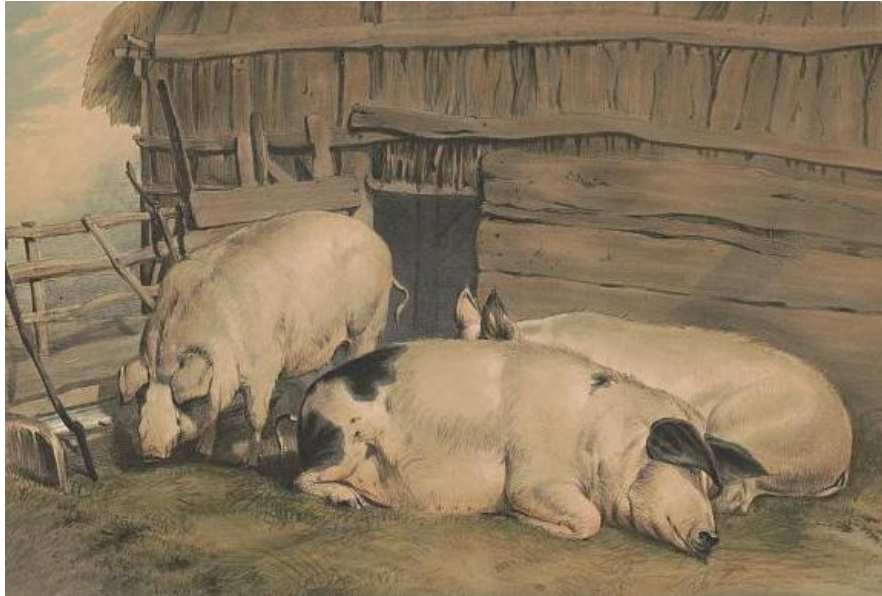


# IOWA HISTORY



*Courtesy Library of Congress*

## **Northlane bought hogs and cattle for a packing house in Sioux City**

### Female Cattle Buyer Becomes Vaudeville Performer

How many Iowa women could claim they had made a living as a cattle buyer and vaudeville performer in the 1900s? At least one—Ollie Northlane.

Northlane was described as petite with a head of golden hair, only a bit over five feet tall and around 100 pounds in weight. Her physique was a topic of conversation because she had a job that typically was performed by men. And while it required a sharp negotiator, the position usually was filled by men who weren't averse to slogging around in a barnyard.

A Sioux City resident, Northlane worked for a large stockyards as a livestock buyer. Some newspapers claimed she was the only female buyer in the country in 1900. It was said she could walk around a herd of cattle and within three minutes have a good idea of how much the livestock would bring at market.

She spent a great amount of time on the road. Her territory covered northern Iowa, South Dakota and Nebraska. And she was very successful at her job; a magazine writer said she made a very “handsome” salary. Northlane had a reputation as a buyer who could secure a shipment of cattle for the Sioux City buying operation even after some of the old-timers in the business had failed. At least one magazine and numerous newspapers from across the country carried articles about the Iowa woman who was considered an “expert cattle buyer.” Maybe the highest compliment someone gave Northlane was when they said she could pick out a good steer as quickly as the average woman could select a new Easter gown.

Northlane felt comfortable around livestock because she had grown up around them. In addition to cattle, she bought hogs. When Northlane realized many of the stockmen in her territory were immigrants, she took it upon herself to learn their native languages—German, French and Norwegian—giving her an advantage over other buyers.

Besides Northlane's unique business savvy, she had an engaging personality. Bright, vivacious, charming and witty were terms used to describe the female livestock buyer. She had a great number of friends and a beautiful home in Sioux City. She also was well known as an excellent telegraph operator and a gifted musician. It was those skills as a musician that led to her second career.

By 1915 she had moved to New York City where she began to perform as a singer and dancer in vaudeville shows. She toured across the country in an act called Northlane, Riano, and Northlane made up of Ollie, Jack Riano and her daughter Edna Northlane. She eventually married Riano. During World War I the trio performed in Europe for the troops. After the war they toured again around the United States. An advertisement in a Rochester, New York, newspaper described their show, "Fun in a Modiste Shop," a "very clever song and laugh skit," that everyone was sure to "enjoy immensely." A Connecticut newspaper called their show a "novel comedy skit." And another promised a "display of costumes and dancing steps" by the three performers. In 1920 they were part of 40-member cast in a musical show in Kansas City called Hitchy Koo. **[To hear a recording of Hitchy Koo by a group called American Quartet, go to <http://www.loc.gov/jukebox/recordings/detail/id/2894/>]**

Northlane continued to perform throughout the 1920s. Both her husband and her daughter's names show up in articles in the 1930s, but Northlane's name is not mentioned after 1928. The December 19, 1942, edition of *Billboard* magazine reported that Ollie Northlane had died on November 24, 1941, in New York City. Her survivors were her husband, daughter and two granddaughters.

[www.CherylMullenbachInk.com](http://www.CherylMullenbachInk.com)

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