



Iowa History Advisory Council

Recommendations to Create a Systemic Approach to Improving the Teaching and Learning of Iowa History in Iowa's K-12 Schools



September 2016

Iowa History Advisory Council Report

State of Iowa

Department of Education

Grimes State Office Building

400 E. 14th Street Des Moines, IA 50319-0146

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Front cover photo of Edna Griffin courtesy of the Fort Des Moines Museum and Education Center.

Executive Summary

"Mr. Harlan thinks, and truly thinks, that the state has been made to suffer through neglect of its history. Every schoolboy learns to love New England through the fact that he studies its pioneer history in school books. Iowa has just a proud history and there is just as much romance, of sturdy effort, of victory over adverse conditions, as has New England. The trouble is, few know about it and no school teaches it."

- **Keosauqua Republican**, May 16, 1912 citing Edgar Harlan, curator, State Historical Society of Iowa

Our approach to our history is shaped by that history itself. For too long, Iowans have slighted our children by neglecting the story of what happened *here*. Iowans often assume that important events happened somewhere else and that important people lived somewhere else. Edgar Harlan's observation in 1912 still rings all true in too many classrooms: Iowa history remains mostly unknown and untaught.

However, a new combination of factors provides the promise of a new start. The Iowa Department of Education formed the Iowa History Advisory Council in order to examine how to systemically address the teaching and learning of Iowa history in Iowa schools. In parallel with this group, the Social Studies Standards Writing Team will soon release a draft of new social studies standards that includes Iowa history standards throughout the document.

Any new initiatives to advance Iowa history in K-12 classrooms must recognize some formidable obstacles. Classroom time devoted to the social studies has been sharply curtailed as the emphasis on reading, mathematics, and science has increased. Because of this, fewer resources have been devoted to systemic efforts generally within social studies and even fewer to Iowa history specifically. As a result, professional development related to Iowa history has also decreased. As retired State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) curator Jerome Thompson observes:

"Since the release of the Blue Ribbon [Iowa History] Task Force Report 26 years ago, the consistent thread . . . has been the lack of opportunities and incentives for teachers to take Iowa history or Iowa Studies courses. There are resources for Iowa History by the boat-load, but chances to learn are limited."

- **Jerome Thompson**, State Historical Society (retired)

While recognizing the challenges, the Governor's Iowa History Advisory Council was buoyed by the opportunities. The Iowa History Advisory Council worked to examine issues around the teaching and learning of Iowa history and make recommendations to improve Iowa history education at the K-12 level across the state. The council focused on the following objectives:

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- Identify the current status of the teaching of Iowa history and the resources available regarding K-12 Iowa history instruction.
- Identify current materials that are dedicated to the teaching of Iowa history at the K-12 level.
- Study how other states and organizations implement state and local history.
- Study best practices for the teaching and learning of state and local history.
- Develop appropriate academic standards related to Iowa history.
- Provide recommendations to advance the study of Iowa history at the K-12 level.

The Iowa History Advisory Council met four times throughout the spring of 2016 to examine the objectives outlined above. The committee included representation from the Iowa Department of Education, Department of Cultural Affairs, Iowa Museum Association, Iowa teachers, a student, and several other Iowa history stakeholders. The council first studied past Iowa history efforts. They then examined what Iowa history resources, initiatives, and professional development experiences were currently available at the K-12 level to support Iowa teachers and students. The student member on the council shared her own experience, or lack thereof, of learning Iowa history in a school setting and the three teacher members of the council shared how they approach the teaching of Iowa history in their own classrooms. Three surrounding states (Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas) shared how their state approaches state history and the resources needed in order to provide that support. Finally, they explored research and best practices in the teaching and learning of state and local history.

Building on past efforts and the extensive background in Iowa history of the Council members, the Council identified three main areas from which all recommendations emerged: addressing systems issues, curating and creating more instructional resources, and making professional development opportunities more available in Iowa history.

