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The Role of Iowans

Who has manned the positions in the State Department and the Foreign Service over the decades? Where did the diplomats, the consular officers, and the rank and file employees come from? The general impression has been that the wealthy families in the East have furnished most State Department personnel. These, it has been concluded, were largely products of the older universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.

This is far from being a true picture. Naturally, the states which are most populous or have been in the Union longer have furnished a great number. However, those who have carried on American foreign relations have come from every state from Maine to California. Likewise, the graduates of colleges and universities throughout the country have been in the State Department.

Not the least of these are Iowans, those who were born or have lived in Iowa or who have been educated in the schools of the state. The first Iowan, Daniel Smith Lee of Centerville, was appointed consul at Basel, Switzerland, in May, 1853. Since then, many more Iowans have served the United States from clerical positions to ambassadorial posts in major countries. It would be dif-

difficult to count all Iowans who have been in the State Department and the Foreign Service. However, the total would doubtless be several hundred.

By the outbreak of the Civil War four Iowans had been in the Foreign Service. In addition to Daniel Smith Lee, there was Augustus C. Dodge, George W. Jones, and Robert Dowling. During Abraham Lincoln's administration eight loyal Republicans were appointed to positions in consulates and legations. President McKinley appointed more Iowans than any other President in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century the greatest numbers of Iowans were appointed to the Foreign Service by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

It is difficult to obtain data regarding Iowans who served in the Department in pre-World War II days. In postwar days it is easier, at least, to ascertain those who claim Iowa as their legal residence. On March 31, 1954, Iowans in this category totaled 128, of whom 73 were in the Foreign Service. The total would be doubled or even tripled by adding those who had lived or were educated in Iowa.

It is of interest to know from what sections of Iowa they came. At least 72 counties were represented in a sampling of 225 Iowans. As might be expected, Polk County led with 15; Black Hawk, Woodbury, and Des Moines had 13, 11, and 10 respectively. Story and Linn counties were repre-

sented by eight each in this sample, with other counties ranging from one to six each. If one could extend the study to include all Iowans, probably almost every county has been represented.

Again, based upon information readily available, one learns that no less than 162 persons attended Iowa colleges and universities before joining the Department of State or the Foreign Service. The State University of Iowa leads with 63. Iowa State College ranks second with 46, of whom only 20 had been in the Foreign Service prior to 1952. The larger number in recent years has been due to the greatly increased emphasis placed on technical assistance, especially in the field of agriculture.

Drake University, Cornell College, and Simpson College have been represented by eight each, and Iowa State Teachers College by six. From one to four alumni of Grinnell, Morningside, Luther, Upper Iowa, Coe, St. Ambrose, Iowa Wesleyan, Parsons, Dubuque, William Penn, and Buena Vista are also found among the diplomats and other Foreign Service officials. Clearly, our foreign policy has been and is conducted by the boy from down the street or a fellow college alumnus, not solely by people who came from other sections of the United States.

Some Iowans have made a career of the Foreign Service; others gained wide experience in other occupations first. A few examples will show what

a variety of backgrounds helped to qualify and prepare them for the job ahead. Many Iowans have been closely associated with education prior to government service. Country school teachers, high school principals, college professors, deans, librarians, and even a school dietitian have become important cogs in the development of our foreign policies. The newspaper profession has been represented by probably the second largest group. Here one finds the job printer, the newspaper reporter, an editor of a German language newspaper (Paul Lange of Burlington), and a former president of the Iowa Press Association (Albert Swalm of Oskaloosa).

From an agricultural state, as would be natural, were those who had engaged in farming, agronomy, and supervising dairy extension work. From the business world came auditors, accountants, railway timekeepers, salesmen, and life insurance brokers. Among those with a professional background were lawyers, physicians, engineers, a metallurgist, a criminologist, and an industrial chemist.

In recent years, with the increased emphasis on mass communications directed to foreign peoples, a new class of Iowans began to join the State Department. Twenty-five years ago one would not have found anyone stating he had been a radio engineer, a production executive for a motion picture company, a screen writer, or a special effects

man in order to get a job with this government agency.

