a sort of caucus, fixed a site of land owned by Jesse Thompson four miles south and a little east of Mount Ayr as a prospective county seat, and suggested that it be called Avon. They probably made no formal report, because no further action was taken and the civil organization of the county, with its 542 square miles of rolling prairie and woodland, was attached to the newly organized Decatur County in 1851. John Ellis and Reason Wilkinson were appointed commissioners by the Iowa General Assembly to locate the seat of Ringgold County. They either had heard nothing about the prospective Avon or else they ignored it, for on June 26 they reported to the Board of Commissioners of Decatur County that they had selected a site four miles south of the center of the county and named it Urbana. They marked the location with a stake, but could give no accurate description since the county had not been surveyed. Later, when an attempt was made to find the stake, it had disappeared. The county land was surveyed in 1854.

After Ringgold had been attached to Decatur for a year, Judge John Lowe of Taylor County ordered that it be made an election precinct of Taylor County, or Schooler Township of Taylor County. Charles Schooler, Abner Smith, and Jesse Harper were appointed election judges, and called an election at Lott Hobbs', on Lotts Creek in the southern part of the county. The voters who gathered elected Charles Schooler as justice of the peace, Lott Hobbs as constable and supervisor of the roads, and Littleton Allen as a commissioner to locate a road from the State line north across the county.

Allen had come to the site of Middle Fork Township in the spring of 1852, and furnished the one authentic instance of slavery in Ringgold County. He was a native of Buncombe County, North Carolina, and when he moved north he brought with him two Negro slaves -- a boy and a girl aged about 16 and 14, respectively. He kept the slaves for almost a year, until public disapproval drove him to sell them to a man from near St. Joseph, Missouri, for \$1,000. One of Allen's neighbors, Squire Milton S. Trullinger, who lived about five miles away, assisted fugitive Negroes in their flight to Canada and freedom. His farm in Middle Fork Township, noted for its flock of pea fowls, was one of the underground railroad stations in this section.

To the north in Tingley Township, Charles S. Grimes was also assisting Negro fugitives. Stories told many years later reported that at one time he had six run-away slaves hidden in the corn shocks on his farm, waiting to be taken to the next station, probably Hopeville in Clark County.

Immigration was slow until August 1854, when the county land was put on the market at the Government land office at

Chariton, Iowa. Occasional settlers, however, did drive in with prairie schooners and spring wagons. In 1854 Luke Shay, the first Irish settler, built a cabin for his family near the site of what was to become Jefferson. Ten years later he sold this farm and moved to land near the present Maloy. He had come from Ireland only a few years before his arrival in Ringgold County. His family and its branches later became one of the largest landowning clans in the county.

Several families who arrived in 1852, entering the county from the south, found few stopping places -- the chief one a settler's cabin with a store, at the future site of Ringgold City. This was the post office and trading point of the disputed nine-mile strip during the boundary troubles, and one of the oldest settlements in the county.

Dr. Alexander McCartney took a claim three miles southwest of the site of Mount Ayr in 1853, and farmed to supplement the scanty pay of his profession, since the early settlers had little money to spend on doctors. In the autumn Robert Riley came to Athens Township to settle.

During the spring of 1854 nine families, some of whom had just arrived, were living or camping temporarily in Schooler's Grove, until they could select the land they wanted and build their cabins. Among them was James C. Hagans, who brought his family from Illinois along the Dagoon Trace. Many years afterward his daughter, Mrs. Clara Harvey, wrote: "The last three days of our trip we never saw a house nor a living thing. The only sign of anyone ever crossing the beautiful prairie with its luxurious growth of grass and beautiful wild flowers, was the Dagoon Trace and that was quite plain to be seen. A deep cut wagon road, a very plain path where the drivers walked to guide and guard their teams."

Schooler's Grove, later Ringgold cemetery, already had three graves in it when Hagans and his family camped there with the Wilsons, the Henry T. Millers, the Littleton Allens, the Barbers, the James Tethrows, and James Cofer. (Two of these graves were those of Mrs. Schooler and one of the Schooler children, not far from the cabin.) When the Hagans family traveled on, they followed the Dagoon Trace to the Grand River, as far as they could. They then turned away from the only trail and cut a road through the timber to the prairie where they intended to live.

Their home soon became a social center, and young and old gathered there for parties -- woodchopping, quilting, house-raising, and candy-making parties. Life in this wilderness was lonely, and these get-togethers broke the monotony.

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Shortly after the Hagans' arrival, the Randolph Sry and the Thomas Hughes families found farms nearby. At the end of 1854 about 42 families had settled in different parts of the county. Some of them -- James Dady, Saray Case Patterson, and Leonard O. Imus -- were to remain for the next 75 years.

Tragedy stalked the Horatio M. Imus family which came to the county in June 1854. The father was drowned while he was driving his wagon across a flooded stream in Marion County. Mrs. Imus brought her family of nine to the prairie land her husband had chosen as their new home, and with the help of her sons built a pole cabin 12 feet square. Later neighbors helped her to build a larger log house.

The Imus home was always open to travelers, and Indians frequently visited the family. Although the Pottawattamie had been removed to Kansas about 1845, small groups of them wandered back to hunt and fish along the Grand and Platte Rivers in Ringgold County. Leonard O. Imus said in later years that these Pottawattamie "were the only associates of the family at first."

In the Mount Ayr Twice-A-Week News for July 1, 1904, Imus wrote his reminiscences, recalling that he and his brothers played with the Indian boys -- wrestling, racing, throwing stones, and playing marbles. He watched the Indian girls as they made little Indian images, riding on ponies with tomahawk and gun, out of clay and set the fantastic figures in the sun to dry. When they were ready, the girls staged battles and hunts with them.

At one time Mrs. Imus had a team of horses that strayed away. She promised an Indian, who dined at their house as often as he dared, a dollar if he would find those horses. Two days later he brought them back, explaining that he had found them in Union County in the barn of a man who had taken them up as strays. The man had refused to release them, but the Indian hid in the woods until nightfall and then "stole" them back for Mrs. Imus.

On another occasion Mrs. Imus and her sons were returning from Union County where they had gone for supplies for themselves and their neighbors. Among the supplies was a jug of whiskey which many people then thought would cure snakebite. Before they reached home, an Indian stopped them and demanded a taste of it. He became so insistent that she gave in at last, when he promised not to take enough to make him "squiffy", his term for "drunk." A little farther on a second red man, with a tomahawk and a rifle, appeared. He, too, demanded a drink. After he had taken his gulp, Mrs. Imus became thoroughly alarmed and turned to her sons with the order, "Drive as fast as you can, boys! The Indians all

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know we have this whiskey." Her greatest fear was that the Indians would all get "squiffy" and attack the settlers. They whipped the horses and went rattling across the prairie only to find a third Indian waiting at their cabin door. The news had spread rapidly among them and had followed the wagon all the way home.

Indians not only visited Thomas Canny, the second Irish settler, who arrived in 1854, but they worked for him and took sorghum and meat for their pay. At first Canny weighed the meat, but the Indians refused to recognize weights. His wife then cut it into chunks, and each Indian picked a chunk, saying, "So big meat for day." Luke Shay's cabin was visited by them, too. Sometimes when the red men annoyed the settlers too much, everyone hitched up his wagon and the red men were taken to the Iowa border, toward their Kansas reservation.

It was about this time that Chief Che-me-use, or Johnny Green as he was known to settlers from Ringgold to Crawford County, decided to buy some Government land in the county. Johnny was aided in entering his land by a white settler. On April 29, 1854, the United States Government, not knowing he was an Indian, entered it. Johnny Green's patent had been granted May 25, 1855, for 80 acres in section 32, township 70, range 30, near Knowlton. Johnny did not understand that there were any such things as taxes, and went on an extended hunting trip into Marshall County.

When he returned three years later he found that his land had been sold to Henry Keller for the unpaid taxes: \$3.62. Not knowing what to do about that, the Indian left and never came back. He went on to Marshall County where he formed a deep and lasting friendship with the pioneers of that region. Once, learning that a band of Sioux had smeared themselves with war paint and were moving toward Marshalltown from Fort Dodge, Johnny Green invited his white friends to accompany him to meet the Sioux. At the south fork of the Iowa River the parties met. Johnny Green told the Sioux that he was leading the whites, who would, if necessary, back him up with government muskets, powder, and balls. Impressed with this argument, the Sioux decided not to proceed any farther. When Johnny died, in 1868, he was buried in Albion, a few miles northwest of Marshalltown. In 1918 the Historical Society of Marshall County erected a monument to him on a high bluff above the Iowa River, near the Iowa Soldier's Home.

The year after Johnny Green bought his land in Ringgold County, some Indians who were roaming through the country-side were accused of murdering a local white man. During the latter part of August 1855 two brothers-in-law, remembered only as Hale and Driggs, who had settled with their

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families in Ringgold County near the Union County line, went out one morning to hunt deer and turkey in the woodlands along the Grand River. About noon, Hale, greatly excited, burst into a neighbor's cabin and announced that Driggs had been slain by the Indians and that he himself had barely escaped with his life.

The settlers, aided by a company of militia from Chari-ton, surrounded the Indians, who were camped on Twelve Mile Creek in Pleasant Township, Union County, and made them surrender and stack their guns. But the ball taken from Driggs' body did not fit any Indian gun, though it could have been shot from Hale's.

At this point an old Indian, called Wanwoxen, called attention in broken English to the fact that the man had been shot at short range. His shirt was burned and blackened by the powder. "No Indian there! No Indian there!" declared Wanwoxen. "Indian never shoot when he can strike!" and he touched his tomahawk. Then he threw off his blanket and said, "Indian no shoot Driggs. Shoot Indian if you want to."

After Wanwoxen's plea, the settlers again questioned Hale. He admitted that although he had heard the shot and had seen Driggs fall, he had not actually seen any Indians. No one suspected Hale, and though the settlers allowed the Indians to have their guns again, many still felt so uneasy that the red men were forced to go back to their Kansas reservations.

After the excitement over the affair had died down, the settlers completely exonerated the Indians of any guilt in the affair. Many years later, in 1908, the improved Order of Red Men was established, and the local tribe was named Wanwoxen Tribe, No. 133, in honor of the old Indian.

CHAPTER 2

OUT OF THE PATHWAY OF MAIN TRAVEL

During 1854 settlers came into Ringgold County from several parts of Iowa and from other States, but the population was still sparse, and all the people could easily have been acquainted with one another. The Judson Griffith family settled in the southern part of the county, and the Somers and Swigart families opened farms near the site of Caledonia. William J. Merritt's house, built that year, became a stopping place for all the people that passed and was known as the "Halfway House" -- halfway between Nebraska City and Ottumwa. In 1855 the Cross post office was established at his cabin. It later became a stagecoach stop.

In January 1855 the State Legislature appointed commissioners to locate a county seat. George W. Jones, Robert W. Stafford, and George A. Hawley were authorized to choose a site as near to the geographical center as seemed reasonable. They reported to the Decatur County judge on April 18 that they had selected the southwest quarter of section 6, township 68, range 29, for a county seat, and had named it Mount Ayr. "Mount" was used because the town was located on the highest land between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in the southern tier of counties, and Ayr was selected to honor the poet, Robert Burns, who was born at Ayr, Scotland.

The site had been suggested by the owner of the land, John S. Sheller of Lucas County, who promised to convey to Ringgold County one-half of the quarter section selected and to have it surveyed into town lots. The deed to this land was the first recorded in the county.

Just after the commissioners had selected the site of Mount Ayr, on the high rolling prairie near the head of the Middle Grand River, Barton B. Dunning arrived. He decided to live in the newly chosen county seat, and became the town's first settler. He built a cabin of one story and a half and then returned for his family. He established the first store and later became the town's first postmaster. His son Charles was the first white child born in Mount Ayr.

Soon after the county seat had been selected, William N. McEfee was appointed sheriff to organize Ringgold County. He set an election of temporary officers for May 14, 1856. The 34 voters chose James C. Hagans as county judge. Matthew K. Brown was elected county clerk, James W. Cofer treasurer and recorder, Hiron Imus sheriff, and Charles W. Schooler school fund commissioner. One of Judge Hagans' first jobs was to settle Ringgold County's accounts with Judge John Lowe of Taylor County. Charles Schooler, the

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school fund commissioner, had a collection of \$19.96 from Ringgold County. After outstanding warrants were paid, the county set up in business for itself. Its total assets were \$1.45.

The first meeting of the temporary officers was held at Ephriam Cofer's cabin, six miles south of Mount Ayr. They divided the county into four townships -- Sand Creek, Platte, West Fork, and Lotts Creek -- for the purpose of holding the first regular election to choose permanent county officers. In August 91 voters reelected Hagans, Brown, and Cofer, and chose Peter Doze as sheriff and Wendell Poor as school fund commissioner.

The county officers continued to meet at Cofer's until September 4, 1855, when they adjourned to meet at Mount Ayr the first Monday in October. There were still no public buildings at Mount Ayr so the officers met in the kitchen of Barton B. Dunning's home.

At the first meeting of the Ringgold County court, the first business taken up was the disposition of \$2,471.79, the estate of Horatio M. Imus, who had drowned en route to the county. George W. Lesan was appointed guardian of the minor children.

Nearly 100 families came to Ringgold County in 1855, and several villages were laid out. Stanford Harrow, who for a number of years had kept a store in his cabin for travelers, staked out Ringgold City near the Missouri border, and Peter Walters started Caledonia three or four miles to the north. This town, named for the Caledon of Sir Walter Scott's Lady of the Lake, was soon made a post office.

James Drake settled in the county this year and built a cabin at the future site of Blackmore Corner. A post office was established at Blackmore, and there was a store and a blacksmith shop, but a village had not yet been platted.

Early in 1856 a hewn-log courthouse, 14 feet square, was erected on lot 305 at Mount Ayr. The building was furnished with two tables, two desks, and a safety box, all made of rough materials. It was occupied by the judge, the clerk, the recorder-treasurer, the surveyor, and a doctor, probably Dr. E. Keith. There were few doctors in the county then. Dr. McCartney was still farming and practicing medicine near Mount Ayr. Dr. John T. Merrill came to the county with his bride in that year and settled at Ringgold City. About 1866 Dr. Merrill moved to Mount Ayr and in the succeeding years branched into other business. In 1880 he owned a bank and a drug store.

E. L. Soles and his son-in-law John Taylor, who had

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come to the village, rigged up a whipsaw and sawed the first lumber in the town. Soles was also a carpenter and was kept busy as the settlers began to stop there. He made the first ballot boxes used in the county elections in the four voting precincts and found time, too, to teach the singing school, one of the town's chief entertainments.

Barton Dunning, who kept the first store, brought his supplies with him in a trunk. He was made postmaster in 1856. He started a Sunday School and presented the organization with a Sunday School library which he had purchased in St. Louis on one of his trips there for supplies for his store. A Methodist preacher, a Mr. Schrober, was superintendent of this Sunday School and preached the first sermon in Mount Ayr. It was also in this year that Judge Hagans and Barton Dunning had a log school erected and gave it to the Mount Ayr school board to use rent free until the town should be able to buy the building.

Other parts of the county at first were more rapid in their settlement than Mount Ayr. In July 1856 the southern part of the county and its outer fringes were more heavily settled than the county seat township, which had a total of 115 residents and 28 voters, while the county as a whole had a population of 1,472 and 322 voters.

A post office was established at Redding in 1856, years before the town was platted, and the Goshen post office was started soon after Michael Stahl, its first postmaster, came to the county in 1856 from Goshen, Indiana.

