

# IOWA HISTORY

## **Iowa History Pulsates With Life**

A new book on Iowa history was released in the fall of 1931, and it was “no drab account of records and dates” according to some who had seen it. The author, Edith Rule, had spent the summer at the University of Iowa completing research “amid the exhaustive” documents of the state’s beginnings and consulting with professors. (Edith had written *Little Stories of Mason City’s Past* at the time of Mason City’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary four years earlier.) A “deluxe edition” of *True Tales of Iowa* was available from Torch Press in Cedar Rapids. The need for a new state history was evident after the 44<sup>th</sup> legislature passed a law making the study of Iowa history compulsory in the schools.

It was touted as a “new type of history.” Not a “dead account of dates and episodes usually known as history,” it promised to offer something different. Readers would be introduced to the events of the past in “the form of little stories” that “pulsate with life.” And the human interest connections would make for “absorbing reading.” Written as a “vivacious drama of real people,” who at times were “heroic and courageous,” at others “cowardly and deceitful,” Edith’s unique style promised to “endear Iowa to Iowans.”

Edith had tackled the task of writing the book by gathering and organizing material about key events and adding “conversation, description, and other details.” She used her own “imagination” to add to the stories. The result was said to be a version of the state’s past unlike any other. Noteworthy individuals became “flesh and blood people” with “lifelike virtues and foibles.” Through Edith’s writings Marquette, Joliet, Keokuk, Black Hawk, and Lewis and Clark became fascinating individuals rather than remote figures from the past. Readers learned how these great men “talked, reacted in the face of danger, and treated their wives.”

Edith recounted Black Hawk’s “defiant speech hurled at the white men” and Keokuk’s “eloquent speech.” The book included a conversation of soldiers who built forts at Muscatine and Fort Madison. The massacre at Spirit Lake was told complete with “drum beats, war whoops, and angry cries of braves.” It also described a “colorful swiftly moving picture” of “warriors on the warpath” and the white man’s “growing supremacy” at the “red man’s melancholy retreat over the river.”

From the early days of interactions between the Native Americans and European settlers, the book dealt with the hardships and dangers of pioneer days and the westward movement. The establishment of Iowa as a territory and eventual statehood was recalled. The “excitement” of establishing the capital in Iowa City was described, as well as the relocation to Des Moines. And Iowa’s part in the struggles of the Civil War was included.

It was thought that the book would be an excellent gift for adults, and that it would be “avidly sought” by every school in the state. Young readers would like it because the book was likely to change history lessons “from a drudgery to pungent enjoyment.”

Sources

“Here Are the Best Reviews of the New Year,” *Des Moines Register*, Dec 13, 1931.  
“Iowa History Pulsates With Life and Vivid Color in Edith Rule’s New Book,” *Mason City Globe Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1931.

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