It is the committee's consensus that never has the opportunity for imbuing Iowa students with an appreciation for their heritage been greater. Online learning opportunities, work to improve academic standards in social studies, public support, and quality examples of a strong state history emphasis from other states combine to provide a fertile field for an increased focus on state history in Iowa. The council holds a strong conviction that understanding the heritage of our state—its diversity, resources, strengths and challenges- prepares students for their roles in a rapidly changing world.

Iowa History Advisory Council Membership

- Bryan Bauer, Iowa Public Television
- Mike Chapman, Iowa History Author
- Jennifer Cooley, State Historical Museum
- Andy Duffelmeyer, Iowa Civil Rights Commission
- Bill Friedrichs, Iowa History Center at Simpson College
- Cindy Hall, Iowa Ag Literacy Foundation
- Jason Harshman, University of Iowa
- Kim Heckart, Teacher, College Community School District
- Jacob Hunter, World Food Prize
- Dan Jones, Living History Farms
- Leo Landis, State Historical Museum
- Michele Mead, Teacher, Des Moines Public Schools
- Cara Miller, Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area
- Tom Morain, Graceland University
- Cheryl Mullenbach, Iowa History Author
- Don Peterson, Iowa Geographic Alliance
- Denise Rehmke, Iowa Library Association
- Katy Swalwell, Iowa State University
- Michael Swanger, Iowa History Journal
- Cynthia Sweet, Iowa Museum Association
- Allie Tubbs, Student, Johnston High School
- Michael Vogt, Iowa Gold Star Military Museum
- Stefanie Wager, Iowa Department of Education (facilitator)
- John Wheeler, Iowa Bar Association
- Janet Wills, Teacher, Southeast Valley Schools
- Tammy Yentis, Iowa Jewish Historical Society

Iowa History Advisory Council Meeting Schedule

Date	Time	Location
November 20, 2015	9:00 am - 12:00 pm	World Food Prize (Founder's Board Room)
January 14, 2016	9:00 am - 2:00 pm	State Historical Museum
March 1, 2016	9:00 am - 2:00 pm	Iowa Gold Star Military Museum
May 3, 2016	9:00 am - 12:00 pm	State Historical Museum

Recommendations

Systems Issues

- 1. Ensure the Iowa History Advisory Council continues to meet in order to promote the teaching and learning of Iowa history at the K-12 level. This council should be jointly coordinated through the Iowa Department of Education and the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs and should advocate, monitor and report to the Governor, Iowa Legislature, and State Board of Education on the implementation of Iowa history.**

By maintaining the Iowa History Advisory Council, there is a committed group of Iowa history advocates and stakeholders who can work to ensure a focus on Iowa history.

- 2. Develop recognition programs to celebrate Iowa history and awards that recognize outstanding Iowa history teaching.**

Iowa has a rich history and it should be celebrated and noted in a variety of ways. The importance of teaching Iowa history is recognized by encouraging the development of various awards. In addition, the council recommends developing some way to celebrate Iowa's history through an Iowa history month or week proclamation. Members of the Iowa History Advisory Council could help coordinate such efforts.

- 3. Investigate developing online Iowa history courses for high school and college students as well as K-12 social studies teachers.**

New online and blended learning options, such as Iowa Learning Online (ILO), provide an outlet for creating and offering an online Iowa history elective course for Iowa high schools. With appropriate funding, this is a way to meet the needs of any school or school district interested in providing Iowa history to students, while not specifically mandating an Iowa history course.

- 4. Ensure adequate staffing within the Education department of the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI).**

One of the objectives of the Iowa History Advisory Council was to hear from other states about what has made the study of state and local history successful in their state. In hearing from representatives from Nebraska, Minnesota, and Kansas, it was clear that these states have a more robust education department within their state historical museum/society. In Minnesota, there are over fifteen people in the education department of the state historical museum. In Kansas,

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there are five. In Iowa, there are only two. Having adequate staff ensures that Iowa history materials are created for K-12 classrooms and that professional development on Iowa history takes place for Iowa teachers.