The people took part in State politics for the first time on November 8, 1856, when they helped choose a delegate to represent the 11th District, of which they were a part, in the State Constitutional Convention at Iowa City, January 19, 1857. In this year also they chose Judge Hagans to serve in the Eighth General Assembly as Ringgold County's first State Senator. According to William H. Bradley, who had come to the county in 1856, Mount Ayr had at this time only eight houses, all of logs.

In November 1856 the pioneers dealt with a murderer without the benefit of a court trial. Silas Rude, who lived in the northwestern corner of Decatur County, shot and killed his neighbor, Ed. McManigal, who was driving stock which had wandered onto Rude's land. Men from Decatur, Ringgold, Union, and Clark Counties formed a posse to hunt Rude. Two men and a 13-year-old boy, James Fullerton, were left on guard at Rude's house to trap him should he return for his saddle horse, which was a fine animal. Rude, meanwhile, had hidden in the hayloft of a Mr. Lamb's barn in Union County. When he asked for food, Lamb notified the posse. Rude was bound and taken to the cornerstone that

marked the four counties. The posse appointed one man to load seven guns and stack them behind a clump of bushes. Seven men then volunteered, each to draw a gun from the stack. They then arranged themselves in a circle around Rude, who stood beside the cornerstone. At a given signal all seven men fired. When Rude fell no one knew or wanted to know in which county he had been shot or by whom.

On May 25, 1857, the first United States district court in the county convened at Mount Ayr, with Judge John S. Townsend presiding. After the court had been organized, the first business transacted was the granting of naturalization papers to Luke Shay, the Irish settler. In the fall of the year the first supplies for the upkeep of the county courthouse were purchased. They consisted of six loads of wood at 80 cents a load, 40 pounds of candles costing \$11.40, and two boxes of envelopes at \$3.50. Previously the county officers had furnished their own supplies. All except the wood was hauled from St. Joseph.

The county papers and belongings were scattered all over Mount Ayr when a cyclone struck the village June 8, 1858. Court was in session at the time and the log courthouse was destroyed. The records, tossed all over town and far beyond, were returned off and on during the next few weeks from various places. The far-flung logs of the building were collected and purchased by Anna Miller, who used them to build a house. The storm demolished fences and trees, and carried the A. G. Beall house across the street, setting it down with its front door facing the opposite direction.

In 1857 the first Bohemian settlers, Joseph Toman, his wife Vorsila, their two sons, Joseph and Eustachius; and Vaclav Jezek, moved to a wooded area along the Grand River, near the future site of Diagonal. Jezek married Dorothy Beall and settled on the farm land on which their descendants still lived in 1942. Several other Bohemian families joined the group from time to time until about 1900. They were all hard workers and good farmers. Jerry Zaruba, one of them, chose to go into business and had a store at Goshen for a number of years.

Charles K. Grimes, who had been among the first dozen settlers in Tingley Township, established Eugene in 1857. He carried the mail between Eugene and Mount Ayr on foot, often wading through mud and water. Grimes was a farmer rather than a promoter, and his platted town was little more than a post office.

In 1858 Middle Fork, Washington, East Fork, and Jefferson Townships were marked off. Edgar Sheldon started a cheese factory, the first in southwestern Iowa. John A.

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Miller and his brother Ezra came to Mount Ayr to practice law.

The county was prosperous in 1859 and had enough money from the sale of town lots at Mount Ayr to finance a new \$3,500 frame courthouse, two stories high. The court and the jury room were on the second floor. Prisoners were frequently kept in the jury room, for there was no county jail. The janitor, William Francis, slept in the treasurer's office to protect the county's property.

The comfortable houses and large barns of the settlers attracted the attention of vagrant outlaws who watched their chances to slip in and steal valuable property, especially horses. They could always be taken to distant localities and sold, as the white "stars" on foreheads and similar distinguishing marks could be dyed so that the animals might even be bought by some unsuspecting neighbor of the owner.

When the uneasy period preceding the Civil War gave way to hostilities, horse stealing increased and the nearness of the Missouri border made criminals harder to catch.

In order to protect themselves, a group of Missouri men organized the "Anti-Horse-Thief Association." They formed the Grand Order in September 1863 at LuRay, Clark County, Missouri, and framed the constitution and by-laws of the association. Several eastern Iowa counties sent delegates to the next meeting, held at Millport, Knox County, Missouri, the following October. Members of the organization were expected to help the officers of the law capture criminals of all kinds, especially the detested horse thieves. They were directed to help the civil officers but not to take the law into their own hands.

Membership in the Anti-Horse-Thief Association spread into many States and included some 2,000 lodges. Although the Grand River Valley was a tempting territory to horse and cattle thieves for many years, the Ringgold County chapter of the Anti-Horse-Thief Association was not formed until the early seventies.

The routing of the Western Stage Coach Company through Ringgold County in 1859 boosted immigration and improved Mount Ayr's mail facilities. Mail then arrived six days a week in coaches en route between Ottumwa and Nebraska City, Nebraska. As these lively jerkies, hustled over the dirt roads by six or eight-horse teams, swung in at their stations, the anxious days of once-a-month mail from Mount Pisgah in Union County were forgotten.

In those days it was just as exciting to see the stages

come in, unload, take on, and start off again, as it is now to watch the arrival and departure of streamlined trains and airplanes. Horses of the Western stages were changed at Mount Ayr at the John Dale farm. The fresh horses at Mount Ayr could sense the excitement long before they actually heard the lurching coach come in. Dancing impatiently in their stalls, they waited until the sweating teams were released, then ran out to stand of their own accord in the traces. If the stage were held for any length of time, these fresh, rested animals chafed at the driver's restraining hand while they waited for the sound of the stableman quickly fastening the clamps of their tugs.

The coaches on this line carried 12 passengers, their baggage, and the mail sacks. They usually averaged only about three and a half miles an hour, because there were terrible roads and few bridges. John Dowling of Mount Ayr did the blacksmithing for the stage horses from 1866 to 1869. The following year the line was discontinued, due to the competition of the railroad that then paralleled part of the route. Railroads, however, did not reach Ringgold County for another decade.

The first Ringgold County Fair Association was organized in June 1859. The association assessed one dollar annual membership dues, but this entitled the holder to a family ticket to the fair. In the fall the association sponsored the first county fair at the courthouse square and awarded \$42.50 in premiums and many diplomas for the best entries. The second county fair was also held at the courthouse square October 15 and 16, 1860. There were 336 entries, and the officials were hopeful of having a fairground before long.

This hope was satisfied in 1868 when a 40-acre tract was deeded to the Ringgold Agricultural Society by Charles W. Drake. The land was a beautiful tract about a mile northwest of Mount Ayr. In 1867 the property was valued at \$1,500. During the Civil War years there was no attempt to hold a fair, but it was again held October 4, 1865, the year the war ended. Not until 1885, however, when varied amusements were introduced to add interest to domestic exhibits of fine stock, fruits, vegetables, and horse racing, did the fair become widely popular. Unfortunately, later years brought unjust pro-rating of premiums and monopoly of horse racing management, which killed the general interest. Finally, in 1898, the fair was abandoned and the grounds were sold. From that time Mount Ayr held only street fairs.

Since there was no other building in the village large enough for a public gathering, the county supervisors voted in 1861 to keep the courthouse open for religious or literary groups who wished to use the rooms. Each group, how -

ever, had to provide its own wood and candles and leave the room in good order.

Mount Ayr in Civil War days was still a village with only 250 inhabitants, but it had a newspaper, the Mount Ayr Republican, established in August 1860 with George Burton its editor and P. O. James the publisher. The paper had only a short life, for both Burton and James enlisted in the army and neither returned to Mount Ayr.

Time almost stood still for the county seat and county until the war was over. James M. Willis, one of five young men who went through Mount Ayr in April of 1860, described it in his diary: "It stands on the summit of a high hill and is no doubt airish, surrounded with rough land, and is certainly remarkable for its insignificance; though here we saw two spry ladies with long gowns, capering on horseback." The county seat had thus barely started when volunteers from the villages and farms rode away to join the companies forming in the larger nearby towns. By June 1861 the county's enlistment quota had been set and there was a fair number of volunteers. July 4, 1861, the men were called into quarters at Mount Ayr.

The Fourth of July, 1861, was the first Independence Day to be celebrated in the county. Patriotic fervor, stirred by the war, lifted the people above thoughts of sod corn, spring wheat, and the litters of pigs so necessary to their survival during the snow-bound winters. Mrs. G. M. Lesan, assisted by her sister Sybil and her Aunt Maggie, made a flag of 13 stars from blue delaine, white muslin, and red calico.

The men used a wagonbox as a base for a platform and set up a pole for the flag. When the wagonbox platform had been hauled to the city park, Mrs. Lesan attached her flag to the pole and the crowd gathered to hear Jowett Bastow sing the new song, "The Star Spangled Banner", a song that by no means everyone there had heard. The group then enjoyed a basket picnic. Sixty-five years later this old flag, flown at the first Fourth of July celebration, was presented to the city of Mount Ayr.

The Civil War volunteers were mustered in on August 15 and assigned to the Twenty-ninth Iowa Infantry. In the fall Henry Van Winkle, 15 years old, believed to be Iowa's youngest accepted volunteer, enlisted in Company K of the Twenty-fifth Iowa Infantry. Most of the Ringgold County soldiers fought with the Twenty-ninth which took part in the capture of Little Rock and in the Mobile campaign.

It was not easy to keep the pioneer home fires burning while the soldiers were away fighting. Many of the volun-

teers left families behind who had to struggle alone through the years of the war.

Scarcely had the volunteers marched away than the "loyalists" in Missouri were threatened by the "secessionists", and many Missourians crowded across the line into Iowa. The companies of Home Guards already organized hurried to their aid. Three times during the war the Home Guards went into Missouri to meet Southern troops. At one time the Northern men fell back to a point near Allendale, Missouri, and threw up breastworks. Then, reinforced by 2,000 men of the Iowa border counties, they forced the Confederate soldiers to retire as far as St. Joseph.

In 1862 the State of Iowa commissioned the Home Guards as the Southern Border Brigade. In Middle Fork Township, on the border, the Home Guards formed Company C, Third Battalion. After the Southerners had retired south of St. Joseph, ten men were detailed to guard the Ringgold County portion of the State line each night. They were relieved every ten days. After three months, when danger seemed past, the patrol was discontinued.

Life flowed along as normally as it could. In 1862 there were 1,101 children attending the crude, uncomfortable log schools that were in session for only a few months each year. Near Rose Hill schoolhouse a cemetery was established, and here a few Negroes, who had crossed the border and lived in the county a short time before their death, were buried side by side with citizens of Ringgold County.

The greatest scare of the war came in 1862 when word reached Mount Ayr that 50 guerilla raiders were riding in by way of the Merritt settlement to burn the town. The boys and old men armed themselves with the old blunderbusses and rifles left behind and set out to face the invaders. About 11 p.m., while the defenders were waiting in ambush, the noise of galloping horses' hooves startled them. It sounded like such a wild cavalry charge that all but one little boy, Charlie Dunning, broke ranks and started to run back toward Mount Ayr. In a minute or two the boy saw his father's 50 unherded mules stampeding toward him in a race for home. The fleeing defenders saw them, too, and returned to their posts. They pledged one another to deep secrecy about their sudden show of fright in the face of a supposed cavalry charge. Many years later, however, they told the tale on themselves with gusto.

Just before the Civil War ended, a family of Negro slaves and one single Negro man from near Albany, Missouri, were freed by a Mrs. Murphy on the condition that they move out of the State. They piled into an old wagon drawn by a team of ancient horses that she had given them and drove in-

to Ringgold County. Sam, the head of the family, established his wife and their two children, Tom and Martha, in a log cabin near the Lesan school. George, the other freed Negro, lived with them. The adults worked for families in the neighborhood while the children attended school. Later, when the two men died, Sarah and her children moved into a cabin about three-quarters of a mile from any neighbor. The three, afraid to be alone in the cabin at night, slipped into David Lesan's barn and slept in the haymow. Discovering them there one night, he gave them permission to live in a cabin near his home. Not long afterward they moved to Mount Ayr.

After the Ringgold County veterans had been mustered out of service in August 1865, the population increased so quickly that for many years after the Civil War there were from two to four new schoolhouses built each season. Other new schools were held in dwelling houses and log cabins until the communities could finance schoolhouses.

In April, just at the close of the war, Ith S. Beall established a newspaper, the Ringgold Record, with W. R. Turk as publisher. They did not run this paper long, but sold it to George Roby, who assumed the double duties of editor and publisher in June of 1866.

By 1867 a local census counted 3,888 people in the county, an increase of nearly 800 in two years, and when the decade ended the population had climbed to 5,029. With this influx it was necessary to divide the townships again, and in 1868 the county was rearranged into 16 civil townships.

During the first week in August 1869 many people in the county had a surprise that gave them the fright of their lives. They were not aware that the sun would be totally eclipsed on August 7, and that the county lay within the line of totality. When the light of the sun diminished and the temperature went down, some of the families piled hastily into their wagons and set out for the nearest neighbor's, thinking the world had come to an end. Horses huddled together uneasily, dogs ran into the house to hide under the beds, chickens went to roost, and the cows came in to be milked. Other people in other places had known of the eclipse, of course, and watched it through smoked glasses. Princeton University astronomers observed it from High Point Chapel in the eastern part of Ottumwa, said to have been the best point in the United States for viewing that particular eclipse.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCHOOLS AND CHURCHES

The wheels of the prairie schooners had scarcely stopped rolling before the thoughts of the settlers turned to schools and churches. There were trees to fell, cabins to build, and prairie to break -- enough to keep the entire family busy -- but church meetings were held whenever the circuit riders came and schools were built as soon as possible. In some communities, Sunday Schools and Methodist classes were organized, though money was scarce.

Before the Civil War, few groups could erect even humble churches. In 1853, when there were only a few families in the northern part of Ringgold County, Reverend W. C. Williams of Lorimor preached a sermon in the timber in Jefferson Township. The next year, in October, a Reverend Mr. Bell, known as an "Iron Jacket Baptist", rode up from Fairview (Denver), Missouri, to conduct a service at the house of Henry Miller. About a year later Mr. and Mrs. Luke Shay found a Catholic priest waiting for them in their cabin when they returned from an expedition of settlers who, in their spring wagons, had driven a band of Indians back along the Dragoon Trace to their reservation in Kansas. This priest said the first mass in the county in the Shay cabin.

In 1854 only one school was reported, but there may have been others held in the cabins of the settlers. According to V. G. Ruby, the first school built in the county was a log cabin with a clapboard roof, erected in 1854 on section five in Jefferson Township. Miss Orcelia Kirkham, later Mrs. George Argabright, was the teacher. Others say that the log house about 100 yards west of the Timby home (then Schooler's land) and less than one mile from the Missouri line was the first school, and that John Cunningham was the teacher. There is no date for this school, however. It is certain that schools were started in a number of localities during 1855 and 1856.

Mount Ayr's first school consisted of a subscription term of two months held in the fall of 1855 in a house belonging to Judge Hagans. The next year Ith Beall taught for three months in a school built by Judge Hagans and Barton Dunning.

Mount Ayr followed the common practice of hiring a man for the winter term when the bigger boys were in school, and a woman for the spring and summer term. Charlotte Swan taught the spring term, following Mr. Beall, and these two continued to teach until they were married and gave up the work. Soon after their marriage, Beall was made deputy recorder. Later he established the Ringgold Record.