Many Iowans, prior to entering the State Department, had held positions outside the United States — for spice companies, export-import firms, mining companies, foreign colleges, and universities — in the Orient, the Near East, Spain, Mexico, and other parts of the world. In this way they brought with their professional talents knowledge of foreign lands, which would be extremely valuable in helping develop and execute policies for the United States government.

Finally, Iowans came into the State Department with previous government experience. At one time or another some of them had been employed in many other Federal agencies. Others gained experience on the local and state levels before being appointed to the State Department. Among these was a county judge, a county agricultural agent, a city manager, a mayor of a county seat, a governor (Samuel J. Kirkwood), United States Senators (Augustus C. Dodge and George W. Jones), a superintendent of recreation for a city government, and two regents of the State University of Iowa (Albert Swalm and Frank W. Mahin).

Service in the military and naval forces should not be overlooked. Many Iowans who have been in the Foreign Service also participated in the wars of this nation — from the Mexican War to the recent Korean conflict. They were also among

the ranks of those who fought in the frontier Indian wars, the Iowa National Guard, or the United States Merchant Marine.

Throughout the nineteenth century these qualifications for appointment were of secondary importance. Diplomatic and consular positions were valuable assets in repaying political debts. Assignments were made in large part because an individual had written campaign literature, had been an active supporter during the convention, had been endorsed by a friend of the President, had been active in state politics, or had otherwise been one of the pillars of the party in power.

A change began to occur in 1895 when the first step was taken to place the Foreign Service on a merit basis. By about 1915 Congress broadened the merit system to include most departmental employees and the entire Foreign Service below the rank of minister. Appointments have since been made on the basis of examinations, educational background, and previous experience. Now, although the party in power may change, political appointments are largely confined to the top levels, while career employees form the bulwark for the Department's activities.

Iowans have served in all major countries and most minor nations, as well as many far-off islands. A total of more than 300 have had at least 822 tours of duty in no less than 312 cities and towns. One might expect the greatest concentra-

tion in European countries because of common racial backgrounds. Except for Germany and the British Isles, where there were 74 and 47 respectively, this has hardly been the case. There were many more in the Western Hemisphere and the Far East. At least 67 Iowans received assignments in Mexico during the past century, while there were 63 in China. Specifically, sons of the Hawkeye state were assigned to Mexico City 15 times, to Shanghai 16, Tokyo 13, Singapore 10, and Batavia 9 times.

A large number of Iowans have served at a single post, but the idea of a career in the Foreign Service was present even as early as the 1860's when Andrew J. Stevens of Des Moines served at Leghorn, Italy, and later at Windsor, Canada. The examples have increased in recent years. Harold Quarton of Algona has been at Berlin, Rotterdam, Helsinki, Malmö, Viborg, Riga, Reval, Coblenz, Havana, Guayaquil, St. John's, Seoul, Málaga, and Tampico. Robert W. Rinden of Oskaloosa has been assigned to Montreal, Hong Kong, Saigon, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria, Ottawa, Peiping, Mukden, Shanghai, Batavia, and Chungking.

The life of a diplomat has not always been an easy one. Many have found themselves in the midst of wars, cut off from communications with the United States for weeks. In other cases unhealthy conditions have led to disease or have

aggravated illnesses. Poor and uncertain transportation often separated men from their families for months and even years.

Financial difficulties also beset them. During the nineteenth century certain consuls were not on a regular salary but received their income from fees they collected in performing services. If few births were registered or invoices certified, the amount of money was correspondingly low. Add to this the changes in political fortunes within the United States and one had an uncertain, even precarious career as a consular or diplomatic officer.

Meanwhile, other Iowans have been holding a variety of positions in the State Department in Washington. Although none has been Secretary or Undersecretary of State, many have held high policy and administrative positions. No aspect of the Department's activities can be studied without finding some Iowan participating.

Specific achievements of Iowans in the State Department and the Foreign Service are many. In its total, as well as many individual phases, it presents a picture of which the state can be proud.

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