5. Recognize the importance of a state historian to tell Iowa's story and advocate for Iowa history in K-12 schools.

Many states maintain a paid or volunteer position of state historian. In Iowa, the volunteer Poet Laureate position might serve as a model for a state historian, an appointment for a two-three year term. The state historian could help publicize and advocate for Iowa history in general and specifically promote Iowa history education in coordination with the State Historical Society Education Department. This person not only advocates for state history, but also helps tell the state's story and is a vital connector in seeing a comprehensive focus on Iowa history.

6. Encourage Iowa public and private colleges and universities to incentivize research of Iowa history and for all colleges and universities to offer a course in Iowa history.

Iowa is one of the few states that does not have dedicated state history faculty members within our state colleges and universities. Texas A&M, for example, has at least three professors within the history department who specialize in Texas history. This means that all students at Texas A&M have the opportunity to take at least one course in Texas history and that there is ongoing research and public outreach in the field of Texas history. Without Iowa institutions dedicating resources toward offering a course in Iowa history, generations of Iowa students don't have the opportunity to learn about Iowa's history.

7. Encourage educator preparation programs at Iowa public and private colleges and universities to require content in the field of Iowa history.

We cannot expect teachers to effectively implement the newly proposed academic standards in Iowa history if they themselves do not have a strong background in Iowa history. It is critical that pre-service teacher candidates in all disciplines, but especially the social studies, have rich exposure to Iowa history in order to be adequately prepared to implement new standards. This doesn't necessarily need to be a three-credit course or mandatory for all majors, but specific concepts should be required, especially for those majors with a teaching endorsement in the area of secondary and middle level social studies and all elementary education majors.

There are two agencies with administrative code authority to affect this change:

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The Iowa Department of Education has authority from IAC 281, chapter 77 and 79. These rules set standards and requirements for operation and approval of educator preparation in Iowa institutions. The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners has authority from IAC 282, various chapters. For this change, the focus is on chapter 13. These rules set the content knowledge requirements to be met for specific teaching licenses. These requirements are for all teachers earning an Iowa license, regardless of the state in which they are prepared. The most efficient way to affect this change is through three additions to IAC 282, chapter 13.

- For elementary teachers:
 - Change 1: IAC 282, Ch 13.26(4) *Teacher, Elementary Classroom, b. (4) 1. Content: ADD: Iowa History.*
- For secondary teachers:
 - Change 2: IAC 282, Ch 13.28(18) Social Sciences, a. American Government, ADD (at end): to include Iowa Government.
 - Change 3: IAC 282, Ch 13.28(18) Social Sciences, b. American History, ADD (at end): to include Iowa History.

8. Investigate greater accountability measures for the teaching of Iowa history and social studies in K-12 schools.

Since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) a focus on social studies has diminished substantially in Iowa and across the nation. This has impacted Iowa history significantly. When Iowa teachers were asked in a recent survey why they don't teach Iowa history, the overwhelming consensus from elementary teachers was that reading, math and science were greater areas of priority and that these were the areas in which they were held accountable. In *Social Studies: A Call to Action*, a report released by the Iowa Department of Education in 2015, elementary teachers reported teaching social studies less than 5% of the instructional week. In the same report, both teachers and superintendents noted a need to make social studies a greater priority and many noted that until there are accountability measures in place for the teaching and learning of social studies, it will not become a priority.

Instructional Resources

- 9. Create a variety of Iowa history curriculum materials that support new Iowa history standards and promote best practices in the teaching and learning of state and local history.**

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Some resources in Iowa history exist. The Iowa History Advisory Council compiled a list of current resources (see appendix). Among these are the Iowa History Journal. Each middle and high school in the state receives a copy of this publication. One of the problems is that many of these resources are not in teacher and student-friendly formats. One of the only resources available in a teacher and student-friendly format is Iowa Public Television's *Iowa Pathways* website. Developed almost twelve years ago, *Iowa Pathways* includes thematic "pathways" to learn about Iowa history. Each pathway includes background information, photographs, video clips, and more. This is an amazing resource, but needs to be updated. Another example is the recently released Iowa Civil Rights Toolkit, developed by the Iowa Civil Rights Commission (see appendix). This includes a variety of information and primary source documents about Iowa's history of civil rights. These are invaluable resources, but additional curriculum materials need to be developed in order to support new Iowa history standards.