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Other schools held during 1856 were the summer classes that A. Foster taught in a log house on Silas Tedrow's land in Lotts Creek Township, and the term held at Marshalltown in Washington Township. The following year there were a few families in other parts of the county, and a summer term was taught by Isabell Poor in an old log house in Clinton Township. Miss Sophia Robinson taught in the eastern part of the county in one half of Jacob Smith's log cabin, near John Archibald's home. In the summer of 1858 "Mother" Talley (Mrs. Adam) taught 12 children in the first school in Grant Township, in a log house on her husband's land, and received a salary of \$10 a month. In 1859, after the Luke Shays had moved into a frame house, Shay donated his first log home to the district for a school.

Irish Catholics in the neighborhood of Maloy used the parlor of the Shay home for a chapel until, in 1875, one was built a fourth of a mile north of Maloy. Shay donated half the cost of erecting it.

In the winter of 1868, Rollie K. Brooks, a returned soldier, taught the Clipper school in Middle Fork Township. School was lively and had its humorous side while Brooks taught. One day, curiosity getting the best of them, the pupils asked him what the treat was to be on closing day at the end of the term. Brooks told them without ceremony that he had no intention of treating them. The next morning he found himself locked out of school with the threat that he'd not get in until he agreed to treat. When Brooks pretended to go home, the boys opened the door and ran out. Then, turning quickly, he got in. The boys waylaid him on the way home, however, and threatened to duck him in the creek if he did not promise to treat them. The creek was very cold, and Brooks promised.

School was held under all sorts of conditions during 1869 and 1870. Thomas A. Stevenson began teaching in the fall of 1869, in a log shanty at Eugene, part of which was used as a granary. Among his 13 pupils was a former Negro slave, past 21, who wanted to learn to read. As was often the case, Stevenson used teaching as a stepping stone to gain a foothold in the county. He later purchased a farm and bred Chester White hogs. He served as county supervisor from 1881 to 1883, then was postmaster at Eugene for five years.

Folks in Liberty Township decided to erect a church in 1874 on a site donated by the heirs of the James A. Drake estate. Building material had to be hauled long distances, and little money was available. The people, however, gathered large boulders for the foundation and donated timber for the foundation sills. A widow, a Mrs. Calfee, gave an oak tree that made a 40-foot sill. Those who could not give

money or material hauled logs to the sawmill, lime from a kiln in Decatur County, or shingles and lumber for the building from Leon. Others hammered and sawed and helped to put up the structure. When the little church on the hill was completed it was free of debt, and Elder Todd dedicated it High Point Methodist Church. For years this little church in the grove was open during wintry blasts and summer heat for church and Sunday School. S. L. Thompson, in the Mount Ayr Record News, April 21, 1914, said, "Those of us who were boys when the church was being built are now men with silvery hair . . ." High Point Church "has now become one of the old landmarks of the early settlement of Ringgold County . . . The church stands as a monument to the memory of the loyal, hardy settlers of the surrounding country."

Another early church was the Palestine United Brethren Church erected three miles south of Delphos. This was one of the rural churches that did not long survive the coming of the automobile. The church was closed in 1918 and the members transferred to the Redding Church.

Many of the churches depended entirely on circuit riding clergymen for their services. These men sought out the settlements, following faint trails across the prairie to reach their scattered congregations.

Camp meetings thrived in the southern part of the county from the 1870's until about 1910, and the fervor and excitement of these meetings made a welcome break in the humdrum of farm life. According to J. E. Holden, the meetings were held annually in the pasture of the Isaac Marshall farm in Middle Fork Township from 1872 to 1875. Tent meetings drew large crowds and raised religious fervor to a high point. The stronger the evangelist's oratory, the larger, of course, were his crowds. In later years, tent meetings were held on the Luther Dennis farm. One of these, recalled by old timers in Middle Fork Township, was held in 1901 on a beautiful 40-acre tract of ground bought by John Bush for religious purposes, but used also for grazing. Large walnut and other native trees grew in this grove along Middle Fork Creek, and here Mrs. Anna Davis, evangelist of the Evangelical church, conducted tent meetings in August. The attendance and conversions prompted a similar series the following summer, but these were held across the river on a hillside. The singing of hymns could be heard two miles away.

Four churches had been erected at Mount Ayr before most of the villages in the county existed. The Methodists built the first church there in 1869, and they were followed by the United Presbyterians in 1870, the Baptists in 1873, the Old Presbyterians in 1875, and the Christians in 1882.

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In 1895 there were 25 churches in the county but some of the smaller rural churches had already been absorbed into others. Of the newer towns, Kellerton held services in a schoolhouse. The Christian church at Tingley, built in 1882, was the first in the group of towns platted on sites along the railroad. In the following year the Baptists built a church at Delphos, the Catholics at Kellerton, the United Brethren at Beaconsfield, and the Evangelists at Wirt (Ellston).

In 1875 Reverend William Brown, pastor of the United Presbyterian church at Mount Ayr, established a mission church at Eugene. In the succeeding years others erected churches in the villages, and by 1895 each village had two or three churches. The evangelistic spirit abroad in the county prompted four young women to dedicate their lives to missionary service in foreign countries. Josephine Stahl went to Darjeeling, India, Helen Galloway to Chung King, China, Lydia Wilkinson to Foo Chow, China, and Fannie Perkins to Rangoon, Burma.

During the 1870's some of the pupils who had finished their schooling began to teach in the rural schools. Rachel Barchus, who returned from Mount Ayr to her father's farm in Benton Township when she had completed her school work, heard of a vacancy in a school six miles from her home. Her father had no horses, but his oxen were trained to the saddle. So she saddled an ox and set out to interview the school director. As she rode along, harvesters in the fields whooped and shouted and waved at her so much that she stopped on the way at a neighbor's, reluctant to go on. The neighbor, a Mrs. Proctor, then saddled a horse for her. Rachel got the school, but the story of her ox ride was published in the Mount Ayr Record and several other newspapers. She made a success of her teaching job, however, and never had any trouble in getting another school.

There were nine rural schools in Middle Fork Township in 1872. The first in the township was probably organized soon after June 6, 1861, when the first school levy was made on the county. One of the early schools mentioned is at Gill, but perhaps the best known in the township was Rose Hill, built in 1872, in which religious services were held for more than a dozen years.

Before 1872, when county superintendent of schools R. E. Askren called the teachers in the county together for the first county institute, each was practically a law unto himself as far as curriculum and grading were concerned. Askren asked those attending the institute to bring slates, pencils, and McGuffey's Fifth Reader. Less than 50 teachers attended the session, conducted by Professor Piper, superintendent of Delaware County Schools, but this was the beginning of improvement.

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A few years later this institute developed into an annual four-week summer Normal which continued until 1900. During the year following the first institute, there were 2,301 pupils enrolled in the 90 schools, only one of which was a log building. Eleven years before, only 36 school buildings had been reported, and ten of these were of logs.

The school was the social center of the community from the beginning, and in the latter 1890's the debates held in schoolhouses drew crowds who willingly listened, often until nearly midnight, while the neighbors who had worked with them in the fields during the day debated such questions as: "Resolved, that our Government is in more danger of dissolution from political than religious causes." Do-re-mi singing schools attracted the younger crowds, who needed only the correct pitch of a tuning fork to set them off on a round of old favorites.

Sometimes there were tragic happenings in the rural schools. School was in session at Mogul school in 1887 when lightning struck it, killing one of the Mogul girls instantly and injuring another, Cora Ephland, and the teacher, Mercy Calfee. The injured were taken to their homes immediately and a neighbor started to Mount Ayr for Dr. Merrill. By the time the doctor was ready to leave Mount Ayr it was so dark the man who had come for him rode on horseback just ahead of his team, carrying a lantern to show the way. In spite of the doctor's efforts, Cora Ephland died during the night. Miss Calfee was permanently deafened.

School directors, teachers, pupils, and parents all over the county were stirred in 1880 and 1881 when the salesmen of the Appleton texts made Ringgold County a battlefield in the effort to persuade the various townships school boards to replace the McGuffey Readers, used since the first schools had been established. McGuffey salesmen battled to hold their ground.

Kyle Jones, in his thesis, The History of Education in Ringgold County, says, "The contest became very spirited. The Appleton men had been at work in the county for several months during the fall of 1880 and had succeeded in getting their books adopted in several townships. During the winter of 1880 the feud smoldered and burst into flame again in the spring of 1881. The entire county seems to have split into two factions over the question, which was put to a general vote in several of the districts. Rumors were rampant, and each side marshalled its supporters as for a matter of major importance... On good authority, according to the newspaper articles, it was said that Appleton agents offered 50 cents each for votes. In the Mount Ayr district McGuffey won the day by a vote of 182 to 57 for Appleton."

In January 1881 the Ringgold Record thought the school war had ended, with the result that Appleton's had succeeded in getting their books introduced in all except four townships. It stated, though, "The Record has no choice, but believes that one kind ought to be in use all over the county, as the teachers shift about from one district to another, and could do better work if they were not compelled to teach from different authors." In March, however, the Record reported, "The school war is revived again. It appeared to be about like the stock market in Wall Street, first one side up to the top, and then the other. Now, the McGuffey men are ahead."

At a township meeting at the Maloy schoolhouse, only those who resided in the district were allowed to speak concerning the matter of textbooks, and McGuffey won. At a general vote, the people in Benton Township voted for McGuffey's although Appleton and Company held a contract with the township to furnish them books for three years. According to reports in the series of contests, McGuffey remained supreme.

In 1884, 100 rural schools were reported in the county, and 33 independent districts. Of these only nine were graded schools, however. One of the early pupils remarked in later years, "You graduated into the grammar school when you wore long pants." Grading was one of the county superintendent's problems during the 1890's and early 1900's. In 1884 only 1,616 out of 4,917 children of school age attended. The schoolhouses were valued at \$55,980. Two hundred nineteen men and women were teaching, but salaries averaged only \$34.45 for men and \$26.35 for women. Usually county schools appeared before the towns were founded, and town children attended them until they were so run down and crowded that others had to be built.

Rural schools were located practically within the village sites at Kellerton and Tingley. The Kellerton district, about 1894, bonded itself for \$1,700 to build a new school, and this, which had been district number one, was at once called the Kellerton school although it was never officially named. The Tingley Center school at the east edge of the village continued until 1885. Then the school board put up a new building which, according to J. L. Galloway, had such fine proportions that it was used as a model for several other school buildings. Redding school was opened in a rented building, but a building was erected for it in 1887, and two years later a two-story, three-room schoolhouse was built on the same site and served until 1915.

One of the first schools to establish a substantial library was at Knowlton. This little village had its greatest period of affluence from 1900 to 1910.

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Especially during the 1890's and 1900's, box socials, held in the schoolhouses all over the county, were popular not only as entertainment but as a means of raising money to buy globes, charts, blackboards, or maps for the schools. Box socials brought in an astonishing revenue at times, especially if two contenders for the favor of one young lady's luncheon box were bidding against each other. At a "social" held at Elwood school in 1907, one young man, the victor in such a contest, paid \$46.00 for a cake!

The name "box social" comes, of course, from the preparation of box lunches by the school girls or young ladies of the town, each box to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Crowds of people would attend to participate in the fun, or watch the good-natured local rivalry among the bidders, who were expected to eat the contents of the box in company with the girl who had prepared it.

In spite of the saying, "Fancy box, plain girl", and "Too much time spent on the outside, not enough on the inside", great care was taken in fixing and wrapping the lunches. Crepe paper, streamers, or ribbons in every color of the rainbow were tied and looped attractively to entice the masculine eye, for each donor hoped that her box would sell for a record sum. Nor did the contents leave much to be desired. Inside would be browned pieces of tender fried chicken or thick slices of meat loaf or home-cured, hickory-smoked ham, generous bread and butter sandwiches, hard-boiled or deviled eggs, candy, fruit, and enormous slices of cake topped with toothsome white or chocolate icing.

The crowds on the evening of the "social" would rather impatiently take part in the preliminary entertainment -- singing, home talent shows -- or a spelldown. The high pitch of excitement was reached when the auctioneer mounted his block with a choice box in his hand.

"All right, gentlemen, what am I bid for this box?" he would shout. "Don't forget it may belong to the prettiest girl in the house. Ep-ep, no signalling, please! Who'll bid 50 cents to start?"

The contest was on, and although the name of the owner of each box was supposed to be a secret, those secrets were not always well-kept. When a girl's best beau started bidding, the other men took delight in bidding against him, and in that way the final sum was often run up to \$10 or \$15. Even so, the \$46 paid by the young man at Elwood school was a record to beat anywhere.

During the second decade of the 1900's some school communities first considered the idea of consolidation. Redding voted for it in 1913, but the vote was invalid on a

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technicality and was cast out. In 1914 Redding erected a new school and the next year the communities concerned again voted to consolidate. In 1917 a large addition, equal to and matching the first unit, was built to provide room for the increased number of pupils.

Other consolidated schools were voted at Delphos in 1915, at Maloy in 1917, and at Beaconsfield in 1920. Ellston voted consolidation but the vote was annulled when the bonding company found a technical error in that the election had been advertised only by public notices and not in the newspapers. Consolidation lost on the second vote.

In the course of years Mount Ayr enrolled the largest number of pupils in the county. In 1938 this was about one-fifth of the school population. This school, however, was well started when the other village schools were just beginning. Lora E. Laughlin, the first graduate of the high school, later Lora Laughlin Richardson, was the first woman to hold the office of Ringgold County superintendent of schools. One of the principals of the school who had much to do with the building of the school program at an early date was J. W. Wilkerson, principal from 1886 to 1895. His influence, it is said, extended far beyond the classroom. Pupils who attended the school during that period reported that they were often deterred from mischievous plans because they remembered that Wilkerson wouldn't approve. Another person who strongly influenced the school was Adam Pickett, principal from 1900 to 1908. Steadily growing in prominence Mount Ayr came to assume a big brotherly attitude toward the smaller high schools in the county, refusing to join an athletic league of larger schools because it would force them to give up games with other towns in the county, which were not eligible for league membership.

In 1928 the Schoolmen's Club of Ringgold County was organized. This was an outgrowth of some of the preceding countywide teachers' organizations which existed as early as 1877, and became the policy maker of the county's cooperative school affairs. In addition to its regular monthly programs, the club undertook the guidance of the county basketball tournament, county baseball tournament, county youth conference, county elementary reading and spelling contests, Iowa silent reading tests, and the county music festival.

The music festival was introduced to give schools not large enough to enter music contests a chance to present their talents. Perhaps the germ of the idea originated in the State Music Festival first held at the University of Iowa at Iowa City in 1926. The first Ringgold County festival was held at Mount Ayr April 22, 1936, in the Methodist Church. Two hundred and twenty-five musicians from the ten

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high schools of the county took part in the boys' glee club, girls' club, and mixed chorus singing. Guest directors conducted the choruses. In 1936, when 500 pupils took part, the county grade school chorus, the junior band, and the advanced all-county band were introduced.

The rural grade school chorus was trained according to Dr. C. A. Fullerton's plan, nationally known as the "Iowa Plan." Dr. Fullerton, of Iowa State Teachers College, devised this means of teaching music to the children in rural schools through the use of phonograph records. Professor Fullerton first collected the songs from all parts of the world and then had nationally known musicians record them. The children learned them from listening to the records, and each child above the third grade was tested with the phonograph. When he could sing the ten songs selected by his county, he became a member of the county chorus. In Ringgold County in 1937, 300 grade school children sang under Professor Fullerton's personal direction.

At Beaconsfield the school sponsored a ten-cent weekly movie throughout the vacation period, a highly successful venture. The county fans have always followed their basketball teams with pride. In 1930 the "Irish" at Maloy won their way to the State basketball tournament at Des Moines, and in 1938 the Diagonal team, with "Pop" Varner as coach, were State champions. For seven out of eight years this team represented its section in the State tournament at Des Moines.

CHAPTER 4

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIENCES

The earliest settlers of Ringgold County were primarily farmers, and whatever obligations arising from citizenship came to them later were merely wedged into the time they could spare from breaking the prairie. They found the prairie grasses growing higher than a horseman's head, and they set out to conquer the prairie with their plows.

H. T. Miller of Clinton Township introduced blue grass, which was soon widely accepted. Believing that the blue grass was the base of stock farming, he took pains to explain its value to the other farmers. Properly cut and cured, the blue grass made excellent hay. It could be piled about the stables on the north and west to make wind breaks for the stock in winter, or stuffed between the rails of slatted granaries.

It grew naturally and luxuriantly and soon appeared over a large part of the 128,000 acres of pasture lands of the county. It did not take Ringgold County farmers long to discover that stock raising was their best chance for security. Horses, cattle, and sheep that grazed on the thick turf were abundantly nourished by the vitamin-rich grass. Heavy grazing increased the growth of the blue grass and at the same time kept down the weeds and less desirable grasses that tried to push their way through the soil.

Indeed, most of southwestern Iowa became blue grass conscious, so much so that 18 counties in 1889 organized the Blue Grass League to advertise the advantages of the region just as the Sioux City Corn Palace publicized the northwestern part of the State. This league, organized at Creston in J. B. Harsh's office on May 11, 1889, sponsored the building of a Blue Grass Palace, and selected the Creston (Union County) fairgrounds as the palace site because it was the center of that particular area.

People from all over southern Iowa visited the Palace when it opened on August 29, 1889, and enjoyed the exhibits which included all types of local soil products. The Blue Grass Palace was so successful that the association planned a bigger and a better one in 1890. This one, made from 76 varieties of wood, all native to southern Iowa, was three times larger than its predecessor. The front of the structure, which extended for 132 feet, was composed entirely of soil products. The building had a central tower 120 feet high, and towers over the entrance on the east and at the north and south ends of the building. One of the novel features was a 12-foot suspension bridge stretched from the

south to the north towers at the highest point. Those who crossed the bridge got a fine view of the grounds and the countryside. Among the clever items constructed to attract attention were a sled, horses, and drivers made of corn, with harness of the grass, and the figure of a farmer in straw, with red corn silk mustaches.

People of Ringgold County who had missed the first Blue Grass Palace Exposition flocked to see the second one, officially opened by Governor Horace Boies.

More than 4,000 visited the grounds the first day. There were "Blue Grass Specials" from as far away as Omaha arriving constantly during the morning of the second day. Each of the cooperating counties had its own exhibits within the palace and displayed its own grain and dairy products. Various towns in the county brought their bands with them, and their carnival spirit made gay hours for the crowds. The League sponsored fairs in 1891 and 1892, but then interest in them slackened and no more expositions were held.

In the beginning, most Ringgold County farmers had planted sod corn as their first crop. Corn and oats soon became staple feeds for hogs, sheep, horses, and cattle. Judson Griffith, who came from Ohio in 1854, tried to raise cotton for two years, but even the small, carefully nursed patches he planted were not too successful. Luke Shay combined grain and stock raising. Before there were any railroads, he butchered hogs and cattle on his farm, cured the meat, and hauled it by wagon to St. Joseph, Missouri, or Burlington. When the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad was extended to Ottumwa, Shay drove hogs and cattle across the prairie to that town and shipped them to Chicago. When the Leon, Mount Ayr and Southwestern Railroad passed through Mount Ayr, Shay shipped even more stock, sometimes 150 carloads a year. In 1859, when Cyrus B. Damen settled in Jefferson Township, he drove his hogs to market at Afton. Two years later John Dickson, returning to Ringgold County to get married after a visit in Union County, joined with Sylvester Beaver to herd back 600 sheep. It took them approximately two months to reach Ringgold County.

Since there were so few villages during the first years of settlement, the farmer had to travel from 50 to 100 miles to reach a store or a mill. Many went to Afton in Union County, and others to St. Joseph, Missouri. But groceries were scarce in these settlements, too. White flour was high, and even salt was ten dollars a barrel or seven cents a pound. Some of the farmers still traveled to St. Joseph, Afton, or Ottumwa for supplies even after Mount Ayr, Ringgold City, Caledonia, and other early post-office-in-a-store villages had been established. These small, isolated village storekeepers had to go as far as the farmers did to re-

plenish their stocks. Sometimes, when sugar was scarce, families substituted watermelon and pumpkin molasses. The soft maple trees in the vicinity gave only a little sap, but even that little was used.

Jeremiah Gustin brought his family to the county in the spring of 1857, and undertook to build a frame house. The framework was hewn from trees in the surrounding timber, but the siding, doors, flooring, and window casing were hauled from Marion County, 100 miles away. For two years this was Jefferson Township's only frame building. Gustin hauled all of his provisions from Marion County and took his grain into Missouri to be ground at a mill 50 miles from home. He was one of those pioneer farmers who used oxen to thresh out the grain, or flailed it on a hard earth floor.

During the early days there was doubt whether fruit could be raised in the county, but Samuel Fellows, who had taken a claim on Crooked Creek in 1855, decided to plant an orchard. Peter Doze, then sheriff, advised him not to "fool away his time setting out trees." Fellows, however, was sure an orchard would grow where wild crab apple and plum trees grew. L. O. Imus, then a boy, heard the two arguing spiritedly after Fellows had cleared a patch for his orchard. Doze admitted that in spite of his protests his wife had gone in the orchard business too and planted the seeds from a bushel of peaches he had brought to her from Missouri. When Fellows asked why apples couldn't be raised, Doze laughed and predicted that the rabbits would eat up the young trees as fast as they were set out. But Fellows went ahead and planted a number of trees, wrapping them each fall, and in due time he enjoyed the apples he gathered from the county's first orchard. Also, Mrs. Doze had good luck with her peaches.

While Fellows experimented with his orchard, other farmers tried sheep raising. Both Captain Andrew Johnson of Liberty Township and Charles K. Grimes of Tingley Township were early sheep raisers. Johnson, who came to the county in 1856, herded 700 head on the open prairie.

During the Civil War sheep raising was important because the wool was needed. Flocks all over the county were increased in size in spite of the constant ravages of wolves. In 1858 a law providing for a bounty on the scalps of wolves and other marauding vermin went into effect, but the bounty was so low that the Iowa Sheepbreeders and Wool Growers Association asked that it be raised. Wolves still increased, and in 1892 the Iowa Homestead charged that some farmers in the State raised wolves to collect the bounty. Wolf trouble never ceased. From 1913 to 1919 the State paid \$150,000 in bounties, and was still paying them in 1942. Although Ringgold County suffered less from the wolves than other coun-

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ties, bounties amounting to \$3,759 were paid during the 20 years from 1918 to 1938.

In Ringgold County during the early days one of the sheep growers tried the remedy of hunting down the wolves with hounds. John Sneer, a neighbor of Captain Johnson, got a pair of hounds, but the hounds bayed around the country and disturbed the neighbors more than they did the wolves. Once the hounds ran down a deer in John K. White's farmyard. When the three women in the house -- Mrs. White, her sister, Mrs. Fry, and Miss Thompson -- ran out to find why Sneer's hounds were baying in their yard, they saw an exhausted buck crouching in a corner of the sheepfold. Mrs. Fry handed Miss Thompson a long-handled shovel and herself seized an ax. They rushed to the sheepfold and killed the deer, who had been keeping the dogs at bay with his antlers. Then Mrs. White rang the dinner bell and called the hired man in from his field work to dress the carcass.

The hounds were used occasionally in circular wolf hunts. Hunters arranged themselves in a loose circle encompassing many miles of territory and then the men with their dogs and horses closed in toward the center.

Farming methods improved during Civil War days. Osman Liniger bought the first threshing machine in the county in 1862, and paid \$600 for it, wholly in cash. Five years later Sy Crosley bought one, a "down power" machine, operated by four or five teams of horses. Two years later, Levi Terwilliger bought the first corn planter.

During the 1870's the Patrons of Husbandry organized Granges in almost every township, and some of them continued for ten or more years. The entire family found a social center in the Grange since the organization included the women and children. It was through this channel, too, that the farmer had his one opportunity to express a unified farm protest against State and National legislation that seemed unfair. The national activities of the Grange eventually brought the establishment of the cabinet office of the Secretary of Agriculture.

In Iowa the Grange championed the farmer in his fight against high freight rates. Grange lobbyists were strong enough to secure the passage of what was popularly known as the Granger law, whereby freight and passenger rates in Iowa were set by the State. Although there were no railroads through Ringgold County at this time, the rates did affect those who hauled their stock to Ottumwa to be shipped to Chicago or other points. The law was repealed after a few years, but the Railway Commission set up in its place became a permanent part of Iowa government to adjust disagreements between the farmer and the railroads.

According to a pamphlet published by the Iowa Board of Immigration in 1870, Ringgold County farmers were doing well in 1868. They had 24,651 acres under cultivation and harvested 24,482 bushels of wheat, 426,840 bushels of corn, and 51,401 bushels of oats as well as many other grains and fruits. Sheep raising had been increased by war demands until there were 16,577 sheep. There were more hogs than cattle (9,362 hogs to 5,961 cattle) but after the herd law was passed, in 1870, the number of sheep and hogs dwindled, for open range was no longer allowed and the cost of feeding was high. Farmers then began to breed the horses that later made the county well known in Eastern markets. There were 2,659 horses on the farms throughout the county, but 116 oxen and 204 mules were also reported. Farmers sold \$142,206 worth of livestock that year.

Fencing became a heavy burden for most of the farmers, for a fence around a farm often cost more than the initial cost of the homestead. But experiments with fencing were soon under way. Ringgold was one of the counties that used osage orange hedges to a great extent. Not long after the railroads crossed the county, pine fencing came into vogue, but this in turn gave way to barbed wire as soon as the prices were brought within reach of the average farmer. Many farmers gave up hog and sheep raising altogether when the herd law went into effect, because of the difficulty of keeping sheep fenced.

Several turned to cattle instead of sheep. Among these was Captain Andrew Johnston. About 1875 he brought back with him from the Iowa State Fair two purebred Shorthorns, Beulah and Young Mary, as the foundation of a herd, probably the first of that breed brought to the county. Johnston had raised Berkshire hogs and Percheron and Clydesdale horses, as well as sheep, before 1870, but his chief interest soon lay in building up his Shorthorn herd. He frequently attended state and county fairs to buy cattle from noted breeders. He also influenced many other farmers in the county to improve their herds. In 1905, when he disposed of his 28 Shorthorns, he received an average of \$700 each for them.

During this period many of the farmers were winning prizes for their stock at the fairs. Among them was Daniel Tidrick of Liberty Township, who raised Poland China hogs and Norman and Clydesdale horses.

In many other parts of Iowa during the 1870's, farmers were fighting grasshoppers, but crop losses in Ringgold County were few. One day in June 1875, however, William A. Matthews stopped plowing his young corn to eat his dinner, then returned to his plow to find a swarm of grasshoppers dining on his corn. The next day they rose from the field with a rumble like thunder and in a swarm so thick they obscured the sun for a few minutes. There was not a blade of corn left.

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The farmers in one section of the county had a bad time with hog cholera in 1876 and 1877. A man who knew little about farming moved into the vicinity, buying his stock on the way from people who took advantage of his ignorance and sold him unhealthy brood sows. In 1877, when he had raised a good litter of pigs, cholera broke out among them and soon spread among his neighbor's stock. The prevalence of cholera and its sudden descent on localities throughout the State may have been another reason that farmers in the county raised fewer hogs in the ensuing years.

During the 1880's interest in dairying increased. One of the most successful enterprises was John Blauer's Evergreen Dairy Farm. Blauer came to Ringgold County in 1881, and in 1883 he netted \$450 on the sale of butter from 12 cows alone. When farmers found that dairy products provided a steady income, many of them kept herds and sold cream to the several creameries then in business. Briggs Wilbur started a creamery in Liberty Township in 1884, and 11 years later a group of farmers in the township bought it and converted it into a cheese factory. The business prospered until it was found that selling cream was more profitable than making cheese from the whole milk.

CHAPTER 5

CHANGES THAT CAME WITH THE RAILROAD

When railroads were extended through Ringgold County, stock raising became still more profitable. Long hauls by wagon, or long drives to market, were no longer necessary. Farm communities grew more compact, centering their trading activities in nearby towns. Some of the railroad station points had stockyards, and all of the villages made bids to handle the stock shipments. Some of the rural churches moved to town and more business sprang up.

Since 1876 the county had been known for its fine horses. Thousands of thorobred Percherons, Normans, Clydesdales, English Shires, and Belgians were shipped from nearly every railroad station. In addition to draft horses, a few stockmen bred Cleveland bays and French coach horses. The leading breeder of these roadsters was Melvin Bennett, who owned the fastest stallion in southwestern Iowa. During the 1880's and 1890's Ringgold County was known for its matched teams as far away as Boston, Massachusetts, and the people in the villages were as proud of the county's fine horses as were the breeders themselves. One of the most successful breeders was E. N. Dewitt, who, with his brothers, ran the livery stable in Tingley. Some of the Dewitt stallions took sweepstake prizes at Illinois State and county fairs. The Dewitts frequently paid as high as \$2,500 for breeding stock. D. D. McGregor of Tingley had the reputation of raising the best horses in the county. He bred draft horses and had specimens in his stable that weighed from 1,800 to 2,300 pounds each.

Prominent horsemen in the county rated one particular carload of horses shipped to the Boston, Massachusetts, market in February 1885 as the best ever sent from the locality. The average weight, all nearing five years old, was 1,800 pounds. The teams were almost perfectly matched for size and color. Some of the big steel-gray draft horses brought big prices in the Eastern markets. One team of dapple grays was reported as ideal for a city fire department. According to the Ringgold Record and the Twice-A-Week News for February 1895, this carload had never been beaten by any county in the State.

About this time, too, there were several horse companies that flourished in different parts of the county. One of these, the Liberty Township Horse Company, was organized by Norm Rogers, S. F. Lowder, D. C. Tidrick, and F. M. Eighme. The splendid horses each year attracted horse buyers to the township. The Tingley Percheron Horse Association was organized. Other horse companies were the Mount

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Ayr Horse Company and the Tingley Shire Horse Company. The Tingley Colt Show, established during the 1890's, was popular until 1899, when interest lessened somewhat. But in August 1900 Tingley boosters sponsored the first Tournament and Street Fair in the town. In 1906 a foal and colt show was added and stallion owners paid premiums for the best colts.

One of the annual features of this fair was the riding exhibition put on by the Tingley Riding Club. Sixty costumed young ladies and gentlemen, trained by E. N. Dewitt, rode in two's, four's, eight's, twelve's, and in other and more difficult formations. Nine of the ladies engaged in a needle threading contest while they rode at a full gallop. The winner threaded her needle in nine seconds flat. This fair became known as the Tingley Farmers' Tournament and Horse Show, all breeds of horses and mules being shown.