10. Create and sustain a website to serve as the "hub" for Iowa history resources.

The resources that do exist in Iowa history are available in several different places. This is unmanageable for creating a systemic focus on Iowa history. Most states offer a single website "hub" in their state and resources created, even if by various organizations, are posted to this "hub." The Council envisioned that this "hub" would be a directory of Iowa history resources.

Professional Development

11. Coordinate and promote professional development opportunities in Iowa history for Iowa teachers through the AEAs, Iowa cultural partners, and higher education.

A critical component to any systemic focus on Iowa history in K-12 schools is providing professional development. In Iowa, our Area Education Agencies (AEA) serve as the main mechanism for professional development delivery. However, our AEA system has not had dedicated social studies specialists for many years. In *Social Studies: A Call to Action*, a report released by the Iowa Department of Education in 2015, 58% of teachers reported that social studies professional development had not been made available to them in the last three years. This lack of social studies support has a direct impact on professional development within Iowa history.

There are some examples of professional development in Iowa history happening within the past few years such as the MOOC (Massive Open Online

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Course) course in Iowa history developed by Iowa State University each summer or the Iowa history workshops being offered to teachers through the University of Iowa. However, this is not happening systemically. This professional development is critical, especially given the number of years in which it has been absent in social studies broadly and Iowa history specifically.

Rationale

Concern about the diminished presence of Iowa history in the state's curriculum at all levels is no recent development. Little seems to have changed in the century since Edgar Harlan bemoaned the paucity of Iowa history materials in our schools quoted earlier: "Few know about it and no school teaches it." While it is not true that "no school teaches it"—there are pockets of excellent Iowa history instruction—abundant evidence from many sources affirms that the bright spots are few and far between. It is not that the absence has gone unnoticed. In 1989, a Blue Ribbon Task Force (see appendix) examined the state of state history and found it woefully inadequate. Another committee was appointed to develop and disseminate models of curriculum and approaches that other schools could adopt and refine for their own needs. It issued its final report (see appendix) in 2010 and disbanded.

Federal guidelines in the early 21st century placed a strong emphasis on reading, mathematics, and science. As schools scrambled to show improvement in these areas, classroom time devoted to all areas of the social studies decreased. AEAs once employed social studies specialists, but currently none of these positions exist. Teachers can no longer turn to the AEA for sustained curriculum or professional development support in social studies. In the face of shrinking budgets, agencies at all levels have responded to the areas in which they are held accountable. This has resulted in a decreased emphasis in not only social studies, but on Iowa history specifically.

This focus away from social studies the past fifteen years has created systemic deficiencies across the state. In 2015, the Iowa Department of Education released a report entitled *Social Studies: A Call to Action*. The study surveyed over 1,500 Iowa teachers and administrators and gathered a comprehensive picture about the state of social studies in Iowa. Some of the statistics were alarming:

- Elementary teachers reported that they were only spending approximately 5% of their week teaching social studies.
- Overall, 58% of social studies teachers reported that social studies professional development had not been made available to them in the last three years.

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- 68% of social studies teachers reported that there were too few social studies professional development opportunities made available to them.
- 47% of elementary teachers, 46% of middle school teachers and 43% of high school teachers stated they were only somewhat familiar with the Iowa Core in Social Studies.

Nevertheless, there are bright spots for a re-emphasis on Iowa history. The governor has championed the value of Iowa history, and the Department of Education will soon release a draft of new social studies standards that include Iowa history. Several higher education institutions have begun offering Iowa history courses online so that teachers or students anywhere in the state can have access to quality Iowa history instruction. Private, not-for-profit institutions and government agencies, like the Iowa Museum Association, Iowa Public Television, the Iowa Ag Literacy Foundation, have placed classroom-ready lesson plans and reading materials on their websites. Digitization of resources like the Iowa Newspaper Archives at the State Historical Society provides ready access to primary historical resources, creating exciting opportunities to provide Iowa students with a chance to explore the heritage of their families, neighborhoods, communities or special interests.