By 1910, however, this had developed into a real county fair, replacing to some extent the Ringgold County fairs which had not been a great financial success, and had been dissolved in 1908. By 1936 this was identified with the Farmers' Institute, and the horse shows were still a popular feature. During the show the town's facilities were always taxed to the limit to provide space for the large number of entries. In the spring of 1941, a large horse buyer from New York told John Blauer, the president of the Farmers' Institute, "Tingley Township, Ringgold County, is listed as the best place to go to buy the best horses to ship, and it keeps its place at the top by its competition at their local fairs."

By 1903 Ringgold County had two annual Farmers' Institutes. They were begun as such in the State when the Twenty-fourth General Assembly passed an act allowing \$50 to each county holding an institute. Ringgold County held its first institute at Mount Ayr four years later, and in 1902 Redding initiated a second institute. In October of 1903, classes in corn culture, judging, buttermilk, and livestock were taught at the Redding institute. Professors P. G. Holden, H. R. Wright, and J. W. Kennedy of Iowa State Agricultural College at Ames assisted in the four-day session. Railroad officials at this time helped Holden by providing what were called "Seed Corn Specials" -- several cars having equipment to give corn and other farm demonstrations. The seed corn specials were sent to all corners of the State to interest the farmers in improving the quality of their crops. These Farmers' Institutes to a large degree replaced the Grange. Then, later, the Farm Bureau took the place of the institutes.

Sometimes farm troubles called for the cooperative effort of all in the community. In the fall of 1904, the

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raids of rats on the stored grain in Rice and Middle Fork Townships made wholesale action necessary. Chosen representatives of the two townships engaged in a rat-killing contest during the week of December 19. Sixteen men from the "Southsiders" raced against 16 from the "Northsiders" to see which team could collect the most rat tails.

Captained by Elmer Defenbaugh, the Southsiders won by bringing in 2,000 tails. The Northsiders, under N. V. Tyrrel, got 1,250. Later the Northsiders treated the Southsiders to an oyster supper at A. J. Kaster's home.

In commenting on local successes in raising cattle and other stock, the Mount Ayr Record News of August 11, 1914, stated that Captain A. Johnston was one of the first men in the county to lay the foundation for a fine Shorthorn herd. Just after the close of the Civil War he enlarged his herd with fine breeding specimens and sold a number from time to time for the improvement of other herds in the county. For years Shorthorns were the leading breed of cattle in Ringgold County. They were still the most numerous in 1896 when Charles H. Robinson wrote an article for the Twice-A-Week News of June 12, reviewing stock raising as the basis of the county's prosperity. After Z. T. Kinsell introduced Hereford cattle in the county, about 1886, four or five others established herds.

A. Ingram built up one of the finest herds in the State from imported Herefords. Kinsell bred his own Maple Grove Herefords on his 480-acre farm two miles southwest of Mount Ayr. A show herd of nine head were taken on a month's tour in 1898 and visited the Union and Lucas County fairs, as well as the Nebraska State Fair. This stock, conceded to be the best in Iowa at that time, was under the care of Thomas Andrews of Herefordshire, England. In August of the next year, Kinsell sent them to the Iowa State Fair where they won top prizes. According to the Breeder's Gazette, quoted in the August 25, 1899, issue of Twice-A-Week News, "St. Elmo of Shadeland was at the head of the herd, and it is doubtful if there are many living bulls bred like him. His sire was Garfield and his dam, Henrietta by Lord Wilton. A bull nowadays whose sire and dam were both royal winners is rather scarce."

Aberdeen Angus cows were first brought to the county about 1890 by T. A. Stevenson, and a few farmers followed his lead and established Angus herds. Only a few farmers owned Jerseys, but this breed was popular with the townspeople or those in the country who owned only one or two cows. Briggs Wilbur bred Holsteins for a time, but sold them out in 1894.

Sheep raising became profitable again for a number of

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years. Shropshires were introduced in 1885 by J. Robinson and sons. B. D. Johnson owned a fine flock of Merinos.

During the early 1900's the Ringgold County "clip" averaged about 12,000 pounds and sold at from 25 cents to 28 cents a pound. In 1905 the Chandler Brothers of Kellerton exhibited entries. At the "Show Me" Fair the Chandler entries carried away more prizes than all the other exhibitors combined. This flock, ranked as one of the finest in the United States, was shown at the Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota State Fairs. In 1907 the Chandler Brothers, with the exception of C. W. Chandler, moved to Chariton with their flocks. As late as 1916, C. W. Chandler still showed sheep and won prizes.

With all the improvements that had come in farming methods, one rural problem remained unsolved -- the bad roads. The dirt highways were not bad after they had been dragged and smoothed, but were impassable after a rain. Wheels bogged down in the gumbo ruts and the wayfarer who got stuck stayed stuck. The first action for better roads was probably started by M. Z. Bailey, the county's representative in the State Legislature. He urged the passage of a bill which gave the farmers credit on their tax bill for dragging the roads in their neighborhoods. Not more than ten draggings at fifty cents a mile, or five dollars, could be credited to any farmer, but this stimulated the interest of farmers in keeping their roads dragged. Four years later Mount Ayr business men staged a better roads campaign among the farmers, and a good many graveled roads resulted, but the county was slow in utilizing its share of the gasoline tax to provide cement roads. Ringgold was the last county in the State to introduce cross-county concrete highways.

The depression of the 1930's brought its own problem to Ringgold County when the extent of erosion in the once fertile soil was recognized. The county is in the southern Iowa loessial area where, according to the Second Report of the Iowa State Planning Board, April 1935, the soils were "probably eroded more than any other soils in the State and present the most serious erosion problem." Much of the top soil had been worn away through the years by heavy cropping and overgrazing, or carried off by excessive rains. Gullies yawned in the earth where the native timber had been cleared off. Through the aid of Government agencies, steps were taken to check this by putting out more trees to slow up the erosion caused by floods. Although Ringgold had more forest area than the average Iowa county, the Grand River often overflowed, washing away tons of soil in its flood periods. Ringgold County farmers participating in the Federal Soil Conservation program under the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1941 led all other counties in Iowa, with 96 per cent of its farmers enrolled.

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Added to the problem of soil depletion came a season of drought during 1933 and 1934, the worse the county had experienced. The year 1933 was almost rainless, and when the spring of 1934 passed with no rain, the farmers feared for their planted crops. Through May, June, and July there was still no rain. The days were hot and clear, with temperatures ranging from 105 to 111 degrees. According to Mrs. B. M. Lesan's History of Early Ringgold County, the corn, oats, gardens, and pastures were burned up by July 1. The rain that poured down on August 30 came too late to save the crops, though it did fill wells, ponds, and creeks. Pastures grew up in weeds. The clovers and grasses had been killed. Many farmers sold their hogs, cattle, and chickens because there was no feed. Some gave hogs away. Had there been no corn-hog loans, many of the farmers would have had to go on relief. During the winter of 1934 and 1935 the Farm Bureau office at Mount Ayr was filled with farmers trying to get hay or fodder, anything that livestock could eat. The Farm Bureau, organized in the county in 1918, proved to be a real friend. The boys and girls who had been in the corn and pig clubs then were managing farms in 1936, and were becoming accustomed to turn to the Farm Bureau for advice. They remembered how their fathers had listened cautiously during the early days of the Farm Bureau's history to the advice to increase the production of spring wheat and to purchase new seed corn for planting since the old was low in vitality. They remembered, too, how successful the new seed corn distributed by that organization had been. They had confidence in the Farm Bureau's plans.

Farming in the county followed the same pattern in 1942 that it had for the several previous decades. Pasture land still occupied the major part of the farm area and most of the farmers depended upon stock raising for their chief income. Grain was raised chiefly to feed the stock that grazed on the rolling grasslands. A stranger driving through Tingley Township, seeing the splendid horses cropping in the pastures, might wonder if this could be a portion of the Middle West not yet invaded by tractors. If he asked he would learn that this was a famous horse raising section, and that many of the stallions racing across the fields could wear strings of premium ribbons for a necklace.

CHAPTER 6

VILLAGE AND COUNTRYSIDE PIONEER TOGETHER

Many of the post offices and villages known to the citizens of Ringgold County in the 1870's disappeared entirely or were absorbed by newer towns that sprang up along the railroad when it entered the county. Some of these names -- Bozzaris, Clipper, Ingart Grove, Marena, Union Hill, Bloomington, Marshall, Riley, and Polen -- were entirely unknown to many residents. When the Western Stagecoach Company stopped its service in 1870 the county was almost as isolated as it had been during the days of early settlement. The railroad which the people of the county had expected to continue across Ringgold County soon after it reached Leon in 1871 was not built any farther until 1879. During this period the county gained 700 in population, but life moved slowly.

When Mount Ayr was incorporated in 1875 it was the largest village in the county, with a population of 422. In the summer of 1872 many townspeople followed the village's first band to Afton, where the members received \$100 for playing at the Fourth of July celebration. Later that year, the Pete Brothers' Leader Band was organized with ten pieces. Another evidence of growth was the establishment of a second newspaper, the Mount Ayr Journal, in 1873. C. C. Bartruff of Creston started the paper and ran it for ten years before he sold out. In the same year George R. Stephens bought a half interest in the Ringgold Record.

There was growth in other sections of the county at this time. Clipper was made a post office, with Harvey Waugh the postmaster, at a salary of \$6.80 for his first year. The hamlet did not grow, however, and the post office was abandoned in the 1880's. The Cross post office at Merritt Station, one of the former stagecoach stops, was moved two miles east to a neighborhood known as New Chicago, so named for a family from Chicago, Illinois, who lived there.

During the middle 1870's several businesses were opened at Mount Ayr. Lewis B. Imus started the first barber shop, which the men of the village quickly welcomed. They no longer had to prop the kerosene lamp beside the mirror on an early winter morning and try to scrape off the stubble of the previous day's growth with doubtfully warm water. T. E. Corkhill started the first town dairy. The cows were milked in the lot and the milk skimmed into a 20-gallon can. At Mount Ayr the can was placed on a two-wheeled cart drawn by a horse with a bell on his hames. The jangling of the bell warned the residents that the milkman was coming, and they ran out with their cans or pails to meet him.

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Although the county had needed a jail for many years, the first one was not erected until 1876. This building, 18 by 20 feet, had two cells made of half-inch boiler plate with a flat tin roof. Previously prisoners had been housed in the jury room at the courthouse, or at the Creston jail in Union County.

Circumstantial evidence almost cost Herman Potter his life in 1876. Dave Aldrich, who lived north of what later was the site of Redding, left home on horseback without telling anyone where he was going. When he had not returned a week later, a posse went out for him. They found some of his clothing near Herman Potter's home and a pool of blood in the adjoining timber, and suspected that Potter had murdered him. Potter explained that his hogs were so wild he had to butcher them in the timber, and the result of butchering was all they had found. But the posse would have hanged Potter then and there, had not John D. Carter persuaded the men to let the law take its course, since the evidence against Potter was only circumstantial. A few days later, when Aldrich returned, everyone was glad that Carter had prevented them from a rash deed.

People were disappointed when the railroad was not extended at once beyond Leon. The delay -- eight years -- may have been partly due to the Granger law enacted by the Iowa State Legislature in 1873, giving the Legislature the right to regulate freight and passenger rates in Iowa. The law divided railroad transportation into three classes, establishing rates for each class, both in passenger and freight service.

Freight rates were worked out according to a complicated divisional scale that did not allow the railroad to pay its own operating costs. A carload of lumber brought \$33.00 for a two-hundred-mile trip. Merchandise traveled the same distance third class at thirty-six cents per hundred pounds. Even the New York Herald Tribune remarked that it was little wonder that immigrants passed Iowa by when it had a bill like the Granger law on its statute books. Railroad boxcars lay idle on the tracks, and some of the railroad equipment rusted from disuse until the law was repealed in 1878, and the Railroad Commission set up to adjust grievances between the farmer and the railroad.

Shortly after the Granger law was repealed, a group in the county organized a stock company to build a narrow gauge railroad from Leon to Mount Ayr. In 1877 this company published a newspaper, The Headlight, to arouse interest in the proposed railroad. It was succeeded by Onward, which was published until 1884.

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There had been no Fourth of July celebration in Mount Ayr for a number of years and the citizens decided to stage a Grand Rally of the Veterans of the Civil War on the Fourth of July 1878. Soldiers in most of the townships met on June 15 and organized their veterans. Fifers and drummers from all over the county met with D. B. Marshall at Mount Ayr on July 3, and assisted the Mount Ayr band, which then was rated as one of the best in the State. The Taylor County Argus commented, "If any town in southwestern Iowa will have a grand time on the Fourth, Mount Ayr will have it." No one wanted to miss the celebration, and many attended from surrounding counties.

The soldiers started the day with reveille at sunrise and carried it through to sick call at 8 o'clock, grand mount at 9, company drill at 9:30, battalion drill at 11:30, skirmish drill at 2 p.m., and dress parade at 3 p.m.

All through the forenoon, crowds arrived on foot, on horseback, in wagons, and in buggies from Taylor, Decatur, and Worth Counties even though the skies were clouded and rain threatened. More than 5,000 people joined in the festivities and listened to the speaker, Edward B. Heaton, well known to this community where he had been farmer, preacher, school teacher, writer, singing master, and soldier. A week later the veterans met again and formed a permanent organization.

A big year was 1879, when the Leon, Mount Ayr and Southwestern Railroad was built through the county from Bethany Junction to Mount Ayr, slightly more than 23 miles. In 1880 the line was continued from Mount Ayr to Grant City, Missouri. The townships voted a tax of two to five per cent to help build the line, which, like other contemporary roads, wandered through as many townships as it could, for the sake of the levy. In return for the money and the right-of-way, the county and townships received railroad stock which was actually worthless. In September 1879 the road was opened for business and at once the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad took it over, operating it as lessee until 1901, and from then on as owner.

Before the new road began operation, a cyclone dipped down into Ringgold County, the night of May 29, 1879, and wrecked the Dulany homestead. The Dulanys had arrived in the county in March and built their house, but it had not yet been plastered. The cyclone lifted it up and set it down a few feet away. The Dulanys then grabbed what few clothes they could and got outside. For a few minutes they were separated, then they managed to crawl together through a ditch to the home of John Erskine, a neighbor. When they returned to their house in the morning, they found it fit only for kindling. Dishes were broken, the furniture smashed, and their clothing and bedding strewn all over the countryside.

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Several new towns had been laid out along the route while the Leon, Mount Ayr and Southwestern Railroad was being completed. Railroad capitalists laid out Kellerton in 1879, naming it in honor of Judge Keller of Mount Ayr. Then New Chicago, a trading post and post office a little more than a mile to the east, moved bodily to Kellerton. The new site, purchased from Samuel and John Tedrow, lay on high level ground from which both Mount Ayr and Leon could be seen on clear days. Seventy of the 240 acres in the town site were soon laid off into lots, and Kellerton began its history. Three and a half miles to the north was an old buffalo wallow about two acres in area. This wallow, about 20 feet deep and then filled with water, was one of the old swimming holes of pioneer days.

Lesanville was a platted town before the railroad came through the county, but it never developed to more than a station on the railroad. In 1887 it had a store, a post office, and a Methodist Church, but this was the extent of its growth. There is no sign of a town there in 1942, but the place is still known as the "Lesan neighborhood."