A persistent complaint about the teaching of Iowa history is that it is too parochial for a curriculum designed to prepare students for our global world and college and career readiness. Many students will move away from their hometown and must know how to navigate in a world of instant communication and interdependence of nations far beyond our own borders, so why does learning about Iowa's history matter?

State and local history provides students with the opportunity to engage in inquiry with topics and locales familiar to them where they can see tangible outcomes in past actions. Historical inquiry is more than memorizing dates and facts. Understanding the "why" of events is "a process ... of wrestling with issues of causality, connections, significance, and context with the goal of developing credible explanations of historical events and developments based on reasoned interpretation of evidence." ("C3 Framework, p. 45) It also teaches students critical thinking. Although some people might think of history as something "nice to know" or something that doesn't transfer to college and career readiness, this is far from accurate. Good practices in history education ask students to analyze multiple sources and make arguments about those sources. It asks students to study multiple sources and perspectives and examine those sources for reliability. There is rarely only one possible explanation, and in "doing" history, not just reading about it, students develop critical thinking skills crucial for success in college, career, and civic life.

Studying state history also helps students see that Iowans have contributed to and impacted their communities, the country and the world. This helps engage students in

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their community. It makes students more likely to feel pride in their state and more likely to stay here upon graduation or return later. As pointed out in the History Relevance Campaign, “History is a catalyst for economic growth. People are drawn to communities that have preserved a strong sense of historical identity and character. Cultural heritage is a demonstrated economic asset and an essential component of any vibrant local economy, providing an infrastructure that attracts and retains talent and enhances business development.” Many Iowans recognize the importance of Iowa’s history and understand the need to support K-12 students in learning Iowa’s history. Michael Swanger, the owner of the Iowa History Journal, and a member of the Iowa History Advisory Council, has dedicated several recent issues to asking readers to chime in about this issue. It is clear from the response that this is important to Iowans. See the appendix to read these letters to the editor.

Studying history, and especially state history, also gets to the “heart of the matter.” A report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), states, “the humanities... foster creativity, appreciation of our commonalities and our differences, and knowledge of all kinds” (The Heart of the Matter, p. 9) Studying Iowa’s history creates a sense of community and helps define us as Iowans. It helps students see they matter and can take action to impact their own community. The AAAS report goes on to state, “At the very moment when China and some European nations are seeking to replicate our model of broad education in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences – as a stimulus to innovation and a source of social cohesion – we are instead narrowing our focus and abandoning our sense of what education has been and should continue to be – our sense of what makes America great.” Although we need to focus on reading, mathematics, science, we must not forget how the study of social studies promotes a well-rounded education and prepares students for participating in civic life.

In hearing from our neighboring states, it was clear that Iowa is lacking a systemic focus on state and local history. In Minnesota, for example, the Minnesota Historical Society employs over fifteen people in their education department whose responsibilities revolve around providing educational resources and professional development in Minnesota state history. The historical society has created a Minnesota history textbook along with several other curriculum resources. Their website (<http://education.mnhs.org/>) serves as a central hub for posting a variety of resources dedicated to the teaching and learning of Minnesota history. Kansas is another example of a state with a strong focus on creating resources around their state’s history. The education department of the Kansas Historical Society employs five people who work on creating resources and delivering professional development on Kansas history. Their website (<http://www.kshs.org/p/classroom-materials/18955>) includes access to a textbook on Kansas history and materials such as Read Kansas (<http://www.kshs.org/p/read-kansas/14921>). Read Kansas provides teachers with access to primary sources on

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Kansas history from kindergarten to high school. These are just two examples of states with a strong focus on state and local history and concrete examples of implementation in this area.

As part of the work of the Iowa History Advisory Council, over 300 Iowa teachers and stakeholders completed a survey related to their experience with and knowledge of Iowa history. The results of the survey are alarming. Over 24% of the respondents never had the opportunity to formally study Iowa history during their K-12 experience. Over 52% indicated that they do not currently teach Iowa history as part of their social studies curriculum. However, of those who did study Iowa history during their K-12 experience, 53% indicated that studying Iowa history promoted a sense of pride in the state. When asked why they do not currently teach Iowa history, the answers fell into three main themes: time constraints at the elementary level for teaching social studies, lack of resources, and lack of support for social studies. When asked what supports would help you to include Iowa history as part of their curriculum, 78% indicated more resources, 62% stated more professional development and 58% indicated that Iowa history needed to be included within our state's academic standards in social studies.