During the 1880's two other railroads crossed the county: the Humeston and Shenandoah in the northern tier of townships, and the Great Western diagonally through the western part of the county. Other new towns were established along these routes and rivalry between them, when some were only a few miles apart, was the keynote of the decade. Older communities and settlements were absorbed by the newer towns.

In 1880, when the Leon and Mount Ayr was extended to Grant City, railroad owners laid out Delphos (formerly Borneo) and Redding. There had been some settlement near the site of Delphos, and it was not long before the town had a reputation for being one of the cleanest and most circum-spect villages in the county. Redding, laid out in the same year, was incorporated in 1882 with a population of 300. There had been a post office in this vicinity for some time, but it had moved at least five times before it finally arrived in Redding. The Methodists erected the first church in the village in 1884. The town had great promise in its earliest years, but suffered several disastrous fires which almost wiped it out. Its business houses moved elsewhere and Redding never recovered.

When the Humeston and Shenandoah crossed the northern part of the county in 1881, Beaconsfield and Tingley were laid out by town companies which purchased the sites from farmers.

Tingley was probably indirectly named for a school teacher, Tingley Cornwall. He had taught in a rural dis-

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trict of Union Township at the same time Union was subdivided into two parts, and the new township had been named for him. Some time later, Eugene, about five miles north of Tingley, was absorbed by it. Then Beaconsfield was platted, and had a doctor, R. G. Rider, before it was a year old. This little village, because of its nearness to other villages, grew slowly.

Two men, Cochrane and LeFever, had a store on the site of Wirt a year before it was platted. Lots were not surveyed for several years after the railroad passed the site, but the post office was moved from Union Hill, three miles northeast, and a railroad station was established. Twelve or 15 years later, the name was changed to Ellston. In a few years there were stockyards and scales there, to meet the needs of the stock raisers in the surrounding territory. A Methodist church was erected during this period by J. E. Evans, the town's first minister.

In 1880, when new towns springing up in the county absorbed old villages, Mount Ayr boasted a population of 1,275. There was an increase in civic activities. A four-room schoolhouse was built and classes were transferred there from their old location in the courthouse. New businesses and lodges were organized. Eighteen veterans of the Civil War started the Ellis G. Miller Post, Grand Army of the Republic, on November 3, 1880. It was named for Lieutenant Miller who had enlisted in Company G, Fourth Iowa Infantry, and was killed at the battle of Chickasaw Bayou at Vicksburg, Mississippi, December 29, 1862. Miller had been the first commissioned officer from Mount Ayr to die in service. By July 1926 the post membership had reached 246.

Mount Ayr began its rather long struggle to provide adequate fire protection in 1880. In that year the town council authorized Z. T. Kinsell to buy fire fighting tools for the newly organized hook and ladder company as the first step in providing better fire protection. The memory of a disastrous fire in 1879, which had burned most of the buildings on the southeast quarter of the block on the north side of the square, was fresh in the minds of the citizens, but popular sentiment was against the hook and ladder company. Five years dragged by before any attempt was made to get the equipment the company needed. Fires still had to be fought by bucket brigades.

In 1881 Walter Marriage moved a three-story roller mill to Mount Ayr. Before the installation of this mill, with its one set of burrs for grinding corn, rye, and buckwheat, and another set for chopping, farmers had to take their grain as far as Afton and Davis City for grinding. Marriage operated the mill until 1885, and then D. Jodon ran it until 1887, when D. D. Ballou bought and managed it until 1908.

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About 1910, while it was in the hands of Poe Johnson, the mill burned to the ground. Later an elevator was built on the site.

Until 1883 the indigent people in the county were supported in their own homes or cared for in the homes of others by county funds. In that year, the county officials moved the poor into a new \$5,000 county home which had been completed in the spring. The officials had purchased 240 acres from John Underhill for a county home site during the fall of 1882. Here the indigent were cared for until 1922.

The towns in the county were having various growing experiences in 1882 and 1883. Mount Ayr still struggled with county fairs that had little success. When train service into Tingley was begun in 1882, that town had a population of 200. A Christian Church had been erected, George Swain was running the first store, and J. Gettinger had started the Tingley News. The paper, however, was soon moved to Wirt (Ellston). Kellerton was incorporated in 1882 and the next year the Kellerton Independent was established to supersede the Kellerton Mentor, a two-year-old newspaper. Redding also became incorporated, with a population of 300. In 1883 the Baptists at Delphos erected that village's first church, and the Catholics at Kellerton built a church.

The county had by this time outgrown its second courthouse. Construction of the third courthouse started in 1883, but the two-story brick and stone building, with its tower 102 feet tall, was not completed until 1884. The courtroom, the sheriff's office, and the grand jury room were on the second floor. The old courthouse was used for a variety of purposes for a number of years. On Thanksgiving night about 1889 the old courthouse, which had been left standing, caught fire and burned to the ground.

While the county was setting up housekeeping in the new building, C. B. Morris, H. A. White, and J. C. Askren sank a shaft 326 feet deep, about two and a half miles east of the depot at Mount Ayr, in the attempt to find coal. They found it, but not in a quantity that would make mining profitable, so the shaft was abandoned.

Several young men in the county experimented with bicycles in the spring of 1884, after a young man named Franklin had ridden a high bike through the streets of Mount Ayr. Jack Scott and Ben Briley, young blacksmiths, then tried their skill at making bicycles and demonstrated them at the county fair. Some of the spectators declared the high-wheeled things were a passing fad, but ten years later they were numerous in Mount Ayr. They sold for \$100 and \$150.

In 1875 the Chicago Great Western ran its road diag-

onally across the western part of the county and three new towns -- Knowlton, Benton, and Maloy -- were established along the route. The Chicago Great Western was known as the Maple Leaf Route in the early days because its track between Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Chicago, roughly outlined a maple leaf, with these three cities as the points of the leaf.

Benton and Maloy did not have such auspicious beginnings as Knowlton, but they were more fortunate in their locations, since neither town faced a competitive struggle with nearby villages. Benton was originally located in two townships. Its main street followed the dividing line between Benton and Rice Townships. When the town was a little more than 30 years old, the county supervisors made a new township out of the large independent district which the school board had organized, and named it Waubonsie. Because one of the early storekeepers had a large red fox painted on his store front, Maloy, first called Delphi, was known to most settlers as Foxtown. This was long before the C. G. W. was built or Maloy platted. The town occupied a dense natural grove on the east side of the Platte River.

Knowlton was named for the president of the Chicago Great Western. Sponsored by the railroad company, the town at first had an unusual growth. It was promoted to freeze out the village of Goshen on the C. B. & Q., about two miles southwest, and to give the Great Western a monopoly on shipping. But the Great Western withdrew its support; Goshen in 1890 moved bodily to the intersection and became Diagonal, and within a few years had obliterated Knowlton. The Knowlton school, once among the foremost in the county, was by 1942 little more than a country school. Pupils there recall that Dr. LeRoy Parkins of the Harvard Medical School, was graduated from Knowlton High School in 1905.

Newspapers mushroomed into existence about this time. The Redding Reporter, the Redding Independent, the Tingley Times, the Battle Axe, the Independent, the Wirt Wasp, and the Wirt News were all short-lived. The Ringgold County Republican was established in 1885 at Mount Ayr by Mr. F. M. Wisdom and Robert Williams. A year later, Wisdom sold out his share to the Reverend J. H. Tedford. Williams and Tedford then purchased the Ringgold Record in 1887, and combined the papers under the Record's name. A few years later Tedford bought out Williams and edited the paper himself until 1907, when he sold half interest to Sam Spurrier. Then they bought the rival paper, the Twice-A-Week News, combined the two, and called them the Record News. In 1910 Tedford sold out to Sam Spurrier, who in 1936 still ran the only weekly newspaper in the county seat.

In 1885 Ringgold County checked up on itself and was

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not displeased. The county fair, held from October 14 to 16, was as good a fair as anyone could wish for. Balloon ascensions and high tight-rope walking drove chills up and down the spine, and the trotting, pacing, and running horse races brought excited cheering. There were 20 post offices in the county, 2,524 houses, 2,550 families, and a population of 12,530, including 523 who were foreign born. The average farm was valued at \$4,135 and there were more than 1,800 farms in operation, averaging 125 acres each. Small wonder that the county, entirely agricultural, felt all was going well on its thirtieth birthday.

A setback in 1885, however, was the destructive fire at Mount Ayr on October 30. The bucket brigade could not control the flames, which destroyed several business places. After the fire, citizens and firemen again contributed to a fund to secure fire fighting tools for the hook and ladder company that had been organized, but not equipped, in 1879. The majority of the citizens at last recognized the need for the organization, and the city council allowed \$50 to the firemen for their previous work. The next year the council paid them half a dollar each for their services at each fire. From this time on there was little opposition to the hook and ladder company. A group of citizens contributed \$75 toward expenses incurred in sending representatives to the Firemen's State Tournament at Council Bluffs in 1889, and public sentiment in the firemen's favor continued.

The next year, a Mr. McCreary established a new brick and tile works in the town. His factory, with its capacity for turning out 12,000 bricks daily, noticeably boosted business in the town.

Diagonal, platted about 1889 at the intersection of the Chicago Great Western and the Humeston and Shenandoah railroads, was the only town in the county through which both a north-south and an east-west railroad ran. It soon was the storm center of a struggle with Goshen and Knowlton. Two years after Knowlton was platted Goshen had been absorbed by Diagonal, although a ghost of the old Knowlton still clung to existence in 1942. The first building in Diagonal was moved from Goshen April 1, 1889.

A lively struggle ensued, however, between Knowlton and Diagonal. On July 9 a fire almost wiped out the town of Knowlton, which then had one of the best business blocks in the county. Items that appeared in Twice-A-Week News revealed the bitter feeling. August 27, 1895, there appeared: "The exodus from Egypt to Canaan has begun. That is, the removal of the people from Knowlton to Diagonal is fairly under way..." September 12 the Diagonal correspondent wrote: "The commotion at Knowlton, always at fever heat,

was greatly increased last week by the presence of detectives trying to ferret out the party who set fire to Knowlton some time ago. We are informed they have the guilty party spotted and, as was predicted, he is no citizen of Diagonal either."

The Knowlton correspondent remarked on September 27, 1895: "The newspaper that was stolen and taken to Diagonal has been brought back and in a few days will be running again. So with all that goes to Diagonal..." Another item boasted, "Men of Knowlton are highly pleased with the town's prospects. Every day business men come through Diagonal to our town to locate. There are five or six more brick buildings talked of. Our printing press soon will be sending out thousands of papers... The only thing we lack is men enough to do the work which is now going on. If anyone is contemplating finding a first-class locality he should come to Knowlton. We have lots of room for honest, upright business men." At this time Knowlton still had the only coaling station on the railroad between Des Moines and St. Joseph, and it was the only night station for a long distance each way. In spite of Knowlton's tenacity, however, the little town lost ground after 1910.

CHAPTER 7

RINGGOLD COUNTY IN THE EIGHTEEN NINETIES

Ringgold County had grown briskly during the 1880's, but growth slackened during the next decade, and the tiny hamlets, never more than post offices in solitary stores or farmhouses, vanished. The new little villages took root, and a number of them reached their highest population before 1900.

All over the county there was a flutter of development. In 1890 the Methodists built a church at Benton and the Bohemian colony replaced their old church on the Dolecek farm with a new one. The next year the Goshen church was moved to Diagonal. A. Morgan opened a cigar factory at Mount Ayr in 1894 and A. H. Teale and W. W. Peasley built a \$6,000 brick and tile factory at Kellerton in 1895. During 1895 the Odd Fellows at Delphos put up a two-story hall. The county erected a new two-story jail with an exercise room for the prisoners and several cells for women on the second floor. The Mount Ayr city council for the first time presented diplomas to its firemen for their service. The first Ringgold County Farmers' Institute was held at Mount Ayr in 1896 and two years later rural free delivery was instituted in the county, although the first route out of Mount Ayr was not in operation for some time afterward. The various censuses taken in the villages gave Tingley 600 in 1894, Kellerton 750, Benton 200, and Delphos 100 in 1895, and Redding 450 in 1896.

Mount Ayr struggled for almost 20 years with the problem of lighting the business district at night. The city council took a forward step in 1889 when street lamps, kerosene lamps with square glass fronts, were installed on poles along the main business street. For the job of lighting the lamps each night, extinguishing them the next day, and keeping them clean, the caretaker received 25 cents a day. This was soon raised to 40 cents. In 1900 the council ordered new lamps to replace the many that had been broken, and two years later they ordered 19 gasoline lamps and supplies of mantles and chimneys. This experiment proved expensive and unsatisfactory as kerosene lamps had been.

The hook and ladder company, poorly equipped in the preceding decade, was no better now. People in the villages had to stand by almost helplessly, watching stores and buildings burn without being able to do much about it. Many of the fires started early in the morning or late at night and were beyond control before the bucket brigade could reach them. Fire at Mount Ayr in February of 1894 destroyed the A. A. Huggins and the Z. T. Kinsell buildings, which

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housed half a dozen businesses. The loss was between eight and ten thousand dollars. In December of the same year Tingley suffered one of the worst fires the county ever had, with losses mounting to \$40,000. The fire, which started in the general store, spread to the east and the west, destroying the bank, the livery stable, and other buildings. On the same day there was a fire at Knowlton that caused a \$6,000 loss. During a blizzard in February 1895 the school at Kellerton caught fire from an overheated stove and was destroyed, but the teachers and pupils marched out without a single injury. In July 1895 there was another fire at Knowlton, one deliberately started, which caused a \$15,000 loss. In 1897 the drug store at Mount Ayr, in which the new telephone switchboard was located, was struck by lightning and set on fire. This started a conflagration that brought losses totaling \$50,000 to about ten business firms. In 1890 a serious fire at Redding burned the lumber yard, a grocery store, and the post office. The valiant work of the bucket brigade, helped by falling snow, saved the west side of the square from complete destruction. In many instances the losses were not covered by insurance and the businesses were not set up again.

Telephones had come in in the early 1890's. Connection between several towns both in and out of the county was established in 1895 at the suggestion of H. Baum and D. N. Smith. The first line connected Clearfield, Lenox, and Mount Ayr. The central office at Mount Ayr was located in Bart Warren's drug store. There were connections to Allyn's bank, the vault in the county treasurer's office, and Bevis real estate office. A switch at the central office connected Mount Ayr with Des Moines. At what might be called a central office in D. N. Smith's farmhouse, rural residents could make connection with Mount Ayr, Lenox, and Clearfield. Mount Ayr and Tingley were connected in the fall with the central telephone at Dr. Bent's office.

When the drug store burned at Mount Ayr, destroying the "central" in 1897, Jim Beard, the telephone messenger boy, collected some copper wire, climbed a telephone pole, and connected the telephone in the auditor's vault with D. N. Smith's switches so that telephone service would not be disrupted. A few weeks later the Mount Ayr central office was moved to the Timbly building. In August of that year a local telephone exchange was established, with connections to about 21 business places and a few residences.

During the decade there were several celebrations at Mount Ayr that drew crowds from all over the county. Towns for miles around abandoned local celebrations to attend the Fourth of July "doin's" at Mount Ayr in 1895. Mount Ayr residents had been excited over the affair for weeks. Flags

and decorations transformed the business district, and many hours were spent decorating floats, bicycles, buggies, and even the horses. Special trains from Leon, in Decatur County, pulled in early in the morning bringing the Leon band and its crowd of followers, and later a train from the south brought a load of celebrators from Grant City, Missouri. Twice during the day crowds stood craning their necks to watch Professor G. W. Kane make a parachute jump from his balloon high in the sky. In the afternoon the crowds lined the streets, watched the attractive floats pass, and listened to the band blare out the well known martial airs that were a part of every procession. The afternoon program was filled to the brim with music by the Leon band, selections by a group of 50 Mount Ayr singers, a ball game between Mount Ayr and Leon, and a bicycle race. Everybody had a chance to participate in some of the other festivities. Fun-seeking crowds gathered to watch contenders chase a greased pig or hobble and tumble along the sack race. The tug-of-war between the townships brought heated rivalry. More than once a five-dollar bill was placed atop a greased pole and he who could reach it could have it. The day ended with a display of fireworks, without which no celebration was complete. Henry Wallace, editor of Wallace's Farm And Dairy, was the speaker, and reminded the people that Independence Day meant "something more than a day for fire-crackers or holiday at the beginning of the harvest."

Nearly 1,000 school children from all parts of the county attended the county fair September 17, 1896, to participate in the School Day parade. The children, grouped by townships, each group wearing decorations of its own choice, paraded past the reviewing stand. Liberty Township school pupils won first honors, but features like this did not make the fair a success, and the association dissolved in 1898. In the fall of 1899 a new fair association sponsored one of the most successful county fairs ever held at Mount Ayr. The fine exhibits and the newly erected Floral Hall attracted a record-breaking crowd.

In 1898 Kellerton initiated its Annual Reunion, holding it in September, though afterward it became an event of early August. This celebration continued for many years.

Diagonal twice aspired to be named the county seat. On July 4, 1895, the Ringgold Record carried the statement: "Diagonal is much lifted up with our plans and prospects of having a depot, sidetracks, and stockyards at the crossing put in by the Chicago Great Western Railroad. Should it happen, New York and Chicago will pale before this place, and who knows but Mount Ayr and Knowlton may move over, and if that happens of course, Mount Ayr will bring along the courthouse and new jail, and then we'll be the county seat, we will."

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Twenty-five years later, when a new courthouse was needed, Diagonal citizens again pointed out how much more centrally located their town was since it was the only town with two railroads. The people even went so far as to circulate a petition throughout the county to call an election to vote on a county seat, but no action was taken.

On July 20, 1897, some of the old frontiersmen formed an Old Settlers Association, opening the membership to anyone who had lived in the county 20 years or longer. Judge Isaac W. Keller, the chairman, set September 30 for the first reunion and on that day four or five thousand people jammed the courthouse yard to enjoy the celebration. Prominent pioneers told stories of their experiences, and prized relics were exhibited at the post office. Visitors registered at a tent set up by the Mount Ayr Journal and exchanged reminiscences.

A 20-mile strip, half a mile wide, in the western part of the county was in the path of the Maloy cyclone that swept through the county May 17, 1898, injuring three persons and causing thousands of dollars in damage. The storm originated in Worth County, Missouri, four miles south of Blockton, and traveled slightly northeast, striking Ringgold County about five or six in the evening. It veered so as to miss Maloy, and then followed the Platte River Valley through Benton, Grant, and Lincoln Townships. Ash trees with stumps as large as a man's body were uprooted and sent flying into the river. A huge old oak in Grant Township, from which Sol Stahl had planned to make \$50 worth of fence posts, was snapped off about 15 feet above the ground. Many buildings were unroofed.

Almost immediately on the heels of the cyclone, the news of the war against Spain reached Mount Ayr and American flags and Cuban colors were unfurled. Patriotic window displays and flying flags gave the town a warlike atmosphere. Interest was keener than ever when Ringgold County boys enlisted for service, among them a number of college men in the battalion of Spanish War troops organized at Simpson College.

When the soldiers returned to Mount Ayr November 10, 1899, the townspeople met them at the station with bands playing and flags flying. As the train pulled in, the signal whistle on the roller mill blew, and all the church bells in town started ringing a welcome. Almost at once a parade was formed, with bands, lodges, school children, and horseback riders to escort the soldiers to the courthouse where singing, speeches, and gaiety held sway. That evening the soldiers were again honored at a banquet. This affair broke up into a merry celebration. As the Mount Ayr Twice-A-Week News stated, a "Fish-Horn band was organized as the

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gaiety proceeded, its chief object being to create all the noise possible." Very likely some of the veterans, on the alert for souvenirs, had brought back the long tin horns used by coastal fishermen.

Kellerton, too, gave a royal welcome to its soldiers that night.

CHAPTER 8

A GRADUAL GROWTH

Ringgold remained one of the smaller counties in the State as it emerged into the twentieth century. Far from a line of transcontinental travel, its towns did not grow to become large cities. It reached its highest population in 1900, with 15,325 people, and its most rapid decrease in population came during the first decade of the twentieth century, when it dropped to 12,904.

It was not until 1900 that the Mount Ayr city council voted to have a "dip" well sunk to supply the town with water. Previously, every farm had provided its own water or shared water with a neighbor. The new well, 257½ feet deep, had a rise of 30 feet and provided 100 barrels a day. But water was not piped into the homes and business places for a number of years and there were few other modern improvements.

Other towns in the county were taking forward steps. The tiny village of Ellston was the first to establish a public library. Dedicated May 13, 1900, the \$200 collection of standard books and the traveling library were placed in charge of the Home Culture Club.

In June 1900 the Des Moines Register credited Mount Ayr with organizing the first McKinley and Roosevelt Rough Riders Club in Iowa. According to the Register, Mount Ayr was "situated in the fighting congressional district of the state, and one of the strongest Republican counties in the district proportionally. The Republicans of that county work and vote, and the working and the voting win the victories."

One of the most exciting political events in the county's history occurred in 1901. According to Walter H. Beall, the mass convention which assembled at Mount Ayr June 27, 1901, and sent a solid delegation to Cedar Rapids to help Albert B. Cummins win his first nomination for Governor, was ever afterward considered exceptional in the annals of political history. In the Mount Ayr Record News for July 5, 1928, Beall stated that no county in Iowa had ever before or since shown such unanimity of purpose.

Ringgold County Republicans asked the county central committee to submit a preference vote on the governorship at the primary, but the committee refused and instead called a mass convention to meet two days before the primary to choose the candidate. According to Beall, "Every livery team in Mount Ayr was worn down to skin and bones as the opposing campaigners drove over the county by day and night"

carrying on the campaign. On convention day Mount Ayr was crowded with Republican voters who assembled at the courthouse from all parts of the county. Physical violence had been predicted, but there was a "free ballot and a fair count." It was a problem to poll so many voters fairly. When the Cummins men had been moved to the west side of the square and the Gear men to the east side, the voters were marched through the east door of the courthouse, down the corridor, and out the west door where Homer Fuller and Clyde Dunning acted as tellers. At this mass meeting 1,021 voters out of 2,000 Republican eligibles cast ballots. The Cummins voters were far more numerous than those of Gear, and only Cummins delegates were sent to the State convention. Ringgold was the one county in the eighth district to stand solidly behind Cummins.

Telephones multiplied rapidly during the early 1900's, spreading to the farms and lessening the isolation of farm families. The Mount Ayr Mutual Telephone Corporation, organized in May 1901, was connected with all lines operating in the county. Caledonia, which for a time was the second largest town in the county, organized a local line in 1901 with 14 instruments. When the Redding Telephone Exchange started service in January 1901, it had a total of 50 phones. Late in November the Business Men's Mutual Telephone Exchange was formed among the merchants and tradespeople in Mount Ayr and this service soon included the residences in the town. Carl Lunney managed and operated the central board, located in his implement store. A year later he installed a Western Telephone switchboard that had 200 town and 30 farm connections. The installation of the poles and the wiring of the lines provided work for many that year. Twelve years later a larger switchboard with 400 town and 42 farm connections was installed at Mount Ayr. By 1904 the county had a total of 555 telephone miles.

Rural free delivery in 1901 marked another step in ending the isolation of the farm home. The first route out of Mount Ayr was mapped over a trip $26\frac{1}{2}$ miles long. Ed. B. White, the carrier, delivered mail to 100 rural families for an annual salary of \$50. A few weeks later two other services were routed out of Diagonal. At first the rural postman blew a whistle if he had mail for the farm family, then came the post boxes with a metal flag on them.

By July 1902 ten other rural routes had been established in the county -- two out of Mount Ayr, two out of Diagonal, three out of Kellerton, and one each from Redding, Beaconsfield, and Benton. At this time there were slightly more than 70 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles of rural free delivery service, reaching 1,398 homes. According to an announcement in the December 19, 1902, issue of Twice-A-Week News, the Federal Government asked Ringgold County to put her roads in better condition

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if free rural delivery service were to continue. The following spring, however, roads were so muddy that for three weeks the carriers had to deliver mail on horseback. In some instances they had to walk. In the fall a rural route was started from Tingley. The creation of the rural routes brought abandonment of many of the small, isolated post offices throughout the county.

In January 1901 the Leon, Mount Ayr and Southwestern railroad was turned over to the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, which had always managed it as lessee. The Burlington had also acquired the Humeston and Shenandoah soon after its completion. From the following ditty, which appeared in the Ringgold County Chronicle April 22, 1904, we may assume the track and rolling stock in Ringgold County were none too good:

The Burlington is a bum road;
It makes the public sore;
It's sure to have a wreck a day,
And some days three or four.

Train wrecks were not the only disturbing events. Fire continued to work havoc in the towns, and when fire destroyed business blocks in the smaller centers there was little capital and little incentive to rebuild them. Small communities that had incorporated ambitiously in the 1890's were stunted in their growth. Benton suffered a serious fire in February 1901 when a grocery store and a furniture store were burned. At Mount Ayr, July 1, 1906, churchgoers were treated to an impromptu display of fireworks when sunlight shining through the window of the C. R. Keating Hardware store generated enough heat to set off the display in the window and start a fire that caused a \$300 loss. In August 1909 the third destructive fire in a decade almost burned Redding off the map. Fire swept through all but one building on the east side of the square, consuming seven business houses. In January 1910 a fire at Kellerton destroyed four buildings and was checked only by tearing down a storage room and a tin shop that lay in the path of the fire. Kellerton had purchased a \$350 fire engine in 1902 and had dug large cisterns on each side of Main Street, but most of the towns still relied on bucket brigades. Mount Ayr Roller Mills, established in 1875 and one of the oldest structures in town, burned to the ground in March 1910. The mill, owned by Jordan and rated one of the best in southwestern Iowa, was not rebuilt.

Farmers threshing in the fields must have stopped working and stared when C. C. Anderson, automobile agent at Creston, rode by in his Olds automobile en route to Mount Ayr

on August 19, 1902. His one-seated "bang wagon", much like a buggy, was the first to travel across the county and through the streets of Mount Ayr. The Twice-A-Week News published the story under the caption, "No Pushee; No Pullee", and reported that the new vehicle could travel at the high speed of 25 miles an hour on level roads. Anderson gave a number of Mount Ayr people their first automobile ride. Burt Williams became the county's first automobile owner by winning the machine in a contest, but he sold it at once. Among the first automobiles driven in Mount Ayr were the high-wheeled cars of John Allyn and Dr. Bement. Other early owners of cars were Dr. Smith, Dr. Dudley, Bert Teale, and A. I. Smith, who bought a Buick in 1907. Asa Rains bought a Huppmobile in 1911 and was still driving it in 1942. It had been registered 32 times. Rains refused many offers of the Huppmobile company to buy back the car.

Horse thief chases again furnished excitement for Ringgold County citizens in the early 1900's as they had in the previous decades. Residents of the county were on the outlook for a horse thief who had stolen an outfit of wagon, horses, and harness in Cass County, Iowa, during the summer of 1902. When a man driving a team and leading a mule behind the wagon near Kellerton was identified as the thief, the sheriff kept on the man's trail by the judicious use of telephones. The thief, at last realizing he was running into a trap, cut the mule loose and lashed the horses to travel at full speed. Soon a posse was at his heels and he jerked the harness from one of the horses and fled on the other until he was nearly caught. He then abandoned the horse and ran through the surrounding cornfields to a farmer's house, where he posed as a man hurrying to Grand River to get a train to go to his sick mother's bedside. The farmer, not having a telephone, was unaware of the chase, and had his son take the stranger to the station. The thief escaped almost in the face of his pursuers, but his loot, left behind in his precipitant flight, was recovered.

Transportation hopes ran high in Mount Ayr about this time. Talk for a while concerned ambitious plans to connect Mount Ayr and Diagonal with an electric railroad as a convenience to the two towns. Out of this grew a still more ambitious plan for an electric railroad to Des Moines. During the fall of 1902 a group of Mount Ayr citizens formed the Des Moines, Mount Ayr and Southern Railway Company, an electric road incorporated at \$600,000. Many meetings were held in towns along the proposed route to interest the people in the project. Although most people were enthusiastic, affairs dragged along for a half dozen or more years before anything was done. Then in the spring of 1904 the promoters traveled by carriage through Tingley, Macksburg, and Winterset, seeking to arouse interest. Later the actual surveying of the railroad routed it by way of Denver and

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Allendale, Missouri, to Mount Ayr, and through Tingley to Des Moines. At this time the projected road, known as the St. Joe, Albany and Des Moines Railway Company, signed a 40-year lease with F. M. Hubbell for property at Southwest Ninth and Mulberry Streets, Des Moines, upon which to erect a terminal freight depot. The whole project, however, was finally abandoned.

Among the events of 1904 and 1905 not forgotten for many years was the failure of the Citizens Bank at Mount Ayr and the subsequent trial of Day Dunning, president of the bank, for fraudulent banking. He was sentenced to three years in prison, but appealed his case to the supreme court and was acquitted in 1906. The following year three other indictments against him were also dismissed.

The failure of the Citizens Bank may have been one reason for the institution of the Mortgage Security Bank, which opened at Mount Ayr in January 1905. Bank deposits were secured by giving mortgage notes on real estate as a guarantee of deposits. In addition, the bank provided all the services of regular commercial banks. It was one of the first in the State to use the mortgage security plan.

In March 1905 Mount Ayr people participated in a wolf chase right through the streets of town. John Saltzman had seen the wolf trying to raid his chicken house and shot at it, but missed. One of his neighbors, Raleigh Shroyer, fired two shots at the fleeing animal, but he also missed it. By this time half a dozen armed men had joined the chase, but they were not very good sharpshooters. The wolf fled to a creek just outside the southern edge of town and got away.

There were many signs of growth in the various towns from 1903 to 1907. In 1903 the Tingley Coal Company was organized with a capital of \$10,000 to prospect for coal, but none was found. At Redding, Marion A. Coverdell and J. Lawrence Parker established the Rural Messenger, but the paper had a short life. There was a lively flurry in the town when H. M. (Bid) Leonard moved a brick plant to Redding from Grant City, because there was better clay around the Ringgold County town. In 1903 Redding held a second Farmers' Institute, said to have been one of the best in southern Iowa. Three of the largest stores at Mount Ayr were consolidated into the Ringgold Mercantile Company, with capital of \$50,000. The Roman Catholic Parish of St. Mary's erected a fine new church with a 68-foot spire.

In 1905 the Mount Ayr Gas Company was granted a franchise to install 24,550 feet of pipe and begin operations on January 15, 1906. But the pipe was never installed. Tingley men organized the Great Western Lumber and Mining Company to deal in Oregon lands, and M. J. Bradley bought sup-

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plies and machinery for a broom factory at Diagonal in 1905. In the fall of that year, Redding organized its first Commercial Club. By this time sales rings had become important through the county. On the last day of February 1906, at Tingley, F. C. Sheldon & Sons sold a buyer one hog for \$1,060, the highest price ever paid up to that time.