An additional part of the survey tested the respondent's basic knowledge of Iowa history. A few highlights from this part of the survey include:

- 49% of respondents believed Iowa became a state in 1848 instead of 1846.
- Only 37% knew that the Iowa Supreme Court in 1868 outlawed racial segregation in *Clark v. Board of Directors*.
- 70% falsely believed African-American officers were trained at Fort Des Moines during World War II. That was true for WWI, but in WWII, the Fort was used to train women to serve in the Women's Army Corps, the WACs.
- Only 49% knew Edna Griffin was known as the "Rosa Parks of Iowa" for her protest of a segregated lunch counter in downtown Des Moines.

Experts in social studies research have identified several reasons why local and state history is important for students to learn: 1) it helps develop critical historical thinking skills as it relies heavily on primary sources, 2) it focuses on the important history of "ordinary" people and diverse cultural groups that too often get overlooked in national histories, 3) it creates personal connections that make it easier to remember and understand broader themes in U.S. and world history, 4) it engages and empowers students in the actual work of doing history about events connected to their own lives, 5) it helps students appreciate and preserve the complex and diverse histories of their communities whether in rural, urban, or suburban areas, and 6) it encourages students to see previously unimagined possible futures for themselves as they learn about people who grew up just like them who went on to do amazing things (Danker, 2003;

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Hedegaard & Chaiklin, 2005; Marino, 2012, 2014; Marino & Crocco, 2012; Perez & Kite, 2011; Waring, 2008). These experts stress the importance of local history not being taught in ways that glorify myths or promote purely celebratory narratives, but rather in a way that allows students to examine multiple perspectives and experiences of people from all different backgrounds. In sum, learning local history is good for the development of individual students' skill sets and understanding of content as well as help the strengthening of communities as we foster young people's knowledge about and connections to their rich histories.

Conclusion

The late distinguished Grinnell historian Joseph Wall makes a compelling case for Iowans to embrace our history. "No region can survive parasitically on an imported culture. It must interpret itself to itself and to others" (*Wall, 1978*). Yet, for too long, Iowans have allowed the outside world to tell us who we are and what our place in the world is. For too long, Iowans have accepted those judgments because we know so little about our own history. As a result, many of us believe that the state's past is historically insignificant, monocultural, and boring. This simply is not true, and our young people need to know that. Given the opportunity, Iowa youth share a fascination with the stories of the rise of their hometowns from riverbanks or tall-grass prairies, of the arrival of immigrants from all over the world, and of life before the Internet, telephones, and automobiles. They are amazed to learn stories of famous scientists, athletes, artists, inventors, activists, and politicians who are from neighborhoods just like theirs. They are curious about how their own communities came to be and where the traditions they know so well came from. Because Iowa history has been so long neglected, there is a generation of Iowa school children growing up unaware of the impressive list of distinguished Iowans who are nationally and even internationally recognized or the ways in which important global events had important Iowa connections or what life was like for their families whenever they arrived in the state. It is a deficiency of our own making, and we have the resources and willpower to end it. It is the solid consensus of the Iowa History Advisory Council that the time to tell our own stories is now. It is a great story.

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Appendix

- [To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Teaching of Iowa History, 1989](#)
- [Iowa History Survey, 2001](#)
- [Iowa Studies Interim Report, 2009](#)
- [Iowa Studies Committee Report, 2010](#)
- [Iowa Civil Rights Toolkit](#)
- [Iowa Museum Association Teaching with Local Resources from Iowa Guide](#)
- Iowa History Journal Letters to the Editor
 - [May/June 2016 Part I](#)
 - [May/June 2016 Part II](#)
 - [July/August 2016](#)
 - [Sept/Oct 2016](#)
- [Scan of Existing Iowa History Resources for K-12 Schools](#)