Various fairs, shows, and organizations were popular in the first decade of the twentieth century. The colt show was often a part of the Ringgold County Farmers' Institute held at Mount Ayr. There was another annual Farmers' Institute held at Redding. The Tingley colt show drew interested buyers and breeders from the surrounding counties and states. During this period there were a number of horse companies operating: the Tingley Shire Horse Company, the Mount Ayr Horse Company, the Liberty Township Horse Company, and others.

In connection with the Farmers' Institutes there were sometimes corn or poultry shows. Town business men usually provided prizes to attract exhibits. At Mount Ayr, during a two-week period in December 1906, the J. C. Crecelius Poultry Yard shipped more than 40,000 pounds of fowl to Eastern markets. The poultry business was good at Redding, too. At one time nine wagonloads of turkeys, three of them double-deckers, were shipped from this town. For a number of years poultry shipping brought the county an income of \$3,000 a week.

At Mount Ayr the city council still struggled with the town's lighting problems. The council had negotiated with a light and water company in 1901, but the negotiations had ceased abruptly, and nothing further was done until 1907 when the council advertised for bids on a municipal plant. All the bids were rejected because they were too high. A little later, W. Jackson Bell organized a stock company to build an electric lighting plant. Soaring expenses almost made the stockholders back out, but the company was at last incorporated and the plant built. By that time many of the stockholders had sold their shares because the total costs had reached \$20,000 instead of the originally estimated \$3,000. In 1917 the company was sold to the Iowa Southern Utility Company, and several years later, after the building had been damaged by lightning, the structure was razed.

During 1910 and 1911 the Mount Ayr Commercial Club became ardent sponsors of good roads. They invited 500 farmers to meet at a "good-will road improvement banquet" on June 28, 1910. The movement was especially timely because the United States Post Office had only a few years before threatened to stop rural free delivery in the county unless the roads were improved. Since everyone in the county had "stuck and cussed" in the sticky gumbo and knew the irritation of being sunk hub deep, a throng of farmers attended

the meeting and accepted the challenge of the Mount Ayr merchants to improve the roads. For the greatest improvement in any main road not less than six miles in length and not more than six miles from Mount Ayr, the Commercial Club offered prizes of \$100, \$75, and \$50. The project did not have to be completed until November 1, but an additional prize of \$25 was offered to the group making the greatest road improvement by August 1.

Good Roads clubs sprang up all over the county and entered into lively contests. Some took for their slogan: "We get both the \$100 and the \$25 prize." The improvement on the Rice Township road won first prize. The Liberty Township improvement took second prize, and on Township Line roadwork drew third. The special prize of \$25 went to the club improving the Alex Maxwell road. There were now many miles of graveled highways and 12 miles of paved road. All the Good Roads clubs got together again at Mount Ayr on November 11 to enjoy a fellowship pep meeting and take part in the awarding of prizes.

This enthusiasm over roads was followed in January 1911 by an attempt to vote a bond issue for paved streets in Mount Ayr, but the issue was defeated by 93 votes. Not discouraged, however, the Mount Ayr Commercial Club reorganized and swelled its membership to more than 100. When there was talk of routing the Waubonsie Trail, scheduled to start at Nebraska City and end somewhere between Keokuk and Burlington, the Mount Ayr Commercial Club joined with Leon, Kellerton, and Lamoni in an attempt to secure the routing through the southern tier of counties. The groups had a union meeting at Mount Ayr and heard the reports of Mount Ayr men who had gone to Shenandoah in their interests, and a permanent organization, the Waubonsie Trail Association, came into being. The main line of the trail entered Ringgold County four miles south of Clearfield and crossed the county through Mount Ayr and Kellerton. In May 1911 the Ayr Line Association selected a route to follow the shortest distance between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Des Moines, Iowa. Mount Ayr was selected as the half-way station. The route was marked by identifying poles along the way.

CHAPTER 9

MATURITY

During 1915 and 1916 Mount Ayr's streets were finally paved. By the time the contractors were through, Mount Ayr had spent \$113,622 and had three miles of paving. No further street improvement was undertaken until 1928 and 1929 when several blocks were graveled.

With the abandonment of the Ringgold County Fair at Mount Ayr, the Tingley Colt Show developed into an important fair. In 1910 the Tingley fair featured among other attractions a children's day, a wild west show, and a baseball tournament. The farmers were particularly attracted to the livestock and poultry shows and the livestock parades. In the evening the admission to the fairgrounds was free, and the young swains and sweethearts patronized the roller skating rink, the merry-go-round, and the ferris wheel on the midway. Tingley welcomed crowds for three days.

Dairying had come into prominence in the county by 1910, and this interest led to the cooperative creamery at Mount Ayr in the spring of 1914. The creamery paid 24 cents a pound for butter fat, two cents over the accepted price, and did a good business. This company furnished the local stores and townspeople with butter, milk, and ice cream.

During these years, interest in a public library for Mount Ayr grew and when the public library was dedicated on New Year's Day, 1917, it was the only one in the county, the Ellston library having passed out of existence. The people had voted to assess a maintenance tax to furnish \$1,000 a year, and the Carnegie Foundation added \$8,000 to the \$2,323 provided by the people in the community. The attractive library had six rooms and a basement and by 1936 had acquired 4,000 volumes for the use of its 1,000 card holders. Pupils of Mount Ayr schools made good use of it from the very first.

Less than six months after the dedication of the library, the United States was at war with Germany and, by June 5, 1917, 1,054 men in the county were registered for service. By the time Ringgold County's quota for the first draft had been set, 18 had enlisted for service. The local boards in the county were busy drawing 248 names, double the number of the county's quota, to provide substitutes for the men who did not pass the examination.

During the tense days of 1918, life in the county proceeded almost at its normal pace. The farmers worked through long hours each day, feeling they were doing a

worthwhile service for their country. On May 4, 1918, the Ringgold County Farm Bureau was organized and began its work of coordinating the efforts of the farmers. As the years passed this organization superseded the Granges and the Farmers' Institutes in the county. Farm Bureau work got off to an auspicious start under W. B. Buck, the county agent.

The World War doubtless turned the thoughts of the county toward other wars. Most of the county celebrated July 4, 1918, at Mount Ayr where a monument to Civil War soldiers was dedicated and unveiled at the northeast corner of the courthouse square. J. W. Wilkerson, well known to Ringgold County people whom he had served as county school superintendent for a number of years after his long rule as principal of schools at Mount Ayr, gave the dedicatory address. Members of the local Ellis C. Miller G.A.R. post assisted in the ceremonies. Esta Poor and Erma Holden pulled the cord that unveiled the monument -- a soldier of the Civil War, at parade rest. The figure topped a white Victoria granite monument some 25 feet high.

Ringgold County joined in the nationwide celebration on November 11, 1918, when Americans went wild with joy because the war had ended. Like magic, the town was decorated in a few short hours as though for a Fourth of July celebration. Bells rang, whistles blew, guns sounded, and people poured into Mount Ayr to celebrate. At two-thirty in the afternoon, the Mount Ayr concert band headed a procession of school children, Red Cross workers, Civil War veterans, and townspeople who paraded through the streets to the courthouse square. There more than 2,000 had assembled to listen with solemn relief to the reading of President Woodrow Wilson's message. Following this, Mr. F. F. Fuller delivered an address eulogizing the "boys over there" and rejoicing that peace had come. Huge bonfires were then lighted in the streets, and again the whistles blew and bells rang out against the strong gay overtone of the shouting crowds. The Kaiser was burned in effigy.

In 1919 Mount Ayr enjoyed a comfortable prosperity, but showed no great outward evidence of it. When the county home was condemned in this year, the people voted against building a new one and nothing was done until 1921. Then, in 1922, the indigent of the county were moved into an attractive two-story, fireproof, modern home which had been built at a cost of \$27,200.

Trends in the 1920's were indicated at Mount Ayr by the issuing of the first permit for a gasoline filling station, the raising of the firemen's fee to a dollar a fire in 1921, the establishing of a tourist park in 1922, the erection of a Golf and Country Club, the condemning of the county courthouse in 1926, and the purchase of a \$5,800 fire engine in 1928 to replace the smaller one bought eight years previously.

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In 1924 the Prentis Hatchery was opened in Mount Ayr with a capacity of 2,400 eggs and by 1936 this had been increased to 100,000. The Prentis plant was the only State-inspected hatchery in the county. The hatchery then used electric equipment to incubate as well as to hatch. A good part of its business was "custom" hatching for farmers and poultry raisers. Most of its chicks were sold locally.

During the hot summer of 1926 the foundation for the fourth courthouse was built. On November 11 the cornerstone was laid. The new three-story building and equipment cost \$132,533. Since jail facilities had been included in the building, the old county jail was sold for a dollar to the Ringgold American Legion Post 172 as a home for the post, the property to be used for a memorial to World War soldiers.

The depression of the early 1930's and the drought of the middle thirties hit the farmers hard, and many of them could scarcely get enough fodder and feed for their livestock. In 1936 there was another dry season. During March heavy dust storms came and April was the driest month on record. In June the grasshoppers were getting bad. Rain ended the 30-day drought July 20, but by this time grasshoppers were eating the leaves from the fruit trees. During August softwood trees all over the county were dying, and the corn crop was almost entirely lost. Dead fish rotted in the dry creeks and ponds. In September rain came again and autumn flowers and the leafless fruit trees bloomed. On Christmas Day, dandelions blossomed in the yards.

In spite of this train of disasters, people all over the county looked ahead to brighter days. In 1933 the Jacobs Fur House, which had been established at Mount Ayr in 1921, expanded its business and rebuilt its store. After 1932 the business kept ten or 12 men and one bookkeeper busy. The Jacobs family started in 1906, trapping furs in Lotts Creek Township, and had expanded operations until their total business reached \$150,000. In that year the old limestone quarry near Waterson also expanded its operations. In 1936 this quarry was worked under the Soil Conservation Service of the Work Projects Administration. A crew of 50 men was added to the regular 50 employees so that two shifts could be maintained.

One of the pioneers, John C. Abarr, could have told the people that the county had survived other periods of hard times, and would again know good days. Abarr was the last Civil War veteran in the county. He died June 19, 1936, at Redding. The people of Redding had gathered at his home in the previous September to help him celebrate his ninetieth birthday. After his death neighbors recalled events of his life. They remembered his pleasure at receiving a gold bust of Abraham Lincoln, presented to him during a political

rally at Redding in 1932 because he was the only living veteran who had voted for Lincoln. Abarr came to the county with his parents when he was a small boy, enlisted in the Civil War at Savannah, Missouri, when he was 18, and was taken prisoner on October 14, 1864, and sent to Jefferson City, Missouri, where he was eventually released. Upon his return to the county he operated a sawmill, then he was postmaster at Redding for 11 years. Then, at the age of 84, he returned to work at the sawmill.

In 1936 Ringgold was the only county in the State without cement highways. Many of the roads and bridges were improved, however, through WPA aid. A total of \$51,000 was spent, \$22,950 of it from federal funds. The next year the residents of the county voted a \$425,000 bond issue for a pavement project on State Highway No. 3, crossing the county from east to west through Mount Ayr and Kellerton. This gave the county its first cement highway. After that time there was additional road improvement and motorists no longer needed to detour to avoid Ringgold's bad roads.

During 1936 an addition was made to the high school at Mount Ayr to provide an auditorium and gymnasium for the 500 and more pupils. The old portion of the building was remodeled to conform in style to the addition. In this year also, Everett Turitt leased the former fairgrounds at the northeastern corner of the town and remodeled old Floral Hall into a sales pavilion where he held sales every Wednesday. He moved from his farm in Riley Township to assume management of the pavilion, which at once became popular.

August 1936 saw the Ringgold County 4-H Club making a tour to visit 4-H Club members all over the county. The caravan, which filled 20 cars, visited seven farms and made a stop at the tourist park at Kellerton where the Kellerton 4-H girls greeted them with 17 gallons of lemonade.

Dog Day at Mount Ayr, one of the annual events heartily welcomed by boys and girls throughout the county, was initiated in 1937. Every child in the county who wished could enter his pet in the parade. The Mount Ayr marching high school band led the first parade from the Legion Hall to the courthouse and around the courthouse square to the band stand. Two hundred fifty dogs of every breed, color, size, and shape paraded before the judges, who awarded prizes for the best decorated dog, the biggest dog, the smallest dog, and the homeliest dog. In the "best decorated" class, we may assume the dog himself had precious little to do with the outcome.

The Diagonal basketball team, which in 1938 went to the State Basketball Tournament at Des Moines for the fifth consecutive time, won the State championship. In the following

year this team was runner-up. In the same year the crack Mount Ayr band appeared at the Iowa State Fair. Under the direction of Forest L. Stewart, this band appeared annually at the State Fair for a number of years. From 1926 to 1936 the band was heard in a total of 233 concerts.

The first Old Timers' reunion was held in 1938 in conjunction with the State-wide centennial celebration. Antiques from all parts of the county were collected and displayed in store windows. The following year the Ringgold County Historical Society was organized at the Old Timers' reunion.

The decade of 1940 ushered in the completion of the \$50,500 post office at Mount Ayr. The total cost of the building including the lot and furnishings was \$75,000. Three old frame buildings, erected in 1875, were torn down to make room for it. The post office was dedicated on August 22, 1940, with W. F. McFarland, superintendent of Mount Ayr schools, the master of ceremonies.

In the fall of that year the people of the county were concerned when the Selective Service draft was completed and 21 young men in the county held the first numbers drawn. One thousand thirty-eight residents of the county were eligible for the draft in October 1940. Fifty-two others who maintained their residence in the county were added to this list by the county draft board -- R. R. Buck, James Mahan, and H. H. Emley.

In June of 1941 torrential rains sent the Platte River out of its banks in a flood that did great damage to crops, livestock, and homes. Mrs. Charles Bailey was drowned when the wagon in which she was riding with her family overturned at the edge of a high steel bridge on which they had been marooned for many hours. As the horses left the bridge in an attempt to traverse the 200 or more feet of swirling flood water that lay between them and higher ground, one of them slipped and pulled the other with it into a deep ditch beside the road. This upset the wagon and threw the seven occupants into the water. All but Mrs. Bailey were carried two to three miles down the stream by the swift current, and were rescued by some of the several hundred persons who had gathered when they heard of the family's plight. A bridge five miles south of Diagonal was washed out, and State Highway 25, which follows the county line between Ringgold and Taylor Counties for some distance, was under water near Blockton. All of the farms in this vicinity were flooded.

When the young men chosen in the selective service draft of 1940 left their homes for a year's training in the spring of 1941, many of them sincerely believed, and hoped, that they would remain in uniform until the end of the war. People remembered 1917, when the youth of another generation

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had been drafted for a similar emergency. Some recalled the years still farther back when their fathers had enlisted for the duration of the Civil War at a time when the county's history had scarcely begun. In the span of their own lives they could see the development of their county -- prairie schooners following a dim trail, plows turning the sod of a trackless prairie, farmhouses along lonely trails that led to the small villages, railroads superseding stagecoaches, automobiles preceding graveled roads that tied the villages closer together -- then airplanes soaring over the conquered prairie, once empty of man's handiwork, now orderly with fenced fields and sturdy farmhouses.

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